

THE GARFIELD HEIGHTS CHURCH OF CHRIST  
presents  
THE SECOND ANNUAL LECTURESHIP

**"THE PARABLES  
OF  
OUR SAVIOUR"**

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Left to right: Bob Jent, Alvin Cook, Earl Dobbs, Don Allison

## *Dedication*

To the faithful elders of the Garfield Heights church of Christ, 2842 Shelby Street, Indianapolis, Indiana, who love the souls of all men and who stand firm in the old paths wanting only the truth proclaimed in the church here; who stand behind the evangelist and give him the needed encouragement to proclaim that truth. Thanks to these great men!! With these thoughts I dedicate this first lectureship book to them.

Fred Davis, Evangelist

Garfield Heights church of Christ

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## CHAPTER ONE

# Introduction Of The Saviour's Parables

Matthew 13:10-17

*Robert Taylor, Jr.*

### INTRODUCTION

- A. Parables meant much to our Saviour and with frequency he employed them.
- B. Parables meant much to the disciples who initially heard them and to subsequent saints also who have studied them across the centuries of vibrant Christianity.
- C. They continue to be a great source of spiritual strength to us.
- D. Seemingly, there is a deserved revival of even deeper interest in their contemplation and this is long overdue.
- E. The Second Annual Lectureship conducted by the great Garfield Heights congregation in Indianapolis, Indiana, is to be commended because the 1983 lectureship deals in a thorough and scholarly way with the parables of our blessed Lord.

### I. PREFACE TO THE PARABLES

- A. Definitions of parables.
- B. Warnings lest they be abused.

### II. THE PREACHER OF THE PARABLES

- A. Mention parables and Jesus promptly comes to mind.
- B. Few are the parables in the Bible found aside and outside the Lord's teachings.
- C. As skilled in talents and as broad in experience as were the apostles they never attempted to major in parables as the Lord before them had done.
- D. Jesus is the very personification of parabolic preaching and story telling.

### III. THE PLACE OF THE PARABLES

- A. They form much of the teaching our Lord did while engaged in his personal ministry.
- B. Jesus employed parables to impart spiritually-needed lessons to a morally bankrupt generation.
- C. The parables of Jesus have immortalized him as the Incomparable Preacher, the Master Teacher of the ceaseless centuries.

### IV. THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES

- A. There is no finer passage in all the Bible relative to the purpose of parables than Matthew 13:10-17.
- B. A detailed analysis of the passage.
- C. Jesus taught in parables:
  - 1. To veil truth from enemies, scoffers and those fully apathetic to his cause.
  - 2. To unveil truth for sincere searchers and seekers of truth.
  - 3. To elicit a condemnation from his enemies of their evil course even before they realized what they were conceding by way of answer.
  - 4. To encourage a deeper, more fascinating and more profitable study of eternal truth.
  - 5. To embellish and immortalize truth by the nobility of these simply told and yet very sublime narratives.

### V. THE PROFIT OF THE PARABLES

- A. Prompts a clearer picture of the Messianic kingdom.
- B. Aids in our retention of greatly needed lessons of truth.
- C. Enables us to appreciate Jesus as Teacher all that much more.
- D. Presents a challenge for a deeper and more thorough study of thrilling truths relative to Christ and Christianity.
- E. Adds some treasured expressions to our vocabulary such as the pearl of great price, the Good Samaritan, the forgiving father, the talents, etc.

### VI. THE PERMANENCE OF THE PARABLES

- A. They are as lasting in their noble nature as the very New Testament in which they are found (Matt. 24:35).

- B. The parables never grow old, never become boring or irksome and never lose their quickening powers and ever fresh approaches to the great issues of life.

**CONCLUSION:** The parables are precious in profile, challenging in their contemplation, profitable in their perusal and edifying in their emulation.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is a deeply esteemed honor to pen the introductory chapter to this great book on the parables of our Lord. I sincerely appreciate the invitation to present this material orally but a commitment of long standing, a gospel meeting in Tampa, Florida, makes impossible the oral presentation. But now to the fulfillment of the literacy invitation to introduce the parables.

Mention the word parable and promptly the Master Teacher comes to mind. Nathan gave the parable of the little ewe lamb to the impenitent David in II Samuel 12 and yet neither the prophet nor the hardened king comes to mind when parables are mentioned generally or any of them in particular. Jesus so overshadows every other employer of parables in or out of Holy Writ that his name alone reflects parabolic usage. Parables meant much to our Saviour and with force and frequency he employed them. Likewise, these precious parables of the gospel records meant much to the initial auditors—the disciples. They must have hanged on to each spoken sentiment when parables were given. Their interest in spiritual matters was quickened by such. The interest has not subsided in intervening centuries as lovers of truth and sincere saints have delved deeply into these choice gems of heavenly truth. Multitudes of saints still attest to the great spiritual sources of strength inhering the parables of the Incomparable Christ. If anything, it seems there is a hearty revival of even deeper interest in the parables. This lectureship at Garfield Heights in Indianapolis, Indiana, for 1983 and this book you now hold in your hands attest to that deepening interest.

## PREFACE TO THE PARABLES

A parable is an extended simile; it is a comparison; it is a likeness; it is an earthly narrative with a spiritual or heavenly meaning. Literally, the term derives from a word



that means to throw or place by the side of. By the side of a familiar earthly story Jesus placed a spiritual lesson relative to the kingdom. By the eloquent employment of parables Jesus taught the unknown (Heavenly and spiritually-minded lessons) from the known (earthly narratives).

A parable differs from a fable in that it (the parable) is composed of realistic happenings and occurrences while fables major in impossible occurrences such as animals who talk to humans, trees or plants that speak an oral message to listeners or mountains that move from place to place and with a message to man. In fables we have animals and inanimate objects acting like men. Not so in parables. Parables enjoy a superior significance to fables. Parables differ also from allegories. In the *Adult Gospel Quarterly*, March 1, 1942, brother H. Leo Boles drew this distinction between a parable and an allegory,

A parable differs from an "allegory" in that the allegory, with its direct personification of ideas or attributes, involves really no comparison. The allegory is self-interpreting; the parable demands attention, insight, sometimes an actual explanation (p. 41).

A parable differs from a proverb in that the parable must include a likeness or similitude and a proverb may simply present some vividly recognized experience of life where no likeness is injected.

Parables may be and frequently have been abused. The Parable of the Tares has often been used to stress that there must not be any discipline practiced in the church for the Lord said that both evil and good should be allowed to grow together and tares should not be rooted up from the wheat lest the wheat be damaged. This misses very badly and quite inexcusably the point of the parable since the field is the WORLD—not the CHURCH (Matt. 13:38). To make the Pharisee and Publican parable represent respectively a person in covenant relationship to God (the Pharisee) and the publican the alien sinner who seeks initially pardon from the God of heaven is to abuse very badly this parable. Both were Jews and under Moses had been born into covenant relationship with God Almighty. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan the traveler does not represent humanity. Leaving Jerusalem is not equivalent to man's departure from God and truth; Jericho is not symbolic of man's temptation; the robbers do not represent Satan and his devilish imps; the priest does not represent Old Testament sacrifices; the Levite does not represent the Mosaic law; the Good Samaritan does

not typify Christ. Yet, according to Dungan in his classic work entitled HERMENEUTICS (a volume dealing with the science of Biblical interpretation, explanation and the exegesis of scripture), there was a Bishop Heber who once presented a sermon with this very development of Luke 10:30-37 (See page 238). The denominational leader missed the mark of accuracy on this parable very, Very, VERY badly. Parables, as a rule, usually have one key lesson to impart. The drapery of the parables gives them color and completion of narrative form but does not demand that a lesson be found in every minute detail mentioned. This is where Bishop Heber missed accuracy and Bible scholarship in the Good Samaritan parable. The parables are too precious and profitable for such abuses to be rendered them by way of careless exegesis.

### THE PREACHER OF THE PARABLES

Mention parables and one person and one person only comes to mind both uniformly and promptly. That person is the Christ. He is the great PERSON of parabolic preaching and story-telling sermons. Few indeed are the parables in the Bible aside from Jesus and outside his personal preaching and earthly ministry messages. Since he is Deity and thus played an originating role in ALL Biblical teaching of the Old Testament, then even its parables such as Nathan's to the erring David relative to the little ewe lamb are connected closely with the Second Person of the gracious Godhead. As skilled in the talents of teaching and the proficiencies of preaching as were the ardent apostles yet they never attempted to major in parabolic preaching as the Lord had done before them. Allusion to these crystal clear points has already been made but they are worthy of repetition in this segment of our study. For instance, Matthew was an apostle and recorded many parables of our blessed Lord. Yet on his own and even by Holy Spirit guidance he never sought to construct parables of his own. All parables recorded in Matthew were GIVEN by Jesus and PENNED my Matthew who by inspiration related what Jesus had said. The same is true with Mark, Luke and John. It is significant that even Paul's brilliance attempted no such duplication. The enemies of the Lord, as per the inspired record, NEVER attempted to answer any of the Lord's parables which they despised and that were aimed squarely against them by a resort to parables themselves. This is significant indeed. No subsequent teacher or preacher in the

past nineteen centuries has attempted to match parabolic powers with Jesus Christ. Those who deny him as the Master Teacher and the Incomparable Preacher of the ceaseless centuries are hereby challenged to match him with just ONE equally constructed parable to say nothing of the dozens he gave and which are ever immortalized. Any preacher or teacher would be foolish indeed to try such and this must be the very reason why they have not attempted such. But unless he were Deity, as indeed he was and is, surely the smart men of subsequent centuries could not only have matched him in such teaching methods but outdone him again and again. Even if one tried, dismal failure would attend such miserable and futile efforts. Of that we may be dogmatically definite. Jesus Christ, without quibble or successful refutation to the contrary, is the very personification of parabolic preaching proficiency. No one, absolutely NO ONE else is a close second to him. Just as the majestic mountains soar so high above the deep valleys they overshadow, so does Jesus soar even more high over all others in parabolic preaching and story-telling sermons. This evaluation of him and his parables will stand as accurate when time ends and the world is aflame as it does now.

### THE PLACE OF THE PARABLES

Prominent indeed is their place in the preaching Jesus did and especially as the opposition toward him mounted. But parables would have been employed by the Lord with or without opposition. Predictive prophecy of the Old Testament had cast Jesus as a teacher of truth with parables prominently presented in his preaching. We read in Psalm 49:4 and 78:2 respectively, "I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark sayings upon a harp...I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:..." Parables were NOT resorted to because he, at the last minute, was having to revamp kingdom establishment plans and hastily change to a church age concept as premillennial proponents have long contended. Quite to the contrary, the parables set forth the basic and beautiful nature of the Messianic kingdom soon to be established in precise perfection and which was established in Acts 2. Matthew 13 is almost an entire chapter dedicated to kingdom parables. Jesus resorted to parables to challenge his disciples toward further study and to conceal truth from those who hated him, the Father and the spiritual kingdom

he planned to establish.

Jesus employed parables to impart spiritually-needed lessons to his morally bankrupt age. The parables held a solution to such a plight.

The parables of Jesus have immortalized him as the Incomparable Preacher and the Master Teacher of the ceaseless centuries.

Hence, prominent indeed is the place of the parables in Christianity.

## THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES

There is no finer passage in all the Bible relative to the purpose of parables than Matthew 13:10-17. Preachers who preach from the parables and teachers who teach the parables would do well to bring one or two lessons on these eight eloquent verses. They constitute a marvelous must in parabolic studies. A detailed analysis will be presented of these verses.

The disciples were those who hungered and thirsted for righteousness or truth. They were now about to be filled even as the beautiful beatitude so richly promises in Matthew 5:6. By a practical and very interested query they provided the very setting for the Lord's explanation as touching the wonderful why of parabolic preaching and story-telling teaching. We read, "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" (Matt. 13:10). Heretofore, the Lord had not been in the habit of employing such a teaching device. At this period of his preaching and teaching ministry he presented one parable right after the other. Matthew 13 is filled with parables. Hence the disciples' inquiry into the grand WHY of parabolic preaching was perfectly logical. It was not a misplaced or inappropriate query at all. The Lord showed that by his prompt response and precious reply.

By way of accurate answer and pinpointed precision,

He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand (Matt. 13:11-13).

Jesus wanted ALL to be saved. That is why he came to earth (Luke 19:10). His name was to be Jesus for it was he

who would save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). Soon he would taste death for all men (Heb. 2:9). John the Baptist had already announced and introduced him as God's Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). The Precious Invitation had already been given at this time (Matt. 11:28-30). Yet all were not of the disposition to be saved. At this time in the Lord's ministry there were already two rather well defined classes—those LOYAL to him and those who LOATHED him and everything for which he stood so nobly, so sacrificially, so selflessly. In these verses Jesus drew a clear line of demarcation between those who HELD to him and those who HATED him. To the former group the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom were given. Mysteries refer not to incomprehensible matters but to principles not yet revealed. When revealed they would be perfectly clear and easy of comprehension. To the latter group such a revelation would not be made. Why? To such people truth is as pearls cast before swine; such is the equivalent of casting that which is holy before dogs (Matt. 7:6). To those who treated holy that which is holy and held truth as treasured indeed more would be given. In fact an abundance would be given and rich indeed would be their possession of the same. But from him who could have had truth and turned in rebellion from the same, that he had shall from him be removed. Improve and be blessed; go backward and what one formerly possessed will be taken away. Use it or lose it, the Lord avers here.

Parables are employed, Jesus states, to veil truth from those who detest and despise it. Blind is their perception toward truth; deaf is their reception of it. They are not minus the faculty of physical eyesight; they have closed their eyes; they are terribly deficient in spiritual eyesight. They are not minus the faculty of hearing; they have stopped their ears; they are minus spiritual powers to hear and heed. Why? Not because God so willed. Not because of an arbitrary decree made of them before the foundation of the world as Calvinism contends. It was due to their will not to see and a rebellious refusal to hear. In this momentous matter there is both the divine will and the human will brought into play. God, from the standpoint of the divine will, desired their salvation (I Tim. 2:3,4; II Pet. 3:9). Yet he would not overrule their free moral agency. Thus as free agents in the matter of choice they decided to defy Deity and rebel at Christ's commands.

This is why parables were spoken—to unveil truth for the

godly and to veil it for the scoffers and scorners of salvation.

In Matthew 13:14,15 the Lord declares,

And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

The reference cited is Isaiah 6:9,10 and is frequently quoted or alluded to in the New Testament (See Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40; Acts 28:26,27; II Cor. 3:14,15). Ezekiel 12:2 has a similar sentiment in regard to the hardened generation to whom he was sent as preaching and writing prophet during the Babylonian Exile. Hence, the language can apply to most any generation. Ours surely is no exception. The people depicted both by Isaiah initially and by the Christ in this parabolic setting are not minus the physical faculties to hear, see and understand. They are minus (by their own freely exercised choice) the spiritual faculties to hear, see and understand. In their disposition toward Deity they refused to hear; they refused to see; they refused to understand and be profited by Christ's message of saving truths. Physically, they saw Jesus as he spoke and witnessed the wonderful works that eloquently exhibited his Deity and yet were minus real spiritual eyesight. They saw and perceived not the spiritual significance due to a deliberate closing of their eyes of perception. Their heart was fat as grease. They deliberately chose to close it rather than open it and come to an understanding of what truth demanded in their lives. Dull ears, closed eyes and a heart that has waxed gross will never lead one to conversion (a turning from Satan and sin to the Saviour and salvation). This is why spiritual healing was denied them. Their wills of rebellion and defiance overruled God's will to save them. Today, the same situation largely prevails. Closed Bibles and closed hearts will never lead one into the sunlit realm of truth heard, truth believed, truth loved, truth obeyed and salvation received and retained.

The final two verses of this segment of scripture read,

But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to

hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them (Matt. 13:16,17).

Jesus draws a sharp and clear contrast between OPEN eyes in search of truth as characterized his dedicated disciples and the CLOSED eyes found among the hardened of heart and between DULL ears that refuse to hear truth and EAGER ears that hang on to every spoken sentiment touching truth and revealing redemption. Pious prophets and righteous giants of the Old Testament longed for the precious privilege of seeing and hearing in their day what the privileged disciples of Christ's era did hear and see. Yet it was but a dim, future image to these Old Testament personalities of piety. Now it is a rich reality to the disciples who saw the Saviour in person and hear him preach with pathos and power. Peter no doubt heard this message in Matthew 13:16,17 initially and later alluded to it in I Peter 1:10-12 wherein we read,

Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

How fortunate we are today to have the clear sunlit truths of Christianity that were but dimly seen by the pious servants of Jehovah prior to Christ, Calvary and Pentecost.

Summarized from this analysis of Matthew 13:10-17 and the parables in general we may say that Jesus taught in parables to: (1) veil truth from his enemies, scoffers, the hostile and those fully apathetic to his Cause on earth; (2) unveil truth for sincere searchers and seekers of truth; (3) elicit self-condemnation from his enemies of their evil course and deserved punishment for the same before they realized what they were doing; (4) encourage a deeper and more profitable study of truth by lovers of the same; and (5) embellish and immortalize truth by the nobility of these simple and yet sublime narratives.

### THE PROFIT OF THE PARABLES

(1) They were dynamically designed initially and later when committed to writing to present clearer concepts and

penetrating, powerful pictures of the Messianic kingdom. No one will ever UNDERSTAND the Messianic kingdom who MISUNDERSTANDS its parables.

(2) It is an indisputable fact that parabolic study and ardent application of the same in life aid in our retention of greatly needed lessons of truth. True neighborliness is better seen in the Good Samaritan parable. Precious pardon stands out with cogent clarity in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. The vast value of the kingdom is seen so stately in the delightful duet of treasure parables in Matthew 13:44-46. Who has not felt the deep tug of God's love for the lost as he contemplated the lost objects in Luke 15—sheep, coin, the prodigal son away from home and the unforgiving, arrogant, loveless and self-righteous brother at home? Who has not come to a much deeper appreciation of precious pardon and lavish love who has contemplated the Parable of the Prodigal Son? Who has not resolved to be more persistent in prayer after reading of the unjust judge and the persistent widow in Luke 18:1ff? Who has not come to a better realization of just what is involved in repentance when finished with a thorough study of the Parable of the Two Sons in Matthew 21:28-32? Who has not come to a deeper concept of the great power that inheres the word of God in a good, receptive heart when he has finished reading and reflecting on the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:3ff? Who has not appreciated more deeply how the kingdom spreads and the thoroughness with which it influences people individually and all human society collectively after reading the kindred Parables of the Mustard seed and Leaven? Who has not resolved to be more diligent in making preparation for the future after realizing the great lesson set forth in the Parable of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16:1ff?

(3) The parables enable us to appreciate Jesus as Teacher all that much more. He cannot be separated from his parables—one of his most effective teaching devices.

(4) They present a clear, courageous challenge toward a deeper and more thorough study of the thrilling truths relative to Christ and Christianity.

(5) They add some treasured expressions to our vocabulary such as the pearl of great price, the Good Samaritan, the seed is the word of God, the prodigal son and loving pardon which received him back after a wayward plunge into the depths of degradation, men of various talents, etc. Were we robbed of all terms that originate within parabolic preaching and story-telling sermons, how exceedingly great would be our tremendous loss. Even



worldly people who care but little for religious matters understand various of these terms and use them in their own conversations. Unwittingly, they even give unsolicited testimony to the evident fact that parables are interwoven deeply into the very fabric of human society and its very language concepts of communicative clarity.

(6) The parables in and of themselves really constitute a tremendous argument for the Deity of Christ. The presence of the parables demand a parabolic preacher and a story-teller communicator. It is not conceivable that these parables were made up by deceivers or the deceived—the very attitudes that scoffers have toward Matthew, Mark and Luke. If Jesus were not God's Son, then he was the greatest and most colossal deceiver the world has ever known. Could a person of this description have come forth with a group of parables that have blessed the world for the better for over nineteen centuries? If so, how, How, HOW?? If these parables were given by someone who was human and human ONLY, why has NO ONE been able to duplicate them or totally overshadow them with the superior parables during the last nineteen centuries in which Christianity has been on the earth? Those who deny the Deity of Jesus Christ will have a momentous problem before them in accounting for the superiority of these parables over any other stories told by renowned teachers of humanity.

### THE PERMANENCE OF THE PARABLES

Parables were intended to be remembered and remembered they have been. This is not overstating the matter in the least. They were not given initially by the Lord and later recorded in Holy Writ by his inspired scribes with a temporary design in mind. Parables and permanence have far more in common than a kindred beginning alphabetical affinity. The Lord told them (the parables) and the Holy Spirit had them recorded with precious permanence gracing the beautiful brow of each one of them. And they have not been forgotten! Furthermore, they will not be forgotten. Jesus affirmed in Matthew 24:35 that **“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”** The parables are a prominent and precious part of that which Jesus declared to be eternal. They are as lasting in their noble nature as the very New Testament in which they are found.

The powerful, precious parables of Jesus never grow old to lovers of truth. They are as fresh as the early morning

dew just outside my window as these words are penned. They never become boring; they are never irksome; they never lose their intensely inherent power to challenge us and to cultivate better things within us; they never lose their ever fresh approach to the intense issues of life. In rich reality they are more up-to-date than this morning's newspaper. It will be discarded before the day is gone. A one time perusal of its contents and offerings is our only motivation toward it. Then its challenge is dead. Among people who take both a morning paper and an afternoon edition of another paper the morning one is discarded when the afternoon one is received. Not so with our Lord's parables. They are here to stay, to cheer, to inform, to mold, to make, to cultivate and to warn. Were they human in origin and earthly only in purpose they would quickly have gone the way of the earth. If anyone doubts it, let him come forth with any other earthly stories that originated in the very century in which these by Christ first saw the light of day have lasted till our day. Roman Caesars came forth with no such; neither did any of the Roman Senators; neither did any of the Grecian philosophers; neither did any Jewish rabbi. In parables Jesus was in a class all to himself. He has no peer and will have none to challenge him in the future either.

## CONCLUSION

The parables are precious in profile; they are challenging in their contemplation; they are profitable in the perusal; they are stimulating in their study; they are uplifting in their uniqueness; they are edifying in their emulation.

The book you now hold in hand about parables of our blessed Lord can change the future course of your life. It can make you a better person. It will draw you closer to him who gave the parables and the Biblical writers who penned them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Read it carefully; read it reverently; read it profitably; read it enjoyably; read it gratefully.

## CHAPTER TWO

# The Parable Of The Sower

Matthew 13:3-9

*John Priola*

### A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

- I. Introduction
- II. Sower Is The Teacher
- III. Soil Upon Which The Seed Falls
- IV. Types Of Soil
- V. Importance Of Hearing
- VI. Conclusion

### AN EXPANDED OUTLINE OF THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

#### I. Introduction

1. Sower went forth to sow (Matt. 13:3) is a literal statement. People living in Palestine actually had to go out to sow. Their fields were not located by their homes.
2. The seed, when sown, fell upon one of the four types of soil.
  - (1) Way Side, Matt. 13:4
  - (2) Stony, Matt. 13:5
  - (3) Thorny, Matt. 13:7
  - (4) Good, Matt. 13:8
3. The results were dependent upon what type of soil the seed landed.
  - (1) If way side, then devoured by fowls or trodden under foot.
  - (2) If stony, then sprang up but was scorched by sun and withered.
  - (3) If thorns, then choked out and yielded no fruit.
  - (4) If good, then yielded fruit.

4. Jesus' instruction:

- (1) Matt. 13:9 - "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."
- (2) Mk. 4:24 - "Take heed what ye hear."
- (3) Lk. 8:18 - "Take heed therefore how ye hear."
- (4) Therefore, we not only need to hear, but we need to give special attention to what and how we hear.

## II. The Sower

1. Sower goes out and sows.

- (1) Will always be sowing time. Gen. 8:22
- (2) Prophesied of in Old Testament, Isa. 2:2-3, "Many people shall go and say..."
- (3) Disciples were to go under limited commission. Matt. 10:6, "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
- (4) We are to go under the Great Commission.  
A. Matt. 28:18-20 - "Go, ye therefore..."  
B. Mk. 16:15-16 - "Go ye into all the world..."

2. Sower sows the seed (Lk. 8:5), but "the seed is the word of God" (Lk. 8:11); therefore, the sower sows the word of God.

3. Sower sows the seed expecting to harvest a crop. The kind of crop he harvests depends upon the kind of seed sown. The seed reproduces after its kind (Gen. 1:11; Gal. 6:7-8).

- (1) Does not depend upon what was planted last year.
- (2) Does not depend upon the character of the sower.
- (3) Does depend upon kind of seed sown.
- (4) Amount of harvest is proportionate to amount of seed sown (II Cor. 9:6).

4. Sower must sow the seed.

- (1) Seed is necessary to production of the harvest. It is not enough to have the seed; it must be sown. Where no seed is sown, there can be no harvest.
- (2) If we don't sow the spiritual seed (the word of God), then there can be no harvest. Where the word of God does not go, there can be no conversion, (Mk. 16:15-16; I Pet. 1:22-23; Col. 1:5-6).

- (3) The word of God is necessary to conversion. Study the book of Acts and you will see it present at every conversion.
- A. II Cor. 5:7
  - B. Rom. 10:17
  - C. Heb. 11:6
  - D. II Tim. 3:16-17
  - E. Acts 20:32
5. The sower plants the seed because he believes in its power.
- (1) We must believe in the power of God's word and sow it.
    - A. Rom. 1:16
    - B. Heb. 4:12
    - C. I Cor. 1:21
    - D. II Tim. 4:2
    - E. Isa. 55:11
  - (2) Cf. Ps. 126:5-6

### III. Soil Upon Which The Seed Falls

1. The soil is the heart. "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart" (Matt. 13:19).
2. What is the Bible "heart"?
  - (1) It is where man's intellect is based (Rom. 10:9-10).
  - (2) It is where man's emotions are based (Matt. 22:37).
  - (3) It is where man's volition is based (Rom. 6:16-17).
  - (4) It is to be kept with diligence, "for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).
  - (5) As a man thinketh in his heart so is he (Prov. 23:7).
3. The soil (heart) must be prepared.
  - (1) Success of sowing depends in great measure upon soil into which the seed is sown.
  - (2) Who prepared the heart?
    - A. II Chron. 12:14
    - B. II Chron. 20:33
    - C. II Chron. 30:18-19
    - D. Ezra 7:10
  - (3) Man, therefore is responsible.
    - A. Jas. 4:8
    - B. Acts 8:21-22

## IV. Types of Soil

### 1. Wayside

- (1) Unable to penetrate because of hardness of soil, thus the seed lies exposed, trodden down, and fowls of the air devour it (Lk. 8:5).
- (2) These are the people who never allow the word to get under the surface of their thoughts. This kind of soil remains exactly the same after the sowing as before: as if it had never known the sowing.
- (3) The Lord's explanation is that the seed is there, but before it can germinate Satan comes and removes it from them. This shows that Satan knows the power of God's word and thus tries to remove it from people's hearts. Guthrie wisely observed, "Whenever there is a preacher in the pulpit, there is a devil among the pews".
- (4) Observe:
  - A. These people were not foreordained. If so, they could not believe to begin with, but the text says - Lk. 8:12 - "then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."
  - B. Universalism cannot be true because this parable denies such with the wayside ground.
  - C. Sower is not to be blamed for wayside soil. sower did his job.

### 2. Stony

- (1) This is a field that has a thin coating of rich soil and underneath it is a bed of stone. It looks good but it is deceptive. Look at how the text describes it. Matthew and Mark say "it had not much earth" while Luke says "it withered away, because it lacked moisture."
- (2) The stony soil represents a heart without strong convictions. It represents the type of individual who begins to make good progress but gets hindered along the way (Gal. 5:7). He represents an impulsive type of individual. It is a response based more on emotion than conviction.
- (3) His problem: He had no root in himself (Matt. 13:21).

- A. We need **“deepness of earth”** (Matt. 13:5) and **“moisture”** (Lk. 8:6) to grow. We are to be **“rooted and grounded in love”** (Eph. 3:17); to **“desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby”** (I Pet. 2:2); and to be **“grounded and settled”** (Col. 1:23).
- B. The man who doesn't have **“deepness of earth”** (i.e. strong convictions) will fall away when tribulations, afflictions, and persecutions arise just like the sun scorches the plant which doesn't have deepness of earth. The man who has **“deepness of earth”** will view tribulations, afflictions, and persecutions in the correct way (II Cor. 4:1-18; Jas. 1:2-6).

(4) Observe:

- A. Our faith needs to rest upon conviction (Heb. 11:1; Jn. 20:30-31) and not emotion. The man whose faith is based on emotion will wither in times of trouble but the man whose faith rests upon conviction will **“be like a tree planted by the river of water”** (Ps. 1:3).
- B. Lk. 8:13 denies the **“once saved, always saved”** theory. This passage says that these individuals represented by the stony ground are individuals who **“for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.”**
- C. This group is an example of those who did not count the cost (Lk. 14:25-33). Cf. Rev. 2:10 and II Tim. 4:6-8.
- D. Note the work of Satan. He was not able to **“take away the word out of their hearts lest they believe and be saved,”** but he didn't give up. He kept working to remove the word after they believed.

3. Thorny

- (1) Plant came up, but before it yielded fruit, it was choked out by thorns which sprang up with it (Mk. 4:7; Lk. 8:7).
- (2) This represents the person who allows self to become preoccupied with the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and pleasures, and the lust of other things (Mk. 4:18-19; Lk. 8:14).

- (3) This ground could produce it could produce thorns or it could produce fruit, but it could not produce **both** thorns and fruit. Likewise, we can serve God, or we can serve mammon, but we cannot serve **both** God and mammon (Matt. 6:24; Josh. 24:15).
- (4) They were **“choked”** out; literally, suffocated. Look at what was suffocating them.
- A. Cares of this world.
- (A) They became overburdened with the affairs of this world.
- (B) Our daily tasks are important (I Tim. 5:8; II Thess. 3:6-13; Eph. 4:28), but when we allow them to assume importance out of proportion to their proper value, and allow them to interfere with our service to God, then they have **“choked”** us (Matt. 6:25-31).
- B. Deceitfulness of Riches
- (A) Riches are deceitful. They promise more than they can deliver. Thus, we must not become so deceived that we place our trust and confidence in them (I Tim. 6:10, 17-19; Mk. 10:24).
- (B) The deceitfulness of riches will cause one to **“err from the faith and pierce themselves through with many sorrows”** (I Tim. 6:10), because they are in violation of Matthew 6:24 and Matthew 16:24.
- (C) Ecclesiastes 5:9-20, Solomon saw the vanity of riches.
- C. Lust of Other Things
- (A) Lust, according to W. E. Vine, denotes a strong desire; therefore, **“lust of other things”** would be a strong desire for something other than the Word of God.
- (B) When we have strong desires that are not controlled, we will be **“choked”** (Jas. 1:13-16).
- (C) We are to **“abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul”** (I Pet. 2:11). Cf. Gal. 5:16-24.
- D. Pleasures of this Life.
- (A) This is part of the group that Paul told Timothy to turn away from (II Tim. 3:3).



(B) Concerning II Timothy 3:3, brother Robert Taylor says in regards to "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," "Pleasures occupy top priority in their fun-filled lives. God is outlawed. 'If it feels good, do it' is the noxious norm accepted by millions today. Hence liquor, dope, and illicit sex are in: sobriety, temperance and moral purity are out — WAY OUT...Millions are now riding the Roller Coaster of pleasure to a beckoning hell and at breakneck speed. Most people could care less about their deadly destiny in yonder's world. Pleasure has been given the green light in our day. God, the Bible and absolute morality are relics of a forgotten past with literally millions in our day."

(C) We are instructed to "set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

(5) The effect of the choking.

A. Became unfruitful.

B. They started but didn't finish. We need to start and finish (Lk. 9:62; II Tim. 4:6-8).

#### 4. Good

(1) This is that which sprang up, brought forth fruit and did increase.

(2) This is the man who having an honest and good heart, hears the Word, understands it, receives it, keeps it, and brings forth fruit with patience (Matt. 13:23; Mk. 4:20; Lk. 8:15).

(3) He "keeps it" — A.S.V. says, "holds it fast."

A. He is not about to be like the wayside ground and let the evil one snatch it out, lest he believe and be saved.

B. He is not about to be like the stony ground and let it be scorched. It won't be said of him that "he has no root in himself," but rather, he has "deepness of earth".

C. He is not about to be like the thorny ground and let it be choked out. He is not going to drift away because of the cares of the world, lusts, pleasures or riches. He makes the word a permanent part of his life. He hides it in his heart, that he might not sin against

God (Ps. 119:11). He keeps it because he realizes that **“the entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple”** (Ps. 119:130). Like the Psalmist, his eyes will anticipate the night watches, that he might meditate in thy word (Ps. 119:148). He is not a hearer only, but also a doer of the word (Jas. 1:22).

- (4) He has an honest and good heart.
  - A. Notice the order. Is a heart good that is not honest?
  - B. It is said of this man that he hears the word and when a man honestly mistaken hears the truth like this man did, he will either quit being mistaken, or cease being honest. So, when this man heard the word, he received it and kept it. An honest heart will search after truth and will accept it. An honest heart is changeable.
  - C. A good heart is a heart of integrity that wants to do the will of God. A good heart is a pure heart.
- (5) He brings forth fruit with patience.
  - A. Brings forth fruit, Cf. John 15:1-14; Gal. 5:22-25.
  - B. With much patience, that is longsuffering. We must be concerned about converting people, but not at such a quick pace that all we do is get them wet.
  - C. We patiently plant and water and God will give the increase (I Cor. 3:6-7; Isa. 55:11).
  - D. The way to bring forth fruit is to patiently sow the seed. Are you sowing the seed of the kingdom brother??

## V. The Importance Of Hearing

1. Hearing is urgent business: **“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear”** (Lk. 8:8).
2. The sower has the responsibility to sow; the hearer the responsibility to hear.
3. We have too much emphasis today being placed on the sower. Brethren, we are trying to blame the preacher for: **“not being able to hold our attention,” “being boring,” “not being dynamic,”** etc. We need more concern for the content of a sermon and

less concern about method of delivery. True, some preachers are able to hold the attention of the audience better than others, but we should not make preaching a competitive business. We need to realize that we, as hearers, have as much responsibility to hear as the sower has to sow. The real problem many times is not the sower but the hearer. Why then must the sower take all the blame?

4. While the sower has an awesome responsibility, let it also be pointed out that the hearer also has an awesome task.

## VI. Conclusion

1. Let us abundantly sow the seed. God's word is as powerful today as it has ever been.
2. Let us ask and answer the sobering question: "What kind of soil is my heart?"

## FOOTNOTES

1 This material has been prepared from notes that I use to teach a class on the Parables in the Bellview Preaching Training School. This outline is part of my notes on the Parable of the Sower. I have collected these notes over the years and do not know the sources of them. However, I can give credit to those that I remember gleaning from on this parable. These are brother Frank Young, who taught my parables class at Memphis School of Preaching; brother Wayne Jackson, brother Guy N. Woods, brother J. J. Turner, brother Bales, and the authors of the G.A. Annual Lesson Commentary Series. While I gleaned from these men, and others, they are not responsible for the material in this outline. Any fault that may be found is my responsibility.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Counting The Cost

Luke 14:25-33

*Ira Rice, Jr*

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh that he hath, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26-33).

In the churches of Christ of the past few decades we seem to have raised up a generation with no understanding of the cost of discipleship. Being faithful to God never has come cheap. Hebrews 11 is crowded with examples of those who died in faith and what sacrifices they made to prove that faith. John the Baptist no doubt knew the risk he was taking to say to Herod, who had taken his brother's wife, "It is not lawful for thee to have her." (Matt. 14:4). Nevertheless, he said the words, which first cost him his freedom and finally his head.

Even though Jesus himself at first was bathed in the adulation of the people, yet from his early ministry he lived in the shadow of the cross. Directly after his temptation in the wilderness, he returned in the power of the spirit into Galilee. Because of the fame of him that went through all

the region round about, everywhere he taught in their synagogues he was glorified of all. Yet, when he taught in Nazareth, revealing that he was the Lord's anointed, they rose up, thrust him out of their city and sought to kill him. From that time forward he went about everywhere doing good. However, even the good that he did seemed but to arouse the enmity of his opposers.

I. Even during his lifetime, it cost something to follow Christ.

This should not have been surprising. He himself had said that except a man forsake not all that he had, he could not be his disciple. He said that foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, but he himself had not where to lay his head. He also said, "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house of Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?...And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:24-25,28).

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:34-39).

In John 6, we read of Jesus feeding the five thousand, of his walking on the water, and of his teaching at Capernaum. Then, chapter 7 tells us, "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him" (Verse 1). This inhibited his disciples. Even though some said, He is a good man; others said, No, but he deceives the people. So, verse 13 says, "Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews."

Two chapters later, we read of Jesus' healing a man who had been blind from birth. The Pharisees were much more concerned that the healing took place on the sabbath day than that he could see for the first time in his life! Neither

did they believe that the man had been born blind, hence that a miracle had happened. They asked the man himself, who acknowledged Jesus as a prophet, saying, "He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see" (John 9:15). Not believing, the Jews called on the man's parents, asking, "Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself" (Verses 19-21). Why did the man's parents hedge in their reply? They were not willing to pay the cost of discipleship. Verses 22-23 make this clear: "These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue, Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him."

Although his parents would not risk being put out of the synagogue, the man that was blind did not fear to accredit Jesus with his healing. When the Jews called the man again, they accused Jesus of being a sinner. "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not:" he answered, "one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (Verses 24-25). When they asked him once more to tell how Jesus had opened his eyes, he answered them, "I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?" (Verse 27). When they reviled him, "Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples...", the man taunted them, saying, "Why herein is a marvelous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing" (Verses 30-33). True to their threat, the Jews reviled the healed blind man and cast him out of the synagogue. But when Jesus heard about it, he found the man, asking, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" To which the man replied, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" And Jesus said unto him, "Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee." Instead of fearing and drawing back, the man said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped him. He had counted the cost of discipleship and found it worth the price.

## II. Jesus said it would cost Saul of Tarsus something to be his disciple.

We all are familiar with the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, as recorded in Acts 9. After Saul had been led by the hand and brought to Damascus, he was without sight and neither ate nor drank for three days. Jesus appeared to a certain disciple at Damascus, saying, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight." Well, you know the story. Ananias was reluctant to go, seeing how much evil he had done to the saints at Jerusalem, and that he had authority from the chief priests to bind all that called on Jesus' name. But the Lord said unto him, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel..." Then he finished by saying a most curious thing: "...I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

As we study the Christian life of Saul (later called Paul), the fulfillment of that last statement is evident at every turn of the way. Even before the end of that chapter, verses 23 through 26, say "...the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying wait was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple."

On Saul's first missionary journey, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, "called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer...withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith" (Acts 13:7-19). At Antioch in Pisidia, when the Jews saw the multitudes that thronged Paul's preaching, "they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (Verse 45). Later on "the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts" (Verse 50).

When Paul and Barnabas went on down to Iconium, they "so spake that a great multitude of both the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up

the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren" (Acts 14:1-2). Verse 5 and 6 state that an assault was made "both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them." Being aware of this, they fled unto Lystra and Derbe, and there they preached the gospel. While still at Lystra, however, certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium came thither, "who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabus to Derbe" (Verses 19-20).

On their return journey home, they spoke again at Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, "confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Verse 22).

As to just how much "tribulation" this was to be can be documented by reading the accounts of the second, third and fourth missionary journeys as well. To save time, please note Paul's summation of the "great things" he had to suffer for Jesus' name's sake, as recorded in II Corinthians 11:23-28, as follows. He said he was

"...in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren: in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."

Instead of resenting all this cost of discipleship, Paul went on to say, "If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities" (Verse 30). In Acts 20, Paul told the Ephesian elders, "Behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy..."



(Verses 22-24). He told the Philippians, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ..." (Phil. 3:7-8).

### III. Worship and service to God always have cost something.

When you get right down to it, worship and service to God never have been without price. They always cost something. Take, for instance, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God gave them the whole garden to eat of—except the fruit of just one tree. For them to be pleasing to God, they had to give up that one fruit. They failed to count the cost of eating that fruit, thus sin came into the world, and death by sin.

When Araunah, the Jebusite, as a king, offered to give to King David oxen for a burnt sacrifice and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood, David said unto Araunah, "Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing..." (II Sam. 24:24).

The same point that David made appears in what Malachi told Israel, in Malachi 1:6-14. He said: "A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, the table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts...Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen saith the Lord of hosts. But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his

meat, is contemptible. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen."

The whole point of Jesus' parable of the talents, when you get to the crux, is the cost of discipleship. Both the five talent servant and the two talent servant had put something into their stewardship; thus the Lord could say unto both of them, "Well done." But when he came to the servant who had received one talent, instead of putting it to use, he had hid it in the earth; thus when the Lord returned all he got back was his own with no gain. Thus the servant who had not paid any cost of stewardship was to be cast into outer darkness where there should be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:14-30).

#### IV. To follow Jesus cost Christians something.

James 5:10-11 shows that we should look to the prophets for an example of suffering: "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure..."

Paul is writing along the same line when he says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58). Paul's own example should be a model for us all. He told Timothy, "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:10-12).

The true spirit of sacrifice likewise is seen in what Paul told the Corinthians about the churches of Macedonia, wherein he said, "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their

liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love" (II Cor. 8:1-8)

#### V. What reward shall those have who pay the cost of discipleship?

In Matthew 19 we have the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking, "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Verse 16). Jesus told him to keep the commandments. He said that he had kept all these from his youth up, "What lack I yet?" (Verse 20). Jesus said unto him, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (Verse 21).

Evidently, this cost of discipleship was not what the young man had in mind, for Verse 22 says that when he heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

This incident must have made a deep impression, especially on Peter, for immediately thereafter, he said to Jesus, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Verse 27-29).

Sometimes after presenting all these passages of scripture demonstrating the cost of discipleship, I get the distinct impression that Christians nowadays feel that all these things they suffered back then are no longer required of us in these easier times. How many times have you heard

someone pray thanking the Lord that we "live in a land where no one can molest us or make us afraid?" I am not at all sure that this is a scriptural prayer. Moreover, even if it is true of the United States, by and large, as we know it, such certainly is not the case in many lands where we are obligated to preach the gospel. Lands such as Russia, China, Siberia and dozens of other countries throughout the world. And I am not sure that it would be true even of this land if we were genuinely living for Christ as we ought to be living. Remember what Paul told Timothy, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." How many? All. All who? That will live godly in Christ Jesus. Shall. Shall what? Suffer persecution. If we are not suffering persecution, it could be that we simply are not living as we ought to live.

For many years now I have been thinking that if ever we plan to evangelize this whole world for Christ, we are going to have to take an entirely different outlook on such things as persecutions, afflictions and sacrifices for the cause we say we serve. Instead of forever being concerned for our own security, we are going to have to account all things but loss (including our security) that we might gain Christ.

Have you counted the cost?

## CHAPTER FOUR

# The Marriage Feast

Matthew 22:1-14

*Mac Deaver*

### Outline

- I. Invitation is sent to the Jews (v. 1-3a,4).
- II. Insolence of the Jews (v. 3b,5,6).
- III. Indignation of the king (v. 7).
- IV. Invitation is sent to the Gentiles (v. 8-10a).
- V. Interest of the Gentiles (v. 10b).
- VI. Inquiry of the king (v. 11,12).
- VII. Indication (v. 13,14).

### INTRODUCTION

The text for our consideration at this time is Matthew 22:1-14. This passage provides for us the "Parable of the Marriage Feast." J. W. McGarvey in his wonderful *Commentary on Matthew and Mark* refers to it as the "Parable of the Royal Wedding" (p. 186).

The context in which this parable is told is one of mounting tension. Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on the back of an unbroken donkey in his "Triumphal Entry." He had attacked the secularizing of the temple for the second time (Matt. 21:12,13; Jno. 2:14-17). And the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, and the Pharisees did not at all like what they were seeing and hearing (Matt. 21:15,23,45).

In a series of three parables the Lord taught that the kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles. This lesson is taught in the parable of the two sons, the parable of the wicked husbandmen, and in the parable of the marriage feast. At the end of the second parable, the chief priests and the Pharisees perceived that

he was talking about them, and they wanted to lay hold on Jesus, but they did not for they feared the multitude. At the end of the third parable, the parable of the marriage feast, the Pharisees met in order to figure out how they might lay an oral trap for Jesus.

Thus, in these three parables the Lord plainly prophesied that he would be generally rejected by the Jews, and that the gospel would then be taken to the Gentile world.

But there are several other important lessons contained in these parables, and tonight for a few moments, I want us to consider some of these lessons as contained in the parable of the marriage feast.

## DISCUSSION

First of all, let us note that salvation is a feast of good things (v. 2,3). The Lord taught that the kingdom of heaven in some sense is like a certain king who made a marriage feast for his son, and others had been bidden to the feast. But note, it is a feast to which they are invited. The Greek word from which "marriage feast" is translated is a word which means "a wedding; nuptial festivities, a marriage festival...any feast or banquet...the marriage state..." (Harper's Lexicon, p. 75). The word in our text is used for a wedding and its attendant festivities. The king's son is to be married, and a feast is held that appertains to that wedding. And plenty of food is provided (v. 4).

Salvation is a feast of good things. It is no penalty, and the law of Christ is no intrusion into the freedom of man. Salvation is the ultimate blessing that God can give to human beings. Every spiritual blessing is in Christ (Eph. 1:3). We have the promise of eternal life (Mk. 16:16; Rev. 2:10), and of earthly sustenance (Matt. 6:33). Providence initiates our ultimate good (Rom. 8:28), and angels attend us (Heb. 1:14). Indeed, what God offered the Jews and then the Gentiles is a feast of good things.

Second, regarding this feast please note that "all things are ready" (v. 4). Through four thousand years of sacred history God had carried man. He had been throughout Patriarchy and Judaism preparing for the coming of the Christ and for the establishment of his church. Many old Testament prophecies were made by God's servants, the prophets, which had Jesus and the church as their fulfillment. And finally on the heels of John came Jesus at just the right time (Gal. 4:4). Jews would be able to be members of the church of our Lord (and later, Gentiles)

because adequate preparation had been made by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Let it be observed that the invitation did not go forth until all things were ready. God has well prepared a feast for all who would partake thereof. If man refuses to come to the feast, it is not because there is something wrong at the table. If men die with spiritual malnutrition it is not because there is not enough food available or because it isn't of the quality that is needed.

And let it be further observed that when and to the extent that men no longer desire what God's feast provides, they are at that point and to that extent characterized by a desire that is wrong. Men must learn to desire what is to their good and to God's glory. Men must learn to be happy with what is right and to encourage within themselves a taste for that which is holy.

Third, please consider that it is a privilege to be invited. The first group in the parable to turn down the invitation failed to realize the benefit of attending. Their hearts were completely out of tune with that of the king. He wanted to bestow a blessing, but they didn't want to receive it. They did not feel honored by the invitation at all. And they obviously did not consider carefully enough that the king was their superior, and that they stood on inferior ground. They were brazen enough to decline as though the invitation from the king meant nothing. But, they were wrong, and we are wrong if we treat the invitation of the "king of kings" that way.

Man must consider his true condition (Heb. 2:6-8), the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23), and that salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-10). It is an honor to be in God's image (Gen. 1:26,27; Acts 17:28,29) and thus in some sense to be worth saving. Jesus died not for animals nor even angels (Heb. 2:16; II Pet. 2:4), but for men. It is an honor to be invited to the feast.

Fourth, it is an obligation to accept the invitation. There are different kinds of "rights" which men have. And a man might not have a clear conception of his rights with reference to the gospel. A man may claim that he has a right not to obey the gospel. But notice, he may have a natural right to thus reject it. That is, in the exercise of his human free-will, he may decline God's invitation to become his child. He may freely choose not to become what he, in fact, ought to be. Next, he may (and usually does) have a legal right to decline the offer. I know of not one

government on earth that demands that men obey the gospel. Thus, a man would have a legal right to remain outside the fold of safety. But, no one has a scriptural right to decline the invitation, for if such were the case no one could be rightly penalized for declining the offer. A man sins who turns his back on the Saviour (Heb. 10:29).

But please observe that one's obligation to God doesn't start after one has already accepted the invitation. Man is under obligation to seek God (Acts 17:27). He must for the sake of his soul locate saving truth, and God wants him to have it (Matt. 7:7-12; II Pet. 3:9; I Tim. 2:4; Acts 17:27,28). It is not the case that man puts himself under obligation by accepting the invitation. He is under obligation already. Now, when he obeys the gospel, he is placing himself under obligation to keep his word and, thus, to be faithful until death. But, one is under obligation to be faithful to God whether he promises to do so or not. All men have the obligation to become Christians and to live the faithful Christian life (Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 1:23; I Jno. 1:7). No one has the right (the scriptural right) to commit and then to stay in sin.

Fifth, notice that some men are too busy with other things and value other things more than God's invitation (v. 5). In the parable after receiving the invitation one man went to his farm, and another went to his merchandise. But, a farm is not as important as a feast given by the king. And the merchandise is not as important as the contemplated marriage of the king's son. We must be careful as to what we value and disvalue in this life. We must have the mind of Christ and value what he values and disvalue what he disvalues.

In Matthew 6:25 Jesus taught that a human life is more important than the food which is required to sustain it. And he said that the human body is more important than the raiment required to cover it. And in Matthew 10:28 he declared that the human soul is more important than the body in which it dwells. And there are many other value judgments rendered which are recorded in the Bible, but these are enough to suggest that we must be careful that we value what is really valuable and that we disvalue what is not valuable at all, and that we have our values in the proper order. The cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life can be the means of a soul's destruction (Lk. 8:14; II Tim. 2:4, 4:10).

Some men are so busy in body, but they are asleep in



mind. That is, they are so involved with the here and now, that they fail to appreciate and prepare for the hereafter.

Sixth, some men are not content to merely refuse the invitation: they want to justify their rejection by criticizing the offer (v. 5,6). **“But they made light of it...”** Since men are made in God’s image, they have a great intellectual capacity for understanding the truth, but this same capacity coupled with a dishonest heart, stirs the imagination to come up with some rationale for disbelieving what God has said. Book upon book has been written in which the attempt is made to show why man should not do what God said that he should. There is something about man which causes him not to be content with simply being a practicing sinner. He wants the endorsement of others (Rom. 1:32). It is not enough for him to be evil. He wants others to declare that he is alright in such a conditon.

Many who refuse to become Christians try to find reasons why they should not. And if they cannot rationally gain ground in attacking the truth, their next strategy may involve making fun of it. Some of those invited in our parable go so far in their rejection as to kill the king’s servants after treating them shamefully. They didn’t intend to go to the feast, and they didn’t want to be continually bothered by being invited, and in their hardheartedness and perverse judgment, they committed murder. That is a horrible reaction, but is to be expected when a man refuses to be intellectually honest in the discussion of an extremely serious issue which is pressed (cf. Acts 6:10; 7:54).

Seventh, the king who sent the invitation out is just (v. 7). The first group had been bidden to the feast in the past (v. 3). The words **“that were bidden”** come from a Greek word that is a perfect passive participle. Thus, the king sent his slaves to call those **“having been invited.”** So, the first group had already been invited. Then they received another invitation (v. 3), and then another (v. 4). Then, the invitation went to others (v. 9,10). And some of the first group were put to death, and their city was burned (v. 7).

God had in days gone by sent prophet after prophet to Jerusalem and to the Jews, but, in a sense, to little avail (Matt. 23:37-39; Lk. 13:33). Then John and Jesus had been sent, and though they differed in method, both were rejected, and wisdom was justified in her works (Matt. 11:18,19). God did what he could to save the Jews, and he did what he could to save the Gentiles (Rom. 11:28-32). God is fair (Acts 10:34).

Eighth, many men judge themselves unworthy of the invitation (v. 3,5,6,8). The king considered the first group worthy of the invitation until they manifested their real disposition. Then he declared of them that "they were not worthy" (v. 8).

A man is worth saving in that he is a sinner, but who is in the image of God. But, he may become, in a sense, unworthy of salvation due to his steadfast refusal to accept the offer that is made. Paul and Barnabas said to some Jews on one occasion, "It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). These Jews judged themselves unworthy of salvation, though obviously it was a practical judgment that they did not realize they had made. One could be "contrary to all men" (I Thess. 2:15) without realizing it, and some could "oppose themselves" without seeing that either (II Tim. 2:25; Acts 18:6). Thus, men can judge themselves unworthy in their constant refusal to obey.

Ninth, God wanted the Gentiles saved as well as the Jews (v. 9,10). The servants of the king are dispatched to others before unbidden, and they accept the invitation, and the wedding is filled with guests (v. 10). God is not prejudiced against any race of men. We are one (Acts 17:26). But, he had to use some man and some family and some nation to get the Christ here. But his using Abraham and then Isaac and then Jacob, and then the nation of Israel does not mean that he had no concern for the Gentiles (Rom. 8:28-32). His son tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:29), and Peter finally learned that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34).

Tenth, it is not enough to "accept" the invitation; one must comply with its requirements (v. 10-13). It is not enough for one to simply show up at the feast. In a sense, the invitation was a stipulated invitation. Those who accepted it were obligated to appropriately attire themselves for the wedding.

And regarding the church it is the same. We live in a time when there may be many who will want to identify themselves with a local congregation of God's people. They might want to "join the group." But, they may want to "get in" the church without actually "giving up" the world. But, you and I cannot scripturally compromise the terms of pardon, the requirements of the invitation. We dare not tamper with those sacred truths. We cannot be party to

turning the church into a glorified community club. Men must still believe, repent, make the good confession, and be baptized in water in order to become Christians (Jno. 8:24; Lk. 13:3; Rom. 10:9,10; Acts 2:38).

Eleventh, the penalty for failing to heed the invitation or for failing to heed its requirements is severe (v. 7,13). In our parable, some men were put to death who refused to come to the feast, and of those who did attend, one was found who was not properly dressed for the occasion. He was bound and cast out into the outer darkness where there shall be weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

To die in sin is serious. In fact, it is eternal suicide. People need to think seriously about the biblical doctrine of hell. Hell is not simply eternal inconvenience or perpetual boredom. It is eternal torment, having been abandoned by God forever. The loss of God is ultimate loss, and such loss constitutes the damnation of the soul.

Twelfth, notice that few are saved (v. 14). **“For many are called, but few are chosen.”** In the Old Testament as well as the New, we read of the **“remnant”** (Rom. 9:27; Is. 10:21,22). And in his ministry, the Lord had declared that few find salvation (Matt. 7:13,14). And he once raised the sobering question, **“...Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find the faith on the earth?”** (Lk. 18:8).

In the parable, the king did not lower the requirements of the invitation in order to have more qualified guests. And we cannot do that either. We must, if we have not already, make up our minds that we will stand with heaven's truth regardless of the number of those who will or will not stand with us.

## CONCLUSION

These are some of the wonderful lessons which the Lord gave us in the great **“Parable of the Wedding Feast.”** May we appreciate them and apply them to our lives for the sake of our souls and to the glory of God who has through Christ extended us the grandest of all invitations to come to the feast.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# The Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-32

*Roy Deaver*

### INTRODUCTION:

1. The reading, Matt. 21:28-32;
2. The events of Monday;
3. The Lord's authority challenged;
4. The Lord deals with His challengers.

### DISCUSSION: Let us consider—

- I. An Analysis;
- II. The Fundamental Message;
- III. Certain Special Lessons;
- IV. Some General Lessons.

### CONCLUSION:

1. Review, and
2. Appeal.

### INTRODUCTION

I want to read with you at this time the Lord's Parable of the Two Sons, recorded in Matthew 21:28-32.

But what think ye? A man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in the vineyard. And he answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented himself, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, Sir: and went not. Which of the two did the will of his father? They say, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but

the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye saw it, did not even repent yourselves afterward, that ye might believe him.

It was Monday, during the week in which the Lord would be crucified. On Sunday had occurred the Lord's great triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The crowd had said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee" (Matt. 21:11). On this Monday the Lord had entered the temple. He had driven out all those who were buying and selling in its courts. He "overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold the doves." He drove them out as He said: "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of thieves." He had healed the blind and the lame. The chief priests and the scribes took notice. The children shouted in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" The chief priests and the scribes said: "Do you hear what they are saying?" Jesus said to them: "From the mouths of babes and nurslings Thou hast perfected praise." Jesus asked them: Have you never read this? On this Monday the Lord had denounced the barren fig tree, thus emphasizing to His disciples the terrible condition of fleshly Israel—a tree with lots of leaves, but no fruit! The Lord went out to Bethany to spend the night.

On Tuesday, the Lord was met by and was challenged by the chief priests and the elders. "By what authority," they asked. "By what authority did you (1) drive out the money changers, (2) overthrow the tables, (3) heal the blind and the lame, and (4) allow the children to call you the Son of David?" In this question the chief priests and the elders were actually affirming: You have no authority to do these things. They were saying: (1) you are not a priest! You are not a civil ruler! (3) You have not been commissioned by the Sanhedrin to do these things. But, let us remember: they had seen His miracles—the healing of the blind and the lame. Their question was clearly one which revealed their prejudice, their hypocrisy, and their dishonesty. Hence, the Lord proceeded to expose their prejudice, their hypocrisy, and their dishonesty. Let us note carefully the reading of Matthew 21:23-27.

And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one question, which if ye tell me, I likewise will tell you by

what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, From men; we fear the multitude; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We know not. He also said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

The Lord said to these hypocrites: **"I also will ask you one question. If you give me the answer to this question, then I also will answer your question—I will tell you by what authority I do these things."** The Lord knew their hearts. Their dishonesty and their hypocrisy were apparent. The Lord, the Master Teacher, knew that the best procedure would be to force them to do some thinking of their own, and thus, to try to help them to see themselves as they really were. There would be no point in giving them a simple, straight-forward answer. They, somehow, would have to involve themselves in self-condemnation.

The Lord, the Master Logician, proceeded to set up a **"strong disjunction,"** which would involve the chief priests and the elders in a dilemma. As brother McGarvey points out, **"They had often tried to place Him in a dilemma, and had never succeeded; He sometimes tried the same with them, and never failed."** A **"strong disjunction"** exhausts the possibilities. In this kind of proposition, one of the disjuncts is true and the other is false. They cannot both be true and they cannot both be false. If one is true, the other is false; if one is false, the other is true.

The **"baptism of John"**—this is the fact with which the Lord begins. The authority behind it was either the authority of God, or it was the authority of man. It was either (1) **divine** in its origin and nature, or it was (2) **human** in its origin and nature. The Lord said to the chief priests and the elders: Which was it?

These men reasoned with themselves. They said among themselves: (1) If we shall say, **From heaven**, then He will say to us, **Why then did ye not believe him?** (2) But if we shall say, **From men**, we fear the multitude (because the multitude held John as a prophet). They decided to say, and they said: **"We know not."** In this response, these men revealed that they were (1) dishonest, (2) hypocritical, (3) liars, (4) unbelievers, and (5) cowards. They thought (and said), **"But if we shall say, From men; all the people will stone us..."** (Lk. 20:6).

Further, if these men had honestly answered this

question of the Lord they would have answered their own question about the Lord's authority. For, if they had recognized the baptism of John as being from God then they would have acknowledged the truthfulness of John's message; but, John said, "This is the Son of God." There is no way they could have accepted the message of John while rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. God sent John. God gave John a definite, specific sign. John saw this sign. John said: "This is the Son of God."

Out of this background, we come now to study the great Parable of the Two Sons. In dealing with this parable, having already noticed the background for it, I want to consider the following: (1) The analysis of it, (2) the Fundamental Message of it, (3) certain Special Lessons, and (4) some General Lessons.

## THE ANALYSIS

In these verses we have—

### I. QUESTION

28a

The Lord posed a question to the chief priests and elders of the people:

1. But what think ye?

2. I want you to tell me what you think with regard to the matter which I am about to present to you.

### II. CASE

28b-30

The Lord presented a specific case:

1. A man had two sons;

2. The man came to the first son—

(1) The father said to the first son,

A. Son,

B. go, work to-day in my vineyard.

(2) The son said: "I will not."

(3) But, he afterward repented and went.

3. The father came to the second son:

(1) The father said to the second son,

A. Son,

B. Go, work to-day in my vineyard.

(2) The second son—

A. Said, "I go, sir";

B. But, he did not go.

### III. QUESTION

31a

The Lord stressed the question He had in mind:

1. What do you think (Cf. 28a)?

2. Which of the two sons did the will of the father?

IV. ANSWER  
31b

The chief priests and the elders answered:

1. The first (that is, the first son, who did go to work in the vineyard) did the father's will.
2. The second son (who said that he would go and work in the father's vineyard, but who did not do so) did not do his father's will.

V. RESPONSE  
31c-32

Jesus responded, applying His parable to His hearers. Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders:

1. The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you;
2. John (the baptizer) came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not;
3. The publicans and the harlots did believe him;
4. When you (chief priests and elders of the people) had seen that the publicans and the harlots believed John the baptizer, you did not repent yourselves afterward that ye might believe him.

### FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE

The Lord, in dealing with the question about His authority, had forced the chief priests and the elders to see their hypocrisy and their dishonesty (verses 23-27). He then sought to help them to recognize that—according to their own thinking—they stood condemned. The Lord was working to try to help these men to see themselves as they really were—not as they thought themselves to be. It is necessary (and it is God's will) that every person be brought to see himself or herself as he or she really is—in the light of God's word. This is the fundamental message of the parable. No one will make proper response to God's will without first seeing himself as he really is. No person, lost in sin, will become concerned about going into the kingdom until he first realizes that he is lost in sin—that he is condemned before God.

By looking honestly and constantly into the perfect law of liberty, the word of God, God's mirror for us (Jas. 1:23-25), we can see ourselves as God sees us; we can see ourselves

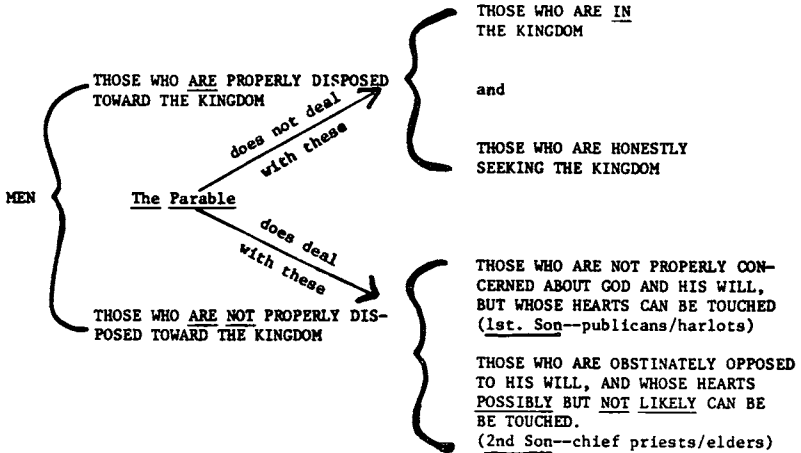


as we really are. We can make the additions, the subtractions, the changes that are necessary in order for us to be pleasing to God.

## SPECIAL LESSONS

### I. The Meaning Of The Two Sons.

I'm suggesting that these two sons do not represent all mankind, but—rather—that they represent two basic types of people (1) who were encountered by John the baptizer, (2) whom the Lord encountered during His personal ministry, and (3) which types are still encountered today. The two sons represent (symbolize) all people who—with regard to the Christ and His Kingdom—are hesitant (reluctant), unconcerned, obstinate, ignorant. But, there were (and there are) many who are not represented by these two sons. There are many persons who are honestly and anxiously and diligently seeking to know and to do His will. The Lord said to Paul, with regard to the city of Corinth, "...for I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:10). Perhaps the following chart will help.



What a revolution would be wrought in our world if we could but be successful in trying to help all men everywhere to realize that they have a God-given responsibility to seek after God and His will. God made of one (blood) every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth...that they should seek God (Acts 17:26). Every man, because he

is a human being, made in the image of God, has a responsibility (and sacred privilege) to seek God and His will. There is nobility (and there is salvation) in the investigation of God's word (Acts 17:11).

## **II. The Lord's Patience.**

Let us observe the Lord's patience, longsuffering. The Lord had forced these men (chief priests and elders) to recognize (1) their dishonesty and (2) their self-condemnation. Yet, He was still holding out before them (and to them) the possibility of their changing their minds and straightening up their lives. There was still some element of hope. It is much like the Lord's great plea recorded in John 7:37, "Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." He had been rejected in so many areas of His labors, but He was still pleading!

We need to understand the nature and purpose of God's "goodness and forbearance and longsuffering"—that these are intended by God to give men time and opportunities to repent (Rom. 2:4). "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). Even to obstinate men the invitation still goes out: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

## **III. The Lord Exposed These Religious Leaders!**

These chief priests and elders, religious leaders of the Jewish people, as dealt with by the Lord in verses 23-32,

1. Were forced to see their dishonesty;
2. Were forced to see their hypocrisy;
3. Were forced to see that they were liars;
4. Were forced to see that they were cowards;
5. Were forced to recognize that they were rejecting the testimony of John;
6. Were forced to recognize that they were rejectors of the One before them, who claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God;
7. Were compelled to realize how much they differed from the people with regard to John and his work.

Some religious leaders these were. It is no wonder that they determined to put Him to death. But their sins and their crimes did not (and will not) destroy His message or His kingdom.

#### IV. What THINK Ye?

1. The Lord's message is addressed to the minds of men.
  - (1) The human being, created in the moral image of God, has the ability to think, to reason, to perceive, to understand, to plan, to purpose, to follow through in accomplishing.
  - (2) It is **this** unique faculty which distinguishes the man from the lower animal creation; and
  - (3) It is **this** unique faculty of man to which God—through His word—addresses Himself.
  - (4) The “**service**” which God requires that men render to Him must be a **reasonable** service (Rom. 12:1).
  - (5) We must ever be diligent students of the word of God. No man can become a Christian without studying and learning God's word (John 6:44,45), and no one can remain faithful to the Lord without continuing to study and to learn—just as long as he lives.
2. The Lord was ever the Master Teacher.
  - (1) He was the Master Logician. He never made an unsound argument!
  - (2) He was ever the Master in the use of questions.
  - (3) He often asked questions as a means of compelling the hearer to **think** and, consequently, to answer his own question or questions. For example, here in our present reading: the chief priests and elders had asked the Lord (1) “**By what authority doest thou these things?**” and (2) “**Who gave thee this authority?**” The Lord responded: “**I also will ask you one question, which if ye tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men?**” If they had, in all honesty, answered **this** question, they would also have answered their **own** question which they had asked the Lord. For, if the baptism of John was “**from heaven,**” then John's work was from God, but John himself presented the Lord as “**the lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world**” (John 1:29). John said, “**I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God**” (John 1:34). There was no way that they could **accept** John and reject the Lord's Messiahship. There was no

way that they could accept the Lord's Messiahship and reject John.

- (4) Too, the Lord often conducted Himself in such way as to cause the hearer to ask Him questions, the right questions. For instance, "...the disciples asked Him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come?"
- (5) Let us observe: one of the most powerful teaching tools that we have is to carefully ask pertinent questions—questions that will help the querist to answer his own questions.

## V. We Must Respect Authority.

1. All original authority is inherent in God, the Father.
2. In time, God the Father gave "all authority" to the Son (Matt. 28:18-20).
3. In time, the Lord gave authority to His apostles—He promised them miraculous inspiration, and He kept His promise. They spake and they wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.
4. The Word (the recorded Word) is the product of the Holy Spirit. It is the Sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). We must be governed by this written Word (II Cor. 5:7; Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6).
5. We must respect also the civil authorities. Cf. Rom. 13. The Christian will be the best citizen.
6. Children must be taught (and trained) to respect the authority of their parents. This training must begin early. What a beautiful example the Lord gives us in regard (Cf. Lk. 2:51). Paul enjoins, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1-3).

## VI. The First Son.

1. The first son flatly said "No" to his father.
2. He failed to show proper respect for his father.
3. He failed to recognize the authority of his father.
4. He failed to recognize that the father was requiring what was best for the son.
5. After his initial refusal, he experienced a feeling of regret (remorse)—not "repentance" in the sense of metanoeo—which feeling of regret produced a change in attitude, and a change in conduct. He went.

6. He represents that vast host of people—
- (1) Who unhesitatingly say “No” to God Almighty;
  - (2) Who fail to have proper respect for God and His will;
  - (3) Who refuse to recognize the authority of God, the Father;
  - (4) Who fail to understand that God’s requirements are for the benefits and blessings of those to whom the requirements are extended;
  - (5) Who, like the publicans and the harlots in their response to John’s message, in time come to experience a feeling of “regret” (remorse), which results in a change in attitude, and a change in conduct—they determine to go into the kingdom of God.

## VII. The Second Son.

1. The father extended to the second son the same requirement.
2. The second son showed an attitude of respect for his father.
3. The second son showed an attitude of recognition of the authority of his father.
4. This son promised complete obedience. He said, “I go, sir.”
5. But, he “went not.” He failed to do what he had promised to do.
6. This son either (1) deliberately lied, or (2) experienced a change in attitude, or (3) succumbed to unexpected hindering circumstances.
7. This son represents that great host of people who—
  - (1) Are quick to make promises to God, but who fail to keep these promises;
  - (2) Are fast on profession, but slow on commitment;
  - (3) Who set up appointments with God, but never show up;
  - (4) Who claim to respect God—His authority, His Word—but who refuse to do what His word teaches;
  - (5) Who claim to be sincerely concerned about getting into the Kingdom, but who refuse to do what the King says one must do in order to get into the Kingdom;
  - (6) Who, like the chief priests and the elders in their relationship to John and to the Lord—want

to appear to be righteous, and concerned about the Messiah and His Kingdom, but who steadfastly reject the divine message.

### VIII. The Father's Charge.

1. The justification of it—"Son."
  - (1) He speaks from a heart of love and respect.
  - (2) He is concerned about what is best for his sons.
  - (3) Sons can rightly be expected to respect and to obey their father.
2. The assignment of it—"Go...work."
  - (1) The father's work requires going.
  - (2) But, there is something to do in addition to "Going."
  - (3) The father's plan—best for all—requires work.
3. The definiteness of it—"...in my vineyard."
  - (1) Not in their own personal vineyards;
  - (2) Not in the vineyard of some other person.

NOTE: Lots of people are working, but in the wrong vineyard!
4. The urgency of it—"to-day."
  - (1) The going and the working must be done NOW, TO-DAY!
  - (2) The Lord stressed (in John 4:35): Do not say there are yet four months, and then we will get to work!
  - (3) We must be "urgent in season and out of season" in preaching the sacred word (II Tim. 4:2).

### IX. Condemned Of God.

Those are condemned of God—

1. Who reject the work and message of John the baptizer;
2. Who reject the Messiahship of Jesus Christ;
3. Who appear righteous in their own eyes, and perhaps in the eyes of men, but who live and teach in contradiction to the Gospel message;
4. Who plainly and emphatically say "No" to God's requirements;
5. Who claim to be concerned about entering God's Kingdom, but who refuse to comply with the terms of entrance set by the King;
6. Who fail to respect the authority of God, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Word;
7. Who are hypocrites;

8. Who are liars;
9. Who are religious cowards;
10. Who are dishonest.

## X. Repentance.

1. The Greek words used in the New Testament for "repentance" are: **metamelomai** and **metanoeo**.

(1) **Metamelomai** indicates emotional concern and regret.

A. The ISBE says: "The feeling indicated by the word may issue in genuine repentance, or it may degenerate into mere remorse" (p. 2558).

B. Judas, Matt. 27:3, "repented" in the sense of "regret" or "remorse." His "regret" did not cause him to turn back to God.

(2) **Metanoeo** "expresses the true N.T. idea of the spiritual change implied in a sinner's return to God."

A. The word means to change one's mind with regard to sin, and consequently to change one's conduct.

B. This word was used by John the baptizer (Matt. 3:2), by the Lord (Matt. 4:17), by Peter (Acts 2:38), and by Paul (Acts 17:30).

C. The reality of the "repentance" demanded in this word is evidenced in the consequent "good fruits appropriate to the new spiritual life."

D. Paul rejoiced that the Corinthian brethren were made sorry "unto repentance" (**metanoeo**), II Cor. 7:9.

E. Vine points out that "...this change of mind involves both a turning from sin and a turning to God."

2. Two classic examples (in the sense of **metanoeo**).

(1) The Ninevites.

A. The Lord said: "The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here" (Mt. 12:41).

B. We note that:

(a) God sent Jonah to Nineveh;

- (B) Jonah preached, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4);
  - (C) The people of Nineveh believed God (3:5);
  - (D) The people "turned from their evil way" (3:10);
  - (E) The Lord said they "repented."
- (2) The Prodigal Son.

- (A) Requested his inheritance;
- (B) Gathered all his substance;
- (C) Went into a far country;
- (D) Wasted his substance in riotous living;
- (E) Experienced extremely hard circumstances;
- (F) Got a job for himself;
- (G) Experienced the pangs of extreme hunger;
- (H) Learned that not everybody is anxious to help those in need;
- (I) Had enough character that "he came to himself";
- (J) Thought about his circumstances and about his father's house;
- (K) Determined to go back home;
- (L) Recognized his sins;
- (M) Honestly, humbly, and forthrightly confessed his sins;
- (N) In humility, requested to be made a servant;
- (O) Experienced a welcome from his father, and the joy of forgiveness.

B. His restoration involved --

- (A) Careful study about his situation;
- (B) Genuine sorrow for the sins committed;
- (C) Determination to make things right;
- (D) Return to the father's house;
- (E) Genuine humility;
- (F) Confession of sins;
- (G) A fervent plea for a place in the father's house.

NOTE: The Lord was talking about **repentance (metanoeo)**.

3. What repentance is NOT. It is NOT --
- (1) Regret;



- (2) Being filled with sorrow;
  - (3) Walking down an isle in a church building while an invitation is being sung;
  - (4) Simply saying "I'm sorry, and I want to make things right";
  - (5) Simply saying "I'm sorry, and I don't intend to do it again";
  - (6) Simply stopping the doing of wrong;
  - (7) Simply starting again to attend services.
4. What repentance IS. It IS --
- (1) Honestly and fervently and sincerely seeking the favor of God, **by**
  - (2) Turning **TO** God in God's appointed way, **having**
  - (3) Turned **FROM** a sinful way of life,
  - (4) Which turning **FROM** and **TO** was based upon
    - A. A sincere desire and determination to do right and to be right;
    - B. Godly sorrow, which was produced **by**
    - C. A deep realization of guilt and condemnation;
    - D. A knowledge of God's law;
    - E. An abiding faith and love for God and His will;
    - F. A deep and sincere sense of personal responsibility;
  - (5) Making restitution, so far as is possible;
  - (6) Getting out of a sinful situation.

WE EMPHASIZE The word "repented" in the statement "he repented...and went" is NOT the word *metanoeo*, the New Testament word for genuine repentance.

### GENERAL LESSONS

1. We have definite responsibilities in our relationship to our opportunities. The chief priests and the elders had witnessed the life and work of John the baptizer. They had witnessed the life and work of the Lord. Yet, they had not made proper response to these opportunities. The rich man (of Lk. 16) was in Hades (at least in part) because he had neglected his opportunities. "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time"—literally, "buying out the opportunity" (Col. 4:5). "Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the

time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15).

2. There are many people who are not teachable. They are not properly concerned about the truth. They will thwart every effort made to try to help them to understand God's will. We find some comfort in the fact that there were some whom the Lord Himself could not teach. Some who refused to listen, to consider. Upon this occasion, the Lord exposed their hypocrisy and their dishonesty, and refused to answer their question. What a genuine delight it is to come in contact with a person who is truly teachable, like the Eunuch, who is anxious to learn and to do the will of the Lord.

3. It is ironic that the religious leaders had not made proper response to the baptism of John, but that the publicans and the harlots recognized that it was from God, and that John was sent from God. Many men today who at least claim to be religious leaders do not know God's plan for man's salvation.

4. This parable calls attention to two kinds of people: (1) Some that promise more than they can prove, and (2) some that prove more than they promise. Some "say" better than they "do," and some "do" better than they "say."

5. These two sons had the same father, the same instructions, the same opportunities, the same responsibilities, and the same potential blessings. But, only one became obedient to the father's will. We have the same heavenly Father, the same instructions, the same opportunities, the same responsibilities (to the Father's will), and the same potential blessings. But these sacred (spiritual) blessings are granted (both present and final) to those who obey Him.

6. The gospel of Christ is God's saving power. It is God's only saving power. It can change even the "publicans and the harlots" into upright citizens of the Kingdom of God. "Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (I Cor. 6:9-11). Perhaps no other passage so forcefully illustrates the power of the gospel of Christ.

7. The Father still requires that men go work in His vineyard. The Father's vineyard—the Kingdom of the

Christ—is not a place of resting idly in the shades of the vines. It is a place of intense activity. There is no place in this vineyard for the person who refuses to work. The Lord Himself is our perfect example: “We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (Jno. 9:4). “It is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch” (Mk. 13:34). Heaven is delightful, beautiful, rest—when the labors of life are over.

8. Even in religious labors, many are working today but not in the **right place**. Many are working, but not in the Father’s vineyard. Many are working in their own vineyard. Many are working in the vineyard of the devil—allowing the world to take all their time, talents, interests, energies, and money. It is one thing to work, but it is another thing to do the **right kind** of work, and in the **right place**.

9. Men ought to be able to recognize the genuineness and authenticity of the baptism of John by—(1) his own personal life; (2) his distinct and powerful message; (3) the demand for “**repentance**” which his message involved; (4) the fruits in the lives of those who responded to his message; (5) the testimony of the apostle John (who wrote by miraculous inspiration), and thus (6) the testimony of the Holy Spirit; and (7) the testimony of the Christ Himself.

10. There is danger and sin in making promises quickly, expressing warm feelings and good intentions, but then failing to follow through in performance.

11. The father, in the parable, had the inherent authority and right to command his sons to “**go**.” He not only told each son to “**go**,” but he also told each son (1) **WHY** to go (work), (2) **WHEN** to go (today), and (3) **WHERE** to go (in my vineyard). Likewise, our Father has the inherent authority and right to command His children to “**go**.” But, He not only tells us to “**go**,” but He also tells us (1) **WHY** to go (to make disciples), (2) **WHEN** to go (now, today, II Cor. 6:2; Jno. 4:35), and (3) **WHERE** to go (into all the world, Mk. 16:15-16). The field is the world. The field is large. The harvest **NOW**. The laborers are few.

## CONCLUSION

In studying this great parable, spoken by our Lord and recorded by the Holy Spirit, we have done the following: (1) We sought to set out the **background** out of which the parable came; (2) we then set forth an **analysis** of the

parable; (3) we directed attention to the **fundamental message** of the parable; (4) we set forth certain **special lessons**, and then (5) we considered certain **general lessons**.

May God help us to write deeply upon our minds the great lessons to be gleaned from the Lord's "**Parable of the Two Sons.**"

## CHAPTER SIX

# The Two Builders

Matthew 7:24-32

*Melvin Elliot*

### I. Context

- A. Matthew 7:21-23
  - 1. Saying contrasted with doing
  - 2. God “never knew” those who do not obey
- B. Matthew 7:20
  - 1. Necessity of good fruit
  - 2. God never accepted evil fruit—false teachers

### II. The two builders

- A. Everyone a builder
  - 1. Land of Palestine
  - 2. Meaning of “rock”
- B. Wise builder
  - 1. Would only hear God’s word
  - 2. Rejected doctrine of men
    - a. New International Version and others
    - b. “Unity in Diversity”
  - 3. Has a working faith
- C. Foolish builder
  - 1. Also heard
  - 2. Did not obey and produce good fruit

### III. The lesson applied

- A. Materialism in the church
  - 1. Business meetings
  - 2. Seen in improper emphasis on numbers and budget
  - 3. Destroys gospel preaching
- B. Materialism in the home
  - 1. Neglect of responsibility of parents
    - a. Physical care of children
    - b. Spiritual care of children

2. Church encroachment into the home
3. Encroachment into both the home and church by  
“our schools”

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (Matt. 7:24-29)

As this passage begins with, “therefore,” it is certain these statements of our Lord are rooted in the preceding passages. In fact, they are a fitting conclusion to the entire “Sermon on the Mount.” If one does not put these sayings of Christ into practice, his spiritual house will fall in this life and into utter ruin in the world to come.

Specifically, these passages are the conclusion and explanation for verses 21-23. “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

In these two sets of passages (verses 21-23 and 24-29) we have contrasted, saying and doing. Observe please, “many will say” indicating the matter under consideration was only a spoken religion. Verse 20 states, “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” Those folks were rejected by Christ who said, “I never knew you.” Since our Lord also knows by “fruits” and he did not know them, it is obvious they didn’t have good fruit but had only said they had done these things in Christ’s name or by his authority. Where has Christ ever authored a saying religion?

Although this has been clearly set forth by the illustration of fruit trees, our Lord drove this point home by

the most blood-chilling words one will ever hear, "I never knew you." Our Lord has never known (i.e., accepted) the false teacher. One who does not submit to the Lord in every point is a false teacher and his fruit contaminated.

Many religionists use, "I never knew you" in an attempt to prove one cannot fall from grace. They falsely reason if you have it you can't lose it and if you lose it you never had it. They emphasize "never" in an attempt to show these were never really converted rather than having become Christians and subsequently falling away.

We must understand a verse taken out of context becomes a pretext and such often teaches error. These passages do not directly refer to the possibility or impossibility of apostasy. They are talking about doing the will of God and bearing good fruit or teaching falsely on a point or points of fundamental doctrine and bearing evil fruit. This is clearly set forth in verses 15-20. Again, these passages are not dealing with specific cases but talking about a principle with God. That principle is, those who do God's will bear good fruit and he knows them; those who refuse to do his will and teach falsely, although they say they have done "wonderful works," he does not know.

God knows by good fruits. Therefore, he does not know nor has he ever known those who refuse to do his will completely and with the whole heart. God simply has never at any time recognized those who refuse to do his will. Why then do we get all twisted out of shape when some liberal, open-fellowship congregation grows and we do not. We fire preachers, and elders are ousted, if they don't advocate the philosophy that, "gain is godliness."

Paul said we are to "withdraw thyself" from "...men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth..." (I Tim. 6:5). We have become so enamored by the "gain is godliness" complex that we have completely forgotten that God accepts only good fruit. One bad apple is worthless. What a warped sense of value that concludes a lot of bad apples are valuable! I'd rather present to my Lord in judgment one faithful Christian than a whole congregation holding false beliefs. Brethren, it is time we started following the Lord instead of some super, "hot shot" false teacher who produces only unacceptable fruit.

With these things in mind, we turn our attention to our Lord's final argument of the wise and the foolish builder to prove the above point. As our text began with "therefore", our Lord is going to show the obvious truthfulness of what

has been said by the illustration of the two builders. The illustration is so plain and so simple no one can miss or misunderstand it. Rather than becoming angry at the force of his arguments, how happy we should be that our Lord used such simple explanations so we could see the truth. False doctrine has to be complicated and obscure because if so clearly presented as our Lord presented truth, no one would be deceived into following it. When one can't give a plain, simple and brief answer to a good Bible question, you'd do well to beware. Our Lord didn't give polished obscure speeches and ear-pleasing platitudes, but simply self-evident truth.

We must understand the force of the parable is that everyone is a builder. This truth is represented by the wise man who built upon the rock and the foolish man who built upon the sand. The wise man by choosing the proper foundation (doing the will of God), built an enduring house—the only profitable life. The foolish man laboured to build a house upon the sand (disobedience to God's word) and his house was ruined and his labor lost. One may say, "I'm not going to build," but our Lord anticipated such, and they are also represented by the foolish man.

To really appreciate the story one must understand a little about the terrain of Palestine. The land of Galilee is covered with hills and valleys. In late winter and early spring the heavy mountain rains come. Little rivulets form and come together in washes that rush to the valleys below and turn their peaceful streams into raging torrents carrying everything with them. When the valleys begin to flatten out and the rain subsides, the water will leave alluvial deposits along the floor of the valley. In summer weeds and grass will soon cover this level sandy deposit. Although this level ground nestled in a valley looks inviting, the wise will not build here because he knows another spring flood may take it all away. He rather goes to higher ground where the rock is solid, and with great effort prepares himself a house upon solid foundation that is above the flood.

The next spring the rains are heavy and the flood is greater than the years before. The winds also blow with more fury but his house stands because its foundation is solid, being on rock. So it is in life. The difference in faithful and unfaithful men is not that one has trials and the other doesn't, but in the material upon which they build. The storms also come upon the just and the unjust.

As we have seen, the builders are two classes; wise and



foolish. The wise man is one who first of all hears. We must emphasize that he is one who isn't satisfied by hearing any religious teaching, but he insists on hearing the sayings of Christ. How satan has deceived the world into thinking that the doctrines of man and/or a perverted gospel is satisfactory. How tragic today that many preachers (?) of the Lord's church are preaching old denominational creeds such as Calvinism.

It is sad today that many by promoting new Bibles, such as the New International Version, are actually promoting old creedal doctrines including Calvinism, materialism, and premillennialism. Such also gives aid and comfort to a number of false concepts because this translation, as well as other versions, have put into the text the beliefs of the translators rather than the words of Christ. Add to this, "Unity in Diversity," "Crossroads Philosophy," a variety of false teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, we must indeed, "...take heed what ye hear..." (Mk. 4:24). As many of "our schools" are in the forefront of advocating one or more of these false doctrines, we are putting the souls of our young people in jeopardy when we send them unprepared to these schools. If they follow their professors and their false doctrine, then with certainty they will be building upon the sand of destruction.

The importance of what we hear cannot be over-emphasized. It is the first commandment (Mk. 11:29). "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). If we do not hear that the Lord is "one Lord", and reject all this division in teaching, instead of furthering it by "Unity in Diversity," we can't have saving faith. That comes only by hearing the word of God and building upon the rock and by doing what we hear. Since it is impossible to please God without this kind of faith, then the absolute necessity of hearing only the truth is obvious.

Further, since it is not the forgetful hearer but, "...whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them..." that builds upon the rock, we must also emphasize the importance of doing what we hear, or having, "...faith which worketh..." (Gal. 5:6). Hearing and doing has been the mark of the faithful of all ages. Abel is representative of this truth in patriarch (Gen. 4:4; Heb. 11:4). Josiah under the Mosaic (II Kings 22:2); and Paul under Christianity (II Tim. 4:7). These and many others have been great examples of those who heard and did as they had heard. Obedience to God without exception has always been the mark of the

faithful. Salvation at the point of faith or by faith only is soundly defeated by this section of scripture.

It is further necessary to understand the meaning of the word "rock". In the Old Testament it always referred to deity (Isa. 28:16). In our text, the one who hears and does what he hears, builds upon the rock—the clear implication being that he builds upon Christ. If the religious world, and even many in the Church, could learn the only way one can build upon Christ is to hear and do as his word directs many of our problems would cease to exist. We hear much about "accepting Christ." Again, we must learn the only way one can accept Christ is to hear and do his commandments. "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (Jno. 2:3).

The foolish man has also heard the same truth and has equal intelligence to understand it but his foolishness is shown in that he does not secure that truth by putting it into practice. Like those by the wayside, "...they hear: then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12). Of the gospel, Paul said, "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain" (I Cor. 15:2). James emphasized the same truth by saying, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Jas. 2:22).

The foolish man is one who is looking for an easy way but the prophet said, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion..." (Amos 6:1). The foolish builder looked at the rock and knew it was the only safe place to build because he also heard the word of God. However, he didn't want to make the necessary sacrifice to build there and the flood plain was so inviting. It needed little if any leveling and the sand was easy to work; so he turned his back on the better and looked for the soft life. However, soon the spring rains came and the rivulets began to form and join into washes and gullies until the valley again became a raging torrent that carried the sand away. Without foundation, the foolish man's house fell and "great was the fall of it." I have had people tell me, "Seems like my troubles drive me away from God." My answer is that troubles don't determine one's directions in life but may only push one along the direction in which he is already going.

By this brief consideration of the text and context, the truth of God is simply stated. Now we must apply it and put ourselves to the acid test. Until we today are willing to

apply this truth to ourselves in our present conditions and take the necessary actions, we place ourselves in the foolish man's house and will surely fall with it. It is not enough to agree with truth—we must practice it. Sad, but many people come and sit in a church house, agree with truth, go home and do nothing about it—and the majority of them think they are a Christian. I have news for you. Sitting in a church house will not make you a Christian any more than sitting in a chicken house will make you a chicken.

Generally speaking, the average church of Christ is missing the mark when it comes to hearing the word of God and doing it. First of all we are completely deceived by materialism. If not altogether governed by it, our actions are so influenced by materialism, and Christianity has been so perverted by it, that when a choice must be made, materialism influences win out. I preached at a place that had built a new auditorium; however, they were so enamored by their old building that they wouldn't tear it down. Some of their relatives had helped erect it and they couldn't bear the thought of destroying that material work. Instead of having their new building on a nice corner lot, it was hidden down a side street behind the old abandoned building. Little consideration was shown toward their relatives' spiritual work.

What is materialism? It is the "...tendency to give undue importance to material interests." It is the, "...ethical doctrine that consideration of material well-being, especially of the individual himself, should rule in the determination of conduct." This is why people forsake the assembly for work—time and a half and double time. This is why people extend vacations Sunday morning, picnic, fish, come in late Sunday night, take a bite of the bread, a sip of the cup and imagine themselves righteous.

I'm saying materialism is so wide-spread that most elderships are governed by it. Buildings, attendance numbers and contributions in the final analysis governs the decisions of most elderships. Let a preacher "try out" somewhere and among the first things the elders ask is how much did the church grow where you had been. Spiritual maturity is not remotely considered in the question but how many more people can be counted now than when you first came. Many of the places I have been, the congregations would have been much better off if about ten percent who were impenitent, rebellious, hypocritical, gossipers, trouble-makers, adulterers, fornicators, and liberals, would have left and never come back.

At one place where I have lived, a man was suggested for an elder because he would **"guard the treasury."** At another one, an elder asked me to go see a man who had quit coming and rather than trying to get him to repent, **"try to get him to come back because he puts in \$5.00 a week."** Compromise any scripture or all of them and who will care just as long as we can get another dollar in the contribution and one more on the attendance register.

Attend the majority of business meetings and what will you hear discussed? It is building—building—building. It may be buiding repair, expansion, setting up a fund for a new one, heating, air-conditioning, drinking fountains, lighting, padding the pews, carpeting the floor, buying a new cleaner to sweep the carpet we don't have yet, or a mower to cut the grass. What goes on in most business meetings is so disgusting I almost despise the words **"Business Meeting."** Let someone who has a little interest in Christianity (instead of **"building-anity"**), suggest in a business meeting something that will help further the kingdom or improve the spiritual condition of the congregation and the first rebuttal in the negative will be, **"How much will it cost."** Elder B. will reply, **"This is a hard area,"** and elder C will administer **"last rites"** by saying, **"It wouldn't work here anyway,"** and thus any chance to advance what is really the Lord's work is once more laid to rest.

Now a deacon who has been absorbing the **"spritual"** maturity of the elders and really coming along in the **"work of the church"** says he believes if we would carpet the nursery and put in a speaker and toys to make, **"the church"** more attractive to young mothers with children, that it would help. Deacon B adds, **"While we are at it,"** (he has learned well the power of positive thinking), we might as well go ahead and carpet the auditorium, pad the pews so people will be more comfortable, put in drinking fountains and new lighting so the old folks can see the song books, and brethren I just believe **"the church"** will grow. Oh! how he believes God's words will, **"...not return unto me void..."** (Isaiah 55:11).

Right on cue, Deacon C joins in with, **"I believe the money will come"** if we show people we are interested in **"the church,"** and after all we live by faith, so let us **"just launch out on faith."** It doesn't matter that such is not a forty-second cousin to faith, nor to the Lord's work, yet most elders reply, **"Well, if you think we can do it..."** Soon the money is borrowed and the work of building up **"the**

church" is begun. While these quotes are for emphasis rather than being in every case actual statements (although some are), they nonetheless accurately represent what I have heard and experienced in many business meetings.

Now church B sees the great progress church A has made and they reason if they had a "pastor" like their's, the church could grow in their town also. As often as not, the preacher was the instigator of such garbage because he knows that such is the way up to bigger and better churches in our materialistic oriented religion. Church A is now left without their source of gain, a building payment, higher utilities and the expense of hiring and moving a new preacher. Further, they make the mistake of hiring a gospel preacher who without compromise preaches "...all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:27). Liberals, gossipers and fornicators begin to complain and, for the "good of the church," he is let go.

Brethren, this is materialism, pure and simple. There is nothing Christian about such proceedings and the most of us are headed to hell because of it. Materialism has now become so entrenched in our ranks that we have substituted "church growth" for gospel preaching and it doesn't seem to disturb us that we don't find anything about "growing in church" in the scriptures. However, it does tell us to preach the gospel, and how to carry the gospel to the world so the lost can be saved and the Lord will add them to his church. Until we cut out from our speech the language of Ashdod and again, "call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways," we are not going to have a New Testament church at all.

It seems to me that about twelve years ago we began adopting denominational methods in an attempt to further the gospel because it promised great numbers that excited our materialistic thinking. At least that is when I was present in a meeting in St. Louis, Missouri when such a method was presented as a way to convert people by the hundreds. Strange that congregation is about the same size today as it was then. At any rate, before the meeting was over, we were told of a woman who came to the building to "obey the gospel" that didn't know whether she would be sprinkled or immersed before she came and saw the baptistry. Denominational methods simply cannot guide one to gospel obedience. Their methods are no more designed for such than terrestrial navigation methods are designed to guide one to the moon.

We heard such things in that meeting as to baptize people upon their faith in Christ and you can later teach them the "doctrine of the church." Further, folk didn't need to repent of all their sins but baptize them and they could repent later. Although I think some would be shocked by such teaching, we practice it in the case of adultery. Baptize them anyway, we say, and they can get out of the adultery later when they learn more. Materialism has so blinded us by placing undue emphasis on numbers, buildings and budgets that we really don't care whether they ever get out of their adultery as long as they "join our church" so we can count them and they contribute. Brethren, all such is building upon the quicksand of the devil's doctrine.

What does the Bible say? "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (II Timothy 2:2).

The truth is our materialistic congregations will not let us preach the whole truth on adultery, giving as prospered, immodesty, liberalism, forsaking our assemblies, lukewarmness, social drinking, ignorance of the scriptures, and exposing sin. Why? Some might in their rebellion against Christ, quit coming and some of their friends and relatives get their feelings hurt and go somewhere else. The plain truth is that we had rather have two hundred hypocritical, once a week, back-seat deadheads, than fifty Christians. Yet we are amazed how Rome could sell indulgences to get the money to build St. Peters Cathedral? Do we not the same?

We have built upon the sand of permissiveness, compromise, liberalism, and so desirous to hear smooth things that few congregations will allow the Old Jerusalem gospel to be preached. In principle we are 180° off course. We are now guarding the goats rather than shepherding the sheep.

Brethren, the time has run out for many and is far spent for the best of us, and we can't delay longer. When are we going to start giving our efforts to teaching faithful men who will teach others. If we spent half as much effort doing this as we do trying to appease the lukewarm that God is going to "spew out" anyway, how much better off we'd be. When we teach faithful men who in turn will teach others I believe the numbers will be as God intended. Paul said, "I have planted, Apollos watered: but God gave the increase." (I Cor. 3:6). If we are not satisfied with the results of teaching faithful men who in turn teach others, then we

are not satisfied with New Testament Christianity.

Evidently, we aren't satisfied with it. Unity on the basis of love, peace and tranquility has been broadly advocated and accepted until we have now accepted **"Unity in Diversity."** Why? It is because it attracts more numbers than **"...ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."** (I Cor. 1:10). Fifteen or so years ago we started accepting the Charismatics. Today only a handful of preachers still believe the Holy Spirit operates through the word and only through the word. The Bible plus the Holy Spirit (essentially Baptist doctrine) is predominately believed and heard in the church today.

**"Unity in Diversity"** that began primarily with W. Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett has all but engulfed the church. In the final analysis this is the advocacy of open fellowship to all baptized believers. As a result of this damnable doctrine we have accepted heretics of all kinds. Those who are essentially agnostics are very popular and widely used in the church today. Also, the last **"Mid-America Evangelism Workshop,"** here in Indianapolis, featured a speaker (Abe Miller) who, speaking of Baptists, said, **"It is unfortunate but many of those folks have understood this subject better than we have."** (Stated at Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio July 13, 1980). The subject was **"Law and Grace."** The Baptists never have understood that subject—if they had, there wouldn't be any Baptists. The informed knows this is nothing less than rank Calvinism.

Often I'm told, **"It's not that way here!"** I affirm that in ninety percent of the cases it is that way. The only difference is one of degree at best. I know that congregations have new members who are inexperienced and untaught, for they are babes in Christ. However, I'm speaking of congregations who have within them those who are liberals, adulterers, covetous, materialists, advocates of modern versions, social drinkers and so ignorant of the Bible it is pathetic and they have been that way for years upon years. We have been so taken up in keeping them appeased that we have totally failed in teaching faithful men so as to bring them to maturity. There are numerous congregations that have existed for 40 or more years that have not produced a single qualified elder and many more that when the present eldership is gone will not have a single qualified man to replace them. Why? We have let materialism blind

us to the truth by substituting growing in buildings, numbers and budgets to growing in grace and knowledge of Christ (II Pet. 3:18).

One day we'll stand before God in judgment and, elders, you'll be called into account. What will you present to God? Will it be a nice, well-kept building. You'll have to say, "Lord, 50% of our flock were absent for Bible study, Sunday and Wednesday night and for gospel meetings. Lord, as long as they came for Sunday at 11:00 A.M. there was hope, and they helped pay for our building. Most of our children grew up and left home and quit the church but we took them to church (meaning the building) when they were home, and you know how it was back there." What is the Lord going to say to such obvious hypocrisy.

Let me emphasize that, I'm not down on qualified elders who are doing their work and I'll do anything in my power to assist and cooperate with them. However, God placed upon you the responsibility to see to it that the congregations under your charge were fed the truth and protected from the wolves and generally you have failed miserably. You accepted the work by choice so what is wrong? You are going to answer to God for the souls of them under you and where are you leading them? Again, I'll do all in my power to assist you to meet your responsibility and I've intended these things to that end. However, to those who resist the obvious truth of these observations, I simply say your duty to humbly submit to the truth of God is just as great as the least member of your respective congregations, and I'm to rebuke those who don't. (I Tim. 5:20). Your dislike of these things, if such be the case, is evidence par excellence you are stubborn like King Saul and rebellious like Core and you hold nothing but contempt for the word of God. I don't care who you think you are, preacher, elder, deacon or babe in Christ, we are all 100% alike in respect to our obligation to submit to the will of God.

Some will say you are hard, unloving and disrespectful to elders. Such is not so. I have not been hard nor disrespectful of scriptural elders. If I'm scripturally wrong, I have preached error. If I'm scripturally right, I have preached the truth. Such a statement only proves that the one making the charge also resists the truth of God and walks unworthy of Christ.

Brethren, I fully realize the devil has gone wild in our day. Some doctors and clinics have become murderers of the



unborn, young people burn out their bright minds and destroy their bodies and criminals have more rights than victims. God's word is being destroyed by false prophets and new versions that are allowed to move freely throughout the brotherhood. Yet Jesus said those who **"...heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock."** The storm that came could not harm that house. These things represent the troubles and wickedness in our world that war against the saints. Man must build his life upon the rock—the word of God. **"But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil."** (Prov. 1:33). Do we believe it? By practice, we don't.

The only hope we have is the truth of God. If there ever was a period of history that needed the truth of God more than this generation, I don't know of it. When we so desperately need to preach, **"...all the counsel of God"** with all the power and fervor that we can muster, yet never in our lifetime has it been compromised more. We have been sowing to the wind and are already reaping the whirlwind. Look at our children and grandchildren. They are engulfed in a society without morals, drugs and alcohol, abortion and homosexuality and we offer only a false hope of a perverted compromised, love everybody, pseudo-religious, social, materialistic gospel. Materialism is the cornerstone of apostasy. God forbid we follow such for one moment longer!

I also want to address some thoughts to parents. With the help of a good wife, I think I have earned the right to give some advice. God established three institutions: the home, the state and the church. These three institutions occupy an exclusive and distinctive place and work. One is not to usurp the function of the other. However, as God established them and inasmuch as he can't oppose himself, these institutions are not antagonistic one to the other but they complement one another. The home (the first) is basic to all. If it breaks down, it isn't likely the other two can properly function or survive very long.

It seems that every force of evil is arrayed against the home as God intended it to be. Parents have turned over the rearing of their children to others. The physical care is put into the hands of baby sitters; their secular education is atheistic-trained teachers; and what little spiritual education they get is indirectly, at least, given into the hands of professors in **"our schools"** most of whom received their graduate education in sectarian institutions. If these

professors stayed loyal to God it was in spite of their education. Our local preachers, Bible school teachers and more and more elders, have been taught by them. When our children reach college age they will either be under atheistic professors or in our schools in which many false teachers are on the staff. So the church and home have largely come under the control of our schools. This is the exact opposite of what it should be.

The Bible says, **“and ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”** (Eph. 6:4). This passage places the responsibility upon the father, the head of the family. Included in this is the responsibility to train the mind of his children in the way of the Lord. This in no way rules out assistance from others, but it does rule out the father abdicating his charge and letting someone else do it as they please, or it not being done at all. Further, in our world of mandatory education he must see to it that his children’s minds are so trained that the nearly universal teaching of evolution doesn’t destroy their faith.

Further, it matters little if they are sent to **“our schools.”** There they can be taught the Bible plus the indwelling of the person of the Holy Spirit is necessary to live the Christian life (which is essentially Baptist doctrine). Further, they are often taught that one must take the **“leap of faith”**; that we can’t prove there is a God; theistic evolution; Matthew 19:9 is a **“covenant passage”**; the use of new perverted translations and at least by practice, the **“Crossroads philosophy.”** Most parents have completely failed in meeting this responsibility and you have loosed upon the church a generation of mentally undisciplined young adults that have brought a legion of false doctrine and corrupt practices into the church which have all but destroyed New Testament Christianity.

It matters not that they are now grown, the problem is you failed when you could have taught them. When we couple Ephesians 6:4 with our text, at least by default you have led your children to build upon the sand. There are only two kinds of foundation materials—rock and sand. It is your God given responsibility to establish them on the bed rock of truth. Without such, they are unable to withstand the influence of their teachers and professors. The home has failed and this is a major factor in the widespread trouble and apostasy in the Lord’s church.

Nearly a generation ago when another issue was troubling

the church, Guy N. Woods came to Trumann, Arkansas to discuss those issues. If not these exact words, he said words to the effect that God never assigned to the church the care of children. All faithful preachers believed and taught that then. However, we began to hear that, **"The church is losing her young people."** The first thing we know we began to hear of **"youth ministers"** which in the final analysis were **"glorified entertainment directors."** Now we have built gymnasiums and hired physical education directors and all sorts of secular activities are being conducted by the local congregations under her eldership. These are things God never assigned to the church but these are the functions of the home which are being usurped by the church. This is simply a change that is opposed to God's order of things.

With all this surplus of money to hire a **"minister"** to direct about everything elders could think of and to build gymnasiums costing hundreds of thousands, **"our schools"** began coveting this money. Now we are being told if the church doesn't put the college, especially the Bible department, (as if that made a difference) in the church budget, that by the year 2000 the church won't have any preachers. Hogwash! They say we will have to use our own members to do the preaching. Now wouldn't that be a shame!

The simple truth is that we have gotten God's order of things all confused and we are building upon the sand. God has given us fathers to guide the home and elders to guide the flock and it is their duty to do so in the way God established them. The home is to rear children by providing food, shelter, education and entertainment. The church is to preach the gospel to the whole world. Now both sustain a relationship to each other to assist, but not to take over the function of the other. Brethren, we see our homes falling around us and seemingly most cannot understand what is wrong. Parents in anguish cry, **"where did I go wrong?"**

It is because we are building on the sands of disobedience. Moses told Israel of old, **"...wherefore now do ye trespass the commandment of the Lord but it shall not prosper."** (Num. 14:41). Elders see their congregations going down and also become desperate. The problem is we are standing for the truth outwardly but philosophically we are liberal in our thinking. Paul told Christians, **"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."** (Col. 2:8).

The humanistic tenet of materialism that is totally secular is destroying us and we don't know it. Our society is so saturated with these things that we can no longer judge, "...righteous judgment." (John 7:24). Our homes are disintegrating, our nation is faltering and the church is in apostasy. World communism is poised like a predator over his prey. "Then shall they cry unto the Lord, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings." (Micah 3:4).

What can we do? There is only one thing men can do and be successful. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein." (Jer. 6:16). We know what happened to them. Why? The prophet had just said, "...their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it." (Jer. 6:10).

The prophet said God would place in Zion, "...for a foundation a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation..." (Isa. 28:16). Christ built his church upon "this rock." We can build upon that rock and be safe from every false way that would destroy our spiritual house. What we must understand is that the only way we can have this rock for a foundation is to hearken unto the word of God, delight in it, love it and do it all the days of our lives. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." (Rev. 22:14).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# The Unmerciful Servant

Matthew 18:28-32

*James Davis*

**THESIS:** What should a forgiven sinner's attitude be toward those who may offend or sin against him?

### INTRODUCTION:

#### 1. Historical background

- A. Ancient world's treatment of debtors.
- B. Pagan man's propensity to vengeance.
- C. Rabbinical teaching.
- D. Biblical context of parable.

#### I. MAN IS A DEBTOR TO GOD

- A. The parable compares God to a king who must be reckoned with.
- B. The parable compares the sinner to a servant who owes a tremendous debt.
- C. The parable compares sin to an enormous debt of ten thousand talents.

#### II. MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS

- A. This parable is the only parable in the Bible that demonstrates the magnitude of God's forgiveness.
- B. For those who turn from their sins and seek forgiveness, there is abundant mercy and forgiveness.
- C. It is not difficult to get God to forgive.

#### III. MAN'S FORGIVENESS IS CONDITIONAL ON FORGIVING OTHERS

- A. The action of the unmerciful servant.

- B. The unmerciful servant's behavior was doubly disgraceful.
- C. God forgives more freely than man forgives.
- D. Man's debts to God are much greater than man's debt to man.
- E. Man must forgive as he is forgiven (Eph. 4:32; Matt. 5:7; 6:15; Mark 11:25,26; James 2:13).
- F. This parable also demonstrates the severity of God.

#### IV. FINAL PUNISHMENT OF THE UNMERCIFUL AND UNFORGIVING

- A. The unforgiving servant forfeited his wife, children, and property.
- B. The Roman doctrine of purgatory finds no support from the teachings embraced in this parable.

#### CONCLUSION:

1. This parable of our Lord enounces the law of unlimited forgiveness as one of the essential laws of his kingdom.
2. The foremost duty of every person is to establish and maintain a right relationship with God, yet this is impossible without maintaining the right relationship with our fellowmen.
3. The limitless character of forgiveness springs from its divine origin.
4. If God treated us for our debts as we treat our fellowman, what desolation would be ours!
5. Forgiving our fellowman makes prayer acceptable; it allows us to remain in a state of grace and reconciliation with God; it gives one a peace of mind; and in so doing we are assured that God's infinite mercy will abound unmeasured to us.

**THESIS:** What should a forgiven sinner's attitude be toward those who may offend or sin against him?

#### INTRODUCTION

The teaching embraced in the parable of the UNMERCIFUL SERVANT becomes more meaningful when one places the parable in its first century setting. As an introduction to this parable let us attempt to understand its

historical setting; let us view man's propensity to vengeance as seen in the pagan world; let us observe some teachings of the Jewish Rabbis; and let us look at its biblical context.

First, let us look at the parable in its historical setting. In the ancient world cruel treatment was practiced against debtors, often without regard to the debtor's ability or intention to repay. In Athens, prior to the establishment of democratic rights, a creditor could demand slave-labor of his debtor or of members of the debtor's family as surety to payment. Roman law provided punishment by imprisonment to debtors.

The reason for imprisonment and cruel treatment was to force the debtor to sell whatever property he might secretly own, or to have the debtor's relatives pay his debt. The creditor would demand slave-labor of the debtor's family so that the debt might be worked off.

There were legal restrictions to prevent extreme cruelty, but in spite of the laws the entire system of debts and sureties was recklessly abused in the ancient world. Violations of the law were frequently condemned by the prophets. Ezekiel and Nehemiah were calling God's people back to a strict observance of the law, where mercy and justice were intended to prevail (Ezek. 18:8,13,17; Neh. 5:6-13).

Secondly, we should give some thought to the pagan man and his propensity to vengeance. The pagan world was extremely cruel; cruelty was not only practiced against enemies but also against family and friends without remorse or any sense of guilt. Vengeance was an accepted practice in the Greco-Roman world. The desire for vengeance was usually regarded as obligatory so that one felt himself justified in inflicting maximum vengeance or mischief upon one's enemies. The desire for vengeance was often carried from one generation to another so that a son took satisfaction in wreaking vengeance upon the enemies of his father or perhaps the descendants of those enemies.

Third, consider the rabbinical teaching in the first century. The Jewish teachers encouraged personal vendettas by a faulty application of the "eye for an eye" precept. Although this principle was originally intended for the courts to insure that punishment for the crime would be commensurate with the crime committed. The precept was given to curb excessive vengeance, but it had become erroneously interpreted and applied so that an individual could avenge his injuries and extract "justice" apart from

due process of law. The problem was a personal vindictiveness which was being perpetrated by a misapplication of the judicial "eye for an eye" principle.

The Jewish Rabbis also taught that a man was to be forgiven three times, but no more. The Babylonian Talmud reads, "If a man commits an offense once they forgive him, a second time they forgive him, a third time they forgive him, the fourth time they do not forgive him." The Jews were perverting the Old Testament (Amos 1:3; 2:1,4,6; Job 23:29). No doubt they thought that three times was very liberal when contrasted with the pagan world.

Peter was born and reared in an environment where cruelty to debtors, desire for vengeance, and erroneous rabbinical teaching thrived. The impact of Peter's environment upon his life can be seen in the question he asked. Naturally he thought that forgiving his brother "seven times" would be unusually liberal and sufficiently generous.

Fourth, one should consider the biblical context. Jesus spoke the parable in response to Peter's question, "...how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" Peter's question was asked in response to the Lord's teaching on how to treat an offending brother (Matt. 18:15-20). Jesus was teaching his disciples that they were to seek to be reconciled to those who offend or sin against them. It was only natural for Peter to want to know the extent of his obligation to an offending brother.

Are the foregoing attitudes and teachings foreign to modern day attitudes? Do we subconsciously adhere to the same ancient ideas? How many have severed relationships with close friends after having been repeatedly offended? How many have thought or said, "This is the third time that you have hurt me—I am sick and tired of it—our relationship is finished"? Man's vindictiveness, retaliation, and unforgiveness has been prevalent in every age—not excluding our own.

### MAN IS A DEBTOR TO GOD

The parable compares God to "a certain king, which would take account of his servants." God is portrayed as the one to whom all men must give account. God must be reckoned with. Men should fear God, not men. Jesus said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). The apostles said, "...we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts



5:29). **“So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God”** (Rom. 14:12). Peter said that we **“...shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead”** (I Pet. 4:5). Vengeance belongs to God; it is a fearful thing to fall into His hands (Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30,31). Therefore **“...whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men”** (Col. 3:23).

God is the Accounter and man is the Accountee. All men are servants to the king; all men must give an account to the king; and all men are debtors to God. Our sins are like debts. Jesus taught his disciples to pray saying, **“Forgive us our debts”** (Matt. 6:12). Luke wrote, **“And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us”** (Lk. 11:4). Obedience is due to God, and by failing in our duty we become indebted to his justice, which demands the execution of the penalty of the law. When one is deficient in his duty to God it is like an arrearage of payments and we become indebted to God. Our positive transgressions make us indebted to God because we have wilfully appropriated what was not our own without paying for it. The accumulated omissions and offenses make up one consolidated debt of guilt.

Furthermore, we should regard ourselves as debtors to God in all we have and all we are. We are indebted to God for our food, clothes, health, life, earth, sun, rain, air, etc. **“God made the world and all things...for in him we live, and move and have our being”** (Acts 17:24-28).

Sin is the account that all men have with God. The debt of sin is immense. There is no way of counting the accumulated sins of a lifetime. Jesus spoke of the enormity of the sinner's debt in terms of money—10,000 talents.

Whichever way we look at the debt, ten thousand talents represented an enormous sum. Money values fluctuate so that it is impossible to give the modern day equivalent of ten thousand talents, but let us make some comparisons to better understand the tremendous sum. If a **“talent”** be taken as a talent of silver, then according to the Roman calculation **“ten thousand talents”** would amount to about three million dollars. If the **“talent”** is according to Jewish calculation, then **“ten thousand talents”** would represent about ten million dollars. If the **“talent”** be taken to mean a talent of gold, then the **“ten thousand talents”** would be over 150 million dollars, a colossal sum, especially in that day.

We can better understand its vastness by comparing it

with other sums in the Bible. Twenty-nine talents were used in the construction of the tabernacle (Ex. 38:24). Eight thousand talents was the construction cost of Solomon's temple (I Chron. 29:4-7). One hundred and twenty talents was given to Solomon by the Queen of Sheba (I Kings 10:10). Eight hundred talents was the total tax income for the five provinces of Palestine (Judea, Peraea, Idumea, Samaria, and Galilee). In other words, the servant's debt was over ten times the amount of the national budget.

Jesus used this enormous sum to signify the infinite debt the sinner owes to God. It portrays, as Trenchard said, "the utter bankruptcy of every child of Adam as he stands in the presence of a just God, and is tried by the strictness of the holy law."

The day of reckoning arrived for the servant; he was brought before the king and payment was demanded. The servant had insufficient funds to pay the enormous debt. In accordance with ancient custom (II Kings 4:1; Neh. 5:8) the king commanded that the servant and his family and all his possessions be sold that payment might be made. Of course the sale of all he had would not produce enough to satisfy the debt; but the proceeds would be taken on account of the debt.

At this point the servant made an earnest promise to repay the debt. He failed to realize the enormity and absolute hopelessness of his debt. He appeared blind to the fact that a hundred lifetimes would not allow him sufficient time to repay it. A man in such terror and anguish will promise impossible things. The scene is very true to life. To save himself from a present difficulty, a debtor will make any promise that occurs to him, without considering whether he will ever be in a position to fulfill it.

This attitude is characteristic of many sinners. Some think that their case is really not so bad after all; if God will only allow them enough time they will be able to make amends for all their wrongs. Many sinners believe that future obedience can make up for past disobedience. The sinner then sets out to establish his own righteousness, but is guilty of this folly of attempting with nothing to pay all. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). No sinner could offer to pay—much less pay—the debt due to God.

Sinners usually attempt to deceive themselves about their sin. Many try to hide their sins. Adam and Eve hid

themselves in an attempt to hide their sin. Many feel that they can hide behind respectability, a cloak of self-righteousness, and religion thinking that their deficit will not be noticed. Some hide in darkness so their evil deeds will not be exposed (Jno. 3:20). Others postpone the day of reckoning perhaps thinking they will never be called to account (Acts 24:25). But there will be no escape (Heb. 2:3).

The day of reckoning will come for every soul sooner or later. On that day nothing will be hid. The day of reckoning fully exposed the servant's debt. The servant was brought to the king. He would not have come and exposed his own crime; he probably would have made the debt even greater. The secure sinner goes on heaping up wrath against the day of wrath, writing himself an ever deeper debtor in the books of God (Rom. 2:5). It is quite evident that this is not the final reckoning, but rather a reckoning that made the servant fully aware of his crime. One could be made fully aware of his sins before the final judgment by the preaching of the gospel. One need not wait to the judgment, but one can reckon with God today and receive forgiveness. But for those who put it off until the final reckoning it will be too late (Matt. 25:41). When that day comes, nothing will be hid (Rom. 2:16; Rev. 6:15-17).

### **MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS**

This is the only parable in the Bible that demonstrates the magnitude of God's forgiveness. God will show mercy toward the humble penitent man and will cancel the debt of sin entirely. In God's sight no offense is so great or so frequent as to be beyond forgiveness. What would life be worth if one could outstretch the limit of God's forgiveness? The fear of outstretching the limit would fill us with misery. God is willing to forgive us seven times each day, seventy times a day, 4900 times a day! There is no stopping place with God. The immensity of the debt does not hinder God's full and free pardon (Isa. 1:18; 55:7). God will save the chief of sinners (I Tim. 1:15). No one is beyond forgiveness; it makes little difference as to how many, how big, and how long one's sins have reached.

Warnings are held before the sinner and impenitent; and such threatenings, warnings, and punishments from God are a part of his nature for he cannot and does not tolerate sin. But for those who turn from their sins and seek forgiveness, there is abundant mercy and forgiveness. Exodus 20:2,6 says "I am the Lord, thy God...shewing mercy unto thousands of

them that love me and keep my commandments." Deuteronomy 7:9 says, "know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations." I Kings 8:23 says, "...there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepeth covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart." I Chronicles 16:34 says, "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever." II Chronicles 7:14 says, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." James 4:6 says, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." Psalm 51:17 says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

The truth about God's unlimited forgiveness is very hard to grasp. Man has been struggling with this concept through untold ages. Man has the conception that when he sins it is difficult, if not impossible, to receive forgiveness and to be reconciled to the love and favor of God. For this reason the Hindu mother feeds her baby to the crocodiles, as she supposes it will appease the wrath of God. Some fast and agonize in prayer, they feel they must do this in order to get forgiveness. Others punish and mutilate their bodies to prove to God that they regret their sins. But it is not difficult to get God to forgive.

### MAN'S FORGIVENESS IS CONDITIONAL ON FORGIVING OTHERS

The unmerciful servant went out from the king's presence and forgot that he had been purged of his old sins (II Pet. 1:9). The servant by chance found one of his fellow-servants and remembered the paltry debt which this fellow owed him. The unmerciful servant failed to remember the magnanimous act of the king; he failed to consider his own wrong doing (Gal. 6:1). He remembered his fellow-servant's debt; he forgets his past experience. He took his fellow-servant by the throat and demanded payment. He did not listen to the man's plea (though the prayer was the very same prayer which he himself had just previously uttered to the king). The Lord had dealt with him compassionately, but when he in turn tried to extract a mere pittance from his companion,

there was no love, no compassion, only hard-heartedness. He had been so freely and fully forgiven, but he failed in the reciprocity of forgiveness.

It is so easy to forget our own deep need of mercy and forgiveness and to become harsh and unforgiving to others. The unmerciful servant could have alleviated the distress of his fellow-servant with such trifling cost to himself that one can only wonder at a heart so calloused. And yet, this outrageous occurrence is made by Jesus to stand as the true picture of all his followers who will not forgive others.

The unmerciful servant's conduct was doubly odious. He had just been forgiven himself, and his debt was vastly greater than his fellow-servant. Yet, he cast his fellow-servant into prison without even an extension of time. He exacted the utmost punishment till the debt was fully paid.

God forgives more freely than man forgives. We think mercy is a good thing so long as we are the object of it; and how hard do we all find it to deal with others as God has dealt with us. To be beggars to God and tyrants to our brethren is the height of depravity. It is pathetic to think that we are so unlike our heavenly Father when it comes to forgiveness.

The unmerciful servant probably justified himself by thinking, "I have a right to treat him this way; after all, I am only asking for what is rightfully mine." Sometimes men must give up their rights; when one pushes his rights to an extremity it becomes a wrong (see Romans 14). Jesus said, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:2). Men desire to measure their fellowman by one standard and themselves by another. It will not work! We cannot be measured to God in one measure, and then measured to others by a different measure. If we are exacting and severe in justice toward others, we must expect God to be exacting and severe in justice toward us. Men ought to find it natural to forgive. Men ought not stand on their rights and exact their dues; we should be moved by the desire to promote the welfare of our fellowman (Rom. 15:2; I Cor. 10:24,33).

Man's debts to God are much greater than man's debts to man. An hundred pence when compared to ten thousand talents may be stated more accurately as 1 to 1,250,000—not a millionth of his own debt. He was forgiven between 10 million and 150 million dollars, but he refused to forgive a 16 dollar debt. The enormous difference between these two

amounts contrasts the difference between the offenses of our neighbors against us and those which we have committed against God. The worst offenses committed against men are nothing compared to the offenses all have committed against God. The sin of the unmerciful servant seems incredible, but it is not so incredible when we think of the debt we owe to God and the trifles committed against us which we find so hard to forget. Think about the causes of quarrels among men; usually it is a look, a word loosely spoken, an expression carelessly dropped. We must ask, "Is our shame for our sins against God as intense and real as our indignation concerning the injuries done to ourselves?"

Man must forgive as he is forgiven (Eph. 4:32). "They who forgive most, shall be most forgiven." Although this statement comes from some writing of man, it states exactly what we find in the Bible. When grace is bestowed it lays upon the receiver the obligation to manifest the same grace. Longfellow wrote, "If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility." Our salvation is not only dependent upon receiving mercy, but also dependent upon showing mercy. For the merciless there will be no mercy (Matt. 5:7; 6:15; Mark 11:25,26; James 2:13).

Forgiveness must never be refused when sought with repentance. As long as a man will repent, you offer forgiveness. And if a man even refuses to repent, still open the door of forgiveness. Keep that door open wide. Jesus said, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:3). But someone says, "Now listen, I forgave him the first time, the second time, and the third time. There must be a stopping place." My friends, if there is a stopping place with us, we cut our own throats. If God will forgive you, who are you not to forgive a brother? The greatest thing a man could do is to gain a brother; to gain a brother is more noble than ruining him (Matt. 18:15; I Cor. 5:1-5). The gaining of a brother is greater than the recovery of property!

To be sure, there can be no forgiveness without repentance. The Lord's statement from the cross "Father forgive..." was fulfilled only when they repented (Acts 2). To attempt to extend forgiveness to the impenitent is not being merciful (Exod. 34:6,7; I John 5:16). Forgiveness

without repentance leaves a man's evil nature unchanged. It encourages him to continue in sin and hardens him in her perversity. It also offends our fellowmen and public justice.

Forgiveness must be from the heart, not mere lip forgiveness. It must be a forgiveness which leaves no pique behind, no refusal of friendship. We should ask ourselves some questions to examine our hearts. Do we really have a clear conscience in our relationship with other human beings? Is the atmosphere between me and my fellowman open and unclouded by hostilities? Do I still harbor old hates in my heart? Am I inclined to indulge in ill will over some hurt? Do I allow resentments to rankle beneath the surface of my life? Is there a gnawing grudge against someone tucked away secretly in the back of my memory? Is there a bitter root of recrimination buried deep down on my subconscious mind whether I am reminded of some abuse or injustice I have suffered? Do the wrongs I have endured from others eat away inside me like a consuming cancer?

These probing questions get below the surface of our superficial attitudes. They probably reveal that the overwhelming majority of men and women have not forgiven others. They do not have a clear conscience. A backlog of lingering ill will, hostilities, resentments, and animosities beclouds their relationship with others. They are still demanding restitution. They still insist on getting their pound of flesh.

From infancy we are conditioned to put on a brave front. We have become skilled at pretense. We are good actors. We can say one thing and think quite another. We can smile sweetly at someone yet hold resentment against him down below the surface. Many of us do not even realize that this state of affairs exists in our lives. We have become so skilled in acting that we have deceived ourselves; we are scarcely aware of the warfare with ourselves. Belligerence, spite, and ill will have been companions whom we almost accept as normal life partners.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote, "Whenever I see myself before God and realize something of what my blessed Lord has done for me at Calvary, I am ready to forgive anybody anything. I cannot withhold it. I do not even want to withhold it."

This parable also demonstrates the severity of God. The story teaches that one's forgiveness can be revoked; our behavior after forgiveness can make us morally unfit to receive it. The Lord called the unmerciful servant "wicked;"

he did not call him "wicked" on account of his huge debt, but he called him that on account of his being unmerciful (Jas. 2:13). The problem in this parable is in the fact that after the unmerciful servant was forgiven, he landed in the hands of the tormentors, not for the evil which he had just committed, but for that old debt which had seemed unconditionally remitted to him.

Do sins, once forgiven, return on the sinner through his offenses which are committed afterward? All forgiveness is conditional, the condition in every case is dependent upon the forgiven man continuing in faith and obedience. When one ceases to be obedient in faith his pardon is rescinded. It is much like a man in a raging sea who is grasping for a life line, as long as he holds to the life line he has the hope of being saved, but if he turns loose he returns to the raging sea.

Jesus taught that having received forgiveness, one must extend forgiveness or he will fall from grace. Paul also taught the possibility of falling from grace (Gal. 5:4). This certainly refutes the popular doctrine of "once in grace, always in grace."

#### FINAL PUNISHMENT OF THE UNMERCIFUL AND UNFORGIVING

The unmerciful servant suffered tremendous loss. He forfeited his wife, children, and property. His talents and all that he had been entrusted with was taken away (Matt. 25:15,28). **"Those who sell themselves to work wickedness must be sold to make satisfaction."** (Henry). The last state of the unmerciful servant was worse than the first (II Pet. 2:20-22; Lk. 11:26). The indemnification of the tremendous debt was impossible if he had remained free; now he would have less of a chance of paying it as he was in the hands of the tormentors.

Contrary to the Roman doctrine of purgatory the words, **"till he should pay all that was due unto him,"** does not envision a time when the servant will have paid all that was due the king. In this case the debt is hopeless, and the expression **"till"** he should pay all does not envision any time at which one should be able to work out a debt so large as this. To quote Trench: **"When the Phocaeans, abandoning their city, swore they would not return till the mass of iron which they had plunged into the sea appeared once more upon the surface, this was the most emphatic form they could devise of declaring that they would never**



return; such an emphatic declaraton is this one.”

The phrase is strictly a proverbial statement; man could never acquit the slightest debt which he owes to God, the stating of such a condition was the strongest possible way of expressing the eternal duration of his punishment. The phrase simply means that the offender shall now taste of the extreme severity of the law; he shall have justice without mercy; he shall always be paying; yet he shall never pay off his debt.

## CONCLUSION

In this parable our Lord enounces the law of unlimited forgiveness as one of the essential laws of his kingdom. The unloving, hard-hearted, and unmerciful cannot continue in union with Christ who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor. The unforgiving cannot dare to pray, **“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them which trespass against us.”**

This parable teaches us that the foremost duty of every person is to establish and maintain a right relationship with God, but it also teaches us that it is impossible to maintain a right relationship with God without maintaining right relationships with our fellow-man.

Forgiveness cannot have a limit. It makes little difference how our fellow-man offends us, the law of the Lord is: **“Forgive, until seventy times seven.”**

The limitless character of forgiveness springs from its divine origin. Forgiveness belongs to the ethics of heaven. According to the laws of justice, forgiveness is above the law of justice, as the sovereign who pardons in clemency is above the judge who is compelled to condemn injustice.

If God treated us for our debts as we treat our fellow-man, what desolation would be ours! **“He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would ever reach heaven; for everyone has need to be forgiven”** (Herbert).

Forgiving our fellow-man makes prayer acceptable; it allows us to remain in a state of grace and reconciliation with God; it gives one a peace of mind; and in so doing we are assured that God’s infinite mercy will abound unmeasured to us.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

*Fred Davis*

### INTRODUCTION:

- A. The meaning of a parable and the Master's use.
- B. Christ's discourse with a lawyer.
- C. This parable portrays three philosophies of life.

### I. THE THIEVES

- A. We in our own country display this attitude.

### II. THE WOUNDED MAN

- A. We are not sure who he was.

### III. THE PRIEST AND THE LEVITE—The Indifference Of Religious Men

- A. Both men were by their own declaration religious.
- B. Both failed the Master's test.

### IV. THE SAMARITAN

- A. Samaritans were half-caste, a mixture of Jew and Gentile, therefore, hated by the full-blooded Jews.
- B. The Samaritan was the one who showed compassion.

### V. WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?

- A. Today we have the attitude of watching out for own.
- B. The surest way to find relief from our burdens is to become interested in others and, if possible, to share their burdens.

### INTRODUCTION

The word "parable" signifies a placing of two or more

objects together, usually for the purpose of a comparison. The Master Teacher did much of his teaching by parables. The bulk of the parables are found in Matthew and Luke. As you examine each of the parables of the Saviour each one is driving home a specific point!!!

In Luke 10:25-37 is found the **“Parable of the Good Samaritan.”** One of the loveliest and most suggestive of the matchless pictures of him who **“spake as never man spake.”**

And, behold a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jerico, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. And likewise, a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that hath shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

In verses 25-29 we have Christ's discourse with a certain lawyer. We have the purpose of the parable. **“A certain lawyer”** tested the knowledge and authority of Jesus with two questions. **The first question:** In verse 25 the lawyer confronted Jesus and asked, **“What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”** Jesus answers his question with a question! **“What is written in the law? how readest thou?”**—as much as to say, **“How do you understand the law to teach regarding this particular matter?”** The lawyer was forced to answer his own question. The question was given back to the lawyer and upon what he already knew of the law's

requirements, and gave the only right and complete answer he could, namely, the necessity of loving God and also his neighbor. Jesus, commending him for his answer, said, "Thou hast answered right. This do and thou shalt live."

The second question: In verse 29 the lawyer was desiring to justify himself and asked, "And who is my neighbor?" It seems that the lawyer was at ease in his conscience concerning the first part of his own answer, namely, his duty towards God. The tithe, down to the anise and cummin, had been scrupulously paid. His facts had been rigidly observed. His feasts had been carefully kept. His prayer-formula had never been neglected.

But, what seemed to trouble him, was the second part of his own answer, that is, the identity of the neighbor he must love. As a lawyer, he belonged to a class of teachers who restricted the term so as to exclude not only Gentiles and Samaritans, but also publicans and those who shared not their own particular views. For him as a Jew, neighborliness belonged within the covenant people. The word "neighbor" signified one living near, and was used in a limited sense to mean a friend. It was in response to that second question that Jesus spoke the parable, the design of which was to explain the word "neighbor."

This parable portrays three philosophies of life. That of the robbers—What is thine is mine. That of the priest and Levite—What is thine is thine, and what is mine is mine. That of the good Samaritan—What is mine is thine. In this parable we see three different attitudes toward the helpless and unfortunate. **Perfect indifference.** "The priest passed by on the other side." The priest was doubtless on his way home from the Temple service. In the discharge of his ceremonial duties he is very punctilious, and would pass by nothing, but a needy, dying brother by the wayside is unworthy of his notice. **Interested curiosity.** "The Levite came and looked, and passed by on the other side." This Levite could tell a story about this poor man when he went home, and justify his heartless conduct by saying that the place was too dangerous for him to tarry and lift the fallen. **Practical sympathy.** "The Samaritan came where he was, and had compassion on him." Although the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans, this Samaritan in mercy would have dealings with the half-dead Jew.

The question is asked, "Who fulfills the law of love?" We see the Christlike kindness as contrasted with that of selfishness. We must find our neighbor everywhere and in

everyone, and especially in the fellowman in need. The inspired writer James, informed us what pure religion is!!! (James 1:27) **"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."**

## I. THE THIEVES

**"...and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead."** The Jericho road was rugged, robber-infested. Because travelers had been attacked so often on this road, it became known as **"the bloody way."** On the highway of life thieves and robbers lurk. They know no God but their own desires. The philosophy of life practiced by the robbers was **"might makes right."** This is the rule that was practiced by Hitler in World War II. He cared not for his fellowman—his rights, his good name, his character, or his physical well-being. Hitler destroyed millions and millions of innocent people to try to accomplish his purpose. All war and all crime is based upon this rule. Sometimes this rule is expressed as **"What is thine should be mine and I'll take it."** We are mindful of this attitude in business—in politics—in the church.

In our own country we are more aware of this philosophy now than ever before. Here in the city of Indianapolis about two years ago, a robbery took place in which the robber was caught by the police and the robber made a statement to this effect. **"My children didn't have anything for Christmas and I wanted to make sure that they had a good Christmas. So I robbed the bank."** (I Tim. 6:6-10) **"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."** The attitude of **"the end justifies the means"** is not taught in the Bible. (Romans 3:8) **"...let us do evil, that good may come?"** (Habakkuk 2:12) **"Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!"** The needed revenue does not justify legalized liquor. Starvation does not

justify prostitution. The fact that the crucifixion of Jesus worked out to man's salvation did not justify Judas in betraying him, nor the murderers in crucifying him. The philosophy of life that "might makes right" and that "the end justifies the means" would make life unsafe for anyone.

## II. THE WOUNDED MAN

"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves..." We are not told who the traveler was, Jew or Gentile; not a word about his rank, descent, or religion; simply that he was a man, a human being. It seems, however, from the whole tone of the story, most probable that the wounded traveler was a Jew. The traveler, likely enough a Jewish merchant, had fallen among thieves, who had robbed him, and then had left their victim half-dead. This poor traveler has met the cruel fate of many before and since Christ's time. It is a case of unmistakable need. There is no possibility of deception in the circumstances. The world is full of people like him. Men and women are stripped of righteousness, robbed of life's necessities, broken in body, wounded in spirit.

## III. THE PRIEST AND THE LEVITE The Indifference Of Religious Men

(Luke 10:31) "And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side." The priest was a servant of the Law which enjoined mercy even to a beast. (Exod. 23:4-5) "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him thou shalt surely help with him." Here was a man, professedly consecrated to God, and even now on his way home after his turn of office in the Temple. Surely after his prayers and oblations, he will show mercy to the man who sorely needed it. But this spiritual leader, one of the 12,000 priests living in Jericho at that time, had evidently left God back in the Temple and had neither time nor compassion for his unfortunate fellow Jew. The priest was one who had never learned what "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" meant; who, whatever duties he might have been careful in fulfilling, had "omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." This presents a vivid and powerful picture of the vice of Jewish

ceremonial cleanliness at the cost of moral principle and duty.

(Luke 10:32) **“And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.”** The Levite was a servant of the Temple and as a minister of religious worship and an interpreter of the Law should have been eager to assist the distressed soul he looked on, yet left unaided. The Levite’s conduct was better and worse than his official superior’s—better, in that he did feel a little pity and stopped to look on the sufferer; and worse, because he selfishly strangled the noble impulse in its birth, and passed on to his own place without so much as throwing a cloth over the poor maimed body to shelter it from the scorching sun or the cold night dew. This man is a type of those who want to know, but don’t want to help.

No doubt they made excuses to themselves; did, in some way or another, justify their neglect to their own consciences. Perhaps a cowardly fear of being identified with the robbers. Perhaps the robbers might return at any moment. Perhaps they were in too much of a hurry to get home and to other affairs. Probably the sufferer was beyond all human help. The priest, we may imagine, knowing the Levite was close behind, thought the Levite would help the man. And then the Levite in his turn, may have thought within himself that it could not be incumbent on him to undertake a perilous office, from which the priest had just shrunk.

The philosophy of life practiced by the priest and the Levite was that **“Every man must look after himself.”** **“It is a dog eat dog world.”** They acted on the principle, **“What is mine I will keep.”** They had not contributed to the unfortunate circumstances of the man who had been clubbed, therefore, they did not feel obligated to help. They wouldn’t take bread from an orphan, but neither would they help one. This rule says: **“Let the suffering suffer...the perishing perish...the dying die.”** This was the opposite of Isaiah 58:7, **“Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him: and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?”** This is also the opposite of Galatians 6:2, **“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”**

The whole of their conduct was inhuman, but not unnatural; brethren, we see this conduct copied by multitudes of men and women professing Christianity now!

They neglected an opportunity to do good. Brethren, it is sinful to neglect opportunities to do good. (James 4:17) "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (I John 3:17) "But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (Gal. 6:10) "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Read Matthew 25:31-46. It is sinful to neglect the worship. (Heb. 10:25) "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." It is sinful to neglect preaching the gospel. (I Cor. 9:16) "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" It is sinful to neglect the visiting of the sick and the care of the needy. (James 1:27) "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

#### IV. THE SAMARITAN

Samaritans were half-caste, a mixture of Jew and Gentile, therefore hated by the full-blooded Jew. Jews would have no dealings with Samaritans, treating them as outcasts. Although the Jews and Samaritans were locally closest neighbors, they were morally most unneighborly. Therefore, the lawyer must have been amazed when Jesus introduced a Samaritan as the only one on that lonely, dangerous Jericho road willing to befriend a helpless Jew. The very man from whom no needy Jew could expect the least relief, was the one who gave it.

The Samaritan was the one who showed compassion to the needy one!! The priest had his heart hardened against the one who was robbed. But the Samaritan had his heart opened towards one of another people. When he saw him he had compassion on him, and never took into consideration what country he was of. He was a man, and a man in misery, and the Samaritan has learned to honour all men; he knows not how soon this poor man's case may be his own, and therefore pities him as he himself would desire and expect to be pitied in the like case. That such great love should be found in a Samaritan was wonderful!!! The compassion of this Samaritan was not an idle compassion.



He did not think it enough to say, "And one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" (James 2:16). But he put forth a helping hand to this poor needy creature. The Samaritan was friendly!

First, he went to the poor man, whom the priest and Levite kept at a distance from; he inquired, no doubt, how he came into this deplorable condition, and condoled with him. Secondly, he did the surgeon's part, for want of a better. He bound up his wounds, making use of his own linen, it is likely, for that purpose, and poured in oil and wine, which perhaps he had with him; wine to wash the wound, and oil to mollify it and close it up. He did all he could to ease the pain and prevent the peril of his wounds, as one whose heart bled with them. Thirdly, he set him on his own beast and went on foot himself and brought him to an inn. A great mercy it is to have inns upon the road where we may be furnished for our money with all conveniences for food and rest. Perhaps the Samaritan, if he had not met with this hindrance, would have gotten that night to his journey's end; but, in compassion to that poor man, he takes up short at an inn. Some have said that the priest and Levite pretended they could not stay to help the poor man because they were in haste to go and attend the temple-service at Jerusalem. We suppose this Samaritan went upon business; but he understood that both his own business and God's sacrifice, too, must give place to such an act of mercy as this. The Samaritan puts himself to inconvenience, perhaps to peril, and, after dressing the wounds, takes the wounded one along with him, provides lodging for him and even takes care of the sick and friendless man's future. The piled-up acts of kindness were all clearly done to a poor stranger; without hope of recompense or reward.

The philosophy of life practiced by the good Samaritan was to do good unto others. He acted on the principle, "What is mine is thine, and I will share it." He took time to help one in unfortunate circumstances. He didn't say, "If I had this or that I would help." He didn't wait for someone else.

The Good Samaritan bears the features of the despised Nazarene, who comes to seek and save the lost. He came where he was. Christ comes to us right where we are. In our stripped and wounded condition we could do nothing for ourselves. (Romans 5:6) "For when we were yet without

strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." He had compassion on him. Christ "loved us, and gave himself for us." (Gal. 2:20). He bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine. Although we are full of wounds and bruises (Isa. 1), Christ can bind up and heal (Luke 4:18). This he does by the oil of his Spirit and the wine of his Word. He set him on his own beast. Those whom the Lord lifts up are also set in His own place. "Now are we the Sons of God." (I John 3:2). He brought him to an inn. The saved of the Lord also find shelter and new friendships. He took care of him. In the salvation of Christ there is not only a great deliverance, but also a special providence (Rom. 8:28). He careth for you. (II Pet. 5:7). He left a promise concerning him. Our Great Shepherd has also left enough for our need during His absence in the "exceeding great and precious promises." "When I come again I will repay thee."

## V. WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?

Modern apartment living has been described as complete freedom from grass cutting, fence mending, house repairs AND neighbors. Yet, all arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, neighborliness has a certain ineffable charm—which no amount of work-free expedients can erase. There is universal appeal in the friendship and helpfulness enjoyed by neighbors. Unfortunately, in the serious business of making a living and watching out for our own, we often forget the needs and the hopes of others. When Jesus walked on earth, men puzzled over this matter. The lawyer once asked our Lord, "Who is my neighbor?"

Some historian has pointed out that since 3600 B.C. there have been more than 14,000 large and small wars in which the number of people killed is equal to the present population of the world—four and one-half billion persons. Although these estimates could hardly be expected to be exact, there certainly must have been thousands of wars and billions of people killed. These are staggering figures which the human mind finds it difficult to comprehend. There is actually no way that anyone can fully realize the tragedy and suffering which war has brought upon mankind.

Besides these wars, however, there are uncounted other instances of man's hatred, animosity, jealousy and antagonism to his fellowmen. Strife and tension between men seldom burst into open warfare, in comparison to the number of cases which occur. So far as man's history upon the earth is concerned, by far the world's greatest problem

is man's inability to get along with his fellowman in peace and happiness. Someone has said, "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless millions mourn." I could not contemplate the full meaning of this sentence a few years ago, but the longer that I live the more significant this statement becomes. Man's inhumanity to man indeed make countless millions mourn.

How tantalizing, in the midst of a world of turmoil, is the thought of the veritable paradise that men could have upon this earth if everyone loved his neighbor. If everyone would constantly do nice things for everyone else, what a difference it would make. This one change in attitude and behavior would remove most of the problems which mankind faces and would bring happiness to all men. How tantalizing it is to contemplate a world in which everyone were trying to help everyone else!!!

Place beauty and ugliness side by side. Inevitably, some choose the sordid and ugly. But deep down every man and woman longs for the pure, the good, the beautiful.

There is a very interesting story told by Mr. D. B. Towner, who was associated with the famous preacher, Dwight L. Moody, for the last fourteen years of his life. He wrote, "After his meetings in Oakland, California, in the spring of 1899, when I accompanied him as a singer, we took the train for Santa Cruz. We were hardly seated when in came a party of young men, one of whom was considerably under the influence of liquor and was very badly bruised, with one eye completely closed and terribly discolored. He at once recognized Mr. Moody, and began to sing hymns and talk very loudly for his benefit. Moody caught up his bag and said, 'Towner, let's get out of this.' When I reminded him that the other car was full he settled down, protesting that the company should not allow a drunken man to insult the whole car in such a manner. Presently, the conductor came, and Mr. Moody called his attention to the poor fellow in the rear of the car. The conductor attended to his duty, and when he reached the young man he said a few words to him in a low voice and the fellow followed him into the baggage car where he bathed his eye and bound it up with his handkerchief, after which the young man soon fell asleep. Mr. Moody sat musing for a time, then said, 'Towner, that is an awful rebuke to me. I preached against Phariseeism last night to a crowd, and exhorted them to imitate the Good Samaritan; and now this morning God has given me an opportunity to

practice what I preached, and I find I have both feet in the shoes of the priest and Levite.' He was reticent all the way to Santa Cruz, but he told the incident that night to the audience, confessing his humiliation."

The surest way to find relief from our burdens is to become interested in others and, if possible, to share their burdens. Jesus never failed to show his care and deep concern for others.

When Jesus lived upon the earth he demonstrated both in his life and in his message a deep concern for others—for all others. On one occasion in the synagogue in Nazareth he stood up to read and was handed the scroll of the book of Isaiah. In the course of his reading he included the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovering of sight to the blind, To set at liberty them that are bruised, To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). A few moments later he added the comment, "Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears." Isaiah had proclaimed some seven hundred years before Christ came that the Messiah would be concerned about the poor and would proclaim release to those who were captives to sin and the recovering of sight both to the literally blind and to those who were spiritually blind. (Isa. 61:1-2). The whole focus of Jesus' life was upon helping others.

In the final paragraph of Matthew, chapter 5, we read, "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them that love you, what reward have you? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the Gentiles the same?" (Matt. 5:43-47).

In the 20th chapter of Matthew we find Jesus settling a dispute among his disciples about which should be greatest among them, with the words, "Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister: and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be minister unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26-28). In the 25th chapter of Matthew, we find Christ describing the judgment day in which all men will stand before him. To

some he will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me" (Matt. 25:34-36).

Henry Drummon, in his sermon, "The Greatest Thing In The World," preached eighty-six years ago, most impressively states our theme: "The greatest thing," says someone, 'a man can do for his Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of his other children.' I wonder why it is that we are not all kinder than we are. How much the world needs it. How easily it is done. How instantaneously it acts. How infallibly it is remembered...Lavish it upon the poor, where it is very easy; especially upon the rich, who often need it most; most of all upon your equals, where it is very difficult, and for whom perhaps we each do least of all...Lose no chance of giving pleasure. For that is the ceaseless and anonymous triumph of a truly loving spirit. I shall pass through this world but once. Any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

Others must have a place of preeminence in our thinking. We cannot be true followers of Jesus and live selfishly. We have been saved to serve. It is our mission in God's kingdom to help others.

The highest service one can render to his neighbor is to bring him to Christ. This is to bring him to salvation and to the spiritual life. No other service rivals this in importance. In the scriptures we read this profound declaration concerning Christ: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). This was his purpose, and notice, it was centered on the needs of others. On one occasion when Jesus was sitting by the well in Samaria in the heat of the noonday sun, he asked a drink of water from one of the Samaritan women who came to the well to draw. They discussed water and then we read, "Jesus answered and said unto her, Everyone that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life" (John 4:13-14). Christ was saying simply that the spiritual blessings which he provides are infinitely more valuable than even water itself, which is so pleasant to

the taste in the heat of the day and so essential to physical life.

In writing to the Corinthians the apostle Paul said, "I seek not yours, but you...I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (II Cor. 12:14-15). How deeply this great apostle was concerned for the spiritual welfare of others!! The book of James closes with the words, "Let him know that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20). No greater service can be rendered to anyone than to bring him to Christ for spiritual healing. It is quite significant that men seldom are willing to open their lives to spiritual guidance, until they are convinced that the one who would teach them genuinely and deeply loves them. The genuineness of this love can best be demonstrated by rendering some service—the providing of food, clothing, or some other necessity of life. Concern for the souls of men can be most effective when that concern has been proved to be genuine by concern for the physical needs of men.

### Conclusion

The extremely strong emphasis upon others which we find in the scriptures grows out of a basic Christian concept. Every human being on earth is infinitely important, because he was created in the image of God. He is, therefore, to be treated with respect and with love. We dare not mistreat him, nor ignore him, nor disregard his needs, for he is a son of God. Each man is a living soul, more valuable than the whole world.

May each of us do his part to show all mankind that what our world needs most is the love of God and the love of men. When one becomes a Christian he gradually loses the selfish, self-centered view of life, as ever increasingly he grows to be like his Lord in looking outward to the needs of others. Little by little he grows into the likeness of Christ as he concerns himself with the physical needs of those about him and as he reaches ultimately the higher level of helping them to find the bread of life. In the process of serving others, he finds that he himself, as a kind of unsought by-product, finds happiness. "Who is my neighbor?" All men. All men who are in need. Everyone on earth who is within the reach of some kind of help which we may give!!!

## CHAPTER NINE

# Laborer In The Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

*Bob Jent*

- I. THE KINGDOM IS LIKE UNTO A MAN THAT IS AN HOUSEHOLDER.
  - A. The Householder is God
  - B. The Lord desires workers in his Kingdom
- II. THE PLACE OF WORK IS IN THE VINEYARD, THE CHURCH.
  - A. The market place
  - B. All sinners are idle
- III. THERE IS WORK FOR EVERY QUALIFIED WORKER.
  - A. The laborer accepts the conditions
  - B. The just and lawful shall surely live. (Ezek. 18:5-9; Matt. 25:35-40).
- IV. HOW THE LORD EVALUATES WORK DONE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH.
  - A. All is lost except what is done for Christ
  - B. All human endeavor is idleness
- V. TIME FOR VINEYARD WORK IS SHORT.
  - A. Time for work is today
  - B. Work while it is day (John 9:4)
- VI. THE ELEVENTH HOUR MAN.
  - A. Had time to work
  - B. No encouragement to wait
- VII. PAYMENT AT END OF THE DAY.
  - A. No payment for those who abandon work
  - B. We cannot abandon work by thinking we have done enough

- VIII. HEAVENLY REWARD TO ALL  
A. Emphasis on the crown  
B. Fight the good fight - finish the course
- IX. MURMURING AGAINST THE GOOD MAN.  
A. Discontentment of laboring long  
B. The wrong attitude
- X. THE EVIL EYE.  
A. Envy  
B. Accept what was agreed upon
- XI. MURMURING IN THE CHURCH.  
A. Why should he be in this position  
B. The bull's eye
- XII. THE FIRST AND THE LAST  
A. Held high in eyes of the world  
B. Lowest in the eyes of the world
- XIII. SOME SHALL REMAIN LAST  
A. Not all are humble in the vineyard  
B. Last because of our attitude
- XIV. MANY ARE CALLED  
A. Few are chosen  
B. The call is by the gospel
- XV. REWARDS OF HEAVEN NOT CALCULATED BY METHODS OF EARTH.  
A. The Jews' rejection  
B. Fierce wrath against Paul (Acts 22:21-22)
- XVI. NO ENCOURAGEMENT TO DELAY.  
A. Remember thy creator (Eccl. 12:1)  
B. Labor out of the vineyard is standing idle
- XVII. THE NATIONAL APPLICATION  
A. The calling of the Jews  
B. The willingness of the Gentiles
- XVIII. APPLICATION TO LABOR AGREEMENTS.  
A. Loyally keep our engagements  
B. Employer keep his engagements (Col. 4:1)



I want to express my appreciation for the opportunity to be a part of this lectureship series. I appreciate the men that have spoken thus far, and those who will speak from now to the end of the series. I appreciate the sincerity of the preaching that we have heard, and will hear to the end of the series. Psalms 122:1 the Psalmist wrote, "I was glad when they said let us go unto the house of the Lord."

In the lectureships that will follow in the coming years we shall earnestly contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints. Paul, in writing to the Philippians, "That ye stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel"(Phil. 1:27).

On the subject of unity too much stress cannot be laid. We are to stand our ground against all foes.

The title assigned to me this period is the "Laborers in the Vineyard" as recorded in Matthew 20:1-16. The passage begins with the word "for" which connects the scriptures that follow, with the scriptures that precede. It is an explanation of the last words in the preceding chapter. The passage relates to us one of the principles of the kingdom or church.

The chapter begins with the words "For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder." The kingdom of heaven is the church. The householder is God. The Lord desires workers in his kingdom. Verse 1 says that the householder went out to hire laborers into his vineyard. They were hired to work, to labor on his behalf. Today the Lord needs workers, just as he did in the early days of the church. Luke 10:2 says "The harvest is truly great, but the laborers are few, send forth laborers unto his harvest." The apostle wrote in I Corinthians 15:58, "always abounding in the work of the Lord, that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." John 9:4 states, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work." Amos wrote in Amos 6:1, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, who are idle." The Lord has always encouraged his people to work. Work is honorable before God. II Thessalonians 3:10 says that those who will not work should not eat. The Lord is calling the young and the old, the healthy and the handicapped. I Corinthians 12:22 says, "Those members which seem to be more feeble are necessary." Therefore, the only reason for one not working for the Lord is that a person did not hear the call, or did not heed the call. There is much work to be done in seeking and saving the lost. Let us ask ourselves, "Am I a

**worker, how much visiting, teaching, and helping am I doing?"**

The place of work is in the vineyard—the church. Consider the lesson of the market place. All sinners are idle, doing nothing for the cause of Christ before God calls them to work in his vineyard. The market place is the world, it is a bustling noisy scene, yet many stand there all the day idle. Their idleness may be laborious idleness. Their life may be restless, eager in the pursuit of pleasure or riches, filled every hour with this or that engagement, this or that amusement. If we neglect spiritual growth in this life, we will be like the chaff which the wind driveth away. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish, as stated in Psalms 1:1-6. Men may think they are working hard when, in the eye of God, they are standing idle all the day. They are not seeking the lost, and certainly not working out their own salvation. Philippians 2:12 says, **“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”** Those who desire to labor in the Lord’s cause should be found in the market place where the Master seeks his laborers. Can any truthfully say no man hath hired us?

Consider the lessons of the vineyard. There is work in the church for every qualified laborer, and all are qualified by accepting the householder’s conditions. Read Ezekiel 18:5-9. A parallel scripture to that would be Matthew 25:35-40. The laborers were hired to work in his vineyard, the church. They were not told to go work in the vineyard or church of their choice. The Lord has only one vineyard—one church. Colossians 1:18 says he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have preeminence. Ephesians 4:4, **“There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.”** One can suppose that the householder—God—in this parable would reward the workers for labor in any other field but his own. God has not promised to reward anyone for work he does outside his vineyard, the church. Ephesians 3:21 says, **“Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus through out all ages.”** The Lord will not reward one for work that he may do in a denominational church. Matthew 15:30 says, **“Every plant which my heavenly father hath not planted shall be rooted up.”** God will not excuse anyone for work done in a denominational church. Acts 17:30 states, **“And in the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.”** I John 4:1

says, "Beloved believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

Everyone has the solemn obligation to make certain that they truly work in the Lord's fields, and not in another's. Thus everyone should examine the church in which they hold membership to make sure that it is the right one.

Let's note how the Lord evaluates the work men do outside the vineyard. Those not working in the vineyard are simply standing around idle. All is lost except what is done for Christ and at his direction. All human endeavor is the grossest idleness when contrasted with the work in the vineyard of the Lord.

The length of time for vineyard work is short. James 4:14 says, "Our life is but a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away". The time for vineyard work is today. John 9:4 says, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day, the night (or death) cometh when no man can work." James 4:14 tells that tomorrow may never come. II Corinthians 6:2 says, "Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation." Can anyone say that the Lord would accept one who had lived a riotous life, seeking the pleasures of this world, and then repent just short of the end of his life just to escape the fires of a devil's hell. Are any willing to take that chance. Death bed repentance is the farthest thing removed from this teaching.

The 11th hour man responded when called, and had time to work, even if it were only one hour. They did not say, "I am about to die, and therefore I cannot come to work in your vineyard, so please reward me anyway." There is no encouragement here to wait until the evening of life to respond to the Gospel call. If we keep in mind what a frightful chance these late workers took if they had deliberately waited until late. They may not have had a final chance. However it does give encouragement to those who may be now in the 11th hour not to despair because of a wasted life and wasted opportunities, but to do the best in the time that remains. To work before the night comes when no man can work any more. The night will surely come when no man can work. Our works will surely follow us.

The evening settlement or payment will be given at the end of the day. For all men an evening settlement will come at the close of life's day. In Hebrews 9:27 we learn that it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the

judgement. We do learn from II Corinthians 5:10 that all men will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and all will receive the deeds for the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil.

Payment will come at the end of the day, and it may be dogmatically assumed, that any who abandoned work earlier received nothing at all for their labors. The reward given to the late starters should lend no encouragement to the early quitters. Men may never abandon their labors in the church on the assumption that they have done enough for the Lord. In Revelation 2:10 we learn that if we fear none of the trials and tribulations, and be faithful unto death, we shall receive a crown of life. Matthew 24:13 says, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Thus the parable emphasizes the fact that the rewards of God's kingdom are not of debt, but of grace, and rebukes that desire of preeminence, which is brought on by jealousies and rivalries which often exist. All who have labored without regard to the length of service, receive the same. It is not some indefinite, temporal benefit, but eternal life, which is the same for all that have endured to the end, who have finished the course.

God does not half save some, and fully save others. The heavenly reward will be given to all who seek it in God's way, without reference to time or popularity. Our emphasis should not be on how many stars are in the crown, but on the crown itself. In II Timothy 4:6-8 Paul says "For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

In verse 11 there were those who murmured against the good man of the house. The discontentment of those who had labored long, yet received no more wages than those who started late. Such an attitude is uncalled for in the presence of such a great reward. This part of the parable is not held up for emulation, but rather is given to portray a wrong attitude. It is safe to say that no place will be found for this murmuring in the future world to come. It cannot be conceived; it's incompatible, therefore let each of us take a good look at ourselves, to see if we have inclinations in that direction already.

We must learn this great lesson now, for murmurings

have no place in the kingdom of heaven. Heaven is the place of love. No jarring notes of envy or discontentment may disturb its divine harmonies. It is the home of blessedness. There can be no complaints in heaven. To those who have this unfavorable attitude, heaven would be no heaven if they were allowed to enter.

The cause of the murmurings was the evil eye. The evil eye in this instance was the envious eye. Envy does not demand more of itself, but wishes that others should have less. They murmured not because they received too little. They received what they agreed upon. But because others, as they thought, had received too much. Their complaint is that others who worked less receive the same amount. Many would find a feeling of sympathy for those who were first.

Yes, there are many in all generations who would have been just as outraged as they were. And why were they angry? The householder had interfered with their petty schedule of values.

How many times have we heard the same murmurings in the church? When someone says, "Why should he be a deacon? I have been in this congregation for twenty years." Or, "Why should he be an elder? My uncle Charles started this church in a school house. We've all been members here since it started."

In verse 12 they said, "Thou hast made them equal to us". Right there is the bullseye of the whole trouble. We've done the work, shouldered the load, borne the heat, carried the mail. They (the late comers) ought to be way down on the scale compared to us. The Apostle Paul condemned such action in II Corinthians 10:12. Paul says he had no desire to join such company. When men commend themselves, having nothing but themselves with which to measure themselves, they can only end by boasting of themselves. Paul says that those who measure and compare themselves among themselves are not wise. The wise man lets go of his own ways, and comes to trust in divine guidance.

In Matthew 19:30 Jesus said, "Many that are first shall be last and the last shall be first." Those who are first in the estimation of the world, and probably themselves, will be the last, if they enter at all into the kingdom of God. Those who are last and lowest in the kingdom of God, they shall be first. God does not judge men by their worldly position. Though he does not punish rank, nor does he punish prosperity, for they are not in themselves an evil thing. It is evil when men use them to sow discord among brethren.

On the other hand worldly preeminence has a tendency to injure the better qualities of the soul. In Matthew 19:23 Christ spoke of the difficulty of a rich man entering heaven, for man will tend to trust in riches rather than divine guidance. Another hindrance to spiritual progress is pride, high rank fosters pride. Self will is incompatible with spiritual excellence. Lowliness, obedience, unselfishness, and a spirit of serving are the qualities which Christ honors. To cultivate these spiritual qualities in high places or positions of the world is very difficult because of the temptations of the world.

There are some that are last who shall remain last. Not all who do little do it well. Not all who enter the vineyard late enter it in a humble attitude. One's being last does not guarantee he will be first. The first hired in the parable were last in many respects. The parable would indicate that the first becoming last is a punishment, not for having been first hired, but rather for the attitude which was manifested. Let us remember to be humble, and never boast and exalt ourselves above our fellow laborers. To those who hold onto their humility will be acknowledged first and foremost in the day of the Lord.

The 16th verse of the parable says, "For many be called, but few chosen." We can say that their reward vanished in their hands. Not all that were called would receive their reward, because many would nullify it by their conduct. Many are called, indeed all are called by the gospel, but only a few heed the call. The parable deals with those who heeded the call, the obedient, but as children they had to be disciplined. It does not extend to the disobedient who are mentioned elsewhere, and who refused to work in the vineyard, and refused to enter it.

Many are called to work in God's vineyard, but few retain that temper of spirit, that humility, that entire submission to the righteousness of God, that will allow them in the end to be partakers of that crown of righteousness. Many of us are in the vineyard, and have long been so. But in what spirit have we labored? Let us all examine ourselves.

The rewards of heaven are not calculated by the methods of earth. The Jews showed this narrow spirit of jealousy towards the Gentiles. It was this that caused their rejection of our Lord at Nazareth in Luke 4:25-29. It was this that brought the fierce wrath of the Jews against Paul in Acts 22:21-22. The complainers were like the elder brother in

Luke the 15th chapter. Man must accept God's authority. If God has decreed baptism, accept it, walk by faith as we read in II Corinthians 5:7. However long or short our service to God has been, our sacrifice, blood or tears, it must forever be utterly and completely insignificant. At the eleventh hour there is still work to be done.

In this parable there is encouragement for those who have delayed to enter the service of God till late in life, but surely not encouragement to anyone to purposely delay entering the service of God. For we find every where in the scriptures a blessing resting on early entrance. In Ecclesiastes 12:1, "**Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.**" All activity out of Christ, all labor that is not labor in his church, is in his sight, standing around idle.

There is a national application in the parable. It applies to the calling of the Jews and the Gentiles. God's ancient people were first called to work in the vineyard. The Jews murmured at the admission of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God. These Gentiles are the last in time, but by their willing service and obedience in the faith are made first, while the Jews, once first, became by their jealousy and hatred of others the last.

There is also application to labor agreements. It teaches that every man is a free individual, but if voluntarily that individual enters into engagements, he must loyally keep his engagements. Also, the individual who has work to offer must also keep his engagements. In Colossians 4:1 the writer tells us, "**Master give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a master in heaven.**" The man who has skill to do the work, and agrees for a penny a day, nothing can happen to make that unfair. He may make a new bargain tomorrow, but he must carry through his bargain today.

Strikes are very often sinful repudiations of agreements. See II Peter 2:18-20. Management and labor both have their rights, and neither may purposely encroach upon the other. The employer is entitled to reasonable returns on his investments, and the employee to a decent wage for his labor. The employer steals when he loafs on the job, and does not give full measure. The employer steals when he does not give a fair wage. Refer to Colossians 3:22-25 and Colossians 4:1 for instructions to employers and employees. Exodus 23:2 says, "**Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do**

evil." Numbers do not make a thing right. Just because the whole plant goes on strike does not make it right. Strikes many times infringe on the rights of others. Many times for one to get what he wants he must walk over others to get it.

Would it not be much better to do as the Bible directs? To suffer wrong and endure hardships, rather than to act contrary to Bible teachings? Management and labor must recognize each other. Both are obligated to each other. Neither may exist without the other. Both should strive to work to their common good, and neither defraud the other.

Let us all look daily at ourselves, and daily take inventory of our attitudes. First, one's attitude must be right. Christians must be willing to do whatever Jesus asks, John 2:5 says, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." James 2:10 tells us to keep all of God's laws. In Revelation 2:20, "Let us keep ajar the door we opened to Christ." Any mind not committed to this extent need not go any further, but should right now make the total commitment necessary to living the Christian life.

Hebrews 13:5-6 says "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." The Lord said in Matthew 28:20, "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." In II Corinthians 10:13 the Lord said that he has promised to care for us, helping us to overcome temptations, as we read in II Timothy 1:12, 4:6-8 we can live with the same assurance with which Paul lived.

As Christians we should know by reading from I Peter 2:9 and Titus 2:14 that we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a peculiar nation. The Christian life is a giving life. In I Corinthians 6:19 we read that Christians are no longer their own, for they have been bought with a price. We learn from Mark 16:16 and I Corinthians 14:12 that ones time must be dedicated to the Lord. Such is imperative if the church is to grow through personal evangelism, edification of the saints and benevolence. We also learn from the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 that one's talents are to be dedicated to the Lord. Members of the body are different, having various talents. Failure of one member to perform all his functions results in a weakened member and body. We read in I Corinthians 4:2 that it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

In II Timothy 2:15 we see that it is required that we



study God's word. Psalms 119:105 and 130 we read that God's word is a lamp to guide the Christian. The Christian should desire to study the word of God. By studying we can show ourselves approved unto God. Refer to I Peter 3:15. We should study the word so that we can tell others why we believe what we do, and why we have the hope we do. John 12:48 tells us that this word will judge us one day.

The Christian should be faithful in attendance (Heb. 10:25). If one can forsake one assembling without it being sin, he can forsake all, without it being sin. The church could therefore, be destroyed without sin being involved. What absurd reasoning. To be present we can learn, encourage others, help build each other up, putting the kingdom first, and have fellowship with the saints.

In conclusion, brethren, let us desire to add the Christian graces daily as recorded in II Peter 1:5-7, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

We learn in I Peter 2:2 that we should desire the sincere milk of the word. II Peter 3:18 tells us that we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We also learn in II Peter 3:12-13 that we should look for and be hasting unto the coming of the day of the Lord, looking for new heavens and a new earth, where in dwelleth righteousness, that is the home in heaven. If we never meet (or meet again) this side of heaven, we have the assurance that we will meet on that beautiful shore, where we shall receive that crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give in that day.

## CHAPTER TEN

# The Unrighteous Steward

Luke 16:1-13

*Virgil Hale*

### INTRODUCTION:

1. This right after prodigal son and elder brother—just before rich man and Lazarus.
2. Steward—overseer of what belongs to another. (Joseph—Gen. 39:5-6).
3. We are stewards of God—inspired men were (I Cor. 4:1).
  - a. We are stewards—but not inspired (Eph. 3:10-11).
4. Steward in story betrayed trust placed in him—so can we.
5. Many lessons to be learned from this story.

### I. A CONTRAST BETWEEN “CHILDREN OF LIGHT” AND “CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD.”

1. Children of world wiser more diligent in getting what they want.
2. They are zealous to accomplish desired ends.
3. This man was wise and prompt.
4. He was realistic—he faced facts as they were.
5. He used foresight—planned for future.  
He was commended—not for sin—sin doesn't pay.
  - a. Numbers 32:23; Gal. 6:7-8.
  - b. Commended for foresight and promptness in preparing for inevitable.

### II. A CONTRAST BETWEEN “UNRIGHTEOUS MAMMON” AND “TRUE RICHES.”

1. One temporary—other permanent.
2. Why called “unrighteous mammon”?

- a. Because of how used.
  - (1) Can waste like prodigal (Lk. 15) or hoard like rich fool (Lk. 12).
  - (2) Or can use wisely to gain heaven.
3. Note some of the riches we possess.
  - a. Time (Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5).
  - b. Talents (Matt. 25; Jas. 4:17).
  - c. Money (I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 9:6-10).
  - d. Influence (Matt. 5:13-16).
4. A test of character—**how** we use **what** we have.
  - a. Misuse—miss heaven (v. 11)—use right—can be saved.
5. There is a great danger in money (Matt. 19:23-24; I Tim. 6:9).
6. We need to realize that possessions are:
  - a. **Not really ours** (Psa. 24:1; I Cor. 10:26).
    - (1) Nothing on outside of us is really ours.
  - b. **Temporary** (Matt. 6:19-21; I Tim. 6:17-19).
    - (1) Riches are deceitful (Matt. 13:22).
    - (2) We cannot hold on to things.
7. Possessions must be used.
  - a. Wisely—not selfishly.
    - (1) To glorify God—and for good of mankind.
  - b. We master possessions or they master us.
    - (1) Making a life more important than making a living.
    - (2) When we must cut back—what is first thing to go?
    - (3) Please note I Timothy 6:7.
      - (a) Rich and poor are alike at birth and death. (Prov. 22:2).
8. There will be an accounting time for all of us.
  - a. As stewards, we must be faithful. (I Cor. 4:2).
    - (1) Not—“**What would we do if millions were our lot...**”
  - b. We must choose who or what we will serve here and now.
    - (1) Note our text and also Matthew 6:24.
    - (2) Cannot serve Lord on part-time basis. (Matt. 6:33).
  - c. We must work for the Lord—we must work together—must work together with God.
    - (1) II Cor. 6:1; I Cor. 3:9.
  - d. We can be “**heirs**” of heaven (Rom. 8:17; Rev. 21:7).

## CONCLUSION:

1. What man possessed was not really his—it belonged to another.
2. Would soon be gone.
3. Had to make provision for that time.
4. Only way—had to use time he had to best advantage.
5. We must be **wise** and **prompt** to:
  - a. Obey the gospel (II Cor. 6:2; Rom. 6:17-18; II Thess. 1:7-9).
  - b. If unfaithful—to return to the Lord.
  - c. To worship acceptably and faithfully (Heb. 10:25-31).
  - d. Work for the Lord (Rev. 2:10; John 9:4; I Cor. 15:58).
    - (1) Note: Romans 12:11.

In the text for this study, our Lord is giving a great lesson, and yet one that has been a source of controversy down through the years. Some have contended that Jesus actually commended a man for doing something dishonest, and they wonder how in the world this can be made to agree with all that He taught in other places against dishonesty. I am convinced that they have the wrong concept about what our Lord is teaching in the passage and I believe that some great lessons can be learned by carefully examining the text.

This story is sandwiched in between two well-known stories—that of the “**prodigal son**” and the “**rich man and Lazarus**”. Many sermons have been preached from both of these stories but very few from the story we are considering at this time. Let us study it and see if we cannot gain some of the lessons that the Lord intended for us when he spoke these words.

First of all, we need to understand what a steward is. A steward is one who has been put in charge of another's possessions. Evidently, the master in our story was a rich man, and the steward under consideration had been placed over all of his possessions. Somewhere along the line the steward had proved himself unworthy of the trust placed in him. He had not used his stewardship wisely. To fully appreciate the responsibility given to stewards, let us look at a well-known example in the Old Testament. In Genesis chapter 39, we read of the responsibility given to Joseph by

his master, Potiphar. In verse 4 we read, **“And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.”** So complete was Joseph’s authority over the possessions of Potiphar that we read in verse 6, **“and he left all that he had in Joseph’s hands, and he knew not aught he had, save the bread which he did eat...”** What a responsibility, but Joseph proved equal to the task—he was a faithful steward. In Luke chapter 12 and verse 42, Jesus said **“...Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?”** From this we learn that a steward not only had authority and responsibility over the financial and material possessions of his master, but that he even had authority over other servants, in fact, the entire household **“to give them their portion of meat in due season.”** As we can well see, this was an awesome responsibility. Sadly, the steward in the story of our Lord told, did not measure up to the trust that his master had placed in him.

In order for us to fully appreciate this story and to get the lessons involved, we must place it in a spiritual setting. We must be made to realize that we are stewards of God and that we must give an account one day of our stewardship.

We are not stewards in the same way the apostles were, but we are stewards none the less. The apostles were inspired men, and as such, had the responsibility of making God’s message known to man. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote, **“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of Christ”** (I Cor. 4:1). They were faithful in their discharging of this responsibility as they taught orally and as they wrote the message. We have **“all truth”** (John 16:13); **“all things that pertain unto life and godliness”** (II Pet. 1:3). When we read their message, we can understand their knowledge of **“the mystery of Christ”** (Eph. 3:4). Even though we are not inspired, as were the apostles and others on whom they laid their hands, still we are stewards of the Word. We have the responsibility of making **“the manifold wisdom of God”** (Eph. 3:10) known to the world, **“according to the eternal purpose”** which God **“purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (verse 11). In the first century God’s message was in inspired men—now it is in the inspired book. We must study it, live it, and teach it to others. Are we faithfully discharging our responsibility? Are we faithful stewards of

the Word? Some (in the church) are not faithfully proclaiming the message but are putting forth uncertain sounds across the land. Some day they, like all of us, will give an account of their stewardship.

The steward in our story betrayed the trust that his Lord had placed in him, and so can we. How sad it is to learn that confidence placed in someone has been misplaced. Perhaps all of us have experienced this at some time in life but not to the same extent as the lord in this story. Suppose that you had turned over all of your possessions to another person and they proved to be unreliable. A while back I read in the paper of one of the most popular entertainment groups in America and the problems that they had with their manager. He was in charge of all of their finances; they each drew a salary, and the rest was to be deposited in the bank. However, this man was taking their money and paying off gambling debts that he had made. Before they found out, literally hundreds of thousands of dollars had been stolen from them. How do you suppose they must have felt when they realized that instead of thousands of dollars in the bank they had absolutely nothing! Such a realization is not only a jolt mentally, but financially as well. When we become children of God (His stewards if you please), we are promising Him that we will be faithful in discharging our duties and responsibilities to Him. Are we proving ourselves to be trustworthy, or have we become unfaithful?

As we study the lesson of the unfaithful steward, there are some contrasts that are evident, and I want to look at some of them. First of all, there is the contrast between the children of the world and the children of light. Jesus said, **"...for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light"** (Lk. 16:8). How true this is! We who are children of God (children of light) do not use as much wisdom in obtaining what we desire (a home in heaven) as children of this world use in getting what they want (the **things** of this life). They use far more wisdom in the physical realm than we do in the spiritual.

The steward in the story was diligent; he was wise; he was zealous, and he was prompt. He started out immediately to **"feather his nest"** for the time when he would no longer be a steward. He knew that his time was limited and that he had to take advantage of what time he had. He was realistic—he saw things as they really were and did not try to kid himself into believing that all was well and that everything would turn out fine in the end. He knew that he

would soon be relieved of his stewardship, and facing these facts, he used foresight in planning for the future. He was commended by his master, not because of his dishonesty, but because of the wisdom he had used in preparing for the future.

The things that we have observed about this man are absolutely essential in our lives. We must use wisdom as we live on their earth; we must be prompt in discharging our responsibilities to God and man; we must be realistic and see things as they really are; we must realize that we are not going to be on this earth forever, and we must use foresight in planning for our eternal future.

It is strange to a lot of people that this man was commended for what he did. Just think about it! Suppose you had been that rich man and one of your stewards wasted your possessions and then pulled the underhand trickery that this man pulled—would you commend him for it? Please remember, as I stated earlier, this man was not commended for doing wrong because there is nothing commendable about sin. Sin is destructive in every way. Sin separates a person from God (Isa. 59:1-2). We can be sure that our “sins will find us out” (Num. 32:23) and that “**God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting**” (Gal. 6:7-8). In view of these Scriptures and many more that we could use, we know that the man under consideration was not commended because of sin but because of his wisdom and foresight in preparing for his future. I say again; we need to use wisdom, foresight, and promptness in preparing for eternity. Can you not see the great contrast between the “**children of this world**” and “**the children of light**”?

In the second place, there is the contrast between what the Lord called “**unrighteous mammon**” and “**true riches**”. This is a great contrast, and I am afraid that far too many people are not able to distinguish between the two. What did Jesus mean by “**unrighteous mammon**” and “**true riches**?” I am convinced that one of the biggest contrasts is the fact that one is temporary and the other is permanent. One will not last very long, but the other is eternal. But what did Jesus mean by “**unrighteous mammon**”? I believe that it is called “**unrighteous**” because of the way in which it is used. Money is not inherently evil—it is not wicked, sinful. In fact, money is not capable of committing a single sin, but what people will do for money is another story.

Jesus let us know that there is a great danger in what we possess. He said, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). He did not say that it is impossible, but he said that it is hard. The problem is the fact that rich people have a tendency to "trust in riches" (Mark. 10:24), rather than placing their trust in God. Paul wrote, "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Tim. 6:10). Notice now, it is not money that Paul condemns, it is "the love of money". If you trace evil back to its source (its roots, if you please) you will find the love of money present. The love of money and the things that it can provide is truly the very source of evil. We know that this is true because inspiration so teaches, and we have observed it so many times in life.

How we use our possessions is strictly up to us. In fact, we can use them, or we can let them use us. The prodigal son of Luke chapter 15 wasted his possessions in riotous living, whereas the rich fool of Luke chapter 12 was guilty of hoarding his possessions thinking that he was going to live for a long time and enjoy them. Neither of these men used what he had to the glory of God nor for the good of his fellowman. In each case we could refer to what they possessed as "unrighteous mammon". We are responsible for what we do with our possessions—whether we waste them, hoard them, or use them wisely.

When we really get right down to it, we do not really own our possessions. We might say that they are only loaned to us by God—we are stewards of what really belongs to Him, and we must one day give account of how we have used them. We read, "The earth is the Lords and the fullness thereof" (Psa. 24:1). Paul quotes this statement in I Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 26. We do not really own anything on the outside of our body. Not one single solitary thing! You may be thinking, "Wait just a minute—what I possess is mine. I worked for it; I earned it; it belongs to me." But think about it—what do you possess on the outside of your body that you can carry with you when you depart this life? The only thing that you have that is really yours is your soul, and it is on the inside, not the outside of you. There is not another thing in this world that you and I truly own. Jesus said, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"



(Matt. 16:26). What a great challenge this presents to us as we weigh our soul against our possessions. Which really means the most to you? Are you preparing to live or preparing to die?

What we possess in this life is only temporary. At best it will be here but for a short time. Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19-20). We need to mark it down and mark it well: "We cannot hold on to things!" Within two generations someone you do not even know will have your most prized earthly possession! Most people live as though they can hold on to the things of this life, and they try to do so with all of the power of their being. Our Lord let us know that riches are deceitful (Matt. 13:22), and from our own observation we can see that many people have been deceived in this way. Possessions must be used wisely, not selfishly, and they must be used to the glory of God and the good of mankind.

If there comes a time when you must cut back on something, what will be at the top of the list? Will there be less entertainment, less groceries, less clothing bought, or less contribution given to the Lord? I am merely asking the question—each of us must answer for himself. When we must cut back what usually gets the ax first? Most of the time the Lord is the one who gets the first cut. We are about like the man who never gave anything to the Lord, and when he was confronted with the seriousness of the matter he said, "After I pay my bills, I just don't have anything left for the Lord." He was then asked, "Don't you think you owe the Lord anything?" His answer was, "Yes, but he is the only one that ain't pressing me." It is true—the Lord will not press us; he will not send us a bill—what we give to Him must be given freely. However, we are told to give, how to give, and when to give (I Cor. 16:1-2; II Cor. 9:7). When we give are we giving what we give cheerfully? Remember, "God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7). In reality, what we give to the Lord already belongs to Him, because as stated earlier, everything is His, the earth and the fullness thereof. However, we feel that we must maintain our standard of living, and if something has to go, let it be our contribution to the Lord. After all, we say, "He doesn't really need it anyway." It is true; God does not need what we give, but we need to

give. It is sad that most people are more concerned about making a living than they are about making a life.

Are we really sacrificing in our giving to the Lord? David taught a great lesson when he said, "...Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which cost me nothing" (II Sam. 24:24). Suppose someone offered to do your giving for you—would you be willing to go along with such an arrangement? But again, I say, are we really sacrificing in our giving, or are we just giving God the "leftovers"? Someone has said, "Give because the Lord has said give; give until it hurts; give until it stops hurting; give until it feels good." There is much truth in that statement. I believe that David taught another great lesson on the subject of giving when he said, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (I Chron. 29:14). How badly we need to learn this lesson! We are about like the little boy who was given two nickles one Sunday—one to put in the collection plate and the other to buy candy. On the way to worship he lost one of the nickles and said, "I'm sorry God, but that one was yours." Remember Paul said, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (I Tim. 6:7). Solomon wrote, "The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all" (Prov. 22:2). God made all of us whether rich or poor. At birth and at death we are all alike—"the rich and the poor meet together". We do not have any of this worlds goods when we are born and we do not have any at death. We are all on equal footing at birth and death, whether rich or poor during the rest of life. It matters not what our bank account might be—we leave it all at death. There are so many things that we could say about our possessions, but let us look at some other things that we are stewards of in this life.

We are stewards of our time. We all have the same amount of time in each day (twenty-four hours) and the same number of days in the year (three hundred sixty-five). We are not guaranteed a certain amount of years to live on this earth, but however long we are allowed to live; this is the time given us to prepare for eternity. God has not predetermined when we are going to die but that we are going to die (Heb. 9:27). Some people always complain that they just don't have time to do anything, and yet others, with the same amount of time, accomplish great things. The difference is in the way time is used. We are told to

**“redeem the time”** (Eph. 5:16) and to **“walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time”** (Col. 4:5). This means that we are to buy up—use our time to the best possible advantage. Time is a possession that all of us have, and one day we must give account as to how it is used. Truly we are stewards of our time.

We are also stewards of our **talents**. In Matthew chapter 25 the Lord gives us a picture of the final judgment. In this chapter we are told of a man who had one talent, and he failed to use the talent (ability) which he possessed. This man was condemned—not because he did not accomplish as much as someone else, but because he did not accomplish what he could have accomplished with the ability which he possessed. He was not a faithful steward of the talent which his lord had entrusted to him. James wrote, **“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin”** (Jas. 4:17). We will be lost for failing to do what we have the ability to do just as surely as we will for doing things that are sinful. Study Matthew chapter 25 carefully, and this is very evident. Are we good stewards of our talents?

We are stewards of our **influence**. Jesus said, **“Ye are the salt of the earth...ye are the light of the world”** (Matt. 5:13-14). You alone are responsible for your influence. No other person can exert your influence for you. Are people led to Christ or away from Christ because of your influence? Are you like centrifugal force (which pushes away from the center) or centripetal force (which draws to the center)? Christ must be the very center of life—are we pushing people away from Him or drawing them to Him by our influence? If we let our light shine people will be able to see our good works, and as a result, they will be led to glorify our **“Father which is in heaven”** (Matt. 5:16). Are we good stewards as far as our influence is concerned?

As we think about all of the areas in which we must be stewards, let us be keenly aware of the fact that a day of accounting is coming. The steward in our text had his day of accounting and we are going to have ours. Paul wrote, **“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful”** (I Cor. 4:2). How faithful is the Lord going to find us when we give account of our stewardship? This ought to be our chief concern in life. As someone has said, **“It is not what we would do if millions were our lot, but it is what we are doing with what we’ve got.”** In our text Jesus plainly tells us that we must decide who it is that we are going to serve. He said, **“No man can serve two masters:**

for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Verse 13). The same statement is recorded by Matthew in chapter 6 and verse 24. It is impossible to serve God and mammon at the same time. We must decide who or what will be the master of our life. We must not "serve" sin; let sin "reign" or have "dominion" over us (Rom. 6:6, 12, 14). Speaking of serving, I might also suggest that we cannot serve the Lord on a part-time basis either. Jesus said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). Is God's kingdom and His righteousness first in your life? Not only is it not at the top of most people's list, it is not even found on the list! We need to know that God will not play "second fiddle" to anyone or anything. He will have first place or none at all.

As we live on this earth we need to realize that we are to be workers for the Lord, that we are to work together, and that God must be our partner (II Cor. 6:1; I Cor. 3:9). There are many who are working; they are working together, but God is not the third partner. Since God is not their partner, their labor is in vain. Jesus will say, "...I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:23). We must be in Christ, and then our "labor is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58). At the present we are God's stewards—but if we live our lives aright we can be God's heirs! Paul wrote, "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:16-17). John wrote, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev. 21:7). Wouldn't it be great to learn that someone had included you in his will and that you would receive a million dollars! But we can have something far greater—the glory of heaven. We can be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ!

I hope that our study of this story will cause all of us to really look at our lives to see where we stand with God. The judgment will be too late. We need to profit from the lessons we have learned from the steward that our Lord talked about. What are these lessons again? First of all, this man learned that what he possessed was not really his—it belonged to another. Secondly, he realized that all of these things would soon be taken away from him—he was going to be put out of his stewardship. No longer would he be in

charge of his master's possessions. Thirdly, he recognized that he must make provision for that time. Fourthly, he knew that in order to do that, he had to use the time that he had to the best advantage.

If we can learn these four lessons how valuable they will be to us as we live our lives. We need to realize that we do not really possess any of the things of this life—they belong to God, and we are allowed to use them. Next we need to be aware of the fact that we are not always going to be on this earth. Life at best is brief. We must make provision for death, and in order to do that, we must take advantage of the time we have and use it in the best possible way.

I believe that these four points adequately summarize the great truths that our Lord taught in this story. Isn't it sad that most people go through life never making preparation for eternity? We need to be wise; we need to be prompt in making whatever preparation needs to be made to insure us a home in heaven. What we do must be done now—there is no second chance. We must **"...live soberly, righeously, and godly, in this present world"** (Tit. 2:12). Jesus stated it this way, **"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work"** (John 9:4). May we truly be servants of the Lord who are **"not slothful in business; fervant in spirit; serving the Lord"** (Rom. 12:11). We read again, **"...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"** (Rev. 2:10). Are you a servant of the Lord? Are you serving Him faithfully? Please remember—your lot in eternity will be determined by your faithfulness or unfaithfulness as a steward of God while you are here on the earth.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-24

*Garland Elkins*

And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country; and there he wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. But when he came to himself he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and make merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry (Lk. 15:11-24).

### BACKGROUND OF THE PARABLE

The background of this parable, along with the three additional ones which comprise the fifteenth chapter of Luke,

is set out in these words: "Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him. And both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Lk. 15:1-2).

Jesus in this one remarkable chapter shows that all sinners are lost. He also shows that there are different types of sinners and that they are lost for different reason. One thing is characteristic in all of these parables, namely, the sheep was lost, the coin was lost, the boy was lost, the elder son was lost. However, in each one of these parables someone was concerned for the lost. The shepherd sought the sheep, the woman searched for the coin, the Father welcomes the prodigal home and forgives him, the Father exhorts and urges His elder son to practice the right attitude and action toward his wayward brother. Likewise, when the lost were retrieved, in every instance there was great rejoicing. "I say unto you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance" (Lk. 15:7). "Even so, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Lk. 15:10). "But the father said to his servants, Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and make merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry" (Lk. 15:22-24). Only in the case of the elder brother, because he would not repent, is there no rejoicing. It is a sad scene as the chapter closes with the elder brother remaining in sin because he will not forgive. He shuts himself out from the fellowship of his Father and restored brother. He excludes himself from the great joy characteristic of the rest of the family.

Paul's statement in Romans 2:21 is applicable to the elder brother. "Thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?" All of us need to keep Galatians 6:1 in mind. "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted." This passage does not tell us to discard a brother or refuse to forgive him but rather to seek to restore him.

The word "restore" is an interesting word. It is a word used in medical practice. It is used of the setting of bones

that have been broken or dislocated. It is the word used for putting them back into place, back into a proper relationship. It might be well used of a sheep that has gone astray. i.e., putting him back into a proper relationship, to get him back into the right relationship with the shepherd.

All of our efforts are to be in the spirit of "meekness" or "gentleness." Even animals and birds will respond to kindness. We must never condone sin, yet we must seek to "restore" such a one in kindness.

The passage instructs us, "Looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted." That simply means that you yourselves might be in the same position sometime. It could happen to you or me. Some people seem to think, "It has happened to him or to his family, but it could not happen to me and my family." Peter apparently felt basically that way, and we know what happened to him (Mt. 26:31-35; Lk. 22:31-62). Our biggest problem is dealing with ourselves. That is the prime problem. Our most serious and difficult problem is keeping ourselves in right relationship with God.

### THE AUDITORS

This marvelous chapter has for its original audience the indignant scribes and Pharisees. They were not interested in the kingdom themselves, yet they angered when they saw Jesus welcome the moral outcasts and the black sheep of the Jewish society. Their antagonisms exhibited themselves in bitter criticism, and they said of Jesus, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." And how did our Lord respond? He does not respond with an objection that they have misrepresented Him. Rather He concedes the truth of the charge and on the basis of it presents a touching lesson in parables as to His compassion for the lost.

### THE LOST BOY

The law clearly stated that the firstborn son was to receive a double portion of the father's property. "But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his" (Deut. 21:17). This would mean in this case that two-thirds of the property belonged to the older son and one-third to the younger son. Often a father disposed of his possessions before he died.

As we study the parable of the prodigal son, let us note



a number of the steps in his complete downfall. (1) He desired the far country of sin. God is never responsible for our submitting to the temptation to do evil, but it is always our responsibility. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is fullgrown, bringeth forth death. Be not deceived, my beloved brethren" (Jas. 1:13-16).. (2) The prodigal son made a demand of his father. "And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living" (Lk. 15:11-12). (3) Having obtained his portion of the father's substance, he took his leave of the father. "And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country" (Lk. 15:13). (4) Having arrived in the far country of sin, he there practiced dissipation. "And there he wasted his substance with riotous living" (Lk. 15:13). (5) It wasn't long until he suffered destitution. "And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country; and he began to be in want" (Lk. 15:14). (6) Finally, we see him in his degradation. "And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him" (Lk. 15:15-16).

After wasting his fortune, he was forced to go into the fields and feed swine. Since the swine were unclean animals (Lev. 11:7), to a Jew this was the most humiliating task possible. He left home with a fortune, but he returns penniless. He left home as a free man, but he returns home as a slave.

The prodigal son was not lost through his own carelessness nor through the carelessness of others. He took his journey to the far country with a determinate purpose and forethought. He turned away from home basically thinking only of his selfish desires. Although he may not have deliberately had in mind to injure his father and to break his heart, nevertheless, he was willing to do so in order to have his own way. Self-will is at the very root of sin, and it is the downfall of many souls. Many people deliberately forsake the church and go into the land of

forgetfulness. They throw away all restraint and violate whatever law they choose. They will eat and drink and be merry regardless of the consequences. This is the essence of sin: to desire to please self in spite of the consequences; to do what one wants to do regardless of the feelings of others; to pursue with will of self instead of the will of God. This is the very essence of sin. The prodigal son personifies those who make pleasing self their rule of life. Some of the things the prodigal son lost were: **First**, he lost the fellowship of his father and the comforts of home. **Second**, he lost his self-respect. He is unknown, unheeded and unwanted in the far country. **Third**, he lost all that he had. There is always a famine in the devil's territory. **Fourth**, he was humiliated. **"And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine"** (Lk. 15:15). **Fifth**, he was lonely. **"And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him"** (Lk. 15:16). There was neither food nor love in that far country of sin.

The story of the life of the prodigal son has two major parts to it. In part two of the story he is the ideal penitent. As we have carefully followed the downward steps of the prodigal son, let us now follow his steps as he returns to his father. We note: (1) There was reflection on his part. **"But when he came to himself he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger!"** (Lk. 15:17). There was reflection, realization, and recognition involved in his making the great discovery. **"But when he came to himself..."** (2) He made a resolution. He said, **"I will arise and go to my father."** (3) He then returned to his father. **"And he arose, and came to his father"** (Lk. 15:20). (4) He then demonstrated his complete resignation to his father's will and also his repentance. **"And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son."** (5) Then there followed rejoicing. Because he was penitent, he returned home, and because he was indeed penitent, his father forgave him and received him. Then his father honored him and rejoiced with him.

Though the story has a happy ending with the prodigal son restored to the fellowship of his father, he is treated to rejection on the part of his elder brother (Lk. 15:25-32). In some instances it may be harder to persuade some brethren to forgive than to bring some sensuous sinners to repentance.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# The Great Supper

Luke 14:15-24

*William S. Cline*

### INTRODUCTION:

1. At feast in a Pharisee's house—rebuked the guests—then the host. It was a sharp rebuke and one person sought to turn the edge of it by saying—no doubt in a pious tone—(v. 15).
2. The comment struck unpleasantly on Christ's ear, and he answered the person with a strange story about a great feast to which no one would come.
3. In effect he said, "You think it is a blessed thing to eat bread in the Kingdom of God—WHY you will not even eat bread when it is offered to you."
4. Relate parable—
  - (1) What a lesson. A great feast prepared and no one to sit at the table. How tragic that people would act thusly.
  - (2) But Jew and American are much alike.
  - (3) The way those invited guests treated the invitation is being repeated day by day—thousands of times by men all around us—even by ourselves.
5. "They all, with one consent, began to make excuse."

### I. THE UNANIMOUS REFUSAL.

1. Where in life would you find such conduct?
  - (1) What group of people asked to a great feast would behave as these did? Totally unnatural!
  - (2) Is such unnaturalness a fault of the narrative?
  - (3) NO! Here is found the great lesson of the way men value things.
  - (4) The comparison points to simple and lofty blessings.

- (5) No person would turn his back on such a banquet as described in the parable—not if he could possibly attend.
- (6) What then about those who turn their back on the greatest invitation of all?
2. The eternal, soul-searching truth here is **THAT WHAT IS TOTALLY UNNATURAL** in unimportant matters is almost **UNIVERSALLY THE NATURAL CONDUCT IN IMPORTANT MATTERS.**
3. There almost seems to be a law—the more valuable a thing is, the less men care to have it. In scientific language—**THE ATTRACTION OF AN OBJECT IS IN THE INVERSE RATIO TO ITS WORTH.**
- (1) Small things—material—everybody grasps for.
- (2) The number of graspers steadily decreases as you go up the scale in importance.
- (3) When you come to the highest of all—only a few seek after it.
- (4) Illustrations:
- a. Is there anything lower than that which gratifies the body? Is there anything that men want more??
  - b. Are there many things lower than money? Are there many things that pull stronger?
  - c. Is not truth better than wealth? Which is pursued more? For every man who seeks truth and counts knowledge important there are hundreds—thousands, whose concern is wealth.  
**Illustration: Bulletin board—“Our Dreams” = Home—Car—Boat.**
  - d. Is not goodness higher than truth? Aren't those that devote themselves to becoming wise far greater than those who devote themselves to becoming good?
  - e. Is there anything to be compared with the blessings of salvation in Christ? Is there anything which the masses of men more readily pass by? Is anything more unanimously refused than his offer to sit at his table and feast on his great blessings?
4. Jesus stands with open arms (Matt. 11:28-30). But we—like they—**“With one consent begin to make excuse.”**

5. I have read of unlearned (primitive) people in a land with gold abounding—place no value on it—yet greatly treasured the glass beads that traders brought them.
  - (1) That is how men value Christ and the church.
  - (2) Look at man's conduct—world is suffering from an epidemic of ignorance.
  - (3) To turn from gold and hug glass beads is near madness and such is the conduct of man.
6. Notice, the refusal of the good was accomplished with lip recognition of the preciousness of the neglected thing. (ref. v. 15).
  - (1) The most difficult people in the world to influence are those who pay lip service to righteousness—bow their heads and let true righteousness fly by overhead.
  - (2) You believe every word I preach—never dream of letting it affect your conduct—**YOU ARE THE MAN IN VERSE 15.** You're a good case for the mentally affected society of the world.

## II. THE FLIMSY EXCUSES.

1. Not all consulted together—but all—without any previous assistance had the same sentiments.
2. All the answers come to one thing—Occupation with present interests, duties, possessions or affections.
3. There are differences in the excuses.
  - (1) One man is a shade more polite than the others.
    - a. He puts his refusal on the grounds of necessity.
    - b. He "must" go see the field—he most most courteously asked to be excused.
  - (2) The second is not quite so polite—still there is a touch of courtesy.
    - a. He does not pretend necessity.
    - b. He says, "I am going"—but he still begs to be excused.
  - (3) The last man thinks he has such an undeniable reason that he rather rudely says, "I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come."
4. Thus, the excuses were offered and in their minds the men felt they were excused from the summons to the feast.

5. One obvious lesson is that the alleged necessity was no necessity at all.
- (1) Who made the "MUST"? The man himself.
  - (2) The field would not run away. Could wait a week—much less a day.
  - (3) A great many of us mask weakness and pure disobedience under the garb of imperatives.
    - a. I am so busy I cannot attend Wednesday P.M.
    - b. Teenager—cold—must stay with him.
    - c. Company—must stay with them.
    - d. Must raise family—no time for religion.
    - e. Horse thief—Judge Roy Bean—man said—must live—care for mother—"I do not see such a necessity." (Langtry/Terrell County).
  - (4) Multitudes have deluded themselves with alleged necessities which were not such at all.
6. Another obvious lesson is that some of us are so caught up in the affections of this life that we don't even consider fixing our love on God.
- (1) Fathers, mothers—husbands, wives—parents, children—REMEMBER Christ's words— "A Man's Foes Shall Be They Of His Own Household."
  - (2) This so tragically is true when we allow earthly affections to turn us away from heaven.
7. Another lesson is that things which are good and legitimate can cost us our soul.
- (1) All of the excuses refer to legitimate things.
  - (2) Perfectly right to go see a field—plow oxen—enjoy the sweetness of wedded love.
  - (3) Need to carefully take to heart the lesson that **Legitimate Business** and **Lawful and Pure affections** may be road-blocks on heaven's highway and can cost us our soul.
8. Another lesson is that our Lord did not mean these excuses to be exhaustive.
- (1) There are many grounds upon which man turns his back on the Lord.
  - (2) Though not exhaustive, these are highly **Operative!!**
  - (3) How many—EVEN HERE—are so busy with daily occupations and affections that you do

not serve the Lord as you should? **These excuses really work!!** Work to hurt!!

9. Lastly, the conflict between the invitation and the duties existed only in the minds of the men who made the excuses.

- (1) There is no reason why one could not both attend a banquet and see after a field.
- (2) There is no reason why you should not love your wife and go to the feast.
- (3) God's command may come into collision with many a **Desire, Weakness and Wish** but no legitimate duty, occupation or affection runs in conflict with God's word.
- (4) The more a man devotes himself to the Lord the more fit he is to look after a field, or oxen or a wife.
- (5) The field will be better tilled, the bullocks better driven and the wife more wisely, tenderly, and sacredly loved if one first gives himself to Christ and His will.
- (6) It is the excessive and abusive possession of things that turn them into the pathway of Christian living.

### III. THE REAL REASON.

1. When a man pleads previous engagement, it is usually a pretext and a polite way of saying (9 out of 10) "I Don't Want To."
2. That is the way it was in this case.
3. All three excuses would have vanished like steam on a cool summer's evening if they had wanted to sit at the banquet table.
  - (1) The means could have been found to care for the field.
  - (2) The oxen and the wife could have been looked after if they had wanted to attend the feast.
4. Thus, the real reason for men's rejection of the Christ is the fact that they do not care to have his blessings. They have no taste for higher things.
5. Let's not lose ourselves in generalities—I am talking about you, and about your taste and your affections.
6. Ask yourself. Do you like oxen better than God? If the two were before you—would you rather have a field signed over to you or would you rather sit at the banquet table of the Lord?

7. Why are men so spiritually perverted? Why don't we want to serve God more?
8. Have been shaken from dependence on God to a false security and dependance on THINGS.

**CONCLUSION:**

1. Indifference is a great cause.
2. Ingratitude is a mighty monster.
3. Time will come—all excuses will be removed. Then our naked, ugly, unwilling, unloving self will show forth.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# A Parable Of Watchfulness

Luke 12:35-41

*Tom Bright*

### INTRODUCTION

A. God's people have always needed watchfulness.

B. The parable itself vividly shows this.

I. The Reason for Watchfulness.

II. Moral Watchfulness.

III. Watchfulness and Doctrine.

The thrust of this parable is as important and as appropriate today as when first uttered by Jesus. There is never a time when "watchfulness" is out of date or out of style for God's people.

Should we ever begin to think otherwise, we need only to stop and consider the calamity that was brought upon mankind because of the inattentiveness of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3). Lot's lack of vigilance in choosing an area that would greatly influence his family (Gen. 13:7-11) is of no small importance, seeing that two nations were to issue from his lions which would be a constant source of woe for Israel in later years (Gen. 19:31-38).

Those Israelites brought out of Egypt by God were not allowed to enter the promised land (Num. 14:1-23) because of the lack of this very principle of "watchfulness." Likewise Moses, that great man of God, and his brother, Aaron, were not permitted to enter the land of promise because they failed to observe God's commands (Num. 20:7-12).

Solomon, whom God gave "...wisdom and understanding exceeding much..." which "...excelled the wisdom of all the

children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt" (I Kings 4:29-30) was uncircumspect relative to God's will. It is this same wisest of wise men of which the scriptures speak: "But king Solomon loved many strange women...And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord...And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel..." (I Kings 11:1-9). Oh, that wisdom, riches, and honor had been mingled with watchfulness!

Consider God's prophets of old, most of which cried out against the wickedness of His chosen people. Why was it that some of God's people called "...evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isa. 5:20)? Why did some tell the prophets, "Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (Isa. 30:11)? Were these people alert and watchful? The answer is evident.

Watchfulness is a virtue which cannot be over-emphasized. It is needed in every sphere of our existence; at home, on the job, in social associations, and in the spiritual realm. Woe unto the man who does not make it an integral part of his life.

### THE PARABLE ITSELF

In this parable, Jesus is encouraging His disciples to be ever watchful. In pursuing this theme, He uses the illustrations of servants waiting for their lord's return from the wedding and the watchfulness of the goodman of the house. The girding of the loins refers to the long flowing robes worn in those days. When running, walking, or laboring, it was necessary to gird, or tie, this up by a sash or girdle about the body, that their progress would not be hindered. Hence, we see that "girding up the loins" means to be ready, to be active, and to be diligent.

The lord returning from the wedding is likewise taken from the Jewish customs of the first century. Pictured here is a company of servants waiting for their lord to return from a wedding. Their lamps were to be kept burning, and at this first knock, they would open the door to him. The mention of the second or third watch in verse 38 points out the uncertainty of his coming.

The last illustration is virtually self-explanatory. Eastern homes were built of clay or stone and often the roofs were made of clay or thatch; thus, thieves could easily break

through and plunder. But if the goodman of the house knew the hour of the thief's coming, he could prepare himself and prevent it.

Thus, Jesus has firmly established the principle of watchfulness. Woe to the man who will not hearken to His words!

## THE REASON FOR WATCHFULNESS

Unquestionably, all understand the need for being observant, even though some do not heed the warning. Peter says it so simply, **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"** (I Pet. 5:8). Interestingly enough, the word here translated **"vigilant"** is also found twice in the parable under consideration. In Luke 12:37 and 39, we find this original word translated **"watching"** and **"watched"** respectively. Thayer defines this word as **"to watch; i.e., give strict attention, to be cautious: —to take heed lest through remissness and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one."**<sup>1</sup> Without doubt, Satan is ever watchful, ever aware of the situation. As he watches, so must we.

Paul encouraged the Ephesian Christians to put on the whole armor of God, **"...that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil"** (Eph. 6:11). What is meant, however, by **"wiles"**? Thayer says, **"1. to follow up or investigate by method and settled plan; 2. to follow craftily, frame devices, deceive...cunning arts, deceit, craft, trickery."**<sup>2</sup> Other writers present these thoughts: **"the following or pursuing of orderly and technical procedures in the handling of a subject"**<sup>3</sup>; **"scheming, craftiness"**<sup>4</sup>; **"a deliberate planning or system."**<sup>5</sup> Therefore, since these devilish wiles will come, there can be no doubt as to why we are exhorted to watchfulness.

In II Corinthians 2:11, Paul mentions the **"devices"** of Satan. The word translated **"devices"** is variously defined as: **"1. a mental perception, thought. 2. spec. (an evil) purpose"**<sup>6</sup>; **"purpose, in a bad sense, design, plot"**<sup>7</sup>; **"thought, purpose, opinion, way of thinking."**<sup>8</sup> Thus, we are not dealing with a mystical influence, but he who has the ability to think, purpose, design, and form a plot. No wonder Peter encourages his readers to be sober and vigilant (I Pet. 5:8).

But even more important, remember that rather than a direct impact upon a man's heart, Satan works through the

influence of his agent, whom Paul called the ministers of Satan (II Cor. 11:13-15). The devices that Satan uses are: guile and subtlety (II Cor. 11:3), deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-13), he bewitches (Gal. 3:1), uses words of vanity (II Pet. 2:18), and diabolical snares (II Tim. 2:25-26). Thus, Satan operates through words, works, devices, doctrines, and ministers to employ the means and methods of deception; all of which, however, can be resisted by one "steadfast in the faith" (I Pet. 5:9).

Paul confirms this in the aforementioned discourse on the armor of God. In Ephesians 6:15 he writes, "And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." This is the state of preparedness which comes from the gospel of peace. Therefore, let the Christian soldier not only be watchful, but let him take to himself that state of preparedness which can only come from the gospel of Christ.

Moreover, in making application to ourselves, it is contestable that when each individual is watchful and prepared, this makes for an attentive and prepared congregation, and when each congregation is such, this means an observant and ready brotherhood. Brethren, where did we go wrong? We do not have an alert brotherhood, nor many prepared congregations. What's the answer? Watchfulness has fallen into disuse in our brotherhood.

### MORAL WATCHFULNESS

Let us now turn our attention to more specific areas of consideration.

Within that which we call the moral realm, watchfulness, is sorely needed. Moral issues have always had to be faced by God's people. It is sad, but true, that many Christians have not given heed to the Divine instructions in this realm and have fallen by the wayside. As it was then, so it is today.

### SOCIAL DRINKING

Christians, of all people, should be the last to affirm "social drinking." But some are doing so today. The argument is basically this: "Temperance is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23); we are to be temperate in all things (I Cor. 9:25) and temperance means moderation, not abstinence; and since the 'temperance' movement of the early part of this century dealt with the alcoholic question, a Christian can drink alcoholic beverages with moderation." Needless to say, I am overwhelmed with such logic.

One needs to realize that the original word translated **“temperance”** does not mean moderation. Paul preached unto Felix and Drusilla who, according to the historians, were living in adultery. In Acts 24:25, he **“...reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come...”** Was Paul reasoning of moderation in adultery? In I Corinthians 7, Paul wrote that it was good for the unmarried and widows to remain as he was. He wrote in verse 9, **“...if they cannot contain, let them marry...”** Here, the word rendered **“contain”** is the same Greek word as **“temperance”** in Acts 24:25. This had specific reference to the natural God-given sexual desires that belong to man. Was Paul telling the Corinthians that if they could not **“contain their sexual desires in moderation,”** then they were to marry? Obviously not!

The meaning of this word is **“...self-control...(the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites).”**<sup>9</sup> This word describes the strength of soul by which a man takes hold of himself and is in full control and possession of self. Thus, the asinine argument falls, and great is the fall of it.

## DANCING

Dancing is a moral problem within the Church of our Lord. Such arguments as **“dancing is good exercise”** are made. That it is exercise, none can logically deny. But how can we say it is **“good exercise”** when it is looked upon by inspiration as lasciviousness (Gal. 5:19)? Thayer says this word means **“wanton (acts or) manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females, etc.”**<sup>10</sup> We can say that anything which has a tendency to arouse unlawful desires in an individual is lasciviousness. But remember, Paul not only said that the specific things he mentioned would keep people out of heaven, but **“such like”** (Gal. 5:21), or things like that which he had just mentioned.

Dancing may be exercise, but we must warn of its dangers. Jogging is also good exercise, but does any one want to jog around a certain race track in Indianapolis on Memorial Day weekend?

## MODEST APPAREL

We must be watchful concerning modest apparel. Paul commands such in I Timothy 2:9. This word means **“well-arranged, seemly, modest”**<sup>11</sup>; **“respectable, honor-**

able"<sup>12</sup>; that which may "...be regarded as genuinely moral and respectable."<sup>13</sup> This word is a derivative of the Greek word KOSMOS, and was sometimes used by them to refer to the universe. Does this not tell us of the orderly and harmonious arrangement that is a basic part of this word? We understand that some immodestly attired might not "have any evil thoughts." But I Corinthians 10:32 forever answers this quibble; the same argument is often used to defend dancing. We are not to offend (to induce one to sin) anyone, whether it be Jew, Gentile, or those in the church of God.

Immodest apparel is sometimes defended by the thought: "There are always some who will lust, regardless of what I wear." This may well be true. But does this really answer the problem? Are we so naive as to think that those of such mind belong only to the twentieth century? I II Peter 2:14, the apostle spoke of some "Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin..." They existed then, and have in each subsequent century. But this argument does not answer Paul's statement in I Timothy 2:9 about modest apparel. Even though there were some who might lust, regardless of what a woman wore, Paul still commands modest apparel.

Others will say that it is "just a dirty mind" which would look with lust on a woman. In other words, the evil is in the eye of the beholder. Unquestionably, this is true to a degree. But does this remove the responsibility of the one so attired? Does this argument negate I Timothy 2:9? By using this same philosophy, one could just as easily argue that a young woman could go completely nude and be justified in the action, simply because the evil is in the eye of the beholder.

It is sometimes argued that "custom determines what is modest." To a degree, this is true, but this cannot be the standard by which modesty is judged. In one sub-culture of the world, it is custom for the sons to murder their aged father. Are we to assume that since such acts are acceptable to that culture, God likewise accepts it? I think not. God's word is still the standard which determines right and wrong. Society can only be followed when it, in turn, follows God's standard. When society departs from God's revealed will, it must be repudiated by faithful Christians, regardless of whether our fellow man approves or not.

The Bible demands righteousness, purity, holiness, godliness and unrightness. Shall we allow the world to dictate what comprises these things? Certainly not! So why

should we allow the world to dictate unto us what is modest or immodest?

## ADULTERY AND FORNICATION

The sexual permissiveness of our society is a definite cause for wariness on the part of faithful Christians everywhere. Our young men and women are bombarded from every side with so much emphasis on the world's view of "sex", that it would be infantile to think that our young people are beyond being influenced by such.

From every quarter there is a constant encouraging to illicit relationships. Purity and virtue are no longer held up as the high and holy goals that they once were. The state of virginity of one past the early teen-age years is considered prudish, out-of-date, and ridiculous. It is appalling that the majority of America's young people who come to the marriage altar cannot present themselves to their mate in all purity.

The evidence of the promiscuity of our times is certainly seen in our young married couples. Unfaithfulness is not uncommon. Adultery and fornication is the rule rather than the exception. If we are so naive as to think that such influences will not affect the Church, we are of all men most foolish. Indeed, Paul affirms such will keep us out of heaven (Gal. 5:19-21).

## HOMOSEXUALITY

Our society is falling over itself to present homosexuality as acceptable, honorable and even pleasing to God! How asinine it is for man to affirm that "God made me this way" when the Bible is so plain as to the abhorrence of this gross wickedness. Does the Sovereign of the universe make a person a certain way and then pronounce a condemnation upon what He made? Certainly not!

Paul condemns it so vividly in I Corinthians 6:9. The term "**abusers of themselves with mankind**" comes from one original word, of which a very literal translation would read "**male bed.**" How much more precise and exact would he have had to be to condemn homosexuality in such a way that none would miss the sin condemned? Clearly, Paul's words in Romans 1:24-27 gives no support whatsoever to this wickedness being pushed upon us.

It is now widely known that those practicing this perversion are living proof of Paul's statement in Galatians 6:7: "**Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a**

**man soweth, that shall he also reap."** There is now definite proof that those so participating are having their natural, inborn immunity systems destroyed by a "disease" circulating among the homosexual community. If God made them that way, why didn't He provide for this immunity-destroying disease?

Without question, homosexuality was a sin which characterized the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Does anyone need to be reminded of what happened to them (Gen. 19:1-25)?

There are many other things that time and space forbids us to mention, such as dope, gambling, pornography, impure speech, etc. But we must always emphasize that, in all of these areas, Satan is not inactive, and that by "cunning craftiness", by deceit, and by vain words he will tempt us in these moral areas. Only by watchfulness can we hope to overcome his diabolical efforts.

#### **WATCHFULNESS AND DOCTRINE \***

Isaiah announced a woe upon those who called "...evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (Isa. 5:20). The same prophet spoke of some as "...a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits: get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (Isa. 30:9-11).

Jeremiah would have had his contemporaries to "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls..." (Jer. 6:16).

Just as the inspired prophets of old were refused, so have the New Testament warnings gone unheeded. Paul admonished Timothy to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:2-4). It seems as if some things never change. As it was true then, so it is today.

There is in my part of the country a certain animal that



has a white strip down its back, and it is characterized by a certain, odious smell. When that certain smell comes to your nostrils, you know immediately what it is. You don't necessarily go looking for this animal, but when you get a hint of that odor, you know that he is, or has been, nearby.

Just as certain smells tell us specific things, so do certain "sounds." In most southwestern states, when you hear a certain sound, you immediately "freeze" and begin to look for its source; you know a "rattler" is around.

Within this realm we have denominated as "doctrinal", there are also certain "sounds" which are just as sure, just as certain a warning as the above mentioned "sound."

When we hear certain, questionable sounds, we must, immediately, be alert; danger is near. Such sounds as "We cannot really know truth"; "The continuing restoration of the New Testament Church"; "The truth about grace"; "Fellowship cannot be extended or withdrawn"; "The Holy Spirit today"; "Divorce and remarriage"; and "The authority of elders" directs our thoughts to various areas wherein denominational error is now openly advocated in the Lord's church today.

Within the churches of Christ, we are seeing the adoption of various sectarian doctrines that faithful, dedicated, and knowledgeable gospel preachers of yesteryear have met and utterly destroyed upon the polemic platform. It is, in essence, a complete reversal of the positions that New Testament Christians have held from the beginning.

## AGNOSTICISM

One of the greatest problems today is centered around the question of whether truth, Divine truth, is knowable. Can we really know what is the truth? Are we led up to a certain point by faith, and then, must we take a "leap in the dark"? It is very distressing to know that some of "our" professors, even some of "our" editors who used to stand upon the firm foundation of God's word, have now openly adopted the philosophy of Agnosticism. The only thing they are sure about is that a person cannot be sure about anything.

Akin to this is the "Unity in Diversity" movement being foisted upon the people of God by the Ketcherside-Garrett coterie of false teachers. The basic premise is that Bible truth is subjective and relative, rather than objective and absolute. In other words, the truth of any Bible doctrine is determined by each separate individual, based upon his own

subjective reasoning. What is "truth" to one may not be "truth" to another. However, such "truth" is subjectively reached, both views (sometimes contradictory and opposites) are correct. According to Garrett, baptism is both essential and non-essential at the same time; i.e., essential if you understand the Bible to so teach, but non-essential if you do not interpret it to so teach.<sup>14</sup>

To the subjectivist, premillennialism is no longer a doctrinal issue, but merely a matter of opinion. Thus, according to this philosophy, it is true that Christ is coming back to earth to establish His millennial kingdom, and it is false that Christ is coming back to earth to establish His millennial kingdom. In other words, He is coming back and He is not coming back!

This basic argument is applied to all things of a doctrinal nature. This is why we are seeing many fail to draw lines of fellowship today relative to such things as premillennialism, instrumental music, direct operation of the Holy Spirit, gimmickery to raise money; ad infinitum, ad nauseum.

The anomaly of it all is that these liberals objectively affirm that you can only know anything in a subjective way. Thus, they use objectivity to prove their subjectivity. Oh, consistency, thou art a jewel.

Unquestionably, all of the problems we face today in the doctrinal areas can be traced to this philosophy of Agnosticism, of which "unity in diversity" is merely a fruit.

## GRACE

The beautiful and majestic Bible doctrine of "grace" is now under fire. Grace now means "no law" to many. A close friend of mine was questioning one of these "umbrella grace" zealots. When questioned about how often a Christian needed to repent and pray, this zealot responded, "About every three months"! Such are the consequences when "our" colleges and preaching schools cease to preach "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

This erroneous concept of grace ultimately brings us into the Baptist camp of "once saved, always saved." The principle advocated here mimicks the doctrine of "indulgences" which caused Luther to finally break with Catholicism.

Watchfulness demands us to speak clearly upon this vital subject. Basically stated, grace encompasses everything that God has done in order to offer salvation to mankind. His grace is operative today, but only upon His conditions can

we appropriate the efficacy of the precious blood of Christ.

## ELDERS

We must have watchfulness in the area of the elders.

It is not until a decade or so ago that everyone in the New Testament Church knew exactly **“who calls the shots.”** Now, we see a blatant denial of God’s delegated authority in an effort to make the Church a democracy, governed by majority rule. Now, everyone but the elders **“calls the shots.”**

It is sad that some have forgotten the truth they once preached about the authority of elders. Without question, there have been abuses of this noble office, but the answer is not to swing to the other extreme, likewise mutilating God’s Divine plan. Substituting one error with another is just as unwise. God’s designed plan will work; man needs only to follow it.

## MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

The **“rage of the age”** has taken hold in the Church of our Lord. A generation ago, divorce among our brethren was seldom seen. Now, because the Church has allowed the world to influence her, rather than the Church wielding an influence for good upon the world, the worldly view of marriage and the home is not attempting to fill the Church with adulterers and adulteresses.

Oh, how watchfulness is needed here! The pulpit and the classroom must rally around the beauty and the sanctity of this Divine institution. We must ever teach and remind that God recognizes only one reason for divorce, whether it be saint or sinner, and that is for fornication (Matt. 19:9). Let us attempt to stop the pain, suffering, and anguish before it gets started, rather than encourage adultery and then rationalize it away! Let us continue to preach this precious truth about God’s law of marriage.

## HOLY SPIRIT

It seems that any supposed revival of religious import, ultimately, centers upon the work of the Holy Spirit. The erroneous positions of Pentecostalism is prevalent in the Church. We now hear from our brethren the same spine-tingling **“testimonials”** that once characterized those of the **“holiness”** persuasion. The Holy Spirit is flitting from place to place, faster than a speeding bullet, helping

everything from sore toes to hiccups.

Let us be wary of Pentecostalism, whatever nuance it might take, and from whomever it might come. Let us affirm openly that He indwells only through His word, that He converts only through His word, and that He leads only by His word. Let us boldly declare that the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit, including tongues, have ceased; that Oral Roberts and those like him are false teachers.

Our Lord encouraged watchfulness. We need it in this life, in both areas which we have designated as "moral" and "doctrinal." In order to live faithful to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, let us be always watchful, always wary, always careful "...because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5:8).

In the final day, it shall be as Jesus said, "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching" (Lk. 12:37). Let us all strive to be so found!

#### FOOTNOTES

1 Joseph Henry Thayer, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), p. 122.

2 Ibid., p. 395.

3 Hermann Cremer, **Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek** (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1954), p. 444-445.

4 William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 500.

5 W. E. Vine, **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers** (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), p. 392.

6 Thayer, p. 427.

7 Arndt and Gingrich, pp. 542-543.

8 Cremer, p. 438.

9 Thayer, pp. 166-167.

10 Ibid., pp. 79-80.

11 Ibid., p. 356.

12 Arndt and Gingrich, p. 446.

13 Gerhard Kittel, **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 895.

14 Leroy Garrett, "Is Baptism Essential to Salvation?" **Restoration Review**, Vol. 24 (May, 1982), pp. 291-292.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# The Parable Of The Leaven

Matthew 13:33

*Ben Vick*

### Introduction

- A. Seven parables in Matthew 13
- B. Similarities of parables of mustard seed and leaven
- C. Difference between parables of mustard seed and leaven
- D. In order to understand parable of leaven, need:
  1. Knowledge of leaven and use in Bible
  2. Characteristics of leaven

### Discussion

#### I. LEAVEN

- A. Definition
- B. Usage in Old Testament times
- C. Usage in New Testament times

#### II. CHARACTERISTICS OF LEAVEN

- A. Leaven does not grow in dough; must be placed there
- B. Leaven works
- C. Leaven works inside the dough
- D. Leaven works quietly
- E. Leaven works slowly
- F. Leaven works fastest in warm dough
- G. Leaven multiplies itself
- H. Leaven did not permeate part of the loaf, but the whole

### Conclusion

- A. Gospel is still the power to save (Rom. 1:16)
- B. Churches do not grow by accident

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

The thirteenth chapter of Matthew records seven parables of Jesus. The parable I am to discuss is called the parable of the leaven. It is also found in Luke 13:20-21. There are some similarities between it and the parable of the mustard seed recorded in Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32 and Luke 13:18-19. Both parables emphasize growth and progress. Both also stress the fact of small beginnings with great results to follow (Zech. 4:10). Both were prophetic regarding the growth of the church. Even though these likenesses exist between the two parables, there are some differences. The mustard seed underscores the fact of growth while the leaven gives impetus to the way of growth. The mustard seed parable looks upon the growth of the church from an outward point of view. The leaven keys on the growth of the church from an inward view.

In order to understand the Lord's meaning of this parable we must have a knowledge of leaven. What is leaven? how was it used in Bible times? what are some of its qualities or characteristics? The answers to these questions will go a long way in helping us to see the intent of Jesus' words (Eph. 5:17).

The word leaven signifies sour dough. The word used in the Hebrew language which corresponds to our English word is found five times in the Old Testament. Four times it is rendered "leaven" (Ex. 12:15,19, 13:7; Lev. 2:11) and in the fifth (Deut. 16:4) it is rendered "leavened bread." According to McClintock and Strong, leaven "seems to have denoted originally the remnant of the dough left from the preceding baking which had fermented and turned acid." (Vol. 5, pp. 307-309). What they knew as leaven in Bible times we would most likely refer to as yeast.

Leaven under the Old Covenant was never used in a metaphorical (figurative) sense, but always in the literal. It was strictly forbidden in all offerings to the Lord by fire. **"No meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the Lord, shall be made with leaven: for ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the Lord made by fire"** (Lev. 2:11). This commandment included the following offerings: (1) the meat offering, as mentioned (Lev. 2:11); (2) trespass offering (Lev. 7:12); (3) consecration offering (Ex. 29:2; Lev. 8:2); (4) Nazarite vow (Num. 6:15); and (5) passover (Ex. 12:15,19; Ex. 13:7; Deut. 6:4). In any offering to be

consumed by the priest and not on the altar, leaven could be used. This included the peace offering (Lev. 7:13) and the Pentecostal loaves (Lev. 23:17). The shewbread to be placed on the table in the Holy Place of the tabernacle was to be unleavened. Since the directions for making the shewbread did not call for leaven, then, it was forbidden, for what is not enjoined is thus prohibited. Amos, speaking ironically, calls for the Jews to "offer a sacrifice...with leaven" (Amos 4:5; Lev. 7:12).

In The New Testament leaven is used in the metaphorical sense with the exception of one place. (Matt. 6:12) This exception is when Jesus' disciples thought he meant literal bread when he had reference to the figurative. It is metaphorically used in an evil way to refer to corrupt doctrine and practices (Matt. 16:6; I Cor. 5:7,8; Gal. 5:9). Leaven is also used in a good sense, and that is how our Lord used it in this parable (Matt. 13:33).

The kingdom of God, or the church (Matt. 16:18-19), is compared to leaven (Matt. 13:33; Lk. 13:20-21). In order to grasp the concept which Jesus intended in this parable, we must notice the qualities or characteristics of leaven. The following are some of these and some applications which can be made.

### **LEAVEN DOES NOT GROW IN DOUGH; MUST BE PLACED THERE**

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal..." In order for the leaven to work within the dough, it must be placed there by hands. In order for the gospel of the kingdom of God to work on the hearts of men, it must be placed there by human agency. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:19-20). Again, we read the inspired words of Paul who said, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom. 1:16). The leaven will not leaven any



lump unless it is put in that lump. So it is with the gospel. It must be received. (Rom. 1:16; James 1:21; Acts 2:41.)

God's method for salvation of souls is the gospel (Rom. 1:16), and it is and always has been and always will be carried by human agency. This is what Paul said in II Corinthians 4:7: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." When the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved on the day of Pentecost, it was due to the preaching of the word by preachers (Acts 2:14, 37-47). When the Samaritans needed the gospel, it was the preacher, Philip, who delivered it (Acts 8:5,12). It was this same preacher who was sent to the eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). Another preacher was sent to Saul of Tarsus in order that he might have his sins washed away (Acts 9, 22:16). Cornelius was told by the angel to send for the preacher, Simon Peter, who would tell him words whereby he and all his house could be saved (Acts 10, 11:14).

### LEAVEN WORKS

The chemist will tell us that the process of leavening is fermentation. Fermentation is nothing else but the putrefaction (process of rotting) of a substance containing no nitrogen. "Yeast is a substance in a state of putrefaction, the atoms of which are in a continual motion." Just as leaven works in affecting the dough, so Christians should see the importance of working in the Lord's vineyard. "Son, go work today in my vineyard" (Matt. 21:28). Jesus said, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (Jno. 6:27). This is exactly what Jesus did. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (Jno. 9:4). Paul told the Philippian brethren to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). The beloved apostle John "saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12,13).

### LEAVEN WORKS INSIDE THE DOUGH

As the leaven is hidden within the meal and begins to work, so the gospel works within the hearts of men and

women. David said, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Psa. 19:7). Again, he writes, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa. 119:11). Though "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries" (Matt. 15:19), one is not born in this condition. He goes astray and walks according to the course of this world (Psa. 58:3; Eph. 2:2). When one goes astray, his understanding needs to be enlightened by the word of God (Eph. 1:18; Psa. 19:8).

### LEAVEN WORKS QUIETLY

Leaven does not make an outward show or display as it works. It works quietly and in an unassuming manner. This is a far cry from some who seem to want to draw attention to themselves. The gospel, the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), is the converting or drawing power. Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (Jno. 6:44-45). Just as quietly as the seed is planted, the light glows, the leaven works, and the godly wife lives, so does the gospel work in the hearts of men and women (Matt. 13:3,4; Matt. 5:14-16; Matt. 13:33; I Pet. 3:1-4). Paul's inspired analysis of how some at Thessalonica received God's word demonstrates the converting power as it worked in their hearts: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which he heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (I Thess. 2:13).

### LEAVEN WORKS SLOWLY

Maybe you have heard some housewives say, "I thought my bread would never rise." In this fast-paced land of America with answers and problems solved at our fingertips by a computer, it's easy to become impatient. We do our banking at drive-in windows or money-mover machines. We eat at fast-food restaurants or pull up to their drive-in windows. We expect "the hurry every chance you get" type of service. Some even want their religion this way. But in spite of this age, some things do not change; and those

things which do may not change rapidly. People fit into this category.

Preachers of the gospel and teachers of God's word should be patient with self and others. Remember: **"And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will"** (II Tim. 2:24-26). The word patient in verse 24 means forbearing. Forbearance is an area in which all can improve. Paul also said to the young preacher Timothy, **"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine"** (II Tim. 4:2). Our reproof, rebuking and exhorting is to be marked by every possible exhibition of longsuffering and doctrine. Because it takes a longer time to remove error from the hearts of people than to place truth within, all need to develop patience (Jer. 1:10).

Not only do preachers need a good dose of patience, but those who support the preachers need the same. Some brethren, not satisfied with the results of the preacher's efforts, are ready to let him go when possibly the seed planted will not germinate, come forth, and produce until after the new preacher will have arrived. Besides, the work of the preacher is not the results, but to sow the seed. Let's be patient with our brethren and leave the results of the sown seed to God (I Cor. 3:6-7).

### **LEAVEN WORKS FASTEST IN WARM DOUGH**

Just as the housewife will tell you that leaven works better in some dough than others, so it is with the gospel in the hearts of men. Leaven works fastest in warm dough. In order for the gospel leaven to work in lives of men, their hearts must be of a certain kind. People must desire the truth and have a love for it (Prov. 23:23). Paul wrote, **"And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness"** (II Thess. 2:10-12). One of the differences between the Thessalonians and the Bereans was their **"readiness of mind"** to receive the scriptures.

They joyfully welcomed the truth (Acts 17:11). Thus, it should not surprise us to read concerning them, **“Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few”** (Acts 17:12).

### LEAVEN MULTIPLES ITSELF

Probably the best demonstration of the parable of the leaven is the growth of the early church recorded in the book of Acts. It began small and mushroomed. Consider some of these passages in Acts and the emphasis upon growth.

(1) **Acts 2:41:** “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were **added** unto them three thousand souls.”

(2) **Acts 2:47:** “And the Lord **added** to the church daily such as should be saved.”

(3) **Acts 4:4:** “...and the **number** of the men was about five thousand.”

(4) **Acts 5:14:** “And believers were **the more added** to the Lord, **multitudes** both of men and women.”

(5) **Acts 6:1:** “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was **multiplied...**”

(6) **Acts 6:7:** “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples **multiplied** in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

(7) **Acts 9:31:** “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were **multiplied.**”

(8) **Acts 11:23-24:** “...and **much** people were **added** unto the Lord.”

(9) **Acts 12:24:** “But the word of God **grew** and **multiplied.**”

(10) **Acts 16:5:** “And so were the churches established in the faith, and **increased in number** daily.

(11) **Acts 19:20:** “So mightily **grew the word of God** and prevailed.”

In every case mentioned above, the results of growth are due to the preaching of God's word and the good reception of it. Each congregation became a leavening agent upon others and, thus, the gospel spread.

### **LEAVEN DID NOT PERMEATE PART OF THE LOAF, BUT THE WHOLE**

**"Till the whole was leavened"** (Matt. 13:33). **"Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."** The gospel, if allowed to work in the life of a man, will change his whole life. **"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"** (II Cor. 5:17). The gospel also is not just for a part of the world, but the whole world (Matt. 28:18-20).

### **CONCLUSION**

The gospel is as powerful to save as it has ever been (Rom. 1:16). Paul also said, **"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God"** (I Cor. 1:18).

This parable also makes it plain that churches do not grow by accident. We must work at it. The leaven had to be placed within the meal. The gospel must be placed in the hearts of others by our words and deeds.

The majority of the points made in this lesson were taken from brother Frank Young's class on parables at the Memphis School of Preaching. I am indebted to him for these points.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# The Friend At Midnight

Luke 11:5-13

*Dean Buchanan*

### INTRODUCTION:

- A. The importance of a lectureship such as this.
- B. On Christ's teaching by parables.
  - 1. Trench says parables are like "Apples of gold in a network of silver."
  - 2. The parable is one of Jesus' favorite methods of teaching.
  - 3. A parable is a way or manner of presenting a truth so clearly that the dullest of hearing will understand.
- C. As with any passage from God's word, it is a privilege to discuss the parable of the friend at midnight from Luke chapter eleven.
  - 1. This parable is on the subject of prayer—and more.
  - 2. We will discuss the parable in it's context which includes verses 1-13 of chapter 11.

### I. THE BACKGROUND OF THE PARABLE.

- A. Jesus himself was praying which he often did, especially at important times.
  - 1. His baptism (Luke 3:21).
  - 2. His selection of the twelve (Luke 6:12).
  - 3. His disciple's confession that he was the son of God (Luke 9:18).
  - 4. At the transfiguration (Luke 9:28).
- B. The disciples' request.
  - 1. Lord, teach us to pray.
  - 2. As John taught his disciples.
  - 3. Christ taught them with the model prayer.
- C. The content of the model prayer.

1. Praise, honor and glory to God.
  2. The sovereignty of God.
  3. The physical needs of the disciples.
  4. The spiritual needs of the disciples.
  5. An awareness of those needs.
- D. Only after these instructions does Jesus give the parable.

## II. THE PARABLE

- A. The narrative of the parable.
- B. The parable is a lesson on prayer.
  1. Prayer is communication with God, by man, through Christ.
  2. God answers man's prayers.
- C. Christ's lesson on prayer reveals a contrast between
  1. The selfishness of man and the liberality of God.
  2. The righteousness of God and the unrighteousness of man.
  3. The perfection of God and the imperfection of man.

## III. THE APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE.

- A. Prayer is a powerful tool.
- B. The parable teaches the militancy of Christianity and aggressiveness in this world.
  1. Ask—Receive.
  2. Seek—Find.
  3. Knock—Opened.
  4. God promises positive results.

## CONCLUSION:

Lessons that can be learned from the parable:

1. The power of example.
2. How to pray.
3. The righteousness of God.
4. The power of prayer.
5. The militancy of the Christian life.

What a joy it is to participate in a lectureship such as this! I have been looking forward to this moment since last winter when Fred called and asked if I would participate.

My thanks to him and to the elders for their expression of confidence in me by extending the invitation.

The importance of a lectureship such as this cannot be over-emphasized. The elders, preacher and church here must be commended for putting together such an effort. It takes a lot of money and a lot of work. For every hour we spend here this week studying the word of God, many hours were spent over the last several months by those preparing for this week.

Beyond the visible things are the intangible, most of all the courage exhibited by the elders and the church here at Garfield Heights. The Bible says, that Noah condemned the world by his faith in obeying God and building the ark (Heb. 11:7). Any time a church or an individual Christian does that which is right by the very nature of the case, that which is wrong is condemned. But there is no better way to build up the church of the living God than by a fervent, bold declaration of his word (Acts 20:32).

The parable is the most notable figure of speech used in the New Testament, and used most often by Christ. It is a way of presenting a truth so clearly that even the dullest of hearing can understand. Trench says parables are like "Apples of gold in a network of silver."

It was a parable that made David face up to the sin he had committed with Bathsheba. When Nathan came to David he told him a parable about a poor man who owned but one little ewe lamb and caused David to confess his sin (II Sam. 12).

So to study the parables of Christ is to enjoy one of the most beneficial studies available to us in the Bible. The lessons contained in these accounts are brought home with such clarity and such force that only the mentally incompetent or the unwilling will refuse their meaning. What an appropriate theme for this occasion.

Our specific study this hour is the parable of "The Friend At Midnight," from the eleventh chapter of Luke. The parable itself is a part of a larger context that must be considered also, lest we detract from the impact of the lesson taught by Christ on this occasion. So we will be considering the entire passage beginning with verse one and continuing through verse thirteen.

## I. THE OCCASION OF THE PARABLE

Jesus often prayed, especially at important times. He prayed at his baptism (Luke 3:21), at his selection of the



twelve (Luke 6:12), when his disciples confessed that he was the Son of God (Luke 9:18), and at the transfiguration (Luke 9:28). At times like these Jesus sometimes spent the entire night in prayer.

The occasion of the parable of the friend at midnight is the result of the disciples watching Jesus as he prayed. When he finished his prayer, one of his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1).

There is a message in the request of the disciples. They saw their Saviour praying and they wanted to be like him. They knew that John had taught his disciples to pray. They felt a need to learn better to pray. Peter would later write, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (I Pet. 2:21).

It would be impossible to overestimate the power of example. Have we not watched as the three-year old tries to walk like dad, talk like his dad, and dress like his dad? Usually if a father likes to hunt and fish, his son will also like to hunt and fish. Watch the way a wife keeps her house and you have a pretty good idea how her mother keeps house.

We tell our children to be honest and they watch as we fill out our income tax returns. We teach them to obey the law and they listen as we tell a friend how we deliberately broke the speed limit. They watch and listen to what we are and what we do—and they follow us.

Does it not follow that if our children follow our example in secular matters they will do likewise in spiritual matters? Is it possible for parents to teach their children to pray if they themselves do not pray? Is it not a fact that in most cases children attend worship and Bible study just about the same way their parents attend?

Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16). Christ is the source of this light, Christians are but reflectors. Nevertheless, the only way many people will ever know about Christ is through the lives of Christians they know.

## II. CHRIST'S RESPONSE TO THE DISCIPLES

Christ answers the disciples questions by telling them what to pray for, how to pray, and the results to expect. He tells them what to pray for by using the model prayer. He tells them how to pray by using the parable of the friend at midnight. And he teaches them what results to expect by using the analogy of an earthly father providing the needs of his children and our heavenly father providing the needs of his children.

### THE MODEL PRAYER

And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

We find in this model prayer a very useful outline for our own prayer life. First, Jesus teaches his disciples to praise God and recognize his sovereignty. Second, he teaches them to pray for their own needs. Third, he teaches them to pray for God to forgive them their sins as they forgive others. And fourth, he teaches them to ask for the Father's continued providential care.

Can we go wrong if we make a habit of using this brief outline in our petitions to God? We do not suggest that we simply repeat the model prayer every time we pray, rather that we remember to always thank God and praise him as well as ask for our needs. Too often we may think of prayer as an opportunity to ask for things we want rather than an opportunity to praise God and ask for our needs.

Men often do not receive what they pray for because they do not pray for the right things for the right reason. "Ye lust and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your own lusts" (James 4:2,3).

In teaching the disciples what to pray for, Christ taught them to ask for the necessities of this life—their daily bread. The trivial, the frivolous, the artificial, the shallow—were not to be a part of the request of the disciples.

Sometimes the expression, "Thy kingdom come," in the model prayer comes up for a lot of discussion. Because the kingdom, (the church) has been established, it is sometimes argued that Christians cannot pray for the kingdom to come,

inasmuch as we would be praying for that which is already here.

It is a fact the church came in the first century (Acts 2:1-47). Therefore we cannot pray for the kingdom to come in the sense we expect the church to be established.

### THE PARABLE

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him: And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth (Luke 11:5-8).

The setting of the parable is a household in the first century. Most houses in Palestine in that day consisted only of one room with an earthen floor. There was usually a raised platform on one side of the house where the family slept. The animals slept on the floor to protect them against thieves. Therefore, once the household was asleep and one person got up, the entire house, including the animals was disturbed. So it is not difficult to see why even a friend might not want to get up in the middle of the night.

Now Christ uses the parable to teach the disciples how to pray. In this case he emphasizes persistency. Although the host would not get up because the person at the door was his friend, he would get up because of the friends' continued knocking.

This parable is similar to the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). There was a judge who feared neither God nor man. A widow came to the judge asking him to avenge her against her adversary. At first he would not take her case. But then because of her continual coming he did as she asked. The application made by Christ was that even as the judge finally took the widow's case so would God finally avenge his children though he bear long with them.

In both of these parables Christ is teaching his disciples to be persistent. Only by doing so will they be able to succeed in any area of life.

### THE RESULT THEY COULD EXPECT

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.

For everyone that asked receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:9-13).

There is a progression from asking to seeking to knocking. One can ask and not be willing to seek. One can ask and seek and not be willing to knock. Yet the promise is there. The results of asking, seeking, and knocking is reward.

Our Lord draws a contrast between the righteousness of God and the unrighteousness of man. He reasons from the lesser to the greater. Even men who are finite give good gifts to their children. How much more then, will God take care of his children?

### III. SOME CONSIDERATIONS

The parable of the friend at midnight is a lesson prayer. Specifically it teaches us to be persistent in prayer. Let's consider this thing of prayer a bit further.

Prayer is communication with God. As Christians we have the right to talk to God by the authority of his son, Jesus Christ. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15,16).

There is such an improvement over the Old Testament order of things under which the Jews had to approach God through the priests. To come boldly to the throne of grace is to come with the full assurance that he will hear our prayers and grant us the things we need. How thankful we should be that Christ has made it possible for us to talk directly to God.

Prayer must be in faith. James said, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given him. But let him ask faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" (James 1:5,6). We must believe in prayer, especially that God will

answer our prayers. James further says that the prayer of faith will save the sick (James 5:15).

Prayer must be fervent. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). To pray fervently is to pray earnestly. And this prayer must rise from the lips of a righteous person. Not righteous because of himself. Not righteous in the sense of perfection. But righteous because of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ.

As the parable of the friend at midnight and the persistent widow reveal to us, prayer must be persistent. Christians are urged to, "pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17). This suggests an attitude of continual prayer.

Prayer must not be vain. "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret will reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matt. 6:6,7).

If this lesson from Christ in Luke chapter eleven teaches us anything, it teaches us of the power of prayer. He promised that if we would ask it would be given to us. If we would seek, we would find. If we will but knock, it will be opened unto us.

James tells us that Elias was able to pray and caused there to be no rain for three years and six months. He prayed again and the heaven gave rain (James 5:17,18). Is there any doubt about the power of prayer?

Is God's love for man any less nowadays than when Elias lived, or when the New Testament was written? Is not God's desire that all men should be saved? (II Pet. 3:9).

Therefore, let us be fervent in prayer, persistent in prayer and believe in the power of prayer!

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# The Parable Of The Net

Matthew 13:47-50

*Harry Darrow*

### INTRODUCTION

- I. Opening questions.
- II. Reading of the text. (ASV)

### DISCUSSION

- I. Gospel of Matthew.
  - A. Purpose of the book.
  - B. Five major teaching sections.
- II. Matthew Chapter Thirteen.
  - A. Outline of the chapter.
  - B. Setting of the parables.
- III. Parable of the Net.
  - A. Story and application.
  - B. Comments of James Coffmaan.
- IV. Furnace of Fire.
  - A. References to hell.
  - B. Five major teaching sections.
- V. The Generous Householder.
  - A. Significance of verses 51 and 52.
  - B. Meaning for us today.

### CONCLUSION

- I. Practical lessons.
- II. Closing questions.

What do you remember about Matthew 13? Are you familiar with the Parable of the Net? What is the major emphasis of verses 47-50? Should we include verses 51 & 52 in the study of the parables? How can the lecture for this hour help you as a teacher of the word?

What do we find in Matthew 13:47-50? Here are the moving words of our Lord in the American Standard Version. Please listen carefully and reverently. Try to picture the scene in your imagination.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but the bad they cast away. So shall it be in the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea. And he said unto them, Therefore every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

Here we have six short verses full of spiritual truths and practical benefit. How should we approach the words of Jesus in Matthew 13:47-50? Let me share with you some thoughts in five basic areas.

1. The gospel of Matthew - the purpose and the major teaching sections.
2. The thirteenth chapter of Matthew - the outline and setting for the parables.
3. The parable of the net - the story and the great lesson for the church.
4. The furnace of fire - the teaching of the Messiah concerning hell.
5. The prepared householder - the ability to present things old and new.

## GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

What is the "purpose" of the gospel according to Matthew? Why did he write the "first gospel" consisting of twenty-eight chapters? The following quotation from Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible contains several challenging answers: (It is found on page 474).

Each of the four gospels has its own special emphasis. Matthew, writing for his fellow Jews, concentrates on Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah—the Christ predicted in the Old Testament. Many Jews were expecting a political leader who would free them from Roman domination. So Matthew is careful to record what Jesus said about his kingdom—the kingdom of heaven. He gives us a great

deal of Jesus' teaching, which he collects together into five main sections. These alternate with sections of narrative in the gospel, and include the famous **'Sermon on the Mount.'** Matthew's gospel, more than any other, is the link between the Old Testament and the New, the Old Israel and the new world-wide church of God's people."

What are the "key" words in this quote? There are at least five—Jews, Messiah, kingdom, teaching and link. It is in the gospel for the Jews that we encounter the parable of the net. This should help us appreciate and understand more clearly the words of our Lord.

Are there "five" main teaching sections in the gospel of Matthew? How do we locate or identify them? Matthew uses the expression "And it came to pass." Here are the major teaching sections and the key verse for each.

1. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT. Chapters 5-7.  
"And it came to pass, when Jesus finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching." (Matt. 7:28).
2. JESUS' CHARGE TO THE TWELVE. Chapter 10.  
"And it came to pass when Jesus had finished commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and preach in their cities." (Matt. 11:1)
3. SEVEN PARABLES ABOUT THE KINGDOM. Chapter 13.  
"And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence." (Matt. 13:53)
4. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE KINGDOM. Chapter 18.  
"And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words, he departed from Galilee, and came into the borders of Judea beyond the Jordan." (Matt. 19:1)
5. A SERIES OF WARNINGS ABOUT JUDGMENT. Chapters 23-25.  
"And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all words, he said unto his disciples." (Matt. 26:1)

Let me encourage you to read the book of Matthew with the emphasis on the major teaching sections. It is in the third main teaching section that we encounter the parable of the net. Again, this should help us appreciate and understand more fully the words of our Lord.

### MATTHEW CHAPTER THIRTEEN

In Matthew chapter thirteen the student of God's word finds seven parables about the kingdom. How would you



outline the fifty verses? The following outline should help us remember the marvelous truths of the third major teaching section in the gospel of Matthew.

1. The Parable of the Sower. Verses 1-9.
2. The Purpose of the Parables. Verses 10-17.
3. The Parable of the Sower Explained. Verses 18-23.
4. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. Verses 24-30.
5. The Parable of the Mustard Seed. Verses 31,32.
6. The Parable of the Leaven. Verse 33.
7. Prophecy and the Parables. Verses 34,35.
8. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares explained. Verses 36-43.
9. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure. Verse 44.
10. The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price. Verses 45,46.
11. The Parable of the Net. Verses 47-52.
12. Jesus Rejected at Nazareth. Verses 53-58.

Perhaps the parable of the sower is the most familiar one in this section of the gospel. Again, let me challenge you to read the entire chapter. Write down in your own words the meaning of each parable and what it should mean in your life at the present time.

What is the setting in Matthew thirteen? What is the setting for the seven parables about the kingdom of heaven? What are some of the interesting details in this chapter? The following verses give the background for the third main teaching section of the gospel for the Jewish people. Please follow the reading in your Bible or New Testament.

VERSE 1 - "On that day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side."

VERSE 2 - "And there were gathered unto him great multitudes, so that he entered into a boat, and sat; and all the multitude stood on the beach."

VERSE 10 - "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?"

VERSE 34 - "All these things spake Jesus in parables unto the multitudes; and without a parable spake he nothing unto them."

VERSE 36 - "Then he left the multitudes, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Explain unto us the parable of the tares in the field."

VERSE 53 - "And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence."

What do we learn from these verses? The first four parables were delivered to the multitudes by the sea side

and the last three were given to the disciples in the house. Jesus explained the parable of the sower to the multitude but the interpretation of the parable of the tares was in response to the question of the disciples in the house. Also, the disciples realized that Jesus had changed his method of teaching. At this point in his ministry he is using parables. The thirteenth chapter of Matthew contains a wealth of information and inspiration for the diligent student of the word. Read and study it often.

### PARABLE OF THE NET

What is the theme in Matthew 13:47-50? What is the main lesson of the parable of the net? **FIRST**, we want to review the parable in verses 47 & 48. What did Jesus really say?

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net (margin-dragnet), that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach: and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but the bad they cast away.

What is the major emphasis? The separation of the good and bad fish. The valuable fish are placed in containers while the worthless are thrown away. This scene happened frequently at the sea of Galilee during the time of Christ.

**SECOND**, we want to review the meaning in verses 49 & 50. How did Jesus apply the story?

So shall it be in the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

What is the major emphasis? The final separation of the righteous and the wicked. What is going to happen to the wicked? They are going to be cast into hell! In this parable Jesus places the emphasis on the wicked and their eternal destiny.

**THIRD**, we want to review a contemporary interpretation of the parable of the net. The following application is given by James Coffman in his **Commentary on Matthew**, page 203.

The sea is the world  
The net is the church  
The enclosed fishes of 'every kind' are members of the church  
The good fishes are the truly spiritual children of their father.  
The bad fishes are like the tares, sons of the evil one

The fact that both kinds are in the net shows the proximity of the good and bad in the kingdom, who are all accounted by men to be 'in' it, but some of whom are wicked.

The beach represents the end of time

The net's being 'filled' shows that God will attain his full purpose in the redemption of men

The sorting of the fishes represents the judgment of the last day

The sorters are the angels

The casting of the bad away is the casting of the wicked into hell

The gathering into vessels represents the salvation of the godly

The vessels represent heaven

There is a lot of food for thought in this quotation from one of the newer commentaries. The wicked citizen's of the Lord's kingdom are going to be cast into the furnace of fire.

## FURNACE OF FIRE

What is the significance of verse 50? Is this a reference to hell? What did Jesus have to say about the final abode of the wicked? What do we find on this vital subject in the major teaching sections of the gospel? Please follow the readings in your New Testament or Bible. Remember, these are the words of Jesus!

### 1. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT. Chapters 5-7.

5:22 - "But I say unto you, that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire."

5:29,30 - "And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into hell."

### 2. JESUS' CHARGE TO THE TWELVE. Chapter 10.

10:28 - "And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

### 3. SEVEN PARABLES ABOUT THE KINGDOM. Chapter

13.

13:40-42 - "As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire: so shall it be in the end of the world. The son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of the kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

13:49,50 - "So shall it be in the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

### 4. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE KINGDOM. Chapter 18.

18:8,9 - "And if thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed or halt, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast 'nto eternal fire. And if thine eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire."

### 5. A SERIES OF WARNINGS ABOUT JUDGMENT.

Chapters 23-25.

23:15 - "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves."

23:33 - "Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?"

25:30 - "And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

25:41 - "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels."

25:46 - "And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life."

In light of these words of our Lord, how would you answer the following questions? Is there a hell? How long will it last? What must a person think and do to escape being cast into the furnace of fire? I believe the answers are clear and emphatic!

## THE GENEROUS HOUSEHOLDER

In verses 51 & 52 we encounter the prepared and generous householder. He is able to furnish things old and new. He meets all their needs. How does this describe the disciple of Jesus? What is the message for the teacher that sows the seed of the kingdom? The prepared student and zealous teacher will be able to furnish rich and suitable spiritual food. What a challenge! How are we to understand the words "old" and "new" in the text? Remember Matthew is writing to those of a Jewish background. How would a Jewish thinker respond? The "old" would be the riches of the Old Testament and the "new" would be the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. I believe this would be the immediate response. Here is a recap of the thought-provoking possibilities!

### "Old"

1. Old Testament.
2. Law of Moses.
3. The prophets.
4. Familiar.
5. Familiar lessons.

### "New"

1. New Testament.
2. Gospel of Christ
3. The apostles.
4. Fresh.
5. Recently acquired.

What does this suggest this afternoon? We must continue to read and study. We must continue to sharpen our skills in sowing the seed of the kingdom. We must continue to think and pray. And we must know and use the entire Bible—both the Old Testament and the New. These verses should describe each one of us. In turn, this lectureship should enable us to apply the truths of the parables of the Lord. Please study and ponder the impact of Matthew 13:51,52.

## THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Remember, this is a parable of judgment. What do you think of the kingdom? Are you prepared for the judgment? Are you a citizen of the kingdom? Are you laying up treasure in heaven? Will you be with God or banished from God for eternity? Three great truths emerge from the assigned study at this time:

1. There are hypocrites in the kingdom or church.
2. There is a hell and it will last as long as heaven.
3. There will be a final separation.

Are you sincere? Are you faithful? Are you saved? Are you righteous? Are you pleasing to God? Are you acknowledging

the Savior? Are you learning and sowing the word of God? May this lesson challenge you to be good, to bring forth the old and the new, and to clearly demonstrate the value of the kingdom. Thanks for your interest in the spiritual. Thanks for the opportunity to discuss with you the parable of the net. May God bless you!

#### **SUGGESTED READING**

1. Book — **All the Parables of the Bible** by Herbert Lockyer.
2. Commentary — **Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew** by James Coffman.
3. Handbook — **Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible.**

#### **SUGGESTED RESEARCH**

1. Relationship between the Parables of the Net and the Parable of the Tares. (Same? Different? How?)
2. Application of these two parables to the subject of church discipline.
3. Role and function of the scribes in New Testament times.
4. Meaning of "Hades" — "Tartarus" — "Gehenna".

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# The Rich Fool

Luke 12:13-21

*Lindsey Warren*

### Introduction

1. The background of the parable.
2. The sin discussed by our Lord.

### Discussion

Some reasons why God called the rich farmer foolish:

- I. He thought about his gifts but he forgot about the giver.
- II. He thought about himself and forgot about his neighbor.
- III. He thought of his body but he forgot his spirit.
- IV. He thought of his physical wealth, but he forgot his spiritual poverty.
- V. He thought of his ease but not of his torment.
- VI. He thought of his life but forgot about his death.
- VIII. He thought of his physical freedom but forgot his accountability.

### Conclusion

1. Summary
2. Appeal

Jesus Christ regularly and frequently focused the attention of his audience on the matter of central importance. He does that in this case. Our Lord does this in verse fifteen, when he warns by stating: "Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness..." In doing this the Savior is letting men know that covetousness is the specific problem in this

situation. It is one about which men should be deeply concerned today.

Many definitions are offered for covetousness. In this parable it refers to the selfish hoarding or misuse, or to the abuse or neglect of God-given opportunity or responsibility.

The fact that Jesus Christ took the time and effort to explain the sinfulness of this matter certainly shows the seriousness of the matter. We are also familiar with such passages as Romans 1:29, I Corinthians 6:10, and Ephesians 5:3 to give a partial list of references that clearly condemn such attitudes and actions. Even with such plain Bible teaching (as to the seriousness of this subject) before them, if men are not careful, it will be very easy for them to overlook the sin of covetousness. That such is the case may be due, in part, to the fact that covetousness may very well (or at least for a period of time) be a **private** matter, unlike such **"public"** sins as murder, drunkenness, or fornication. For a time, it might go unnoticed by others that it exists in our lives and this secret may go on to the point that we build into our minds a **false** sense of security. All of us need to be reminded that there is never any permanent security in disobedience to God. The sin of covetousness shows itself in many ways in our lives.

(1) It destroys our hearts for useful service to God and reduces us to idolatry (Col. 3:5). Because we push God off the throne of our hearts and allow what we covet (money, power, position, or whatever) to be the god of our lives.

(2) It causes us to no longer be able to properly evaluate just which life is comprised of that which God demands of men. (The book of Ecclesiastes and Matthew 6:24). Our values are **"turned upside down."** We often willingly trade our **"birthright for a bowl of pottage."**

(3) It robs us of opportunities to be of help to those who truly need it. Instead of looking for ways to be of service to others we may be looking for ways to **"rob"** (by deception) someone out of something that they have.

(4) It can keep us from coming to the Master in total submission. This was shown to be the case in Matthew 19 with the rich young ruler. It rears its head at nearly every turn today both in and out of the Lord's church. According to the text, covetousness is a terrible sin because our Lord called the rich farmer foolish for allowing it in his life.

It has already been mentioned that many of us have a tendency to overlook covetousness as being a problem in our lives. One might easily (without close examination of his



heart) say "I am not a covetous person, and I am surely not foolish!" Jesus, however, believed this to be a worthwhile study. Therefore, it is worth more than a perfunctory examination to see if such a disposition exists within us today. This divine warning is greatly needed today because, "...a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Each person should remind himself that money, power, and influence, et al., do not constitute the essence of the "abundant life." There are many people who are unhappy with much while there are also many who are happy with just a little of life's material possessions. This truth is pointed out not to suggest that happiness is determined by a "head count" but rather to call attention to the fact that one must follow the Lord's directions for true and lasting happiness.

The question that we must constantly hold before us is: "Why did God call the farmer foolish?" The fundamental reason is that he was covetous. This fact has already been noted. The remaining portion of this article will suggest some of the particular ways covetousness manifests itself and some reasons the rich farmer was called foolish by the Son of God.

1. The farmer was called foolish because he thought about gifts but he forgot about the giver. The story is told of a woman whose son was sent to prison. The woman being very poor worked scrubbing floors for years trying to earn enough money to be able to hire a lawyer in order to try to have her son set free. After years of striving at "back-breaking" work, she finally was able to secure the services of an attorney. Within a short period of time, the lawyer was successful in securing the release of her son from prison. When the day came for that release, the mother was there, outside of the prison gates anxiously awaiting the sight of her son who was stepping out into freedom after all of those years of dismal imprisonment. The woman happily saw her son being released and coming in her direction. Her heart leaped with joy because once again she was seeing her son walking as a "free" man. The released prisoner made his way in the direction of his mother, but even when he came to her, he manifested no show of emotion. He said a bare, "Hi, Mother," and walked on without as much as a "thank you" for all that she had done for him. This is a modern day example of thinking about and accepting the gift, but forgetting the one who gave (the giver). This is the essence of ingratitude! One might even react in unbelief and

say, "Oh, surely that could never happen." Things of just such a nature have been taking place from almost the very beginning of man's existence.

In the Lord's parable (Luke 12:17-18), the rich farmer talked only of: "...my fruits,...my barns,...my grain, and my goods," (material things of life). His mind was totally occupied with himself. The farmer quickly accepted the gifts (material things, life) from God the Creator (Gen. 1:1; Jas. 1:17), but he also just as quickly forgot the giver (God) of the gifts. That is, he was unwilling to give God the thought or thanksgiving that He deserved. Many times today it seems that we seem "to lift a page from the rich farmer's script" when our conversation sounds something like this: "my house, my health, my money, my bonds, my business, my decision and my project." These can be fine to discuss, but not to the point of covetousness or the leaving out of God.

The pulpit may not be free from this idea of forgetting the Giver, because it seems clear that there are times when we forget that God is the giver of the increase. Far too often, it seems, our bulletins and friendly chats are filled with such expressions as: my idea, my bulletin article, my program, my gospel meeting, my personal work" and so on. It is right to give thought to one's own affairs, but one must never become so enamored of self as to crowd out God.

2. It is clear that God considered the farmer foolish because he thought of himself and forgot about his neighbors. There is no indication from the text that the rich man was even aware of -- much less concerned about -- those of his neighbors that were in need of help. He was not mindful of the widow, the orphan, or the poverty-stricken that sincerely needed and deserved help. The farmer was involved, on a full-time basis, in the process of hoarding everything he could for himself. Let each one truly examine his own stewardship to see if he is actually carrying out the commandment to give on the first day of every week (I Cor. 16:1, 2; II Cor. 9:7) as we have been prospered. Are we unconcerned and/or unaware of our neighbor's needs? We are commanded to provide for the needy, in passages such as Matthew 19:21; Ephesians 4:28 and Galatians 6:10. It seems to be the case, during this time of economic difficulty, that the Lord's church has within its grasp the opportunity to be truly evangelistic (with those that are deserving of help) not only in message but through our acts of kindness and aid.

Christ's teaching on the final judgment indicates that the everyday life of a child of God is to be characterized not only by feelings of kindness, but also by acts of kindness. It might be especially easy for some people (e.g., preachers) to think that they give so much in other ways (e.g., preaching, teaching, writing, et al.) that they are excused from doing acts of kindness. "After all," preachers might reason, "we are paid so little that we are already giving a disproportionate amount (that is, in the light of our income)." But, all of us must remember that no one can afford not to give as God has instructed men to give.

3. The farmer was called foolish because, while he thought of his body, he forgot his spirit. Each person must recognize and honor the value of both his mind and his body. It is true that one must strive to develop his mind—to grow intellectually. He should also be deeply concerned about his body, and, to this end, he must wisely eat, exercise, rest, etc. But neither the development of the intellectual nor of the physical side of a man should have priority in his life. Priority must ever be given to the spiritual side of a man (Matt. 6:33; Gal. 6:7-9). Jesus made clear that men should give priority to the "meat" (food) for the soul, rather than to meat for the body (John 6:26-27). No man can be pleasing to God who values his physical condition above that of his spiritual condition. Of course, bodily exercise is of value (I Tim. 4:8), but it is not as valuable as "godliness." In giving this comparison, Paul makes clear that spiritual exercise is of far greater value than is physical exercise. The Lord would have all men to take proper care of their bodies, but, at the same time, He would have them to give priority to the proper development of their spirits (II Pet. 3:18; 1:5-11).

Two questions by Jesus (Matt. 16:26) point up the cruciality of this question about priorities. These rhetorical questions point up the fact that to lose one's soul is to lose all that is truly valuable, in the ultimate sense (cf. II Thess. 1:7-9). One may have a truly wonderful physique, but if he loses his soul, he loses all that is of any worth or value to human existence.

And, for many people (perhaps for all) it is much more difficult to see one's own sins (including that of placing a greater value on one's body than on one's soul) than it is to see the sins of others (cf. David in II Samuel 12).

Likely, as men read the story of the foolish farmer, they can quickly and easily see the sin in his life. But, when

those same men look at their own lives, it is hard for them to see the sin that is there.

Let us ask ourselves: "Are we really more interested in providing for spiritual well-being than we are for our physical desires?" If the situation demanded it, would we not sell our possessions (to what extent necessary) in order to provide for our families? But, what is our attitude concerning the souls of our loved ones? Do we make sure—to the best of our abilities—that the word of God is studied, understood, and applied by all members of our families, including ourselves?

4. The farmer was called foolish because he remembered his physical wealth, but he forgot his spiritual poverty. Someone has said that, "earthly possessions can give no real comfort in the hour of death, but may be the means of condemnation." But, it must be noted that financial poverty is no guarantee of going to heaven. Thanksgiving should overflow from the heart of the Christian because Christ became poor that men might become rich (II Cor. 8:9). It is clear from the text that the foolish farmer was not rich toward God! Each one should ask himself, "Am I rich toward God?"

5. The farmer was called foolish because he gave thought to his ease but not to his torment. A key factor of motivation for the farmer's high regard for body may be connected to the fact that he remembered (gave great thought to) his ease, but he forgot his eternal torment. The rich man said, "...soul...take thy ease, eat, drink, be merry" (Luke 12:19). It seems his toughest decision was what to do with his abundance of material wealth. Even though most of us are pressed financially today we still find a way to purchase that new car, home, appliances, clothes and recreation. Certainly these are needed to a degree, but the crucial question is: "Have we reached the point of desiring the 'easy' more than the Christian life?" If so, then we have wanted it too easy (or "easy" in the wrong way Matt. 11:28-30).. To a limited degree we all need money and certainly the Lord's church needs money in order to spread the gospel. Let us be thankful for people who have the ability to make money, while keeping their hearts pure and being willing to give generously to the Lord's cause. If we make the decision to go after what worldly-minded people call the "good life" (materialistically oriented) then we need to be reminded of the words of Jehovah in the parable when he said, "...thou foolish one, this night is thy

soul required of thee; and the things which thou has prepared, whose shall they be?" (Luke 12:20).

6. The farmer was called foolish because he thought of his life, but he forgot about his death. Death is so often totally unexpected (James 4:13-17). All of us have been confronted with this fact in our various walks of life. In the case of the farmer he planned, in some detail, to live but seemingly he gave no thought of dying. Is it not the case that most of us spend our time and energy (as well as our activities) in filling our thoughts only with living (leaving out dying)! How little most of us actually think about dying. A key question for us all, however, is: "Am I ready to die?" Another all important question is: "How many of us are doing anything by way of preparation for death?" We need to do more than just purchase a burial plot and "package plan" in order to truly be prepared. The rich farmer planned to lie—not to die. He planned to lie on his bed of ease and simply "enjoy" life. Man is blessed by God in being free to make his own choices in this life. However, there is a very definite sense in which there are three things over which we have no choice. To live (that is, at least to be born), to die (unless the Lord returns during our life), and to be in the judgment. Throughout God's message there are sober warnings concerning these facts and urging us to be prepared for that time (Heb. 9:27; II Cor. 5:1-11).

7. The farmer was called foolish because he thought of his physical freedom but he forgot about his accountability. The farmer asked himself: "What shall I do...?" (Luke 12:17). He was very much aware of his freedom of choice, but he forgot (or was ignoring) the fact that he would leave behind all material riches he might gain. Some men may live as if they think that there really is a financial figure set in heaven such that, when they gain that level of material riches, God will take them to heaven and let them bring their money along. So, let us constantly remind ourselves of the limited value of money and other earthly possessions. The foolish farmer's life was filled so much by "things" and recreation that he had neither time nor room left to even give judgment a thought. He had the freedom of choice, but he was so busy wrongly exercising that choice that he forgot about the responsibility involved. Let us ask: "How much thought do we give to our accountability?" Passages like II Thessalonians 1:7-9; Acts 17:30, 31; II Corinthians 5:10; Romans 2:6; Matthew 7:25 indicate that this must be very high on our priority list, if we are to spend eternity in heaven.

May each and every one of us realize if our treasures and desires are in the wrong place, then we are not pleasing to God, because, "...he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21) teaches this. For any of us to follow the example of the rich farmer is to have God to consider us to be foolish. In everyday life we do not like for our friends, our bosses, and certainly not "our idol" to think us to be foolish. However, there is no real comparison between that evaluation and that of being considered foolish by the Creator. Let us all ask ourselves if it is truly best to be rich today toward ourselves, toward our fellow-man or toward God? What will be best in the day of judgment? If we have followed the rich farmer in Luke 12, then we too are foolish in the sight of God. But through His grace we can put a stop to our foolishness and become submissive, thankful servants for the one true living God (Rev. 2:10; Gal. 6:7-9; I John 1:3-7).

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

# The Barren Fig Tree

Luke 13:6-9

*Thomas B. Warren*

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. The background of the parable (13:1-5).
  1. Pilate had killed some people.
  2. Jesus asks and answers two questions.
  3. The Jews had many advantages but failed to recognize this truth.
- II. The Facts of the parable (13:6-9).
  1. The facts stated.
  2. The significance of the facts.
- III. Some great lessons from this parable for men living today. \*Every man should recognize and honor the truth that:
  1. God is the owner of the universe (including man).
  2. God has the right to expect the right kind of fruit from each human being.
  3. God has the right to intercede in the human situation.
  4. God has the right to stipulate the conditions with which human beings must comply in order to be saved by His grace.

\* No one can be saved if he does not:

  - (1) Believe in God.
  - (2) Believe the gospel.
  - (3) Believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
  - (4) Repent of his sins.
  - (5) Confess Jesus Christ as Lord.
  - (6) Obey Christ in being baptized in water unto remission of his sins.
  - (7) Live a life of walking in the light of God's word.

5. God has the right of disposition (to execute judgment).
- IV. Some special warnings to members of the church of Christ.
1. It is possible for a child of God to become useless in the kingdom.
  2. It is possible for a child of God to become a hindrance in the kingdom.
  3. When one fails to bear the expected fruit, he is headed for disaster.
- V. How can men bear fruit as Christ demands that they bear it?
1. They must love truth.
  2. They must learn the truth.
  3. They must gladly receive the truth.
  4. They must repent of sin and confess both that sin and Christ as the Son.
  5. They must be born of water and the Spirit.
  6. One must let his life be "worthy of the gospel."

Literally, a parable is the placing of one thing by the side of another. Metaphorically, a parable is the comparing of one thing with another, the casting of one thing alongside of another so that one may learn something of the second thing from knowing something about the first thing. Jesus was truly the master teacher. And, one of the ways of teaching which He often used was the employment of parables.

The account of the parable of the barren fig tree is as follows:

And he spake this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit thereon, and found none. And he said unto the vinedresser, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why doth it also cumber the ground: And he answering saith unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit thenceforth, well; but if not, thou shalt cut it down.

The study of this parable here will include at least the following: (1) a look at the background of the parable, (2) a listing of the facts of the parable, (3) some great lessons to be learned from this parable, and (4) application to men living today.



## 1. THE BACKGROUND OF THE PARABLE

1. There were some people who had told Jesus of some Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices (13:1). Evidently, Pilate had had these people killed while they were in the midst of offering sacrifices.

2. In His reply, Jesus asks two questions and answers both of them. (1) First, He asked, **“Think ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they have suffered these things?”** (13:2). Jesus then told them that they were not. He then warned His listeners that except they repent, they also will perish. (2) Second, Jesus asked, **“Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem?”** (13:4). Jesus then answered His own question by saying that they were not. And, as before, He warned His listeners that unless they themselves repented they also would perish.

3. This exchange no doubt had to do with the fact that the Jews had been so rebellious against God and His will. The Jews had so many advantages but failed to appreciate that fact. They had so many blessings but were not thankful, and, while they were so critical of others, Paul pointed out that they were just as guilty as others (Romans 2).

## II. THE FACTS OF THE PARABLE

1. **The facts stated.** (1) A certain man had a vineyard. (2) He had a fig tree planted in that vineyard. (3) He came a number of times (over a three-year period) seeking fruit on the tree. (4) However, in spite of his patient and persistent seeking, he found no fruit on the tree. (5) He concluded that the tree was not only fruitless but was also actually **harmful** to the ground (making the ground **useless** so far as bringing forth fruit from any other tree which might have been planted in that same spot of ground). (6) As a result of this conclusion, the owner ordered that the tree be cut down. (7) At this point, the vinedresser of the vineyard **interceded** with the owner of the vineyard, asking that the tree be **“let alone this year also,”** allowing him the opportunity of fertilizing the ground in which the tree was growing and digging about the tree. (8) The vinedresser tacitly grants that the sentence (**“cut it down”**) which had just been pronounced by the owner was a just (righteous) one by saying, **“...if it bear fruit thenceforth, well; but if not, thou shalt cut it down.”** He grants that

if—after the tree has been fertilized for “this year” it still does not bear fruit, then it should be “cut down.”

2. A look at the significance of the facts. As an immediate application, it should be noted that the Jews (as well as the Gentiles, Rom. 1:18-32) deserved to be “cut down” because of their sins (Rom. 2). There is a recognition here that all sinners deserve to be punished forever (Rom. 6:23; II Thess. 1:7-9). There is a recognition that no man can save himself apart from the grace of God (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 11:6; 4:4-5), but that man can be saved by God’s intercession into the human scene (that is, by the gift of His Son, John 3:16; Rom. 5:8-9). There is the clear implication that God is both “severe” and “good” (Rom. 11:22); that is, God is infinite both in goodness and in righteousness.

### III. SOME GREAT LESSONS FROM THIS PARABLE FOR MEN LIVING TODAY

Men now living on the earth are under obligation to learn the great truths which are clearly implied by this parable. It is not enough to look merely at the “bare facts” of this parable. God requires of all that they carefully examine the truths which are explicitly and implicitly taught in this great parable. At least some of these great lessons will be discussed briefly.<sup>1</sup>

1. Every man should recognize and honor the truth that God is the owner of the universe. Every person living on earth owes his ultimate existence to the creative activity of God. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). God also created the first man and the first woman (Gen. 2:18-25; 1:26-27; I Tim. 2:13-14). Thus, the right of ownership—both as to the universe, to man, and to all else which has been created by God—obviously belongs to God. The devil has never created (bestowed existence upon) even one blade of grass. Men owe allegiance to God and to goodness, not to Satan and to evil. As each man contemplates just what he should do with his life, he should have squarely before him this great truth: God has the right of ownership.

2. Every man should recognize that God has the right to expect fruit—the right kind of fruit—from each man. When human beings breed livestock, they expect (as the Bible clearly teaches, Gen. 1:11; Gal. 6:7-9) every seed to bring forth “after its kind.” They expect that the mating of two horses will result in a horse being born—if indeed anything

at all results from that mating. Further, if they plant a watermelon seed, they expect that—if anything grows—a watermelon vine, which will bear watermelons, will result from that planting. Just so, God expects each man to bear the fruit of **“manhood.”** Jesus perfectly exemplified the **“manhood”** which God desires in each of us. Jesus left men an example that they should walk in His steps. The Apostle Peter put the matter this way in I Peter 2:21-23.

For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

Thus, as to **character**, Jesus was absolutely **sinless** (Cf.: Heb. 4:15; II Cor. 5:21). This is the **ideal** which God would have each human being to reach and maintain (Cf.: I John 2:1). Even in the garden of Eden God made this clear to Adam and Eve. The ideal was: do not ever—not even one time—disobey my (God’s instructions). Further, Jesus gave to men the perfect example in that He lived His life epitomizing **unselfishness**. He counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be held onto at the cost of man’s not having a Savior (one who could save him from his sins), so He **“emptied”** Himself, coming to earth and dying on the cross just as if He—and not men—had been guilty of sin (Phil. 2:5-8). Even though He was rich (pure Spirit in heaven), yet, for the sake of men (who were lost because of their sins) He became **“poor”** (became incarnate) so that men, through His **“poverty”** (death on the cross, Heb. 2:9), might become **“rich”** (be saved from their sins) (II Cor. 8:9). In the face of the Apostle Peter’s tacit affirmation of selfishness as the proper basic philosophy of life, Jesus left to men a great element in the proper example when He strongly rebuked Peter and made clear that such an affirmation was from Satan, not from God (Matt. 16:21-23). Jesus went on to make clear that no man can truly follow Him without denying himself and taking up his cross daily and following after Jesus (Matt. 16:24; cf.: Luke 9:23). Satan would have each person to adopt as his basic philosophy of life the affirmation: **“I will spare myself—I will look out for number one!”** But Christ would have each person to commit himself to this affirmation: **“I will give myself away in service to God by serving my fellow man.”**

God has the right to expect this fruit from each person. Each person is free and must make the decision for himself (Cf.: Josh. 24:14-15). Quite obviously, however, it is clear (both from experience and from the teachings of the Bible, Rom. 3:23) that no man perfectly serves God (that is, without ever sinning even one time).

It should be noted that there are some very interesting things about the tree. First, it was in the vineyard. This vineyard was owned by the man who came to "check up" on the tree. Second, the tree had been planted in the vineyard. Thus, it was there by design; it was there because of the purpose in the mind of the owner. Third, the tree was expected to bear fruit. Fourth, it was expected to bear fruit of a certain sort. But, fifth, the tree was fruitless. Sixth, because it was fruitless, it was not acceptable to the owner. This was the case because it had failed to fulfill the purpose for which it had been planted.

As it was with the tree, so it is with men. First, they are in the vineyard. Second, each one has been "planted" in God's vineyard (here, meaning the earth). Third, each human being is expected to bear fruit. Human beings are not here on earth for no purpose whatever. Fourth, each human being is expected to bear fruit of a very special sort: a character like that of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 2:21; Phil. 2:5-8). Fifth, but no human being—apart from the grace of God, the power of the gospel and blood of Jesus Christ—brings forth that fruit. All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). No one can save himself apart from the grace of God. No one can do works of such merit as to save himself apart from the grace of God (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 11:6; Tit. 2:11). Sixth, because human beings have sinned, they are not acceptable to God while in that condition or state (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 3:9-20).

Thus, without the intercession of God, no sinner could have any hope of salvation from his sins. The wages (what one deserves) of sin is death (eternal separation from God and everything that is good) (Rom. 6:23). The parable clearly teaches another vital truth.

**3. Every man should both recognize and honor the truth that God had (has) and exercised the right of interceding in human situation.**

Simply by virtue of the fact that He is God (and who thus has the power to bestow existence—for example on the world and on human beings) God has the right to intercede into the situation which He created. This is His world and

**His creatures. He has the right to intercede, and He did intercede!**

God interceded by the giving of His Son to die in order that men might live in glorious eternal life in spite of the fact that no one who has sinned could ever deserve such life (Rom. 6:23; John 3:16; Rom. 5:8-9). In spite of the fact that, for example, the Law of Moses was perfect for the purpose which God had in giving it, no man could be saved by that law. Paul said, **“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh”** (Rom. 8:3).

Further, Paul said, **“But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”** (Rom. 5:8). The writer of Hebrews declared that Christ tasted of death for every man (Heb. 2:9). Jesus Christ came into this world to seek and save the lost (Lk. 19:10). Because of love for men, God gave His Son (John 3:16). Because of love for men, Jesus Christ laid down His own life (John 10:14-18).

How glorious it is for men to be able to realize that God has interceded into the human situation. It was His right to do so, and He has done it. May every human being be filled with heartfelt gratitude for the fact that God has interceded so that we might bear the fruit which God both expects and demands: to stand before Him (by the cleansing power of the blood of Christ) free from all sin (Heb. 7:25).

**4. Every man should both recognize and honor the truth that God has the right to stipulate conditions with men (who desire to be saved) must comply.**

All authority inherently resides in God (see Rom. 9-11). This is the case, as noted above, because God is the Creator (Gen. 1:1).

God the Father gave all authority in heaven and on earth unto the Son (Matt. 28:18-20). By means of the Holy Spirit, the Son gave authority unto His Apostles (cf.: John 14:26; 16:13). Through the Apostles (by means of the laying on of hands, Christ gave authority unto prophets to reveal His will to men (Cf.: Acts 8:14-19; Eph. 3:5; Rom. 1:11; et al.). By means of the Apostles and prophets, the Holy Spirit gave the Scriptures to men (II Tim. 3:16-17; II Pet. 1:20-21; John 10:35; I Cor. 2:9-13; Eph. 3:5; et al.).

The sacred Scriptures make clear that no man can be saved without being obedient to the word of God (cf.: in Old Testament: Deut. 11:26-28, and in the New Testament:

Rom. 11:22; Matt. 7:21-23; 7:24-27; II Thess. 1:7-9; Heb. 5:8-9; et al.).

Only God—not man—has the right to stipulate the conditions with which men must comply in order to be saved. While it is necessary to be religious, no one can be saved merely by being religious. (See conversion of Saul of Tarsus, Acts 9, 22, 26). It is also necessary (to salvation) to live in good conscience before God. However, living in good conscience is not—within and of itself—sufficient for one to be saved. Saul of Tarsus lived in all good conscience while he was committing sin in persecuting the Lord's church (Acts 8; 23:1). Also, while having zeal for God is necessary, having even great zeal without the truth will not save one. No one could have been more zealous than Saul of Tarsus in persecuting the saints. Yet, he was lost (cf.: Acts 9:6; 22:16).

The Bible clearly teaches that there are certain things about which—if one is to be saved—he simple must be right! Note the following:

**No one can be saved if he does not believe in God.** The writer of Hebrews said, "...without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is,..." (Heb. 11:6). This stricture is by the authority of God!

**No one can be saved if he does not believe the gospel.** Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mk. 16:15-16). This condition is by the authority of Jesus Christ!

**No one can be saved if he does not believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.** Jesus said, "Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). This warning is by the authority of Jesus Christ. If men seek to set this condition aside, they act in rebellion to God. See the principle set out in I Samuel 15:29, which records the information which Samuel gave to King Saul in regard to the result of his rejection of the word of God.

**No one can be saved if he does not repent of his sins.** Through the Apostle Paul, Jesus warned all men everywhere that they must repent. This means that men must change their minds about their sins—about what they are doing with lives (if they are living in rebellion against God). Godly sorrow (for one's sins) leads to genuine repentance, and genuine (true) repentance leads to reformation of life. True

penitents bring forth fruits which are "worthy of repentance" (Matt. 3:7-8).

No one can be saved if he does not confess the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus made this clear in Matthew 10:32-33. If men will confess Jesus (with all that it means to confess Him as the Son of God), then Jesus will confess them before the Father in heaven. But if men deny Him (Jesus) before men, then Jesus will deny them before the Father in heaven. Confession is made with the mouth unto salvation, said Paul (Rom. 10:9-10). This is a condition which has been set out by the authority of Jesus Christ; it is not a mere human stipulation.

No one can be saved if he is not born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5). Baptism is an act of obedience which stands between the penitent believer and the remission of his sins. Jesus said that the one who both believes and is baptized shall be saved (Mk. 16:15-16). This statement makes clear that Jesus just as surely made being baptized prerequisite to salvation as He did believing the gospel. It is sheer folly for one to so pervert this passage as to conclude that it teaches that one is saved the very moment (the very "split second," as some put it) he believes on Jesus Christ, before and without being baptized. One is saved (becomes a child of God) when he enters Christ (II Tim. 2:10). And, one enters Christ when he is baptized in the name of Christ (Acts 2:38; 10:47-48; Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:26-27; Acts 22:16). Being baptized unto the remission of sins is a condition which has been set forth by the authority of Jesus Christ. No man of wisdom will reject it and accept a mere human plan of salvation.

No one can be saved (eternally) if he does not live a life of walking in the light of God's sacred word. John said, "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:6-7). To "walk in the light" is to walk in obedience to the will of God. To "walk in the darkness" is live a life of rebellious disobedience to the will of God. Jesus tasted of death for every man (Heb. 2:9). He offers to be the savior of every man (Tit. 2:11). But, as a matter of fact, He is the savior only of those who are obedient to Him (Heb. 5:8-9). Every person who is not living on the earth is either sowing unto the Spirit or unto the flesh (Gal. 6:7-9). To live a life of sowing unto the Spirit is to live a

life of truly putting Jesus Christ, His will, and His church first in one's life. In failing to put Jesus first in one's life, one thereby lives a life of walking in the darkness. Foolish indeed is the man who chooses to spend his life in disobedience to the will of God.

No man can be faithful to God who presumptuously does those things which are not authorized by the word of God. The Bible over and over makes—and stresses—this point (Cf.: Lev. 10:1-2; I Chron. 15:1-15; II John 9-11; I Cor. 4:6; Matt. 15:13). This principle applies to acts of both work and worship, as well as to attitudes of the mind (Matt. 5:27-28; Phil. 4:8; 2:5-8; II Pet. 1:5-11; et al.).

5. Every man should recognize and honor the truth that God has the right of disposition. In the parable, the owner of the vineyard had the right (simply because he was the owner) to issue the order, "Cut it down!" Just so, the Lord has the right—and that right will be exercised at the Judgment—to say where each individual human being will spend eternity (II Cor. 5:1-11; Matt. 5:46).

There is much warning in God's word in regard to the coming Judgment. In seeking to persuade men to accept His gracious offer of salvation from sin (Cf.: Matt. 11:28-30), Jesus—as a crucial element in the total package of persuasion which Jesus used—warned men of the wrath of God against sin (Mk. 9:43-48; Matt. 5:30; 25:46). On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle warned his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (that is, save yourselves from the fate that is in store for those who live and die in sin) (Acts 2:40). The Apostle warned, "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). John warned that those whose names are not found written in the Lamb's book of life will be cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10-15; 21:8; 14:9-11). Paul further warned that those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel shall suffer punishment, even everlasting destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might (II Thess. 1:7-9).

God has the right—and all men may be assured that He will exercise the right (we know this because we know that God does not lie, Heb. 6:18; Tit. 1:2; I Sam. 15:29) at the Judgment—to sentence the wicked to everlasting punishment. May every human being remember: "...the wages of sin is



death" (Rom. 6:23). The wages of sin is separation from God, and everything that is good, once and forever more. To be lost in hell is to lose everything that gives any worth or value to human existence.

#### IV. SOME SPECIAL WARNINGS TO MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

While the principles involved in this parable apply to all men (both to non-Christian and to Christian), it seems appropriate to set out some warnings which arise from this parable and which are certainly valuable to use in warning members of the body of Christ in regard to lives they may be living.

1. It should be noted that the tree in the vineyard (of this parable) was useless. The tree was useless because it was not bearing fruit. Just so it is with many in the church: they are useless. They are not liars, murderers, rapists, fornicators, thieves, et al. They are just useless. The sins of which they are guilty are "respectable sins"—the kind of which one can be guilty and still be highly thought of by the "respectable" folks in the community! Some of them never even realize that the church is Christ's army—they do not even realize that God's people are at war with the forces of Satan. But children of God are at war with the children of the devil—not to hurt or harm them but to help them, by showing them the way of salvation as the Great Commission demands (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Lk. 24:45-49; Acts 1:6-8).

Others may realize that the church is at war, but they do nothing about it. They never truly prepare for the battle (they do not study in order to learn to use the only "weapon" which Christ has given to the soldiers in His army: the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," (Eph. 6:17). They are not willing to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (II Tim. 2:3). They are not willing to "fight the good fight of the faith" (I Tim. 6:12). They are not involved in the work of the church at all. They are making no contribution to the salvation of the lost. They are not developing the character which is like Jesus (I Pet. 2:21; Phil. 2:5-8). In short, they are useless.

2. It must also be noted that the tree in the vineyard was actually a hindrance. The tree was not only useless; it was actually a hindrance. It was soaking up the sunshine which some other tree (which might have been bearing fruit) could have been absorbing. It was taking minerals from the

ground which some other tree could have been absorbing. It was taking moisture from the ground which some other tree might have been assimilating. It was taking up valuable space which could have been used by some other tree.

As with the tree, so it is with some members of the church: they are not only **useless**, they are actually a **hindrance** to the growth of the Lord's cause. Such members took vows to truly follow Christ, but they have become unfruitful, spiritually speaking. In becoming thus unfruitful, they have dulled the sense of God in their own lives. A vicious cycle is thus set up: the longer they remain unfruitful, the more the sense of God in their lives is dulled. Further, by such neglect of their duties as children of God, such members of the church declare both to the world (non-Christians) and to the church that "**the cause of Christ is of little or no value.**" In destroying their own spiritual morale, they tend to lower the morale of every other child of God. This tends to lower the spiritual morale of the entire congregation of which they are members and of others who know about their uselessness. Such members make it much harder for other children of God to be **enthusiastic** about spiritual matters. They make it **easier** for others to be spiritually **lethargic**. They make it easier for others to be spiritually **useless**. And, as often happens, the fact that one is useless and actually a hindrance to the church causes him to **harden** into actual **antagonism** against the church. He thus becomes a critic of the church in general and of individual members in particular. It seems difficult to doubt that much of the trouble which God's people have faced down through the years comes from the fact that many members of the church became useless in the church—they did not bear the fruit which God demands that we all bear: the character of Jesus and laboring (in at least some scriptural way) for the souls of men (I Cor. 15:58).

3. It must also be noted that in failing to bear the expected fruit, the tree was setting itself for ultimate disaster. According to the parable, if the tree did not—after further cultivation of it—bear fruit, then it was to be cut down (disposed of). Just so, if members of the church (Christians) do not bear the fruit which Christ demands that they bear, then they too will be "**cut down**"—cast into hell at the Judgment (Matt. 25:46; John 5:28-29; et al.).

## V. HOW CAN MEN BEAR FRUIT AS CHRIST DEMANDS THAT THEY BEAR IT?

Here are some brief suggestions (based upon plain Bible teaching) as to how men might bear the fruit which Christ demands of men.

They must **love truth** (II Thess. 2:10-12). One must truly desire to know the truth which said that men can come to know (John 8:32).

Having learned the truth, men must **gladly receive it** (Acts 2:41). If any man wills to **do** the will of Christ, then he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God (John 7:17). One of the valuable "**tools**" in gaining knowledge of the word of God is the willingness to obey whatever one learns to be the will of God. But if one does not have the sincere desire to obey Christ, then he can easily deceive himself into thinking that he is obeying Christ when he is doing nothing more than obeying himself.

Having come to faith in God and in Jesus Christ as His Son, one must then **repent** of every sin. He must repent of a life of sin and of specific sins as well (Acts 17:30-31; 2:22-40; 3:19; II Pet. 3:9; et al.). God will not save the impenitent. In the light of this truth, it is clear that men must fill their hearts with the determination to be truly useful in the kingdom of God.

One must be **born of water and the Spirit** (John 3:3-5). This means that one must be baptized in the name of (by the authority of) Jesus Christ unto the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:26-27; et al.). As long as one remains not baptized in the name of Jesus, he remains a child of the devil (that is, he is **not** a child of God).

One must let his manner of life be "**worthy of the gospel**" (Phil. 1:27). This means that, as one lives, he reflects the principles of the gospel of Christ by the things which he thinks, says and does. One must be able to say (truthfully) "**...for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain**" (Phil. 1:21). In a very real sense, Christians are to be "**epistles**" from which the gospel of Christ can be truly read. Husbands and wives must live with one another in such fashion that they may be "**gained**" by that manner of life (I Pet. 3:1-2). It is a rejection of the word of God to say one's manner of life is not truly crucial in the total scheme of things. Those who live lives of "**sowing unto the flesh**" (Gal. 6:7-9) will "**reap corruption**" (be cast into hell).

One must not only build the principles of the gospel in his own life, he must also—to be pleasing to God—arise and

go tell—in some way—some one else about Jesus Christ and His gospel (I Cor. 15:58; Acts 1:6-8).

Let us learn the lesson of the barren fig tree.

#### NOTES

1 I owe the “**seed thought**” for the five points which follow the designation of this note to G. Campbell Morgan. I am sorry that I no longer have the book in which I found these suggestions. I **think** that they were set out in his **The Westminster Pulpit** (a multi-volume set of sermons).

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

# The Parable Of The Hidden Treasure And The Pearl Of Great Price

Matthew 13:44-48

*Dan Jenkins*

### I. Introduction

### II. The Hidden Treasure

- A. The background of the parable.
- B. Things that are not discussed, things that are discussed.
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### III. The Pearl Of Great Price

- A. The background of the parable.
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- C. Explanation of the parable.
  - 1. The kingdom like the merchant, not the pearl.
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It is hard to imagine the difficulty of the task that faced Jesus. With most individuals, including His disciples, expecting an earthly kingdom, He began using figurative

language of parables to try to convey the riches that lay in store for them. Near the end of the discourse from the small ship just off the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He spoke of a hidden treasure and a pearl of great price. What marvelous truths these parables contain!

### THE HIDDEN TREASURE

In the absence of banks it was difficult for the person in the Bible times to find a safe place to keep his treasures. True enough, they could be kept safely at some great temple like the one erected in Ephesus to Diana, but what person who believed in Jehovah would ever consider such! What could be done with one's wealth?

He could choose to carry it with him wherever he went, but the plunderage of the man in the parable of the good Samaritan could easily befall any who made this choice. One's own house was not a safe place to keep possessions. Remember the words of Jesus, "**Lay not up for yourselves upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through (the Greeks says dig through) and steal**" (Matt. 6:19). Where could one keep his riches?

The most logical answer would be to bury it in a place known only to the owner. If the land on which it was buried belonged to him, hardly anyone could ever lay claim to it. The only risk was that he might die or forget where it had been hidden.

This is the background of the parable of the hidden treasure. Jesus does not give us every detail regarding the circumstances in view. Where was the owner of the treasure? Had he died? Had he forgotten where the treasure was placed? Jesus does not choose to tell us.

Neither does He discuss the ethics of the man who found the treasure. He does not vindicate or condemn the re-hiding of the treasure by the one who found it while he made arrangements to purchase the field. Such is not the nature of the parables (cf. the parable of the unjust steward of Luke 16 and the parable of the unjust judge in Luke 18). If we had needed to know all of these answers, they would have been given! Let us never lose sight of great truths by wasting time in seeking answers that are not ours (Deut. 29:29).

This much we do know. (1) There was a treasure; (2) it was hidden (the Greek tense is perfect) in a field; (3) it was discovered by a man (one can only conjecture about the circumstances surrounding the discovery); (4) he hid the

treasure again; (6) and went and sold all that he had to obtain it.

### EXPLANATION OF THIS PARABLE

Jesus leaves no doubt as to the meaning of this parable. The treasure is in the kingdom! **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field...”** It was not uncommon for Jesus to speak of treasures. They were brought to Him at his birth (Matt. 2:11). He warned against laying up earthly treasures (Matt. 6:19). He spoke of the treasures of a good man’s heart (Matt. 12:35) and the treasures of the householder (Matt. 13:52). He told the rich young man how to have treasures in heaven (Matt. 19:21). Now to His hearers He gives the greatest of lessons regarding treasures—**they are to be obtained by obtaining the kingdom!** **The kingdom of heaven is God’s treasure for us!**

The treasure must be found. Had not Jesus spoken of seeking? The background of his promise, **“...seek, and ye shall find...(Matt. 7:7)** is His words, **“Seek ye first the kingdom of God...”** (Matt. 6:33). Some might seek after worldly things (Matt. 6:32), others might seek after signs (Matt. 12:39), others might seek their own welfare (I Cor. 13:5), but the truly wise persons must seek and find the true treasure—the kingdom of heaven!

The treasure must be valued. Think of all of those in Jesus’ day who walked in the **“New Testament field”** and never saw the treasure. Many followed Jesus, they heard Him tell of the coming kingdom, but never did see it! Truths long sought after by prophets and righteous men (Matt. 13:17) lay at their feet and yet they were never seen. Had not others gone through the same field of Jesus’ parable? Was the discoverer of the treasure the only one who ever came through the field? He found it, recognized its value and in doing so obtained what others never possessed.

It is easy to overlook the value of that kingdom. Did not the Almighty plan that kingdom (Eph. 3:10,11)? Did He not send prophets to tell men of its coming? Did He not providentially work to bring all things to the **“fullness of time”** (Gal. 4:4)?

Did not the Son give up heaven to bring it about (Phil. 2:65,67)? Did not He endure the cruel mockery of sinners (Heb. 12:3) and rejection by His closest friends (Matt. 26:65)? Did not He endure the blasphemy of crucifixion that

culminated with even God forsaking Him (Ps. 22)? This is the value of the kingdom that was hidden in that field! Jesus loved it; gave Himself for it; He purchased it with His own blood; He gave His life for it; He gave His soul for it!

The treasure must be bought. It is not enough to find it. It is not enough to know its value—it must be purchased. Note carefully the price that must be paid. "...he...goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." The kingdom is available, but one must be willing to pay the price to obtain it.

There are things that cannot buy the kingdom. Some seek to obtain it by worldly wisdom, but these never find it (I Cor. 1:19-31). Some think that the kingdom is theirs by virtue of their wealth, but they are wrong (James 2:5). Others wrongly think that the kingdom is obtained by force (Matt. 11:12). All of these are to no avail. The kingdom is obtainable, but only to the man who gives all to obtain it.

Consider Paul as an illustration of one who found and procured this treasure. He turned his back on his earthly wisdom to become a fool for Christ (I Cor. 4:10). He gave up any hope for wealth and replaced it with hunger, thirst, cold, and nakedness (II Cor. 11:27). He gave up certain popularity to become reviled, persecuted, defamed, and the filth and offscouring of the world (I Cor. 4:11-13). Hear his words, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. And be found in Him...that I might know Him...and the fellowship of His suffering..." (Phil. 3:7-10).

This is the point of the parable. The kingdom is ours, but its value is such that nothing short of a complete surrender will obtain it. Until a man reaches this understanding he will never find His kingdom.

Finally, the kingdom brings great joy. He sold all that he had "for joy." Some purchases are regretted, but never this one. Consider Paul again and the joy Christianity brought him. "The kingdom of God is...joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). The God of hope fills His children with joy (Rom. 15:13). The fruit of the spirit is joy (Gal. 5:22), and to give one's life in service to fellow Christians brings joy and rejoicing (Phil. 2:17).

The priests of God are clothed with righteousness, and His saints shout for joy (Ps. 132:9). In the midst of



adversity His people "count it all joy..." (James 1:2). When persecuted, reviled, and blasphemed, they rejoice and are "exceeding glad" (Matt. 5:12). The hosannas that heralded the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem are echoed in the hearts of everyone who finds His kingdom.

### APPLICATION OF THIS PARABLE

The force of this parable in our lives must not be overlooked. These words were not spoken just for the benefit of people of the first century. Profitable Bible study is not just an intellectual exercise of first century attitude. It is the honest heart applying those truths to one's life today.

Beloved, do you recognize the treasure of His kingdom? Have you found it and then lost sight of its worth? Did you deny self, take up your cross and begin to follow Him, only to later trade it for something of lesser worth? Do you not remember the joy of your salvation when you first believed? Do you have that same joy today? Do you count all things but loss for Him? Do you joy in the midst of tribulation? Do the hosannas you sang when you obeyed the gospel still reflect the same joy when you sing them today?

Remember, He loved the church, gave Himself up for it. What about you?

### THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Jesus taught another parable, in many ways like the one just noted, but there are some very interesting differences. It also is a reflection of life in the first century.

Pearls are mentioned only about ten times in the Bible, but every mention of them emphasizes their great value. It was not uncommon for one to exchange his wealth for precious metals or jewels because such was not only economically wise, it also afforded safety from easy plunder by thieves. It was this practice that Jesus used to illustrate kingdom.

Jesus does not answer every question we might have regarding this parable. How long had the man searched? Why had he not found this pearl before? What did the man do with this pearl once he obtained it? These are things we may never know, but there are things we do know.

We know that (1) there was a merchant man; (2) he was seeking for many pearls; (3) he found one of costly price; (4) he sold all that he had to buy it. When one first looks at this he sees little difference in what we know about these two parables.

## EXPLANATION OF THIS PARABLE

What is the distinction to be made between the parable of the treasure and the parable of the pearls? The common explanation is that they are parallel in almost every way, but with one major difference. This is that in the first parable one is not seeking the kingdom, but "accidentally" finds it while in the second, one is eagerly searching and finds the kingdom. While it is true that men find the kingdom in various ways, let me point out what evidently is an even greater difference.

Note the wording of the two parables. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field," and "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man..." Now contrast this with the usual interpretation that views the verses as saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field," and "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a pearl of great price." Look again at the text. The latter parable does not say the kingdom is like the pearl, but that it is like the merchant! The difference in the parables is not in how one finds great fortunes! The difference is that in one the treasure represents the kingdom and in the other, the merchant represents the kingdom.

The kingdom is like a merchant seeking goodly pearls. What does this mean? What is it about the church that parallels the merchant's seeking? When one examines the nature of the kingdom the answer is obvious. Those in the kingdom have already found God, Christ, peace, salvation, but their never ending task is to seek those who are lost! Our songs and prayers reflect this understanding of our primary task. We are saved to save, we are found to find, we are sought out to become seekers! This is the point of the parable. The church is like a merchant, but we seek not goodly pearls, but souls!

The text says he was seeking for goodly pearls. He was not just searching for one particular one. This is the great commission of the church—to go into all the world, to every nation, to every ethnic group, to every creature. This is what the merchant man is depicted as doing. Traveling about he was seeking, and when he found that for which he longed, nothing could stand in his way to obtain it.

Study the book of Acts and see the kingdom seeking goodly pearls. Opposition by religious leaders could not dissuade them. The disappointment caused by the lies of Ananias and Sapphira did not stop them. Neither did the death of Stephen nor Paul's great persecution that scattered

them. Everyone who was scattered went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4). Racial problems did not cause them to lose sight of their task (Acts 11, 15). The great famine foretold by Agabus did not make them cease. Doctrinal problems over circumcision did not cause them to become sidetracked. The world was lost and nothing was more worthy to them than that lost soul, that pearl of great price (Matt. 16:26).

When one nears the end of that period of time he sees just how much the kingdom had been like the merchant. They had been to all nations—"Yes, verily their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the worlds" (Rom. 10:18). They had been to every ethnic group, to every village, to every home. The truth is they had been to every creature (Col. 1:23). Many who heard the words of Jesus in Matthew 13 lived to see their explanation. The kingdom had sought goodly pearls and paid the price to obtain them!

Consider what price was paid by one Christian to obtain precious pearls. "...I have made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more...I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Cor. 9:19,22). And again, "That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh..." (Rom. 9:2,3).

This is the meaning of the parable. The kingdom seeks souls and when it finds one of great worth it pays whatever price is necessary to obtain it.

### APPLICATION OF THIS PARABLE

Beloved, since you are a part of this kingdom God expects you to be like the merchant. Are you seeking goodly pearls? Are you ready to pay all that you have to obtain even one soul? Cease forever those petty excuses that men utter for not being soul winners! Our king gave His very life for our souls. Can we do any less for the souls of others? Just how much are you like this merchant?

## CHAPTER TWENTY

# The Pharisee And The Publican

Luke 18:9-14

*Warner W. Kirby*

- I. Jesus was the master teacher.
  - A. Parables were paramount in Christ's teaching.
  - B. He taught with great authority.
  - C. No man compares in teaching ability to him.
- II. Parables are found in the Old Testament scriptures.
  - A. Nathan related a parable to David.
  - B. The woman of Tekoah used a parable to teach.
- III. The parable is defined.
- IV. The text of the parable is given.
- V. Two subjects are involved.
  - A. Who were the Pharisees?
  - B. Who were publicans?
  - C. Contrast the two.
- VI. Why did Jesus speak this parable?
  - A. He condemned the self-righteous spirit.
  - B. He showed the superiority of humility.
- VII. What lessons do we learn from the parable?
  - A. God condemns a self-righteous attitude.
  - B. Man needs to practice self-examination.
  - C. Man had need for persistent prayer.
  - D. Morality alone does not save man.
- VIII. Errors are taught relative to this parable.
  - A. Man is saved in answer to prayer.
  - B. Salvation is wholly of grace.

Jesus, the master teacher, has left an abundance of wealth in the instructions of the many parables. We are indeed blessed to have access to them and be able to benefit from these teachings. Never has another so taught as to maintain the simplicity and vividness of thought than did our Lord.

As Jesus concluded his sermon on the mount, Matthew tells us that the people were astonished at his teaching, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28,29). His uniqueness and power as a teacher is further evidenced when on one occasion the officers of the chief priests went to arrest him. They found him in the temple (John 7:28), and they listened as he taught the people. After his discourse, they returned without him and the officers said, "Why have ye not brought him?" John tells us that the officers replied unto the chief priests, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:45-46). There was never one before him nor one to come after that compares to his ability for teaching. A reading of the sermon on the mount reveals powerful and thorough teaching. Among his many techniques or forms of teaching, the parable is used extensively.

The parable technique is not limited to Jesus' teaching. Parables are also found in the Old Testament writings. For example, one reads of the parable that Nathan used to teach David the error of his way in his sin with Bathsheba (II Sam. 12:1-23). David had taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and thus was reprov'd of his sin by the parable of the ewe lamb. The message was plain and simple, yet forcefully indicating, as it caused David to say, "I have sinned" (II Sam. 12:13). Another Old Testament parable is found in II Samuel 14:1-24. Here the woman of Tekoah uses this strong manner of teaching to persuade David to pursue a rightful, wholesome relationship with his banished son and to restore him to his family. These two parables are mentioned to impress us with the effectiveness of this teaching technique.

The word **parable** is an anglicized form of the Greek word **parabole**. In its original form, the word is found fifty times in the Greek New Testament. In the King James Version, it is translated "**comparison**" once (Mark 4:30); it is rendered "**figure**" twice (Heb. 9:9; 11:10); once it is rendered "**proverb**" (Luke 4:23); and forty-six times it is

simply found as "parable". The word derives from the two roots: **para** meaning "beside" and **ballo** meaning "to throw". Thus it literally means "to throw something or place something down beside something else for the sake of comparison". As with the teaching of Jesus, parables were certain narratives placed alongside of certain truths in order for the people to see clearly the truth he was pointing out unto them. As in our consideration, Jesus told about two men who went to pray in the temple. He told about the prayers they uttered, and he showed the attitudes they both maintained. Thus, it became easy for those listening to see themselves in one of the two men and the attitudes mentioned and make valuable comparison.

### THE PARABLE AS STATED

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:9-14).

Observe that this parable is given in connection with Jesus' instruction of verse one, "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). Jesus then gave the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:2-5). This parable taught the need of persistent prayer, while the Pharisee and the publican emphasized the need for the proper attitude in prayer. Both narratives are given relative to prayer.

### THE SUBJECTS INVOLVED

Jesus tells of two men who went to the temple to pray: one, a Pharisee, the other, a publican. The Jewish people were divided into basically two major groups; the Pharisees and the Sadducees. By most standards, the Pharisees were the elite class or sect. They were noted for their conservative attitude toward the law and spiritual matters in

general. Often they would involve themselves with trying to put our Lord in difficult positions as they would ask him questions concerning spiritual matters. Our Lord pronounced a strict, harsh rebuke of them in Matthew 23. Frequently he said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (Matt. 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29). The Pharisees were often characterized by formalism as they held in a conservative manner the traditions of their fathers. They were prompt in their rebuke to those failing to recognize and follow these traditions. They were characterized by hypocrisy and a self-righteous spirit. Such is abundantly clear in the parable before us. Notice the self-righteous attitude of the Pharisee, "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:11,12). It is easy to see the self-righteous attitude in the words of his prayer and such was characteristic of Phariseeism.

The other subject of this parable was a publican. The publicans were men hired by the Roman officials to assess, collect, and turn over tax returns to the Roman government. They were to the Jewish people what the IRS is to us. Those accepting such a role of employment were looked down upon by the Jews and thought of as being inferior morally to all others. No doubt there were publicans who often were dishonest and collected more than what was due the government. But though they had this general reputation, there were honest publicans, too. For example, study Luke's record of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-9. The Lord was guest in this man's home, and it is abundantly clear that he was an upright, honest person: "And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him forefold" (Luke 19:8). Thus, we have an exception to the rule; an honest, just man employed as the Roman tax collector. We also may note that Matthew was also a publican, and he was chosen as one of the twelve disciples of Jesus (Matt. 9:9; Luke 5:27).

### THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLE

Jesus taught the parable to show God's contempt for self-righteousness and to teach man not to be given to over exaltation: "And he spake this parable unto certain which

trusted themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:8). Here we have the key behind the purpose of this parable. There were certain who relied on their own self-righteousness to see their approval before God, who at the same time rejected others as being worthy of God's favor.

One can to some degree commend the Pharisee because he is not wholly bad. Many things he mentioned would qualify him as a great person in today's society. Notice, he was a prayerful man, "He went up to the temple to pray" (Luke 18:10). Thus he apparently was devoutly religious and most sincere. He also maintains unquestionable moral integrity as verse eleven states that he was no adulterer. It would seem that he was not covetous because he was no extortioner. He was a man who gave of his means to support the work of the Lord, "I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:12). He even was a man of fasting. Yet his attitude of self-righteousness rendered him displeasing to the Lord (Luke 18:14).

In contrast to this attitude of pride, arrogance, and self-exaltation, we see an attitude of humility portrayed in the publican: "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). According to the next verse, this attitude pleased God, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other" (Luke 18:14). Further we have the instruction that those who exalt themselves shall be abased and those who humble themselves shall be exalted (Luke 18:14).

### LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PARABLE

God disdains pride and attitudes of self-righteousness. Solomon of old says, "These six things doth the Lord hate, yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:16-19). I think it significant that in the catalog of things which God hates "a proud look" is mentioned at the top of the list. Certainly we can all agree that Christians are not to be proud or haughty. Note some other Bible warnings about it. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). "An high look, and a proud heart,



and the plowing of the wicked, is sin" (Prov. 21:4). The man of inspired wisdom alerts us to the seriousness of being proud and haughty.

John says that pride is not of the Father but is of the world. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:15,16). Thus to be guilty of such an attitude is not to be of the Father but of the world. In I John 2:17, the writer plainly states the fate of those who embrace the pride of life as it is a worldly lust: "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

Pride stands in the way of one's obedience to God. When God's people were in bondage to Pharaoh in Egypt, God sent Moses unto them saying, "Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness" (Ex. 5:1). But the king did not obey, and he replied, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go" (Ex. 5:2). You will perhaps recall this story, how that Pharaoh through his pride and arrogant spirit tried to withstand the God of the Israelites. The result was that a series of plagues were sent upon him and all Egypt before he humbled himself and obeyed God's voice. Such pride brought about his own destruction (Ex. 14:26-31).

Let us also recall the Old Testament account of Naaman. In II Kings 5, one reads of Naaman who was captain of the host of Syria. The same was said to be "a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper" (II Kings 5:1). Instructions were given to Naaman to go to the prophet of God in Samaria, and he would heal him of his leprosy. Upon arriving at Elisha's house, he made inquiry concerning his leprosy and the cleansing of it. The prophet of God did not so much as answer him personally but sent word by his servant to Naaman saying, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (II Kings 5:10). In arrogance and pride, Naaman became wroth upon hearing the command and said, "Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over

the place, and recover the leper. Are not the Abana and Pharper, rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage" (II Kings 5:11,12).

Observe the attitude of Naaman. He heard what was commanded, but it was not what he wanted to hear nor see. He wanted Elisha to come and wave the magic wand over him and all would be right. His heart was filled with pride and he did not want to stoop to such a simple plan of going to dip seven times in the river of Jordan. He was not even satisfied with the river chosen and wanted to choose his own place of washing, namely a river in Damascus. Thus, he went away angry at God's plan to cleanse him of this dreaded disease. Had he been left to his own reasoning and disposition, he would have died a leper. The servants reasoned with him however and were able to get him to put his pride aside and do as the prophet had bidden. The result was as Elisha had predicted; he went and dipped as told and came forth clean (II Kings 5:13,14). So many today are opposed to the truth of the gospel as was Naaman. When many are told to believe (John 8:24), repent (Luke 13:3,5), confess (Matt. 10:32), and be baptized (Mark 16:16), they rationalize as did Naaman and are too proud to submit unto the plan of God. Others such as Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4). and Herod (Acts 12:21-23) are clear examples to us that indicates God's attitude toward pride.

The Pharisee was self-righteous and boastful to God concerning his spirituality, as if God did not already know his every thought (Luke 18:11,12; Ps. 147:5; Heb. 4:13; I John 3:20). Pride spurns a desire to be recognized openly and to be acknowledged. This was certainly seen in the character of the Pharisee. In Matthew 23, Jesus said they did their works to be seen of men: "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments" (Matt. 23:1-5).

Our Lord taught that our works of righteousness were not to be performed out of motives for recognition (Matt. 6:1-4). Our recognition from the Father is that which we should

seek, and Jesus says he will see and reward us openly.

A most familiar story in the New Testament, one which I recall learning in youth, is the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). In the story, Jesus mentions the certain priest and Levite who passed by and saw the man who had fallen into adversity, yet did not help him. Pride and self-esteem in their lives caused them to fail to do as God required of them on this occasion.

In the church at Corinth, an immoral situation arose, and the members through pride allowed such to continue among them. For this, Paul pronounces a harsh rebuke, telling them they had been "**puffed up**" about the situation when it should have humbled them and brought about cause for mourning (I Cor. 5:1-6). Pride often stands in the way of proper discipline in the Lord's body!

**Man needs to practice self-examination.** As Christians, we need to practice more self-examination and less mote-hunting. The man under condemnation in this parable was so busy counting his stars that he could not see the crown. Often we become guilty of looking at others' faults while failing to see our own. If we are not careful, we will become guilty of passing judgment on others unwisely (Matt. 7:1-5).

Jeremiah stated a much needed standard in Israel and one needed today as well: "**Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord**" (Lam. 3:40). He mourned the conditions of the people of God as he reviewed their history and summed up their downfall. Usually, when we look at the failures and faults of others, we never take personal inventory. Paul says, "**Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves**" (II Cor. 13:5). Doctrinal matters were under consideration here, however the principle of self-examination is also seen.

Jesus condemned the church at Laodicea and said that they were lacking self-examination. Notice his words, "**I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable; and poor, and blind, and naked**" (Rev. 3:15-17). These thought they were doing well and were pleasing the Lord and progressing in his cause, but they were lacking. The need was there for an examination. Occasionally I am asked by an insurance firm, or the board

of education to have a physical examination. Usually I react negatively to the idea of acquiring such because I always say within myself that I am in good health and nothing is wrong. There are many such examinations acquired each day in our country, and for some, such examinations mean years of prolonged life because the physician detects problems of a physical nature. Such problems are often easily corrected and the patient leads a normal life because of proper attention and correction by the physician. Unfortunately, some fail to have such examinations and frequently lives are lost as a result of the doctor not being consulted in time.

What is the point? Every Christian needs a periodical spiritual examination. Let the great physician make a close examination of your life by reading and studying the word (II Tim. 2:15). Such will help us avoid the attitude of heart the Pharisee had in possessing a self-righteous attitude and a disposition of fault-finding.

**Man should be earnest in prayer.** All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Among these is that wonderful privilege of prayer. Jesus taught in the parable that these men went to the temple to pray. Both are to be commended because we are taught to be persistent in prayer.

**“Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually”** (I Chron. 16:11). Men of spiritual strength are always men of prayer. Luke begins the chapter from which our lesson comes today by recording Jesus’ statement, **“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint”** (Luke 18:1). Jesus taught his disciples to pray (Matt. 6:9-13) and urged prayer of them: **“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation”** (Matt. 26:41). Prayer is part of the Christian armor listed in Ephesians 6:18,19. Paul says we are to pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17).

Prayer is one means of drawing nigh to God as we resist the devil (James 4:7,8). Let us learn to be persistent in prayer and thus utilize this great spiritual blessing.

**Morality alone will not save.** Men of sin get the idea that as long as they are morally good that this is all that is necessary. The Pharisee had his credentials as far as morality was concerned, yet he was not justified.

Such should cause men to realize that simply living a good moral life is insufficient in God’s sight to save. The Bible is abundant in examples where such could not save. Cornelius (Acts 10) was devout, a believer in God, and one that feared him. He gave much alms to the people and was prayerful. Yet he was not saved and was told, **“Call for**

**Simon, whose surname is Peter: who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved"** (Acts 11:13,14). It took the message of the gospel which Peter preached to him and obedience unto those words to bring this man into the right relationship with God.

Another example is that of Saul of Tarsus. Luke tells us that he was on his way to Damascus to find Christians and bring them bound unto Jerusalem for trial. While making his way to that place, he saw a bright light from heaven and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" (Acts 9:3-5). Saul then made inquiry as to what the Lord would have him to do. The Lord told him to arise, to go into the city and it would be told him "what he must do" (Acts 9:6). When in the city, Saul prayed and fasted for three days. An evangelist came to him and told him to arise and be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). So it took more than morality to save Saul. It took obedience to the gospel.

Other examples are seen clearly where morality alone never was sufficient to save: such men as the eunuch of Acts 8 and the men of Athens in Acts 17. The eunuch was religious. He had been to Jerusalem to worship which was a distance of several hundred miles. He was a man who read scriptures, no doubt was devoutly sincere, yet he was not saved. It took the message of the gospel and his obedience unto it (Acts 8:26-40).

Paul found the men of Athens to be religious, but they were doing so through ignorance (Acts 17:22-23). When Paul preached unto them, they were told of the necessity to repent of such ignorant worship (Acts 17:31). These were not morally bad, but they were not saved. On and on one could go with such clear examples pointing out that morality alone does not save.

### **ERROR TAUGHT RELATIVE TO THIS PARABLE**

One erroneous teaching relative to this parable is that men can be saved in answer to prayer alone. The support for this argument is supposed to be the publican: "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other" (Luke 18:13,14). The argument is made that the publican was saved in answer to prayer alone.

Whatever or however this man was justified, has no bearing on the way that man is saved today. Jesus had not sealed his covenant at this point. The gospel of the great commission had not been validated for the testator was yet alive. **“For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth”** (Heb. 9:16,17). While on earth, Jesus could forgive any sin any way he pleased as he did on several occasions. For example in Mark 2:5, Jesus said to the sick of the palsy, **“Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”** To the woman that washed his feet and anointed them, Jesus said, **“Her sins, which are many, are forgiven”** (Luke 7:47,48). On the cross, one of the thieves asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom, and Jesus replied unto him, **“Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise”** (Luke 23:42,43). Such clearly indicates that the man was forgiven of his sins. These all lived under the Old Testament covenant. When Christ died, his new will and testament became effective. Jesus said in his will that those who **“believe and are baptized shall be saved”** (Mark 16:16). Since Jesus’ death, men come to God through faith in his son Jesus Christ (John 6:44,45; 8:24; Heb. 11:6) and upon their confession and penitence are baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15,16; Matt. 28:18-20). Not one case of conversion recorded in the book of Acts even remotely supports the argument of salvation through prayer alone. Man must obey the gospel (Heb. 5:8,9) which is God’s power to save those who believe (Matt. 7:21; Rom. 1:16,17; I Cor. 1:21).

Another argument is made which states that man is saved wholly of grace, and the case of the publican is used to support this theory. The Bible teaches that man is saved by God’s grace (Acts 15:11; Rom. 3:24; 5:15; 11:6; Eph. 2:5,8). Nowhere does the Bible teach that man is saved wholly by God’s grace separate and apart from man’s obedience. Paul says in Titus 2:11, **“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men.”** God’s grace then is universally extended to man. Granting the argument that man is saved wholly by God’s grace, then one must hold the position that all will be saved. I know of no man who would hold the position that all men will be saved. The Bible teaches that the majority are lost and doomed to hell (Matt. 7:13,14, 21-27; 25:41; Rev. 21:8,9).

Man is saved when he appropriates God's grace through obedience (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:9). Therefore these arguments made relative to the parable are in error and must be rejected.

## CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

# The Unjust Judge

Luke 18:1-8

*Jimmy Thompson*

### I. The Scriptural Reference

- A. Luke 18:1-8
- B. The only writer that relates this parable
  - 1. The reference in verse 1 to prayer
  - 2. Luke writes more of prayer than any other writer

### II. The Central Characters

- A. The judge
  - 1. His attributes
  - 2. His motives
- B. The widow
  - 1. Her condition
  - 2. Her desire

### III. The Biblical Attitude Toward The Characters

- A. The judge
  - 1. His qualifications
    - a. Ex. 18:21,22
    - b. Deut. 16:18-20
  - 2. Their history
    - a. I Sam. 8:3
    - b. Dan. 9:12
    - c. Mic. 7:3
- B. The Widow
  - 1. Her protection
    - a. Jer. 22:3
    - b. Ex. 22:22
  - 2. The perversion of that protection
    - a. Jer. 22:3
    - b. Ex. 22:22



#### **IV. The Teaching Of The Parable**

- A. The truth that was expressed
- B. The application to be made

#### **V. The Need For Our Time**

- A. The startling comparisons
- B. The application we must make

In the eighteenth chapter of the book of Luke, we find the parable of the judge related by the Lord. He introduces the parable with the intent that the lesson that they would draw would be that men ought always to pray. The point of the teaching was to be the value of prayer in the face of trial and adversity. Soon these men that were receiving this instruction would be under trials that were beyond the imagination as the words came forth from the lips of the savior. The opportunity to pray, and the need to keep prayer as a constant part of the life of one under trial, was to soon become a stay in the daily lives of the Apostles. Stressed in the parable was the importance of continuance in prayer, never fainting or tiring in the practice of beseeching God for that which we have a sincere need.

Luke is the only writer that relates this particular parable and it is Luke that writes more about prayer than any of the other New Testament writers. The possibility that the book was written at or about the time of the persecution that we read about in the eighth chapter of the book of Acts, is indeed very real, and the teaching that is contained in the parable would be in that case even more relevant to the young children under persecution.

The central characters of the parable are those with which the Jews were intimately familiar. The judge was a man central in the Jewish system from the time of the giving of the law. Yet in the passage of time he had taken upon the office from generation to generation more of the nature of the judges that were found in the Gentile nations. The heathen judge used his office for his own gain and position, and the judges of Israel had started to practice the same philosophy. Notice that the judge is referred to as one who neither feared God nor regarded man. His only interest was of himself. The thought of being an instrument of God's justice did not enter his mind or his heart. There was no attitude of concern for the plight of those who addressed him, nor was there a feeling for the great charge that he

was to carry out as he filled the office. The drive and the faith was all of self. He was after gain and power, and all other things paled into insignificance as he sought these. His first thought was to be of God, his second was to be of the poor and destitute, and his last thought was to have been for himself. Though he shows in the center portions of the parable that he recognizes there is a God, and that God is in fact true to his word, he fails to relate that to the condition in which he has placed himself. He is related to the vast majority of Christendom today.

The widow was a pitiful sight indeed. She had no family or none that was able, or more probably willing, to care for her; to avenge her wrong, or to plead her case. She stood alone, in a culture that was poor, where there was no livelihood that could produce a decent standard of living for a woman that was without support. She had been wronged in some way by someone, and she had followed the law and gone to the judge as God had ordained. It was a problem of a serious nature, for she troubled him day and night. She was always seeking relief from the condition that had been forced upon her. She continually forced the judge to look upon the conditions that she occupied, and sought the relief that had been promised under the law, which, in fact, was a promise of God. She knew what was right, and she was not afraid to request that she be given her fair portion. She followed the method that had been established, and she spoke out against the adversary to be awarded a decision. She did not take matters into her own hand and render the judgment herself, but she was sure to carry the charge, and not bashful in proclaiming it. Her desire was to be treated in accordance with the law. She was ready to accept it in its fullness. She was willing to comply with the requirements as given by God to the extent of her ability.

The Bible had quite a different attitude toward the characters that are in the parable than the parable portrays them as possessing. According to the word of God the judge was to have been a man that was a servant of God most high, and was to represent the law of God in the settlement of disputes. In the eighteenth chapter of Exodus, the twenty-first and twenty-second verses read, "Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: Let them judge the people at all seasons: And it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter

they shall judge: so it shall be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee." Even back at the time that Moses was with the children of Israel, the need for judges was found, and they were to possess certain qualities. These qualities were spelled out by God, and they were not to be altered. The chosen one was to be a lover of God, and not a lover of fame and fortune. He was to be able. Not able from the point of a formal education, but from the desire of his heart, and the purpose of the task. He was to have a character that was able to handle temptations that might arise that would lead to the perversion of justice. One that would remain true to the right way of God. In Deuteronomy the sixteenth chapter and verses eighteen to twenty we read, "Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with a just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment: thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: For a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." The men were appointed to have a just judgment for all the people. They were not to wrest, or wrestle, with the question trying to find a way to release, but they were to follow the law. They were not to respect persons, showing equality to all those that were under the law, and they were not to take a gift from any of the principles of their representatives for that could blind the eyes of judgment and place them in a position of making void the dictates of God.

God had given the people the blueprint for the proper method to insure justice and fairness for all the people in the dealings of men with men. But as had been the case in the days of the wilderness wanderings, the people were quick to forget the way that God would have them to be.

Just for a moment, look at the history of the judges in the land of Israel. In I Samuel 8:3, we see the description of the sons of Samuel as they assume the office of judge. It is indeed a sad commentary upon the children of God that these are examples of how the children of God return his love and favor. "And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." The refusal of the judges to follow after the footsteps of the servants of God had terrible results as are related in the 9th chapter of Daniel, verse 12. "And he hath confirmed his words which he spake against us, and

against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: For under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem." Because of the judges the fall of the kingdom was especially harsh. Those who were charged with the care of justice voided that task, and the people agreed. They paid.

The beautiful temple of Solomon was torn to the ground. The Holy of Holies that was there for the priest to go into the presence of God for the forgiveness of the trespasses of the people had been taken away. The morning sun no longer rose on the splendor of the house that God would occupy in the midst of the people. The walls were now in ruins, and the land was desolate. The proud stables and palaces of Solomon were ravaged, the courts lay empty under the heaven. No longer was the word of God taught to a free and devoted people. They were now held captive in a strange and foreign land. They were there because they had refused to obey and stand by the way that God had ordained. They were reaping the fruits of years and ignoring the warnings of the faithful few. By the time that Micah was a prophet of God, the people had degenerated to the point that all men were again serving that which was evil, and in Micah 7:3 we read, "That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up."

A movement that started with the two sons of Samuel accelerated to the point that it now consumed everyone. There was no following after God, but only following after self. This is the condition that prevailed when the parable that Jesus spoke was delivered. This is the depth that the judge of the widow had allowed himself to occupy. It was a creeping canker that was to prevail in the land of the law of Moses, and was soon to be born again in the infant church. It was a deterioration that was traced and documented, but the lesson that was there to be learned was ignored, and this generation of the parable was still entrapped under a system that was perverted because they were willing for it to be.

In the 22nd chapter of Jeremiah, and the third verse, we read: "Do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow." In the Jewish society, the widow was one who was usually not only without her husband, but also one who had no other living relatives. The law required that the family of the husband care for the widow,

and provide for her welfare. One called a widow was one who was without human protection.

Her protection, not coming from an earthly family, came instead from the law of God. The people had been constantly taught to protect and provide for those who were indeed defenseless. In Exodus 22, the 22nd verse, God gives a specific commandment to the children of Israel. **“Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.”** And again in Deuteronomy 24 and starting with verses 17-21,

Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger nor of the fatherless nor take a widow's raiment to pledge: But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing. When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger. for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

The testimony that we find in the New Testament shows us the practice that God had ordained regarding the widow had been perverted. The Pharisees had gained a reputation of grimness. Their attitude of tradition superseding the law of God had digressed their disobedience of God's law to the point that they would even take advantage of a widow in order to further their own case or position. To be so hard and so cruel as to literally consume all that the widow possesseth, was to turn completely against the teachings of God, the moral standard of the land, and the personal judgment of righteous persons. What a depth of degradation had been reached by the chosen ones of God. They had taken the banner of the law of God and had trodden it afoot. Isaiah pleaded with the nation, pointing out to them in the first chapter and the 23rd verse that the princes were rebellious and were loving gifts (bribes), paying no heed to the cause or the cries of the widow. A faithful man of God was proclaiming the cause of God, and uncovering the perversity of the people. For this he was hated.

The teaching of the parable can be generally classified as teaching persistence in prayer. In the fact of adversity and trial, the power of prayer is an awesome thing. In the face

of sadness and grief, the calm of prayer is the only solace. In the face of joy and good tidings prayer is the means of giving thanks and praise. The sincere continuance in prayer is an effective means to see the desires of our hearts granted. Even those who are enemies against all that is good and just can not stand against the persistent prayer of a devout person.

But there are other lessons here also. There is the lesson that is brought to light of God protecting those who are faithful to him, even if they are ruled over by a group of godless and self-centered individuals. Within this parable is taught the lesson that all things work for good for him that loves God, and seeks to do his will. There is also the teaching that one who feels as the prophet felt that they are indeed alone in the service of God, there is still that power and that fellowship to be enjoyed and to be treasured. Also we see again the teaching that if an unjust person can do those things that are good for us, how much more can God do for us, and will God do for us, realizing that his motives are the deep and sincere love that gave his only begotten son while we were yet sinners.

There are lessons upon lessons found within the parable, and to try to teach them all would lead to a condition of books without end. There are certain portions and thoughts of the parable which seem to be so very applicable to those of us who are in the body of Christ today. A few of these I would like to relate for our study and consideration.

Among these are the character of the man that was the judge. He was one of those persons in whom you could place no trust, and yet who was in a position that exercised authority over you. A man whom you would receive no justice unless you offered a higher price, or a darker threat.

Also there is the condition of the widow. Where can you find a position that is apparently more hopeless and more deserted than that of this widow. On first glance it appears that she is alone and totally at the mercy of this evil and perverse individual. Yet when we search the background of the law of God, we find that he has said that he will be the protector of the widow and the fatherless, and that his will is for the poor to enjoy his comfort and protection. In the light of the desire and expressed will of God it is indeed erroneous for us to think that this widow was alone. Her faith in the word of God, and the promises that were made in that word for her to enjoy, led her to continue against cruel odds, to seek that which the law entitled her.

Then there is the general condition of the kingdom of

Israel. It was a kingdom that had laid its foundation and strength on the unyielding word of God, and had grown into a world shaking force that had to be reckoned with. Yet it had, because of the ease that was found in Zion, turned from the keeping of that word, and had followed after the nations that were round about it, and the result was a weak and pitiful kingdom, that had neither power nor respect. The people tolerated the vices of the heathens, and saw no harm in the repeated transgressions of the law of God, and the constant reliance on the individual gains instead of a treasure in a better way.

The priest of the kingdom did not cry out against the wickedness, and condoned the transgressions if they were not in their own personal lives. The spirit of compromise covered the lips of the men that were charged with delivering to the people the word that was to guide their way. Because of these things, men came to fill important positions who feared not God, and who respected not man. The decay of the kingdom was brought about not by a greater power but by a weakness that started from within the ranks of the selected few, and gathered in size and intensity until it had weakened the entire structure of the Jewish economy. Leaving the chosen people of God weak and non-effective in the world.

The parable taught many lessons to those who were hearing the words of our Lord, that were applicable to their lives. The parable also teaches many lessons that are applicable to our lives. Lessons that we need.

Today, across the expanse of the church, we see a parallel to the parable. Those who are charged with the responsibility of protecting the needy, are instead the ones who harm them the most from within. Judges in Israel were prone to render decisions based on the gift or bribe they would receive. Today the same situations exist.

The simple, beautiful, unique and saving gospel has been used and re-used for purposes not intended when it was given to the saints (Jude 3). The praise of men has been given a greater position in the minds of elders and preachers than the approval of God. To build a larger and more beautiful building has more importance than to build a home for the needy. To create new and elaborate gimmicks to entice more people to attend the services occupies a more prominent place in some elders' and preachers' desires than to buy the truth and sell it not.

Bribery is as prominent now as then, but the form it takes is a little more subtle. There are no pouches of coins

passed hand to hand, or setting aside of civil laws by grateful politicians, but there are so many other ways the same action is being accomplished. The pouch of coins has given way to the large check controlled by members who have been allowed to dictate to elders what must or should be done. The implicit threat is do it my way or I will quit donating. Since we have developed into a materialistic brotherhood, the hand which controls the purse strings, controls the judgment. To keep a standard of buildings and prominence in the religious world, elders have allowed their judgment to be purchased so that perverted gospel is taught. A gospel which turns aside God's laws on marriage and divorce, on the kingdom, on the separation of home and church, and a myriad of other points of doctrine. To keep the property, prestige and pride which we have builded, we have undercut the foundation which God laid. The hope of eternity in God's presence has been replaced by the vain glory of pride and self-satisfaction of possessions, crowds, prominence in the community as a religious group and the blazing banner of sophisticated education which has produced doctors of national prominence. To protect all the attention and praise from man, elders have allowed, and continue to allow, the law of God to be superceded by gifts of man. Our elders are like the sons of Samuel. They have no fear of God.

Our preachers are basically no different, but for the fact that their interests may be more self-centered. To protect high salaries, fine homes and utility payments, a preacher will swallow any meal set before him and will glance to the side of the road as he walks past the sin sick and leaves their care to denominations (Samaritans), and they hear a false gospel by our failure to do as God has said. To avoid embarrassment the preachers appear with men who teach false doctrine and raise not their voice in complaint or concern. They want to be on expensive and prestigious workshops, heralded from coast to coast, and known for being dynamic and persuasive.

The men who were judges under the Jewish system were proud and covetous of the title, "judge." It carried an aura of authority and prestige. It was a way for recognition to become automatic, and people were very dubious of questioning their decisions. It was a title which gave authority which defeated questions before they could be formed or presented. Today the in title is "Doctor." The doctors are educated and titled and, therefore, who can



question the answers or judgments they give? After all, what can we do who are so uneducated?

The same pathway is opened for us which was opened for the widow. Persistence, perseverance, prayer and determination can give to us results for our desire to have a pure and non-perverted gospel. The woman knocked on the door, not just once, but repeatedly. She wanted the proper decision against those who wronged her. Today each of us is wronged when the church is taught wrong, or led wrong or abused for any purpose. We need to do several things:

**1. Make elders responsible for what is preached, practiced and advocated.**

We must continually knock on these doors of judgment and require a righteous answer. Awake them from sleep and make them weary of not giving the proper and timely answer. Elders who refuse to honor the word of God must be corrected or removed. We need to realize the office of elder is not parallel to supreme court justice. It is not for life. It continues only so long as the work is faithfully carried out.

**2. Make preachers preach only the word.**

We need to hold preachers to the position of speaking only as the oracles of God. We must refuse to accept perversions, situation ethics, educated compromise, and social gospels. The lessons delivered from our pulpits must have the ring of the message that echoed from Mount Calvary; just as the judges of the kingdom of Israel were required to deliver messages that rang as the law that was delivered from Mount Sinai. Preaching in the church must once again become that which speaks where the Bible speaks and is silent where the Bible is silent. No more can we afford to have unsound doctrine uttered. We must rise up as the Bible says and stop their mouths. We cannot rest as long as one unsound preacher is allowed to teach in the body of Christ.

**3. Most importantly, we must respect God and continually seek his help.**

Knees which have for so long been covered with the smooth polyester of ease and content, must now become bared and calloused from the prayers of submitting and obedient saints of God. The dirt of the floor would be better upon our knees from kneeling in prayer, than the shadow of compromise would be upon our hearts as we seek to have unity with the questionable many. Our Lord declared if we love him we will keep his commandments, including those

that require the placing of God over friend and family. Recognizing that we are powerless ourselves, but can do all things through Christ Jesus, we must become again a praying people. We must be lifting up our hands and hearts to God, and seek his aid in the battles against the judges who follow not in the steps of the fathers.

The judges of Israel could only retain their power and office through the laxity of the Jews. These judges of today can only retain the power and influence if we allow it.

The call used to be to hold to the anchor for we are drifting. Today that call must be to hoist the sails and return to the anchorage, for we have left the safe harbor. We see here today a portion of that remnant that is trying to remain true but our permissiveness can be our loss.

That widow took a stand to beat on that door. She would not be moved, put off or disregarded. We must beat on that door of perversion. Not pitty-pat like playing with a child, but with a tenacity which shows we will not be ignored, or put off, or refused. We must, to be right with God, demand, defend, and cleanse this great body of Christ or stand by and watch, be charged and pay for what we allow.

If we believe what we teach: if we love the word: if we desire eternal salvation, we must as individuals and congregations do as God has willed.

1. If any bring any other gospel receive him not into your house, nor wish godspeed.

2. Mark those that cause division.

3. Seek first the kingdom.

4. For this is love—keep his commandments remembering “if God be for me who can stand against me?”

Conversely, if God be against me, who can stand for me?

As Joshua said “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!”

## CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

# The Elder Brother

Luke 15:25-32

*Walter W. Pigg, Jr*

### INTRODUCTION:

- A. Jesus came to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10).
  - B. His followers commanded to seek the lost (Matt. 20:18-20; Mk. 16:15,16; II Tim. 2:2).
  - C. New Testament replete with examples of concern for the lost.
  - D. The third parable of Luke 15 is actually the parable of a father and two sons. "And he said a certain man had two sons" (v. 11).
  - E. Valuable lessons may be learned from a study of elder brother and relationship to himself, his brother and his father.
- I. The Setting of the parable of a father and two sons
- A. Publicans and sinners drew near to Jesus, but Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying: "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Lk. 15:1,2).
  - B. It was to justify his concern for the lost, and refute the unjust implication of the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees that Jesus spoke the three parables of Luke 15.
  - C. In view of the above circumstances, Jesus spoke the parable of the man and two sons, wherein he discusses the "elder brother" (Lk. 15:31,32).
- II. The Interpretation of the Parable
- A. What is a parable?
  - B. There is great need for care in the interpretation of parables.

- C. In this parable we have the advantage of knowing why Jesus spoke it.
- D. Identifying the father, the younger son, and the elder brother.

### III. Lessons to be learned from the parable

- A. Though spoken first to the Pharisees, the principles of the parable are applicable today.
- B. Greatest lesson from elder brother—example of what we shouldn't be.
- C. Elder brother inquires as to meaning of merriment and receives a detestable answer in reply.
- D. The elder brother is angry and will have no part in the rejoicing, not even so much as to go to the house to see his brother.
- E. Elder brother indicates he has served his father with resentment.
- F. The elder brother's statement, "I have never transgressed thy commandment" is a manifestation of a self-righteous attitude.
- G. Self-pity and jealousy are evident in the elder brother.
- H. The father's justification of this action toward his younger son.

### IV. Further considerations and timely applications

- A. Many brethren have gone into the far country of error.
- B. What should be our attitude toward those prodigals?
- C. At all cost, we must avoid an attitude of self-righteousness.

### CONCLUSION:

- A. Our Saviour's concern for the lost should be our concern.
- B. May we never, due to self-righteousness, display the attitude of the elder brother relative to the lost.
- C. We must rejoice in the return of prodigal brethren in true repentance.
- D. If we should fall into the snare of the elder brother's disposition, we would be among the dead (in sin), and affect others.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In God's considerate display of love toward mankind he sent his only begotten son (John 3:16) to earth to die for

man: "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10). The significance of this once for all sacrifice is seen in Paul's statement in Philippians 2:8,9. **"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and giveth him a name which is above every name."**

In view of this great sacrifice, the followers of Jesus have been granted the greatest opportunity and given the greatest responsibility ever toward others, that of seeking the lost the world over (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15,16). The New Testament is replete with examples where concern for the lost is emphasized, and many are the efforts put forth to reach them. One of the most forceful examples of Christ's concern for the lost is set forth in Luke 15. This chapter might well be called the **"lost and found"** chapter of the Bible, since its three parables each emphasize that which was lost being found. On each occasion when the lost was found, there was rejoicing. The lost sheep was found (vs. 3-7); the lost piece of silver was found (vs. 8-10); and the lost son was found (vs. 11-32).

The third parable of Luke 15, usually referred to as the **"Parable of the Prodigal Son,"** is actually the parable of the father and two sons. The parable is begun as follows: **"And he said a certain man had two sons"** (v. 11). Usually, attention is focused almost entirely upon the first son (the prodigal) who was lost, then found. But without the second son, the elder brother, the parable does not convey the lesson our Lord intended. That the Lord had a purpose in making the elder brother an integral part of the lesson is clearly evident from the fact that an emphasis is here given which is not found in the other two parables of Luke 15. In this case there was also rejoicing when the lost son was found, but there was also a display of anger, resentment, self-righteousness, and jealousy on the part of the elder brother. There is something special about this parable in that it involves people, not things. A father shows his concern for the well being of his two sons, as our heavenly Father shows concern for his sons. There is a reason that it has been called, **"the crown and pearl of all parables."**

From a study of the elder brother a number of valuable lessons may be learned as one views his relationship to himself, to his father, and to his brother. He failed to recognize his own condition; his action toward his father was one of rejection and resentment for well doing; and, his offensive attitude toward his brother could only have been a

discouragement to one who had been lost in sin, but who had come to himself in repentance. The father's attitude toward both sons is one that should constantly remind us that our Father cares and desires that which is for our good. This reminds us of Christ's concern over Jerusalem, when they would not hear him (Lk. 13:34).

## II. THE SETTING OF THE PARABLE OF A FATHER AND TWO SONS

In order to get the full import of the parable concerning the elder brother, it is needful to consider the setting under which the parables of Luke 15 were spoken. This is found in verses one and two of the chapter. "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Unlike the publicans and sinners who were admittedly sinners, but who had a commendable interest in hearing Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees are interested only in finding fault with Jesus. The Pharisees and scribes, though listed separately, had much in common; namely their opposition to Jesus and a manifestation of a self-righteous attitude. This accounts for their charge that "this man" was receiving sinners and eating with them.

Jesus did indeed associate with sinners, but not for the purpose of upholding their sins as the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes implied. His association was for the purpose of teaching them, in keeping with his mission of seeking the lost. When Levi, the publican, left all and followed Jesus (Lk. 5:27-33), he (Levi) made a feast in his own house and a great company of publicans and others attended. But the scribes and Pharisees were quick to murmur against Jesus' disciples, asking why they ate and drank with publicans and sinners. It was in reply to this indictment that Jesus said: "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

It was to justify his concern for the lost, and to refute the unjust implications of the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, that Jesus spoke the three parables of Luke 15. He did not deny associating with sinners; they were sick and needed the healing that only he could give them. They were sinners who needed to be called to repentance. The obstinate Pharisees and scribes needed healing but they were unaware of their own needs. Jesus would portray them

as the elder brother in order that they might see themselves as he saw them. It was under these circumstances that Jesus said:

Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found (Luke 15:25-32).

### III. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE

What is a parable? There is some variation in the definitions of a parable but most arrive at the same basic concept. For example, one writer defines the word as follows: "The word parable (parabole from parabollo, to place alongside for measurement or comparison like a yardstick) is an objective illustration for spiritual or moral truth."<sup>1</sup> Another, noted for his work on the parables of Jesus, does not give a precise definition of a parable, but shows how the parable differs from the fable, myth, proverb, and allegory. He does state, however, "But the parable is constructed to set forth a spiritual truth."<sup>2</sup> We have all heard that which I believe is a quite accurate definition of a parable: "An earthly story with a heavenly (or spiritual) meaning."

There is a great need for care in the interpretation of parables, one reason being the tendency to press every minute detail beyond the reason and striving to make those details teach things which were obviously never intended. In this connection the following advice from Ramm is worthy of careful consideration.

**Determine the one central truth the parable is attempting to teach.** This might be called the golden rule of parabolic interpretation for practically all writers on the subject mention it with stress. 'The typical parable presents one

single point of comparison,' writes Dodd. 'The details are not intended to have independent significance.' Others have put the rule this way: **Don't make a parable walk on all fours.**<sup>3</sup>

In the parable under consideration we have the advantage of knowing (Lk. 15:1,2) the purpose for which Jesus spoke it. And that was to justify his action in connection with the Pharisees' and scribes' charge of **"receiving sinners and eating with them."** Since concern for the lost does not in any way depict the sentiments of the Pharisees and scribes, the lack of concern on the part of the elder brother must be directed to them.

In order to get the intended lesson from the parable it is necessary to identify the three main characters: the father, the younger son, and the elder brother. While there is a variety of opinions as to the identity of the two sons, there is general agreement among Bible scholars that the **father** represents the heavenly Father. Therefore, with this much in common, we will consider some opinions as to the identity of the two sons. Albert Barnes believes: **"The elder son represents the Pharisees; the younger, the returning sinner, whether Jew or Gentile; and the father, God, who is willing to receive them."**<sup>4</sup> To a great extent Trench agrees with Barnes when he says:

Some considering the sons as the Jew and the Gentile, the younger representing by his conduct the apostasy and return of the Gentile world, the elder, the narrow-minded, self-extolling Jews, grudging that the 'sinners of the Gentiles' should be admitted to the same blessing with themselves; others looking upon the younger son as representing all who have widely departed from God, and who having in consequence experienced misery, have by His grace been brought back to Him, while in the elder brother they see either a narrow form of real righteousness, or one righteous in his own sight, not in the Lord's. The latter view is the more correct one, though not rigorously excluding the former.<sup>5</sup>

In my estimation, McGarvey and Pendleton give the most accurate interpretation of the parable when they identify the characters this way: **"These two sons represent the professedly religious (the elder) and the openly irreligious (the younger). They have special reference to the two parties found in the first two verses of this chapter—the Pharisees, the publicans and sinners."**<sup>6</sup>

Additional meaningful statements by the above authors are made in their comments on Luke 15:24.



Having thus finished his account of the openly irreligious, Jesus now turns to portray that of the professedly religious; i.e., he turns from the publican to the Pharisee. He paints both parties alike children of God, as both faulty and sinful in his sight, and each as being loved despite his faultiness. But while the story of the elder son had a present and local application to the Pharisees, it is to be taken comprehensively as describing all the self-righteous who murmur at and refuse to take part in the conversion of sinners.<sup>7</sup>

#### IV. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE PARABLE

##### PARABLE PRINCIPLES APPLY TODAY

Though first spoken to the scribes and Pharisees in the presence of the publicans and sinners, the parable, as it concerns the elder brother and his relationship to others, is applicable in principle today and in every age to come. There is not a Christian who cannot profit from this parable provided there is a willingness to hear, in the sense of applying the principles contained therein. God's word studied, whether it be this passage or others, for the sole purpose of ascertaining facts without any view to application is of little value.

##### AN EXAMPLE NOT TO FOLLOW

The greatest lesson to be learned from the elder brother himself is in the fact that he is an example of what we should strive NOT TO BE. For those who look for lessons in the positive only, there is not a great deal to be learned from the elder brother. From a positive standpoint we may take what is said about him coming in from the field to indicate that he was not lazy; that he was willing to work for his living. And, according to his own account, he had served his father many years and had never at any time transgressed his father's commandment, but his service does not seem to have been of a willing nature. The language carries the idea of having "slaved" for an oppressive father. If the elder brother had kept all his father's commandments, his attitude served to nullify the value of his serving. And then, too, on the positive side we may say that he was positively wrong with respect to attitude toward himself and others. However, some of the greatest lessons may be learned by viewing others as examples for the purpose of not doing as they have done and not being what they have been. In most cases, if we cannot learn from another how to

do something we can at least learn how not to do it. There is a valuable lesson to be learned from the father's intreaty of his elder son. He did not retaliate with the spirit of bitterness, anger, jealousy and resentment which characterized the son.

### AN UNDESIRABLE ANSWER RECEIVED

It is not unusual for people to ask questions for which they would prefer not to receive an answer. This was the case with the elder brother as he approaches the house from the field and hears the merriment, the **"music and dancing."** He inquires of a servant as to the meaning of the activities. The answer he receives is not at all what he wanted to hear, but perhaps it is what he expected. The servant seemingly exuding with joy at the occasion himself, announces that **"Thy brother is come."** But there was more, **"Thy father hath killed the fatted calf."** This is a happy occasion, not just because the son and brother had returned home, but because he has returned safe and sound (in good health). Though the brother has returned a different man, the elder brother would not rejoice. Rather, he is offended, and had apparently already made up his mind regarding his brother. The throwing of a party for the wasteful, worldly, brother who has come home was not at all what the elder brother wants to hear about. Like Saul, when the Israelites sang David's praises for having slain his **"ten thousands"** and Saul for having slain his **"thousands"** (I Sam. 18:7,8), the elder brother was very displeased. Though the prodigal's return is the occasion of no more rejoicing than should be the case upon the lost's return, it is much more than the inquiring brother can accept.

Perhaps it is in order to mention the fact at this point that the **"music and dancing"** which was in progress upon the return of the lost son is some times used in an effort to justify the popular dancing of modern times. That this is a poor example to be used for this purpose is well said by Barnes:

It is an expressive image, used in accordance with the known customs of the country, to express joy. It is further to be remarked, that if the example of persons in Scripture be pleaded for dancing, it can be **only for just such dances as they practiced**—for sacred or triumphal occasions.<sup>8</sup>

### THE ELDER BROTHER'S ANGER

The elder brother was angry and would not so much as

go in to see his brother. Such anger would have hardly arisen on the spur of the moment. It must have been brewing for some time, and there is further indication of this in his reply to his father. His anger was over what should have been a great cause for his own rejoicing, and would have been such a cause if his heart had been right. But his thoughts were on himself, and his jealousy and ill feeling toward his brother would not allow him to rejoice. Furthermore, his anger implies that his father is wrong in rejoicing over his lost son, now found. But his father is not rewarding sin but rejoicing over repentance. That the father's concern, demonstrated by his intreaty, is a show of his father's love matters not; love should not be shown to his brother.

Just as the elder brother's anger caused him to reject his father's kind intreaty ("Kept on beseeching him" Robertson), our anger may well bear the same kind of fruit. To become angry is dangerous and as a tool of the devil may become sinful. Such was the case with the elder brother. Paul warns, "Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:26,27). There is a great difference between being angry and not allowing that anger to develop into sin, and that of allowing anger to bring about envy, jealousy, and resentment toward those who are doing the right things.

### SERVING WITH A SPIRIT OF RESENTMENT

In the elder son's statement, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee" (literally, "slave for thee"), there is the indication of serving with resentment toward an oppressive father. Is there not a very real danger of Christians serving the heavenly Father with some of the same spirit? What of those who ask, or imply: "Do I have to attend the mid-week services?" "Do I have to attend every service of the church?" "Do I have to try to reach the lost with the gospel?" Is it not a privilege to serve our loving heavenly Father? And aren't we the ones who profit most from that service? Though we must ultimately give an account of our lives to God, he will not force us to serve him. A forced service is not what he wants from us. That Christ, who willingly served his Father, wants man to serve him willingly is shown by his statement, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). Man must make the decision as to whether or

not he will serve the Lord. If the decision is made to serve him, it is then in order to **“hunger and thirst after righteousness”** (Matt. 5:6). That we are to serve God with a willing heart is shown in the area of giving. Of the great example of the churches of Macedonia, Paul said:

How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the richness of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves...But this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God (II Cor. 8:2,3,5).

Following the above example, the apostle said to the Corinthians: **“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver”** (II Cor. 9:7).

### A SELF-RIGHTEOUS ATTITUDE

The elder brother reveals his self-righteousness when he said that he had never at any time transgressed his father's commandment, and then points to **“thy son”** as having devoured his father's living with harlots. It was true that the younger son had wasted his substance with riotous living, but it was his own inheritance which he had requested his father to give him. This, of course, didn't justify the misuse of his funds, but the elder brother seemingly wants it to appear even worse than it was, by suggesting that it was his father's substance wasted. There could have been a hint that the father was financing his son's wasteful, worldly living. Though the elder son boasts of his obedience to his father **“these many years”** without ever transgressing, this is no more than he should have done. And we, as unworthy servants, have no right to boast when we do our Father's will. At our best we are still far from perfect and have no right to glory. The younger son did go wrong, but thankfully he has seen the folly of sin and has returned to his father in repentance. His brother has yet to recognize his own sin.

The elder brother sees himself and his actions as above reproach. He is proud of himself. His keeping of the commandment of his father was like that of the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-11:

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:  
Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a

Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

We are again reminded of the elder brother in the account of the rich young ruler who said he had kept all the commandments (Lk. 18:21), but Jesus reminded him that he lacked one thing yet. Unfortunately, the young ruler was not willing to admit his wrong and make it right. The elder brother had not gone into a "far country" to live a profligate life, he was wrong at home because his whole attitude was wrong. This should remind us that it is possible to "keep the commandments" with respect to attending church services; taking part in worship services; and, not engaging in the common sins of worldiness, and still be wrong because of our attitude. That attitude which should be avoided is that which says that we can never be wrong and therefore we never stand in need of forgiveness.

There was no justification for refusing a brother who has now seen his error and is returning in true repentance. The prodigal son is not received as a worldly citizen from a far country, but as one who left his father's house and now sees his duty, and his opportunity, to return. He has reached that state which the Lord desires, repentance (II Pet. 3:9). When one errs from the truth and is converted that soul has been saved from death (James 5:19,20). One who was "dead" spiritually has now come to life. Surely, there is cause for rejoicing. But this is not always the case with Christians, even. Did you ever know of a Christian saying, "I'll never forgive that person for what they did"? It happens some times, and when it does it is a sign of self-righteousness which is no more acceptable than that of the elder brother.

It is typical of the self-righteous person to cry out against some sins, as they are seen in the lives of others, when there is sin within, though not admitted. While crying out against the sins of others, the self-righteous individual may have the feeling that "Whatever I do is right because I am the one doing it." But no one has any more right to sin than another, because sin is always wrong, regardless of who is committing it, or what the nature of it is. That there is a certain amount of hypocrisy within the self-righteous is clearly evident from the example of the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' time.

The sin of self-righteousness may indeed be one of the most dangerous in that there is deception. When one is

deceived to the point of overlooking his own sins he will never see the need for forgiveness, as the younger brother who saw his own sins and acknowledged them in repentance. If there is one thing taught plainly in the New Testament (and there are many) it is that we all, even Christians, stand in need of forgiveness. Paul said, **"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"** (Rom. 3:23), but then there is that continuing need for forgiveness. John says, **"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"** (I John 1:8). He continues by saying, **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us"** (I John 1,9,10).

### EVIDENCE OF SELF PITY AND JEALOUSY

In spite of the elder brother's appraisal of himself as the keeper of his father's commandment without exception for all those years, he says, **"Yet thou never gavest me a kid."** But his younger brother had been given much more than a mere kid, the father had killed for him the **"fatted calf."** There is not equal treatment, in the eyes of the elder brother, but rather preferential treatment of the younger brother. Poor elder brother, even though two thirds of his father's wealth (all that which remained) was his by Jewish law, he cannot accept the kindness which is being shown to the son who went wrong but has now repented. But why shouldn't the father show his son that he is thankful for his return? He has now repented. Will not God forgive any sin when there is confession and repentance of that sin? **"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"** (I John 1:7). We should never be jealous, or feel self-pity, when there is rejoicing over a brother who has repented. This is the way it should be and the provisions by God which make forgiveness possible are available for all to profit from, even at our best. And in addition, the privilege of having the Father's blessings continually is not to be taken lightly. (II John 9b; John 14:23).

### FATHER'S ACTIONS TOWARD YOUNGER SON JUSTIFIED

The considerate father, who desires the right relationship with both his sons, reminds the elder brother that it is proper and right that there should be rejoicing at the return

of the once worldly son. There was no reason for the elder son to be jealous. He had enjoyed the blessing of being with his father all the time, and materially speaking he would have all that remained of his father's wealth; twice as much as the younger son received. There was no reason to rejoice over that which was not lost, but for a son who was "dead," but is "alive again" it is a different matter. Jesus has just related how that there was rejoicing over a lost sheep, and a lost coin which were found; how much more rejoicing over a lost son who is found.

How can we, if our heart is right, help but to rejoice with the Father when the wayward come home. In rejoicing over the return of the lost there is a demonstration of the love (agapao) which God has for man; man has for God, and that men should have for one another (John 3:16; 14:23; 13:34).

## V. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS AND TIMELY APPLICATIONS

Many brethren have gone into the far country of error and false doctrine in our day. They are prodigals in that they are wasting God's truth through compromise. They have left the Father's supervision to go their own way. An example to consider: Divorce and remarriage doctrine; Crossroadism; Family Life concept of the work of the church where recreation and entertainment are provided; Fellowshiping denominations; The Herald of Truth with its false and non-distinctive teaching; and, those brethren who encourage such as the above (Cf. II John 9-11). There is no question but that these things represent departures from the Father's counsel and authority. And, this spells trouble for the family of God, the church (I Tim. 3:15).

How should those who still strive for the "old paths" react toward those prodigals? There must be rejoicing at their return! Only those with the disposition of the elder brother could fail to rejoice upon their return. And, it is hard to believe that more than a few, if any, would not like to see the return of every brother who has gone into a far country. If I know my own heart, nothing would please me more than to see the family united; the ranks of God's army unbroken, even to the degree that it was 25 years ago. Our hearts ache because of those who have compromised God's truth and no longer stand where they once stood.

But as great as our longing is to see those prodigals return, they can only be accepted in true repentance.

Therefore, the far country brethren need to **“come to themselves”** and return to the Father **“alive,”** not **“dead.”** If the Father will not receive them without repentance, neither could brethren. But some seemingly want to court the far country brethren while remaining in good standing at home. Such cannot be. The father received his son in **repentance**, we cannot go farther and receive without repentance; our Father will not. Jesus said, if a brother sin and repent, forgive him. Some would do what God **would not do** and forgive whether there is repentance or not. The prodigal said, **“I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son”** (Lk. 15:21). It is rather ironic that our elder brother would not receive his brother when **he had repented**, but some of our brethren encourage some of our wayward brethren in their sins when there is no repentance.

At all costs, we must avoid an attitude of self-righteousness. Error is error regardless of who holds it or the nature of it. Just because one may have wide recognition among brethren does not mean that he has liberty to stand for less than the whole truth. It may be a quirk of self-righteousness which encourages the feeling with some that whatever they do or say should not be called in question, even though there may not be a Biblical basis for the same. It is also wrong to encourage error on the part of another person, regardless of who that person is (II John 9). Self-righteousness may cry out against some sins while practicing **“Unity in Diversity.”** There is a form of self-righteousness which may lead the church into apostasy, in that one presumes to have a knowledge which may well be greater than that of the New Testament. This seems to be the implication when men frown upon God’s way of carrying on the work of the church, substituting their own way of doing things. If this is not the case, why have so many departed from the New Testament pattern, and assume the position that they should not be called in question?

## VI. CONCLUSION

Our Saviour’s concern for the lost should be our concern. Without that concern we show a lack of concern for our own soul and evidence a lack of that love which seeks the well being of others.

May we never allow ourselves to display the attitude of the elder brother toward the lost, due to a feeling of self-righteousness. The sinner who comes to himself and



repents is far more righteous than those who never see any need of repentance.

We must stand ready to rejoice when any prodigal brother comes home in true repentance. And, we should encourage them to do so, longing for the time when they will return. It would be good to keep in mind Paul's admonition to restore those overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1), mindful of the fact that we could be the one who one day needs to be restored. But in our noble desire to see the wayward restored let us not fall into the error of doing what our Father will not do—accept into fellowship those who have not repented.

The lesson of the elder son was given for our benefit, and if we fall into the snare of the elder brother, we will be the "dead" in sin who are lost and need to be found. Not only do we run the risk of losing our own souls, only the Lord can know the influence upon others, in time to come. Let us watch and pray that we are not lured into the far country of sin, nor come to have the self-righteous spirit of the elder brother. But if either should ever happen, let us be ever mindful of the loving Father's kind intreaty toward the elder brother and His rejoicing over the return of the younger.

#### FOOTNOTES

1 A. T. Robertson, **Word Pictures of the New Testament**, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1930), Vol. I, p. 101.

2 R. C. Trench, **Notes on the Parables of our Lord**, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1948), p. 3.

3 Bernard Ramm, **Protestant Biblical Interpretation**, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 283.

4 Albert Barnes, **Barnes on the New Testament**, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), Luke-John, p. 107.

5 R. C. Trench, **op. cit.**, p. 141.

6 McGarvey and Pendelton, **The Fourfold Gospel**, (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co.), p. 501.

7 McGarvey and Pendelton, **ibid.**, p. 504.

8 Albert Barnes, **op. cit.**, p. 106.

## CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

### The Lost Coin

Luke 15:8-10

*Jeffery Stevenson*

My wife and I had just been married and were living in the vacated but unsold home of a brother in Christ who had transferred to another state. Aware of our plight to secure a suitable place to live, this gracious brother invited us to occupy his home until such time as it was sold. In the mean time, he would move his family to their new home. This was especially advantageous for us. Up to this point, we had not secured a place to live and as well at the end of the summer, we would be moving to Henderson, Tennessee. But what was most attractive about the arrangement was that this brother permitted us to live in his home rent-free. This made it possible for us to save the \$800 we would need for our up-coming move and my continued education at Freed-Hardeman College. It was not too much longer before we had accumulated \$250 toward our cause, a sum which was to be taken to the bank, but negligently hidden in a dresser drawer on a temporary basis. Throughout our stay, of course, realtors frequented the home during the day with prospective buyers.

One day, as my wife and I came home from work, we curiously found our bedroom door shut and locked (it locked on the inside). As we broke into the room and made our search, our suspicions were verified—the \$250 was stolen! We were frantic! We reasoned that since the house was locked and there was no sign of breaking and entering, the realtor or one of his clients could be the only suspects. But due to our unsubstantiatable theory, authorities informed us our money was forever lost, never to be retrieved.

Jesus likened the sinner to lost money. In Luke 15:8-10, he said:

Or what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a lamp, and sweep the house,

and seek diligently until she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost. Even so, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

The phrase **“piece of silver”** here translated the Greek drachma, **“which was the wage paid to a labourer for a day’s work.”**<sup>1</sup> The woman to whom Jesus refers was likely the common poverty-stricken person who, as the day’s custom was, protected a small treasury at home.<sup>2</sup> To the woman of the first century, the purchasing power of a drachma was sufficient cause to be alarmed.<sup>3</sup>

Whether we realize it or not, there is a lot of **“lost money”** to find! But are we really all that concerned? What does this parable mean? What lessons from it are available to Christians today?

### ANALYSIS OF THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN

The contextual setting is of course vital to a proper understanding of this parable. At this juncture in his ministry, Luke 14 indicates that Jesus’ popularity was soaring: **“Now there went with him great multitudes”** (14:25). This obvious superficial consensus of discipleship prompted Jesus’ stringent teaching on the subject (14:26-35). He sought to either elicit a deeper commitment from the crowds, or, should they refuse such devotion, provoke them to leave off following him. Interestingly, Jesus closed his discourse by saying: **“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear”** (14:35b) and 15:1 shows that **“all publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him.”** **“Publicans”** were localized, government employed tax collectors who made themselves rich at the expense of others through extortion and blackmail. Classed with **“sinners”** (the immoral defiers of tradition), the publicans **“were people who were regarded and treated as outcasts from the Jewish religious and national life.”**<sup>4</sup>

Reacting unfavorably to Jesus’ reception of these misfits, the Pharisees and scribes levied this complaint: **“This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them”** (15:2). The viewpoint of the Pharisees toward such people is indicated by the most widely accepted etymology of the name **“Pharisee”** which means **“to separate.”**<sup>5</sup> This exclusive and narrow group of **“separatists”** deliberately remained aloof from anyone who would not accept and conform not only to

Moses' law, but also to their cumbersome and intricate traditions (cf. Matt. 15:1-9). The "scribes" were the expert scholars and authorities on the law of Moses. On a contemporary plane, the scribes and Pharisees were the "church-goers" of Jesus' day; the religious; the meticulous keepers of human traditions. In short, they were insulted that Jesus would spend his time courting "riff-raffs" and "low-lifes" that could never inherit the kingdom of God.

Having considered the immediate context, let us now consider some of the dominant features of the parable itself. First, examination of the initial losing of the coin is in order. Again, the women of Jesus' day were aware of the necessity of having a small savings at home for security purposes, or if poverty was the case, for the purpose of sheer survival. At any rate, losing a tenth of one's earnings or savings was cause for considerable concern, especially if this be a widow with limited funds (cf. Lk. 21:2,4).<sup>6</sup> The soul of the sinner is "lost silver" in the eyes of Jesus! Just as the woman of the parable would not resign herself and say, "Oh well, at least I have nine more coins," Jesus, too, does not want to lose one. The parable of the lost coin underscores the concluding premise of the previous parable: "I say unto you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance" (Lk. 15:7). Just as the "good shepherd" (John 10:11). would leave the flock of ninety and nine to find the one, the nine coins in possession diminish as to their urgent need for their owner's attention in preference of the one lost coin. The soul of just one sinner is cause for alarm in the mind of Christ.

Second, notice the diligent search conducted by the woman after discovering that the one coin was missing. The woman's efforts to locate the lost piece were industrious and deliberate. She would "light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she find it" (Lk. 15:8b). It is noteworthy that the woman went to find the piece; she did not wait for the piece to come to her. So many of the brethren expect the lost to come to them. She also used whatever resources she had available in retrieving the coin. "She had to light a lamp because she lived in a typical Palestinian peasant house with a low door and no windows."<sup>7</sup> She swept the house. Her intent was to seek diligently until she found it, not "until she got tired of looking." She did not entertain the possibility of not finding it. Coins do not just walk out of the house! Contrast how quickly some Christians weary of seeking the lost and their

**“exhaustion”** eventually turns into indifference and a resignation that the lost will have to remain lost. (And the utter irony is that the same brethren smirk and snicker about how **“soft”** the preacher’s job is: they are the first ones to tire doing it!) At any rate, Jesus was likening the woman to himself. **“The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost”** (Lk. 19:10) and Jesus’ earthly ministry reflects his untiring concentrated effort to search for the lost until they are found. Jesus used the resources available to him (miracles, authoritative preaching, the cross, etc). Today he continues his search using the word as a **“lamp”** and the church as the **“broom”** that sweeps the cracks and corners of the world wherein may rest lost souls.

The third feature of the parable to be mentioned is the finding of the coin. **“And when she hath found it, she calleth together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost”** (Lk. 15:9). Interestingly, the parable suggests that the woman’s finding the coin is inevitable from the phrase **“when she hath found it,”** not **“if.”** Again, it is impossible for a coin to simply disappear; it has to be somewhere. Even so, lost people are **“findable.”** How many times the discouraged have published the warning to the fervent evangelist: **“No one will listen to the gospel”!** Contrary to this popular sentiment among the many who **“are at ease in Zion”** (Amos 61), Jesus Christ implied in the parable of the lost coin that the lost are findable if we would but seek for them. II Peter 3:8, 9 and 15 seem to indicate that this world still stands because God (**“who knowest the hearts of all men,”** Acts 1:24) holds hope for some men to repent and is therefore exercising his long-suffering. Christians must believe that there are many people who will yet repent, many lost who would be found. The certainty of finding the lost coin is clear in the parable: **“Seek diligently until she find it,”** **“And when she hath found it.”**

The fourth noteworthy aspect of the parable is the rejoicing that occurred at the finding of the coin (Lk. 15:9,10). The woman’s joy was such that she could not contain herself. She exploded with the good news to those close to her, knowing that they too would want to share in her elation. Obviously, the **“joy of finding and the desire to share that joy** is again emphasized. This parable, like the other, illustrates the heavenly Father’s joy in receiving back a repentant sinner. The search illustrates the determination of the Messiah to pursue His mission.”<sup>8</sup> Through this short lesson, Jesus **“sought to shame the Pharisees out of their**

cold-blooded murmuring” through relating what he knew took place among the heavenly angelic host when a sinner repented. <sup>9</sup>

### INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN

Expositors appear to have had difficulty in interpreting this parable and deciphering the exact relationship between it and the other two similar parables in Luke 15. Some emphasize that there is a difference in the “lost” of these parables and that such an underlying subtlety would effect the application of the parables. “Some are lost like the coin—with no awareness of their lost condition, but do not know the way to the fold. And many others are lost like the son was lost—lost, aware of it, and fully informed of the way back to the Father’s house.” <sup>10</sup> Trench carried further this distinction of the lost, but only focusing on the first two parables: “...the shepherd sought his lost sheep in the wilderness; but it is in the house that the piece of money is lost and looked for.” <sup>11</sup> He then suggests that that parable of the lost sheep refers to Christ’s ministry while the parable of the lost coin concerns the ministry of the church.

The shepherd says, “I have found my sheep;” the woman, “I have found the coin;” for it was not hers in the sense in which the sheep was his. He says, “which was lost;” she says, “which I lost,” confessing fault of her own, the original cause of the loss; for a sheep strays of itself, but a piece of money could only be lost by a certain negligence on the part of possessor. <sup>12</sup>

Others observe varied points of emphasis in the parables. While Guthrie analyzes thusly: “...the first two focus on searching; the third on restoring. They all concern lost things or lost people.” <sup>13</sup> Geldenhuys restricts that “the emphasis in the parable of the lost coin is placed more on the thoroughness with which the search is carried out.” <sup>14</sup> McGarvey & Pendleton explain that the:

first parable illustrates Christ’s compassion...The second parable shows us how God values a soul...The first two parables depict the efforts of Christ in the salvation of man, or that side of conversion more apparent, so to speak, to God; while the third sets forth the responsive efforts put forth by man to avail himself of God’s salvation—the side of conversion more apparent to us. Moreover, as the parabolic figures become more nearly literal, as we pass from sheep and coin to son, the values also rise, and instead of one from a hundred, or one from ten, we have one out of two! <sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, there are expositors who affirm that the meanings of the parables are basically the same and that the details should not be pressed. Leon Morris calls the first two "twin parables,"<sup>16</sup> while I. Howard Marshall sees the third parable as making "the same point at greater length," (i.e., that "the Pharisees should share in God's rejoicing over the salvation of the outcasts").<sup>17</sup> H. Leo Boles concurs that the parable of the lost coin "has the same general meaning as the parable of the lost sheep."<sup>18</sup>

As a footnote on the interpretation of the parable of the lost coin, Trench notes what appears to have been a popular 19th century view:

In the lost piece of money, expositors have traced a resemblance to the human soul ("God created man in His own image," Gen. 1:27), which still retains traces of the mint from which it proceeded, though the image has been nearly effaced by sin; farther, as the piece of money is lost for all useful purposes to its owner, so man through sin has become unprofitable to God.<sup>19</sup>

Although Trench himself does not specifically endorse or refute this approach, Adam Clark does develop this as an interpretation unique to the parable of the lost coin.<sup>20</sup>

While certainly all the above material on the interpretation of the parable of the lost coin represents interesting insights and observations, dogmatism is to be cautioned against. To this point, I have simply listed some of the views taken and this is not to be understood as implying that I necessarily adopt any of them. Suffice it to say that our Lord's illustrations can fall and have fallen prey to less responsible exegetes who, in their efforts "to tell or to hear some new thing" (Acts 17:21) or to be recognized as profound Biblical sages, extend the parables' meanings beyond the Speaker's intention! "Students of parables are cautioned to avoid the extreme practice of forcing everything in the parable to represent a critical point...Absolute rules are not possible because there are obvious lessons that can be drawn from fringe details in some parables....(but) one should desist from attaching importance to every single detail."<sup>21</sup> Much of the above emphasis on distinctions between the parables and fancy allegorization of their details evidently results from neglecting this simple rule and, as a result, the basic point behind the parable of the lost coin has been overlooked or overshadowed through eisegesis (reading into a passage that which is not there).

All factors considered, the basic thrust of the parable of the lost coin concerns our attitude toward the sinner, viz.,

the value we place on a sinner is revealed by how diligently we search for them and by how much we rejoice at their conversion!

### APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN

Does the church truly value the sinner today? Jesus implied that we must, as he did, look for the sinner as though we were looking for money! Perhaps the term "sinner" ought to be contextually defined here in order for the point to be clear. The Pharisees meant by "sinner" the irreligious, prostitutes, cheats, thieves, etc. While it was true that they themselves were also "sinners," they did not view themselves as such. Furthermore, Jesus did condescend to and adopt in these parables the Pharisee's definition of a "sinner," but he also sought to alert the Pharisee to include himself in that realm and did so by making the Pharisee in his teachings worse than what he (the Pharisee) called the "sinner." A prime example may be found in Jesus' comparison of the Pharisee and the publican praying in Luke 18:9-14.

Therefore, for the purpose of the application that I would like to make, I am not, when speaking of "sinners," speaking of religious sinners (although they are such), but I am referring to the drunks, thieves, homosexuals, prostitutes, "low-lives," etc. In our efforts to evangelize, could it be that we concentrate so much on the "church-goers" (Pharisees) that we neglect the "sinners?" These same "pious" church-goers, like the Pharisees, wouldn't think of touching the life of a "sinner" and are many times self-righteous keepers of traditions not found in the scriptures who would not change their views if they knew the Bible told them they had to go to heaven! Is it not high time to shake the dust off our feet against hard-nosed, authority-defying denominations who "thrust" the word of God from themselves (Acts 13:46) and declare with Paul: "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles"?! (Acts 13:46).

The Pharisees snubbed the sinner. A rabbinic saying capturing the Pharisee's attitude toward the sinner said: "Let not a man associate with the wicked, not even to bring him to the Law."<sup>22</sup> Of course, Jesus' disposition is contrasted by his willingness to eat with them, in spite of the disapproval of the Pharisees. His defense was: "They that are in health have no need of a physician; but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31,32).



But some Christians today imitate the Pharisees over Christ. Some do not wish to **“dirty their hands.”** Unlike the woman and the lost coin, we do not consider the sinner our loss. The sinner is not sufficient cause to alarm many brethren. If we truly viewed sinners as our loss, we would seek as diligently for them as Jesus did and we would attract them like Jesus did. Recently, I asked one member to introduce themselves to a young divorced woman with whom I had been studying. The home of the one to be contacted was several houses down from this particular member and my request was that they simply encourage this **“sinner”** to obey the gospel because our studies had concluded and she had not responded. After several days, I inquired as to whether the visit had been made and the member replied, **“I can’t visit her because I don’t believe in divorce.”** To this date, the divorced woman has not repented. An eternal destiny could have been changed if that member would have **“eaten with a sinner.”** The Pharisees would not eat with them; Jesus looked for them. Which characterizes you and the church you attend?

Also, how much we value the sinner is revealed by whether or not we rejoice when they repent. **“Rejoicing”** is the common link to all three of the parables in Luke 15. Verses 7 and 10 show this, but possibly the key point of the whole chapter is: **“But it was meet (fit-JSS) to make merry and be glad”** (Lk. 15:32). Jesus not only contrasted the Pharisee’s abstinence from sinners with his diligence to search for them, but he also contrasted the Pharisee’s murmuring (15:2) with heaven’s joy (15:7, 10, 32).

Does the church today rejoice when a sinner repents, or is she casual, unemotional and even ignoring? I can well remember that after I was baptized into Christ, I re-entered the auditorium and every member of the church (175 of them) formed a greeting line and welcomed me into the family of God with hugs and tears of joy! How that motivated me! And how different from some congregations I have attended where, after one is immersed into Christ or restored, services close and the people leave without even speaking to the penitent person! Some Christians do not rejoice over sinners who repent because they are like the Pharisees—too self-righteous and no love for the lost is in them. Others do not recognize the value of what has taken place. The most important event of any given day is not how the stock market fared, what congress did, who won the little league pennant or how the roast turned out, but

how many sinners have been found! This alone evokes the thunderous joy of the heavenly host! Still other "stone faced" Christians remain untouched when a sinner repents because the sinner is not "like them." "He's been immoral." "She's black." "They're so dirty." "He's so overweight." "She's homely and will not fit in." These are all thoughts of some who arrogantly assume that they are somehow a cut above the sinner and cannot afford to commune with "those kind."

## CONCLUSION

The church of the first century was not afraid to come in contact with sinners, teach them the gospel and welcome them into their fellowships when they repented. Paul reminded the Corinthians: "Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (I Cor. 6:9-11). How many among us actually are converted from these kinds of backgrounds? Perhaps our answer indicates how much interaction the 20th century church is willing to have with "sinners."

The lesson in a statement is summed up by Guthrie when he says that religious people who have "no time for sinful men are out of touch with God."<sup>23</sup> There are many lost "coins" in the world. Can Jesus Christ count on his church to "light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she find" them? Or will the lost coins remain forever stolen by Satan, never to be retrieved? If we do not find them, Satan will "bank" them in hell.

## FOOTNOTES

1 Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 239.

2 H. Leo Boles, **Luke: Gospel Advocate New Testament Commentaries** (Nashville, Tennessee: Gospel Advocate Company, 1940), p. 297.

3 **The New Berkeley Version** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), p. 81, n. "h" on Luke 15:8.

4 Norval Geldenhuys, **The Gospel of Luke: The New International Commentary on the New Testament** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 401.

5 **The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible**, 1st ed. (1975), s.v. "Pharisees," by D. A. Hagner, p. 745.

6 Some commentators mention that "**small coins have for centuries been worn by oriental women as a sort of ornamental fringe around the forehead.**" J. W. McGarvey & P. Y. Pendleton, **The Fourfold Gospel** (Cogdill Foundation Publications, no date), p. 501. Cf. Morris, op. cit., p. 239. This is not the most likely understanding and is quite irrelevant.

7 I. Howard Marshall, "**Luke,**" in **The New Bible Commentary: Revised** eds. Donald Guthrie, et al. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 912.

8 Donald Guthrie, **Jesus The Messiah** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p. 213.

9 McGarvey & Pendleton, op. cit., p. 501.

10 Guy N. Woods, "**Questions and Answers Column,**" **Gospel Advocate**, March 2, 1978, p. 131.

11 R. C. Trench, **Notes on the Parables of Our Lord** (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 18th reprinting, 1979), p. 140.

12 Ibid., p. 140.

13 Guthrie, op. cit., p. 212.

14 Geldenhuys, op. cit., p. 402.

15 McGarvey & Pendleton, op. cit., pp. 505, 506.

16 Leon Morris, op. cit., p. 239.

17 I. Howard Marshall, op. cit., pp. 911, 912.

18 H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 297.

19 Trench, op. cit., p. 139.

20 Adam Clark, **Clark's Commentary**, 6 vols. (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, no date), vol. 5, p. 456.

21 Jack Wilhelm, "**Christ and His Parables**," in **Jesus Christ, The Son of God** (Freed-Hardeman College Lectures), ed. William Woodson (Nashville, Tennessee: Gospel Advocate Company, 1973), p. 307.

22 I. Howard Marshall, op. cit., p. 911.

23 Guthrie, op. cit., p. 213.

## CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

# The Unprofitable Servant

Luke 17:5-10

*Charles C. Pugh*

### INTRODUCTION:

1. The parable herein considered is one of the most neglected of all of Jesus' parables.
2. Although the parable and its application are set forth in verses seven through ten a proper consideration of the message here must entail a study of verses three through six as well.
3. We shall divide our study into three areas.

### I. CONTEXT CONSIDERED

#### A. Verses 3-4

1. Jesus commands rebuke of the sinner (Prov. 27:5).
2. Jesus commands forgiveness for the repentant sinner.

#### B. Verse 5.

1. The apostles request the Lord to increase their faith.
2. They perhaps felt a deficiency with regard to their ability to obey that which the Lord enjoined in the preceding verses.
3. They felt that a great supply of faith would insure the performance of the commands of verses 3-4.

#### C. Verse 6.

1. The Lord informs the apostles that a supply of true faith (though it may be small, i.e., "as a grain of mustard seed") will accomplish great things.
2. We believe the Lord to be speaking here of that miraculous measure of faith possessed by the apostles and others in the first century church who

had the hands of the apostles laid on them (cf. Acts 8:17-19; I Cor. 12:9; 13:2).

3. To command this kind of attention and obedience is impressive.
4. With little they could achieve much.
5. These accomplishments and attainments could be the occasion for pride and vainglory on the part of the apostles just as any spiritual achievement might be shadowed by such danger. Thus, the Lord taught the parable in the following verses.

#### D. Verses 7-10.

1. **"BUT"** - (verse 7; a word of contrast.)
2. Every servant is expected to continue to serve his master even after returning from the field of labor.
  - a. If the master has not eaten he expects to be served first.
  - b. After the master has eaten and drunk only then can the servant do likewise.
3. A master does not thank his servant for doing the preceding (which is commanded) and the servant is obligated to do such because he is a servant.
4. **THEREFORE**, regardless of what great accomplishments one might make spiritually (even after doing ALL things commanded by his Master) he must see himself only as a servant, and an unprofitable one at that.
  - a. No matter what the apostles (or any one of us) might accomplish **"the bottom line"** is **"but by the grace of God I am what I am"** (I Cor. 15:10).
  - b. Regardless of what we accomplish spiritually, ultimately we are all only as servants doing that which it is our duty to do.

## II. LESSONS LEARNED.

### A. The lesson of SERVICE.

1. All followers of Christ are to be servants (verse 10).
  - a. I Pet. 2:21; Phil. 2:5.
  - b. He **"took upon him the form of a servant"** (Phil. 2:7).
  - c. John 13:13-16).

**B. The lesson of OBEDIENCE (verse 9-10).**

1. Something commanded implies something to be obeyed.
2. Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46; John 14:15; 15:14; II Thess. 1:7-9; Heb. 5:8-9; I John 5:3; II John 6.

**C. The lesson of GRACE (verse 10).**

1. After doing all things commanded we are yet at the mercy of God for salvation.
2. It is God's grace which has revealed the commands which we must obey to be saved.
3. Eph. 2:8-10.

**III. DOCTRINES DEFEATED.**

**A. DENOMINATIONALISM.**

1. Denominational doctrine of salvation is "grace only", "faith only".
2. Salvation by "grace only" would negate men doing anything.
3. Bible teaches two sides to salvation.
  - a. God's - grace.
  - b. Man's - obedience.
4. This parable makes several references explicitly and implicitly to such things as commands, doing, obedience, etc.

**B. ANTINOMIANISM.**

1. Presently those teaching man is not under law but grace
2. This is a misunderstanding of such passages as Rom. 6:14, et al.
3. The parable herein studied refers to that which is our duty; thus that to which we are obligated (law).
4. Rom. 3:27; Gal. 6:2; James 1:25; James 2:12.

**C. LEGALISM.**

1. Legalism implies that man can be saved by a law system (apart from grace).
2. This parable teaches that even after one obeys that which God commands one still must appeal to God's grace.

**D. ROMANISM.**

1. Romanism teaches salvation by meritorious works.

2. Although we are justified by works (James 2:24), we are not justified by any works by which salvation would be merited (Titus 3:3-5).
3. This parable is devastating to any doctrine which would teach man could earn salvation.

#### E. FACTIONALISM.

1. This parable teaches that **all** men stand before God (even after doing all things commanded) as **“unprofitable servants”**.
2. Therefore, no human personality is worth dividing the body of Christ over.
3. **“Therefore let no man glory in men”** (I Cor. 3:21).
4. Cf. I Cor. 3:5-9.
5. It is the truth with which we are to align ourselves and not merely human personalities (III John 3-4).

#### CONCLUSION:

1. We have noted from Luke 17:5-10:
  - a. The context considered.
  - b. The lessons learned.
  - c. The doctrines defeated.
2. Truly, this (as all our Lord's parables) is marvelous!

### INTRODUCTION

The parable assigned me in this lecture (viz. **“The Unprofitable Servant”** Luke 17:5-10) is one of the most neglected of our Lord's parables. Nevertheless, it is rich in its teaching (as is each parable), and it is a privilege for me to consider its timeless teaching with you in this lecture.

Although the assignment specifically calls for us to deal with verses five through ten of Luke seventeen, it is essential that we consider verses three and four as well. We shall study these verses (Luke 17:3-10) in light of three basic areas: (1) The context of the parable, (2) The lessons learned from this parable and (3) The false doctrines answered and defeated by this parable.

### THE CONTEXT CONSIDERED

The verses of our study read as follows:



Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

In verses three and four Jesus teaches concerning the great doctrine of forgiveness in general, and forgiveness toward our brethren in particular. He says, **“If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him...”** Note that the Lord did not (and does not) hold to the false idea that “love” never rebukes or says anything negative about anyone or anything. Instead, Jesus exemplified the principles that **“open rebuke is better than secret love”** (Prov. 27:5). **“Faithful are the wounds of a friend...”** (Prov. 27:6). One who kindly, but truthfully and plainly, rebukes us when we have sinned is a friend indeed. Paul asked the Galatians, **“Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”** (Gal. 4:16).

The aim of rebuke is repentance and the salvation of the soul of the one who is rebuked. Jesus says, **“...and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.”** We are to rebuke the sinner, but it is just as essential that we forgive the penitent soul and forgive him as often as he repents.

The apostles reacted to Jesus' command of unlimited forgiveness toward the repentant, seemingly, with the attitude that it would be impossible for them to do this without a special measure of faith. Thus, they requested of the Lord, **“Lord, increase our faith”** (Lk. 17:5). They felt they knew their deficiencies, and they may have felt this kind of forgiveness was something in which they were lacking. Only

with a great supply of faith (they must have thought) could they perform what the Lord enjoined in verses three and four.

However, the Lord clarified the apostles' misunderstanding by showing them that even a small supply of true faith could accomplish great and wonderful things. He said, "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you" (Lk. 17:6). It is the view of this writer that when our Lord made reference here to such faith as that which could command a tree to be uprooted and cast into the sea (or a mountain to be removed—Matt. 17:20) that he was referring to that miraculous measure of faith which was given the apostles of Christ and those in the first century church upon whom the apostles had laid their hands (cf. Acts 8:17-19; I Cor. 12:9; 13:2). However, though this is likely the kind of faith under consideration here, there is still a general principle implied here which has reference to those living in every age. The principle: Though man with little may achieve much spiritually, this is no grounds for self-glory. The apostles might well be tempted to pride and vainglory upon hearing the Lord tell them the great things their "mustard seed" faith could accomplish. However, all occasion for such boasting is removed in the lesson of the parable which the Lord related in verses seven through ten. As the apostles contemplated (and as each person contemplates) what might be accomplished by way of spiritual attainment the lesson of this powerful parable was (is) ever needed to be placed before them (us).

The very first word (BUT) in this parable presents the contrast the Lord meant to picture here. Yes, great achievements may be envisioned spiritually. BUT there is another side. There is, as Paul Harvey says: "The Rest Of The Story". The other side, or the rest of the story, is seen in the picture of a servant returning from plowing or feeding cattle. When he meets his master as he (the servant) returns from the field, does the master tell the servant to go and sit down and he (the servant) will be served? No! Rather the master commands the tired, weary servant to "make ready wherewith I (the master) may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me (the master)..." When the master has been served, then, and only then, can the servant eat and drink. Jesus then raised the question regarding the servant's obedience: "Doth he (the master) thank that servant because

he did the things commanded him? I trow not." (verse nine).

**THE CONCLUSION:** "So likewise, ye when ye shall have done all things which are commanded you, say, **We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.**" The message is clear and plain: if earthly servants are obligated to their masters, then servants of Christ are much more obligated to Him, who is their Master (Matt. 23:8; Col. 3:24). Regardless of what one might accomplish through his faith (even if it uproot trees and move mountains), when all is said and done, **ALL** of us must see ourselves for what we are: **SERVANTS OF CHRIST**. And if we are but servants, even after doing all those things commanded us, we must humbly admit, "we are **unprofitable...we have done that which was our duty to do.**" To quote the apostle, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded" (Rom. 3:27)!

### LESSONS LEARNED

This parable of the unprofitable servant is rich in lessons for our learning. We call attention to three of these lessons. First, we learn from this parable the lesson of **service**. The basic relationship with which the parable is concerned is that of a servant (slave) to his master.

One of the many ways the New Testament teaches regarding the Christian life is through the usage of the idea of service. The chief in the kingdom is a servant (Matt. 20:27). The greatest among the disciples is a servant (Matt. 23:11). He who would be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all (Mark 9:35). He who will serve Christ will be honored by the Father (John 12:26). One of the final lessons which Jesus aimed to indelibly impress on the minds of His apostles was that of service (John 13:1-17). The apostle Paul answered those who would abuse the grace of God (Rom. 6:3) by stating: "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:16-18).

The primary focus of attention in the parable of the unprofitable servant is the **absolute servitude** of the servant to his master. Jesus' argument is: if this is the case among

those who serve earthly masters, how much more should it be the case among those who serve Him who Himself "took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). **WE ARE SAVED TO SERVE, AND WE SERVE TO BE SAVED.** Before we receive the crown of righteousness and glory (II Tim. 4:6-8; I Pet. 5:4) we must gird ourselves with the towel of service (John 13:1-17). The way up is down! It is the valley of service before the mount of exaltation (cf. Lk. 14:11).

A second lesson taught in the parable of the unprofitable servant is the lesson of **obedience**. In verse nine Jesus referred to "the things that were commanded him (the servant)". In verse ten He made application to the disciple saying: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things commanded you..." It is obvious that something(s) commanded implies that which is to be obeyed. The New Testament teaches the essentiality of obedience on the part of each person who desires to be right with the Lord. Obedience is taught **explicitly** (Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46; John 14:15; 15:15; II Thess. 1:7-9; Heb. 5:8-9; I John 5:3; II John 6) as well as **implicitly** (in this parable and in other passages). We must obey God (Acts 5:29).

Thirdly, there is couched in this parable the lesson of God's amazing **grace**. Jesus stated that even after one's service; even after obedience to "all those things which are commanded" we must acknowledge: "**WE ARE UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS: WE HAVE DONE THAT WHICH IT WAS OUR DUTY TO DO**". This is one of the greatest affirmations of our need for God's grace in all the scriptures. Grace is unmerited favor and the Lord shows in this precious parable that all (apostles included) are but bond-slaves of the Lord and thus one's best service "was no more than what was due, and could not, therefore, bring him (God) under obligation" to man (Lamar). Not only is it herein implied that, even after doing all things commanded, the servant of Christ must look to God's mercy for salvation, but without God's grace there would initially have not been any commands to obey in the first place (cf. Jer. 10:23).

### **SOME FALSE DOCTRINES ANSWERED**

Every false doctrine which has even been used (or ever will be used) in an attempt to cause man to lose his soul is answered by the Bible. That such is the case is clearly implied in the doctrine of the all-sufficiency of the scriptures (II Tim. 3:16-17). There is not one single false doctrine that

is not, at least in principle, devastatingly defeated by one or more passages in the Bible. There are several such false doctrines that are thoroughly refuted by the timeless teaching of the parable of the unprofitable servant. First, the false teaching of DENOMINATIONALISM relative to the plan of salvation is refuted by this parable. Most denominational bodies teach the doctrine of salvation by faith only or grace only. That such doctrine is false is clearly seen from a consideration of many plain passages of scripture among which is this parable in Luke 17:7-10. Salvation by "grace only" would negate men having to do anything in order to be right with God. Yet the parable of the unprofitable servant plainly shows there are two sides to salvation (i.e. God's side and man's side). Man's part involves such things referred to in this parable as service, obedience to commands, duty, etc. God's part involves grace and the providing of a plan whereby man might be saved.

Another false doctrine which is answered by this parable is the 'doctrine known as ANTINOMIANISM. This false doctrine denies that man is under obligation to any law. Advocates of such false teaching pervert passages such as Romans 6:14 and others. They claim, "The Bible says, 'ye are not under the law, but under grace!'" (Rom. 6:14). However, what this false doctrine fails to set forth is that the Bible teaches that "where no law is there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15). Therefore, if it is the case (as antinomianism teaches) that man is not under obligation to any law, then it must also be the case that there is no sin or transgression. However, it is false that there is no sin or transgression (Rom. 3:23; I John 1:8, et al). Therefore, it also is false that man is not under obligation to any law. The parable under consideration plainly teaches that man is under obligation. He is obligated to obey those things commanded (verse 10). He is obligated to do that which is his duty (verse 10). Each of these facts clearly establish the truthfulness of the idea that man is under law. This is sufficiently evidenced by other plain passages such as Romans 3:27; 8:2; Galatians 6:2; James 1:25; 2:12, et al.

The false doctrine of LEGALISM is also dealt the death blow by the parable of the unprofitable servant. Legalism implies that man can be saved by a law system (apart from grace). However, as already observed, a fundamental point of the parable is that even after one obeys that which God commands, he still must appeal to the grace of God because he is an unprofitable servant only having done that which was his duty to do (Lk. 17:10).

Another error which is refuted by this precious parable is the deadly error of ROMANISM! The false system of Romanism which has led millions astray for centuries teaches, among other errors, the doctrine of salvation by meritorious works. Although the Bible plainly teaches that man is justified by works and not by faith only or faith alone (James 2:17,24), the Bible nowhere teaches salvation by any kind of works whereby it could be said that man merited salvation. Paul wrote, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit. 3:5). "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Therefore, it can be correctly concluded from the preceding verses that (1) salvation is by works (James 2:17,24) and (2) salvation is not by works (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 2:5). Thus there are works included and works excluded. The works included (those essential) are the works of God (John 6:28-29), works of obedience by which faith is made perfect (James 2:22). Such things as faith, repentance, confession, baptism and faithful Christian living are included in these works. They are commanded (Lk. 17:10). They are essential and yet they (when performed) do not result in man earning (meriting) salvation. The works excluded (those not essential) are the works of the law of Moses, meritorious works, any works devised by man. Such would include the works of Romanism (and every other system of human origin). The parable of the unprofitable servant (Lk. 17:7-10) teaches that salvation is by grace through obedient faith.

Finally, this marvelous parable refutes the errors of FACTIONALISM. It is evident from this parable that ALL men stand before God (after having been obedient to God's commands) on level ground (viz. "unprofitable servants"). Since such is the case no human personality would be worth dividing the body of Christ into various factions or sects. The parable of the unprofitable servant beautifully illustrates the principles set forth by the inspired apostle to the divided church at Corinth. The Corinthians were divided over man (cf. I Cor. 1:10-13) but Paul declared to them that "neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth: but God that giveth the increase" (I Cor. 3:7). As a result, Paul concluded, "Therefore let no man glory in men" (I Cor. 3:21). Anyone who understands the teaching of the parable of the unprofitable servant will recognize that every faithful

member in the kingdom is but a servant doing his duty and to the Lord belongs the glory. Thus we learn even here (Lk. 17:7-10) "not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another" (I Cor. 4:6).

### CONCLUSION

In this study of the parable of the unprofitable servant (Lk. 17:7-10) we have observed the following: (1) the immediate context and message of the parable (verses 3-10), (2) some lessons learned from the parable, and (3) some false doctrines answered by the parable. Every parable taught by the Lord is a masterpiece. The parable of the unprofitable servant is no exception. It truly is a precious parable with a marvelous message! May we never neglect it and the timeless teaching contained therein.

## CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

# The Parable Of The Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-32

*Joe Gilmore*

1. There are two species of the "Mustard Seed" in Palestine. Also, there is the "Black Mustard Seed." All attain a great size sufficient to fit the details of Matt. 13:31,32; Mk. 4:32; Lk. 13:19.
2. The "Mustard Seed" was an herb and grew to be about ten feet high.
3. It was proverbial among the Jews (Matt. 17:20).
4. In just two scriptures Jesus tells of the beginning and growth of the kingdom (Matt. 31,32).
5. Jesus used parables to explain the unknown by the known.
6. In the parables of the "Sower" and the "Tares" the disciples of Jesus were in a state of despondency. By the parable of the "Mustard Seed" the Lord encourages His disciples. He knew the kingdom would have a small beginning, but would become large.
7. In every parable, there is one main idea. Some preachers try to see special lessons in every phrase. There are those who would have us believe that "branches" in the parable of the "Mustard Seed" refer to denominations. Others tells us that the parable refers to the Jews returning to Canaan in fulfillment of Bible promises and prophecy.
8. We shall consider the ways in which the kingdom of Christ is like the grain of "Mustard Seed".

### 1. THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST IS LIKE A MUSTARD SEED IN ITS EARLY INSIGNIFICANCE

1. We need to remind ourselves of the importance of little things in this life. (1) Americans have been victimized by the thought of bigness.



2. Little things do have importance.
  - (1) The spinning of a spider's web led to a great war of liberty.
3. Little things often caught the attention of Jesus and caused His comments.
  - (1) The fall of a sparrow, the cry of need in a noisy crowd, etc. In this parable the growth of a seed.
4. The kingdom of Christ was small in the beginning. It was made without hands (Dan. 2:44,45).
  - (1) It is different from other kingdoms.
  - (2) No man has the right understanding of God until he has been fully taught the power of small things.
5. The men who went forth under the Lord's commission were not men of wealth and had no fighting equipment but God's word.
  - (1) We must not despise the day of small things (Zech. 4:10).
6. The kingdom would have an insignificant beginning, but there would be a phenomenal growth!

## 2. NATURE OF THE SEED

1. The Lord knew the kingdom would succeed because life is in the seed.
  - (1) The seed has a germinating and expansive power that cannot be destroyed (Lk. 8:11; Rom. 1:16).
2. We do not have to find an unbroken chain of church succession from the apostles until today to have the same church as they did then.
  - (1) What Christ and His apostles commanded is right today regardless of whether anyone has practiced it since the death of the last apostle.
  - (2) It is not necessary for seed to be planted every year to maintain the original stock (Lk. 8:11; I Pet. 1:23).
3. In Lev. 19:19 God forbade the Jew to mix his seed in his field.
  - (1) Do not mix the word of God with other seeds.

## 3. THE SEED MUST BE PLANTED

1. "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took, and sowed in his field" (Matt. 13:31).
  - (1) Someone must teach or preach the gospel. There is no way to eliminate the third party (Acts 2:38; II Tim. 4:2).
2. The church is still a vital force in the world. It is God's missionary agency (Eph. 3:21). The gospel is God's message (Jno. 6:44,45). The evangelizing of the world is God's program (Rev. 22:17).
3. Paul thought in world terms (Rom. 1:16).

#### **4. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE THE MUSTARD SEED IN THE EXTENT OF ITS GROWTH**

1. The **"Mustard Seed"** is small in its beginning and has a great increase (Matt. 13:32).  
(1) Dr. Thompson in his word: **"The Land and the Book"** says he has seen the plant as tall as the horse and the rider!
2. Under fires of persecution the apostles and early disciples preached the gospel to every creature.  
(1) (Matt. 28:19; Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:23).
3. Why were the early preachers more successful than preachers today?  
(1) They loved the cause of Christ. They loved each other. They worked for the cause of Christ. They prayed and kept the **"unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."**
4. During the lifetime of the apostles, in spite of persecution, the kingdom began, lived, and thrived. Like the Hebrews in Egypt, Christians increased exceedingly!

#### **5. IN THE HUMAN HEART THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A MUSTARD SEED**

1. The **"Mustard Seed"** is small in its beginning but large in the increase.
2. When the gospel is planted in the human heart it produces great results.  
(1) Teaching is gradual. It takes time before there is the obedience of faith.  
(2) There is power in the gospel. It has abolished slavery in our country. It has elevated women. Also, the gospel has led to the conversions of thousands.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

1. When the roll is called up yonder we can thank the Lord for the parable of the **"Mustard Seed"**.
2. It assures us that the kingdom will go forward.
3. We are not to despise the things that are small and lowly.
4. Don't stay out of the church because it is small in some places.
5. Pray that a greater number of congregations be established in 1983 than in any year of the 1st century!

There are two species of the **mustard seed** in Palestine: the *Sinapis Arvensis*, L, and *Sinapis Alba*. Also, there is the black mustard. All attain a great size sufficient to fit the details of Matthew 13:31, 32; Mark 4:32; Luke 13:19. The term "**Great tree**" is to be taken as an exaggerated contrast with the minute seed, and to be explained by the parallel "**greatest among herbs**" (Matt. 13:32). The mustard seed was actually an herb and grew to be about ten feet high.

Notice the smallness of the seed in proportion to the greatness of the tree: "**small as a mustard seed**", a current expression to indicate anything that was very insignificant. So small, it was a proverb in the land of Palestine, "**as small as a grain of mustard seed**" (Matt. 17:20).

In just two scriptures, Matthew 13:31, 32, Jesus foretold the growth of the kingdom. No human power, prestige, wealth or influence belonged to it. However, small and unpromising the kingdom might first appear, it would soon go into all the earth. With this view in mind Jesus compares the kingdom to a mustard seed.

Jesus used parables to explain the unknown by the known. Thus parables were employed to reveal the truth, conceal the truth, to elicit assent to the truth and to preserve the truth. In this parable the Lord reveals the truth. It is one of the **shortest** parables and reveals the outward aspect of the kingdom.

In the parable of the sower, due to the nature of the soil, a considerable portion of the seed is likely to be lost. Just think, only one-fourth of what a preacher says is likely to be understood! Furthermore we see in the parable of the **tares** the dangers even that portion is exposed to that falls on good ground. To keep His disciples from despondency, Jesus gave the parable of "**the mustard seed**". Truly the grain of "**mustard seed**" is a fitting symbol of the origin of the kingdom. The disciples needed to be encouraged. The kingdom shall begin small, go forward and become large. This is good news, considering there are so many enemies of the church. Christ's enemies at that time looked upon the word, the seed of the kingdom, just as something to put in the ground, as it were, to die and be forgotten. Even though our Lord knew this seed would grow, this view was not shared by many people, perhaps not even the disciples.

In every parable of the Lord there is one main idea. Sometimes preachers try to see some special lessons, more than the Lord intended, in every phrase which the Lord spoke. When one allows his imagination to run away, he will completely lose sight of the Lord's intended message.

For example, some tell us that **“branches”**, Matthew 13:32, refer to denominations. This is not true. Jesus said, **“I am the vine”** (Jno. 15:1). What are the branches? Hear Jesus, **“I am the vine and ye are the branches”** (Jno. 15:5). Who? **“He that abideth in me, and I in him.”** We do not refer to denominations as he! Individuals are the branches. **“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch”** (Jno. 15:6). Jesus made no comment on the branches of Matthew 13:32. We ask to what denominations did the apostles belong? They were in Jerusalem when the kingdom or church began. Soon persecution came and the church was scattered and went everywhere preaching the word. This included the apostles. Did the apostles continue to work in the same religious body? Did they preach the same things? They certainly did, and urged others to do the same thing (I Cor. 1:10). They did not labor to build up different churches. They knew but one church. **“There is one body”** (Eph. 4:4). The **body is the church** (Col. 1:18). In the New Testament the church is spoken of under different figures such as: **“household of God”** (Eph. 2:19), **“house of God”** (Eph. 3:14,15). These figures will admit of there being but one church. Jesus said, **“and other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd”** (Jno. 10:16). Notice: there were to be just as many folds as there were to be shepherds! It is obvious that there are too many churches in the world today! Salvation cannot be found in human churches. The apostles understood their instructions. The only discord came when preachers preached another gospel, (Gal. 1:8-9).

Others tell us that **“the parable of the mustard seed”** refers to the Jews returning today to Canaan in fulfillment of Bible promise and prophecy, (Gen. 13:14-17; Gen. 17:8). Many Jews in our day go to Canaan, but not in fulfillment to any promise made in **“the parable of the mustard seed”** or to any other promise made in the Bible. In Acts 7:5 and Genesis 48:4 we are told that Abraham’s seed would receive it after him. This promise has been fulfilled, (Josh. 21:43-45; Josh. 23:14). The Jews possessed Canaan and dwelt therein. **“There failed not ought of any good thing...all came to pass”** (Josh. 21:45). **“To give the land of the Canaanites...and hast performed thy words”** (Neh. 9:8).

We shall consider the ways in which the kingdom of Christ is like a grain of **“mustard seed”**.

## 1. THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST IS LIKE A MUSTARD SEED IN ITS EARLY INSIGNIFICANCE

Few today escape the tendency of equating size with importance or significance. How many confuse quantity for quality? Bigness is not the equivalent of significance. We need to remind ourselves of the importance of little things in this life. Americans have been victimized by the thought of bigness. Our automobile makers in these inflationary times continue to make big cars when the market demands small ones. Banks, builders, government, etc. have trouble in seeing that little things have significance..

Little things do have importance. The breaking of a hen egg led to an Indian war in this country. The spinning of a spider's web led to a great war for victory. Bruce of Scotland had lost six battles against the English. He retired to his cabin brooding about the future of Scotland. He saw a spider trying to throw thread from one beam to another. The spider failed six times, but succeeded the seventh time: Bruce went back to battle the seventh time and was successful.

Have you heard of the parable of the "horseshoe nail"? For want of a nail the shoe was lost, for want of a shoe the horse was lost, for want of a horse, the rider was lost, for want of a rider, the battle was lost, for want of a battle, the kingdom was lost, and all for the want of a horseshoe nail!

Little things often caught the attention of Jesus and caused His comments such as: the fall of a sparrow, the cry of need in a noisy crowd, and in this parable the growth of a seed. A cup of cold water given in His name wins His praise. The widow's mite does not go unnoticed. No man has made the right approach toward God until he understands the importance of small things.

The kingdom of Christ was small in the beginning. It was established by divine power and is spiritual in nature. It was made without hands, Daniel 44-45. It is different from other kingdoms. When the kingdom was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus there was no rolling thunder, or flashing of lightning, nor angels climbing ladders to herald it. Jesus and His disciples were just a few poor men with seemingly little power. Jesus did not come as a rich powerful monarch. He appeared in the lowest state of humiliation. He was cradled in a manger in Bethlehem. His early years were spent in Nazareth, an obscure and despised city. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth" (Jno

1:46)? In His earthly ministry very few gathered around His standard. "He came unto His own and his own received Him not" (Jno. 1:11). "He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; they hid as it were their faces from Him; He was despised, and they esteemed Him not" (Isa. 53:3). He was unjustly condemned and died a painful death upon the cross. To the world His prospects for establishing a kingdom seemed to be forever defeated. No man has the right understanding of God until he has been fully taught the power of small things.

Who were the men who went forth under the Lord's commission to accomplish the greatest revolution upon the earth without violence or bloodshed? They were not men of wealth. For the most part they were publicans and fishermen, unlearned and ignorant men, having no fighting equipment but God's word. Yet they went forth and confounded philosophies, overturned giant systems opposed to the Lord's kingdom. In human estimation the work of the apostles was an undertaking that was not likely to be met with success. "We must not despise the day of small things" (Zech. 4:10).

In this parable Jesus taught a number of things about the kingdom. It would have an insignificant beginning, but there would be a phenomenal growth. It would be a refuge for all people. This was a prophecy as well as a parable. Even though the kingdom was founded by a Galilean peasant, and the first missionaries were fishermen and tax collectors, it soon conquered the Roman Empire. It also subdued the northern barbarians and evangelized the western continent. Furthermore, the kingdom is still bringing life and light to the nations of the world.

## 2. NATURE OF THE SEED

Our Lord knew the kingdom would succeed because life is in the seed. It had a germinating and expansive power that could not be destroyed. The life of anything depends upon its ability to reproduce itself. The seed has power to push its way through the crust of the earth and to become a plant. Jesus said the "seed is the word of God" (Lk. 8:11). Paul tells us that the "Gospel is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). Jesus, knowing the power there is in the seed, expected the kingdom to grow. When the seed, word, of the kingdom was sown during the age of the apostles, a Christian was produced. If the pure seed, gospel, is sown today, it will yield the same crop. It takes the

gospel, sound doctrine, to make a Christian.

There are those today who tell us that it is necessary to find an unbroken chain of church succession from the apostles until today to have the same church as they did then. No Bible informed person would attempt to prove this view. It does not matter what people believed two hundred or a thousand years ago. Any teacher that does not go back to Christ and the apostles has no divine sanction, no matter who started it, or where it began. However, whatever Christ and His apostles commanded is scriptural and right regardless of whether anyone has practiced it since the death of the last apostle. Attention is called to Luke 8:11. Jesus speaks of the word of God as the "seed of the kingdom". It is not necessary for seed to be planted every year in order to maintain its original stock. Some years ago some wheat was found in one of the pyramids of Egypt. It had been hidden there for more than three thousand years without being exposed to any of the decaying forces of nature. This same wheat was brought to our country and planted. It produced the same kind of wheat we have today.

Peter speaks of the word of God as: "incorruptible seed, which lives and abides forever" (I Pet. 1:23). When one will receive the word of God into his heart it will do for him what it did for the first century in the time of the apostles. It will make of him what it made them. When we teach and practice what they taught and practiced, we will bring about the same results, regardless of what men have taught and practiced since then.

If we take a grain of wheat and cross it with another seed and continue to do so for years, we would develop something entirely different. Eventually it would be much easier to get pure seed, and grow wheat than it would be to try to develop the original stock again from the corrupted plant. So it is in religion; we must discard all corrupted forms of religion and return to the word of God rather than try to purify the corrupted form of religion created by paganism, ritualism, and human tradition.

### 3. THE SEED MUST BE PLANTED

"The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field" (Matt. 13:31). Someone must teach or preach the gospel just as the mustard seed was brought and planted in the field. There is no way to eliminate the human element, the third party, in the plan of redemption. The denominational world scoffs at

the idea of divine and human elements being combined in the scheme of redemption. They teach that man can do nothing in the plan of salvation, that the plan is all divine. If the human element enters into the plan, it brings in the third party and makes one man's salvation depend upon another. Denominations make void the plan of salvation by their traditions. The Holy Spirit on Pentecost used Peter, the third party, in conveying the revelation, the divine plan, to his hearers. The human element was brought into the divine plan. The Holy Spirit, through Peter, the third party, commanded these believing inquirers! **"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"** (Acts 2:38). Peter, on Pentecost, talked about man's relationship with God, not social reforms. When men get right with God, they will live right.

The worst thief on earth is the one that steals the word of God from his neighbor. This is done by substituting the commandments and doctrines of men for the doctrine of God.

The church as it was in the beginning, Pentecost, can still be a vital force in the world. **"Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end"** (Eph. 3:21). The church is God's missionary agency. The gospel is God's message, (John 4:44-45). The evangelizing of the world is God's program (Rev. 22:17).

When the gospel was planted in human hearts, people were converted from their selfish desires and pleasures to the unselfish claims of the religion of Christ. The gospel was a conquering force in those days. Nothing could stand in its way.

Paul thought in world terms: **"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek"** (Rom. 1:16). The gospel in a third of a century was preached in all the world (Col. 1:23). It could be done today if we would sow the seed as they did then. If a man is going to come through the waters of baptism and sit down, he had just as well sit down on the other side of the water so far as eternal salvation is concerned.

#### **4. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE THE MUSTARD SEED IN THE EXTENT OF ITS GROWTH**

**"Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree,**



so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Matt. 13:32). The "mustard seed" is small in the beginning and has a great increase. The kingdom of heaven is like this. Dr. Thompson in his work, "The Land And The Book", says he has seen the wild mustard on the rich plain of Akkar, as tall as the horse and the rider. In obedience to the Lord's command, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19), the apostles and other disciples preached the gospel to every creature under heaven. "Yea, verily, their sound went out into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Rom. 10:18). The apostles and others were faithful to this commission even under fires of persecution. Never were enemies more bitter and friends more true than in the days of the early church. It seems that every failure turned out for the success of the cause of Christ. We know they were very successful because we read: "these have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). No doubt, those who stoned Stephen to death thought they were putting an end to Christianity. But instead there was a great ingathering of souls. This persecution turned the Jerusalem church into personal workers, missionaries. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). Country after country fell before them: Judea, Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, Babylon, Arabia and Ethiopia. It thrills my heart to read of the growth of the early church. In Acts 2:41, the number added is said to have been about three thousand. In Acts 4:4, we are informed that the number had grown to about five thousand. After that Luke seems to have lost count of the number. He simply says "the number of the disciples was multiplying" (Acts 6:1), and speaks of the "multitude of disciples" (Acts 6:2). "And so were the churches established in the faith and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5).

Why were those early preachers so much more successful than preachers of today? The divine motivation was so intense that the gospel of Christ reached all parts of the earth in one generation. (1) They loved the cause of Christ. The early preachers knew that the message they preached was divinely inspired. Hence, they were willing to make any sacrifice that would make for the furtherance of this cause. Paul said, "But (we) suffer all those things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ" (I Cor. 9:12). Many today cannot suffer the slightest disappointment. Neither can some

bear the thought that people may not love them if they preach just the seed, word, of the kingdom. (2) They loved each other. **“And the multitudes of them that believed were of one heart and soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common...neither was there any among them that lacked”** (Acts 4:32-34). Each worker rejoiced as much over the success of others as he did his own. (3) We do not work as they did. Place ourselves by the side of the apostles in their work and see the difference. Can it be said of us: **“teaching publicly, and from house to house”** (Acts 20:20)? It is said of those preachers: **“and daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ”** (Acts 5:42). (4) Do we pray as they prayed? How many have gone out early in the morning to a quiet place to pray? How many have prayed all night for success in the Lord’s work? Our Lord did this (Mk. 1:35; Lk. 6:12). We are exhorted to pray: **“pray without ceasing...for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to youward”** (I Thess. 5:17,18). (5) They kept the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3-6). Many preachers today instead of preaching the gospel are destroying each other. When they get through fighting and devouring one another, they have no strength left to fight the devil. (6) In giving, the early preachers followed the Lord’s command: **“Give and it shall be given unto you”** (Lk. 6:38). The hardest thing about a man to convert is his pocket book. A common disease in the church today is called **rheumatism of the heart** caused by the contraction of the wallet. Many who are good otherwise will hide out when it comes to giving. When a man learns how to give he will never be asking: **“how much can I get!”** It was a sad day for man when he conceived that he **owned** anything. The Bible makes it plain that property is a trust.

In the first century, from province to province and city to city the kingdom of Christ was to prevail in the Roman Empire. Though the least of seeds, the gospel sown in unfriendly soil, and under an unfavorable climate, has produced a lofty and extended tree. All classes of people: the poor, the captive, fatherless, widows, etc. have found shelter under its branches. During the lifetime of the apostles, in spite of persecution it lived and thrived. Like the Hebrews in Egypt, Christians increased exceedingly.

## 5. IN THE HUMAN HEART THE KINGDOM IS LIKE A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED

The "mustard seed" is small in its beginning but large in the increase. One may hear the gospel preached several times before he obeys. It may take time before there is the obedience of faith. The teaching process is gradual. No one learns the New Testament in twenty minutes. However, people in the first century learned enough by hearing one sermon to obey the gospel.

When the word of God, as seed, is planted in the human heart it produces great results. Before a heart is filled with the word of God perhaps there was a word spoken or some action of deed seen to arouse interest in divine things. We have seen the power there is in the gospel. It has abolished slavery in our nation. As men read the golden rule, Matthew 7:12, slavery became impossible. The gospel has elevated women: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond or free, there is neither male nor female" (Gal. 3:28). It has led to the conversions of men and women alienated from God. It has triumphed over governments. When the kingdom began, it was persecuted by human governments. Today these governments acknowledge the kingdom and its king. It has also triumphed over pagan religions. When the gospel or the kingdom of Christ come in contact today with such religions, they win their way in spite of them.

The world is benefited by the kingdom of Christ. What would the world be like today without the kingdom of heaven?

## 6. CONCLUSION

When the roll is called up yonder, we can thank the Lord for the parable of the "Mustard Seed". The parable has assured us that the kingdom will go forward. As we read the parable we learn not to despise the things that are small and lowly.

People should not stay out of the church because it is small in some places.

Let us pray and work that we will be of greater use in the Lord's cause than ever before, that more gospel preaching will be done in destitute fields, and a greater number of congregations be established in 1983 than in any year of the first century! God's way will win.

## CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

# A Picture Of The Judgment

Matthew 25:31-46

*Buster Dobbs*

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in, or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, and in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

## CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

# Looking For Chief Seats

Luke 14:7-11

*Garland Robinson*

### INTRODUCTION

1. He used every occasion to set forth the truth.
2. Much of his teaching was in parables.
3. The setting of the parable of "the chief seats."
4. Customs of a supper or banquet.

### I. EXPOSITION OF A FEW KEY WORDS.

- A. "Marked"
- B. "Chief Rooms"
- C. "Marriage Feast"
- D. "Shame"

### II. THE LESSON OF HUMILITY.

- A. Looking for a key passage
- B. Phil. 2:5-8 the greatest lesson of humility
- C. Matt. 5:3 the poor in spirit
- D. Humility is essential to enter the kingdom

### III. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE PROMOTES AND ENCOURAGES HUMILITY.

- A. To be great is to be a servant
- B. Jesus acts out what he taught
- C. Numerous passages on humility
- D. Humility is first, second and third in the Christian life

### IV. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OPPOSES AND DISCOURAGES PRIDE.

- A. Pride would dethrone God to enthrone self

- B. The lesson the Pharisee and publican
- C. The Christian life opposes pride in one's self
- D. The Christian life opposes pride in the church

## CONCLUSION

1. One must be humble to confess Christ.
  2. One must be humble to pray unto God.
  3. One must be humble to forgive others of their trespasses against us.
  4. Several advantages of humility.
  5. Things to remember to obtain humility.
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And he hath put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, when thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou began with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: and shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 14:7-11).

Unlike man, Jesus always had mastery of thought and teaching. There was never a moment when he knew not what to say. Even at twelve years old, while sitting in the midst of the doctors in Jerusalem, he was "both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers" (Luke 2:46-47). Many were the occasions when the Pharisees and Sadducees stood speechless at his doctrine.

## BACKGROUND

On numerous occasions, Jesus would be found in the home of certain individuals. We were familiar with the story of Zacchaeus the publican where Jesus said unto him, "Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house" (Luke 19:1-10). As Jesus entered into a certain village, a woman named Martha received him into her house with her sister Mary (Luke 10:38-42). In

Matthew 26:6, we read of Jesus being in the house of Simon the leper. But on this occasion, Jesus went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day. Some have thought that perhaps he was asked there that he might be trapped in some act or teaching which was always common for his enemies to do. Nevertheless, Jesus always availed himself of every opportunity to teach and to set forth the truth.

It was a common practice for the Jews to meet as families on the sabbath with invited guests, even as it is common for families around the world to meet in similar fashion. All that were gathered at this feast had their eyes fastened upon Jesus to see what he might do. A. T. Robinson notes: "they were themselves watching on the side (on the sly), watching insidiously, with evil intent."<sup>1</sup> We read of a similar account in Mark 3:2, "And they watched him whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him."

Verse two of our text tells us there was a certain man there which had the dropsy. Some suppose this man was placed here for the express purpose of seeing what Jesus would do on the sabbath and even that this man could have been a party to it. McClintock and Strong says that dropsy was "a well-known disease manifested by a morbid collection of watery secretion in any of the cavities of the body."<sup>2</sup> In the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia we read:

Both forms of this disease occur in Palestine, that in which the limbs and body are distended with water called **anasarca**, depending generally on cardiac or renal disease, and the form confined to the abdomen, usually the result of liver affection. The latter is the commoner, as liver disease is a frequent result of recurrent attacks of malarial fever. The man was evidently able to move about, as he had entered into the Pharisee's house."<sup>3</sup>

After healing this man and setting forth his defense saying, "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day;" he put forth a parable unto them that were invited to "sit at meat" that day when he noticed how they sought out the chief seats.

### CUSTOMS OF A SUPPER OR BANQUET

The occasion of the parable before us stems from Jesus watching how those that attended this feast chose out the most honorable seats. It was common practice for the

Pharisees to covet these places of distinction. (Even as it is with many in our day).

The arrangements would be made and the invitations sent out. To be polite, it would be expected for one to decline the first invitation. This would allow him to be **"compelled"** to accept which was looked upon in a favorable light. No doubt this is what Lydia did concerning Paul and the company with him. Our brother Luke says, **"she constrained us"** (Acts 16:15). Surely Jesus had received an invitation here as he had received from another Pharisee as recorded in Luke 7:36.

Upon entering the room where the feast was to be held, these Pharisees began immediately to search out the seats of honor (from our standpoint, the head of the table). The custom in those days found the people seated mostly on the floor on mats or a very low couch which would normally seat three. Regarding the arrangement of furniture and the respective positions of honor, Fred H. Wight says:

There were three couches which were located on the three sides of a square, the fourth side being left open, so that a servant could get on the inside to assist in serving the meal. The guest's position was to recline with the body's upper part resting on the left arm, and the head raised, and a cushion at the back, and the lower part of the body stretched out. The head of the second guest was opposite the breast of the first guest, so that if he wanted to speak to him in secret he would lean upon his breast.<sup>4</sup>

The most honorable place would be on the right hand of the host. The left side would be the next highest place. It was to these positions that James and John had requested that Jesus would grant unto them when he came in his glory (Mark 10:35-37). The lowest place would be at the end and the farthest place from the host. In Christ's stunning rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew chapter twenty three, he made mention of the fact that the Pharisees **"love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues..."** (v. 6).

Neil R. Lightfoot writes:

It is well-known that the ancients of Greek and Roman times ate their meals in reclining positions on low couches drawn up against low tables. Ordinarily the tables were U-shaped, which allowed the servants to serve food about the table with ease. At the head of the table was placed the honored guest, in Jewish circle this honor always being reserved for the rabbis. On his right and left were



placed the next most honored guests, and the others were seated around the table in descending order of importance. Quite often the exact hour of the meal was not announced. Some guests would arrive early, others would come late. In Jesus' day many of the Pharisee's, especially those of the more prominent sort, would time their arrival so they could make an auspicious entrance and in the presence of all receive the chief seats. <sup>5</sup>

### **“MARKED”**

In verse seven we read where Jesus **“marked how they chose out the chief rooms.”** The word **“mark”** comes from the Greek word *epecho* and is used five times in the Greek New Testament. Thayer says it means **“to have or hold upon, apply, to observe, attend to, to give attention to one. (2) to hold towards, hold forth, present (3) to check, to delay, stop, stay.”** <sup>6</sup> It is translated **“stay”** in Acts 19:22; **“give heed unto”** in Acts 3:5; **“hold forth”** in Philippians 2:16; **“take heed unto”** in I Timothy 4:16 and **“marked”** in the passage before us. Jesus noticed the maneuvering on the part of the Pharisees to secure the higher and more honorable seats. He observed their slyness to seek great honor.

### **“CHIEF ROOMS”**

At any feast or banquet there would be places of honor which the more prominent ones would seek out for themselves. These seats were what is called here **“the chief rooms.”** W. E. Vine says: **“The first reclining place, the chief place at table.”** <sup>7</sup> R. C. H. Lenski notes: **“the chief rooms were the best seats or better yet ‘reclining places.’”** <sup>8</sup>

This same word is used four other times in the New Testament.

In Matthew 23:6-7 Christ spoke of the scribes and Pharisees who **“love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.”** In verse two, Jesus said they love to sit in Moses' seat. This would be a place of honor, prestige and authority.

Jesus taught to **“beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms (chief places) at feasts...these shall receive greater damnation”** (Mark 12:38-40).

Luke records the Lord's teaching by using the same words of the "highest (chief) seats" and the "chief rooms (places)" (20:46).

### "MARRIAGE FEAST"

The "wedding" of verse eight is used sixteen times in the New Testament and is always translated "wedding" or "marriage." Thayer says this was "a wedding or marriage festival" a "wedding banquet."<sup>9</sup> Perhaps a wedding feast was used by our Lord because many guests would be invited to such a function and thus the chief reclining places would be multiplied, giving those bidden to the festive occasion a greater opportunity to seek-out such seats. But the lesson Jesus was teaching was for them not to covet the chief seats, rather, they should occupy a humble place and let the host arrange according to his own judgment. H. Leo Boles said: "It shows egotism, self-conceit and haughtiness to go into a feast and occupy the chief place without an invitation."<sup>10</sup>

Jesus' attitude was quite opposite of these self-righteous Pharisees. The Pharisees, doctors and lawyers had looked upon themselves for such a long time as due such honor and respect that they would automatically search out the places of most honor. We should pray we never fall into such a haughty attitude.

### SHAME AND EMBARRASSMENT

It would most certainly be embarrassing for the host to come to you and ask if he could have your seat for another. As you begin to rise to find another seat you can immediately feel the rush of blood to your face as with shame you begin to occupy the lowest place because all other seats would have been taken by this time.

Albert Barnes comments on this passage:

His chief design here was, no doubt, to reprove the pride and ambition of the Pharisees; but in doing it, he teaches us that religion does not violate the courtesies of life. It does not teach us to be rude, forward, pert, assuming, and despising the proprieties of refined intercourse. It teaches humility and kindness, and a desire to make all happy, and a willingness to occupy our appropriate situation and rank in life; and this is true politeness, for true politeness is a desire to make all others happy, and a readiness to do whatever is necessary to make them so.<sup>11</sup>

In verse ten, Jesus teaches that the more honorable thing to do would be to choose the lowest seat. That way, the only direction you can go is up. It just may be that you will be asked to go up higher. One thing to keep in mind is that one must never seek the lowest place just so he can be esteemed in others' eyes when he is asked to take the higher seat. Such would be an act of pride and not of humility. Humility does not exalt itself. Neither is it boastful in front of others.

## A LESSON IN HUMILITY

The sincere Bible student will always look for the "key" of a passage that will cue him in on the purpose of the teaching. For example, the "key" for understanding Ephesians 5:22-31 (where Paul discusses the relationship of a husband and wife and Christ and the church) is verse 32. **"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."** In order to emphasize Christ's relationship to the church, Paul used the example of a husband and wife. The key passage of the parable of the chief seats is verse eleven. **"For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."** It has always been God's will to bring down the proud and lofty and to raise up the lowly and meek in heart. **"A man's pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit"** (Prov. 29:23). Jesus not only taught and impressed upon his disciples the need of humility, but was himself the greatest example of it. He said, **"...I am meek and lowly in heart..."** (Matt. 11:29).

The greatest of all examples of humility is recorded in Philippians 2:5-8. **"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."**

What greater example of humility could be shown? **"For even Christ pleased not himself"** (Rom. 15:3). It is his desire that we follow his example. **"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God"** (Micah 6:8). What greater humility could there be than for God to become flesh (John 1:14) and dwell among men. Imagine the Lord of glory condescending

to such a low estate as that of man. This was all done that man might be redeemed. "...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them..." (II Cor. 5:19).

The humble mind is therefore the root of all graces and virtues. There can be no real love without humility. As Paul said, "Charity (love) vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up" (I Cor. 13:4).

### THE BEATITUDE OF POOR IN SPIRIT

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). Happy, cheerful, delighted are those who have a humble spirit. To be poor in spirit means "to have a humble opinion of ourselves; to be destitute of the proud, haughty, arrogant spirit of the world; to recognize that we are sinners and have no righteousness of our own." Those who are destitute of spiritual possessions and know their true condition and long for a better state are those who are "poor in spirit."

To be poor in spirit is an attitude of the soul. We bring nothing to God but a complete emptiness and need. We must have a state of mind that is holy and reverent before God. We must be willing to be where God places us, to bear what he lays on us, to go where he bids and to be willing to do what he commands.

In order for one to make that first step in coming to God, they must first realize their desperate need and their utter inability to fill that need themselves. until you do, you will remain in sin until the day you die because you see no need to do any better. But, if you submit and obey, yours is the kingdom of heaven. No other attitude will make it!

### THE NECESSITY OF HUMILITY

Without a humble heart, one cannot please God. We must empty ourselves and be receptive to God's authority and rule in our life. The first shall be last and the last shall be first (Matt. 19:30). Those that place themselves at the front will find a rude awakening at the judgment day. Humility is necessary in order to please God.

The teaching of Christ in Matthew 18:1-4 is a lesson of humility. The disciples came unto Jesus saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become

as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

On at least one occasion the disciples sought to turn away those that were bringing their children to Jesus. "But Jesus said, suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14). What a tremendous lesson that he was teaching. We must become as humble as a small child to be great in God's eyes. We must become as adults, what little children already are. The way "up" is "down," down in humility, to be risen up in greatness.

Brother Boles made the comment:

The child of God who thus humbles himself like the little child to think the Father knows best, and he knows it is best because his Father says so, will be crowned with the highest honors in the kingdom of heaven. He who thinks his is wise enough to improve on the Father's way is a fool, and will never find a home in heaven. It is the vital point of a true son to take God's way just as he gave it as the best and only way for a child of God to walk and work.<sup>12</sup>

A little child has no self-seeking attitude. They have no desire to promote self. They know no shame, but are innocent and pure in God's sight. It's only when we humble ourselves in the same manner that we can be truly great.

### THE CHRISTIAN LIFE PROMOTES AND ENCOURAGES HUMILITY

Jesus set the example of humility. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He is our perfect example and we are to follow him wherever he leads. Jesus taught that if you want to be great in the kingdom, then you must become servant of all. This lesson was exemplified when the mother of James and John came to Jesus desiring of him to grant that her two sons may sit on his right hand and the other on the left. When the other ten heard it, they were filled with indignation against the two. Jesus uses this occasion to teach a vital lesson. "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20:20-27). One must show humility to be a servant.

Jesus not only taught the things of the Father, but lived them as well. An exhortation to humility is displayed in

John chapter thirteen. "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father...He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him" (John 13:1, 4-5, 12-16).

What was Jesus teaching? Instead of merely telling his disciples what they should do, he translated the principle into concrete practice. On other occasions he had taught them this lesson, now, they were seeing it performed by their Lord's own hands. We must do as he has done. Any person who will not humble himself and submit to anything which Jesus commands has no part nor lot with him. No disciple or servant of Christ should ever be ashamed or hesitate one minute to do what our Lord has done. If he could humble himself to do it, then so should we. "When people are characterized by true humility, all selfishness is removed, and the spiritual becomes the supreme object of their interest and desires. Such people prefer themselves, and are willing to accept inferior places for themselves when it is the Lord's plan."<sup>13</sup> Imagine, the Lord of glory stooping to such a menial task as that of washing a man's feet; one whom he created by the breath of his own mouth. Oh, what love, humility!

#### OTHER SCRIPTURES WHICH TEACH HUMILITY

"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:12). "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" (Luke 1:52). We are taught in Romans 12:3, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think." In verse sixteen we read, "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." We are never to think we

are too good to fall (I Cor. 10:12).

Paul mentions his "thorn in the flesh" lest he should be exalted above measure. Because of it, he says, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor. 12:7, 10). He mentions in Galatians 5:26, "Let us not be desirous of vain glory." We are to "let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

In Colossians 3:2 we are told to put on humbleness of mind and meekness. In James 4:6-8 we learn, "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." We are to "be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (I Pet. 5:5-7).

Even a casual reading of the scriptures should amaze us at the many times humility is expressed. As Augustine said, "humility is first, second and third in Christianity." There can be no real love without humility. The humble mind is at the root of all good works and deeds.

## THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OPPOSES AND DISCOURAGES PRIDE

Not only does the law of Christ teach, exemplify and encourage humility, it also opposes and discourages pride. Pride is the opposite of humility. There is as much difference in pride and humility as there is between the East and the West.

Pride is defined as: "inordinate self-esteem: conceit." We are told that the condemnation of the devil was pride (I Tim. 3:6). Pride is the basic fall of man. It is the consorted effort of man to dethrone God (in one way or another) and to enthrone self. The Pharisees and Sadducees which came to be baptized of John boasted of their relationship to Abraham but were rebuked by the immerser and told to bring forth "fruits worthy of repentance" (Matt. 3:7-12).

The parable of the Pharisee and the publican (found elsewhere in this book) serves as a fitting example of the

opposing sides of pride and humility. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:11-14). We should ever be reminded that our lot is to be as the publican in bowing in humble submission before God.

Christianity opposes pride in one's self. "Pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Prov. 16:18-19). A man's pride will certainly lead him into destruction. "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit" (Prov. 29:23). We are to be lowly in mind and promote others. "The Lord's example of humility, self-sacrifice, and service to others should forever prevent any professed follower of his from seeking pre-eminence, disputing about places of honor, and shrinking from humble service which he may do for the welfare of others."<sup>14</sup> It will prevent him from becoming a "Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence" (3 John 9).

Christianity opposes pride in the church. Elders are not to "lord it over" the charge given them (I Pet. 5:3). They must displace pride and put on humility even as every other faithful servant must do (v. 6). If you truly want to be great, be a servant. You may not receive the glory that many others do in this life, but you will be great with God.

### SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Humility is of the uttermost importance. It stands at the base of obeying the commands of God. We must express humility when we acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father. It is needed when we bow our heads in humble submission to God in prayer. It must be present if we are to forgive those who trespass against us. We must admit that it is essential in being everything that Christ would have us to be.

McClintock and Strong list several advantages of humility: "1. It is well-pleasing to God (I Pet. 3:4). 2. It has great



influence on us in the performance of all other duties; praying, hearing, converse, etc. 3. It indicates that more grace shall be given (James 4:6; Psa. 25:9). 4. It preserves the soul in great tranquility and contentment (Psa. 69:32-33). 5. It makes us patient and resigned under afflictions (Job 1:22). 6. It enables us to exercise moderation in everything.”

They also present some thoughts to remember in order to obtain humility. We should remember: “The example of Christ (Phil. 2:5-8). 2. That heaven is a place of humility (Rev. 5:8). 3. That our sins are numerous, and deserve the greatest punishment (Lam. 3:39). 4. That humility is the way to honor (Prov. 16:18). 5. That the greatest promises of good are made to the humble (Isa. 57:15; I Pet. 5:5; Psa. 147:6; Matt. 5:5).”<sup>15</sup>

To be humble is to be like Christ. To be humble, we must follow his example. “When he came into the world he slept in a manger, and when he died he reclined on a cross. Néither at his birth nor at his death could he find a more lowly place.”<sup>16</sup> When we seek to be right with God, the things of the world will take care of themselves. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (I Pet. 5:6).

#### FOOTNOTES

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15 McClintock and Strong, Vol. 4, p. 404.

16 Neil R. Lightfoot, p. 99.

## CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

### The Two Debtors

Luke 7:36-50

*Leon Cole*

And one of the Pharisees desired to him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, this man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace (Luke 7:36-50).

This is one of the most vivid incidents in the life of Christ. The scene is in the courtyard of the house of Simon the Pharisee. The houses of well-to-do people were built around an open courtyard in the form of a hollow square. Often in the courtyard there was a garden and fountain and in warm weather it was not unusual for meals to be eaten there. It was the custom if a Rabbi came for a meal in such a house for all kinds of people to come in and listen to his words of wisdom. This explains the presence of the woman.

When a guest came in three things were done. The host gave his guest a kiss of peace. This was never omitted if the guest were a respected Rabbi. The roads in those days were dusty trails and the shoes open sandals, so always cool water was poured over the guests feet to cool and comfort them. Then usually a drop of perfume was placed on his head. These were common acts of courtesy, none of which were performed by this host for the visiting rabbi Jesus of Nazareth.

It was also custom for guests to recline at the table rather than sit when they ate. They lay on couches, resting the left elbow and leaving the right arm free, with the feet stretched out behind; and during the meal sandals were taken off. This explains how the woman could be standing at Jesus feet.<sup>1</sup>

The first character in this little drama is Simon the Pharisee. He is not to be confused with Simon the Leper of which we read in Matthew 26 and Mark 14.<sup>2</sup> He was one of The Separated Ones.

Often we form a bad opinion of anyone who is said to be a pharisee. We have visions of an egotistical, self-righteous hypocrite. But all pharisees were not bad men, some were noble and good like Nicodemus and Saul of Tarsus. The sect of the pharisee began with the noble cause of seeking to restore and maintain the law of Moses from the corruption of Hellenization. In their zeal to keep the law pure the movement degenerated into a process of keeping the outward forms and forgetting the spirit behind them.

We do not know why Simon invited Jesus to his home. It may have been that he was an admirer of Jesus. But the atmosphere of discourtesy makes that unlikely. He may have invited Jesus with the deliberate intention of enticing him into some action which could be the basis of a charge against him. This is not likely, because Simon does at least address Jesus with the title, Rabbi.

Reading between the lines, it would appear that Simon's

invitation to Jesus was tendered mainly by curiosity.<sup>3</sup> Rumor had it that Jesus was Jeremiah, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Simon was not convinced these reports were true, but he was curious enough and open minded enough to invite Jesus to dinner.

The conduct of Simon as host was inexcusable. But it can be said to his credit that he did make some investigation of Jesus. He was willing to at least "look and see". All of us should strive to keep an open and inquiring mind. There are too many whose minds are like concrete, thoroughly mixed and permanently set.

The second character in this brief scene is a nameless woman. It borders on the ridiculous to equate her with the devout Mary whose anointing of Jesus is mentioned in the other gospel. There is also no evidence to support the old tradition that she is Mary called Magdalene, out of whom the Lord cast seven devils.

This woman was known for only one thing. She was a sinner, an abandoned woman on the streets—a prostitute. Perhaps she had stood at the edge of the crowd and listened to Jesus. For the first time in her life there was a glimmer of hope for one who had been only a plaything for coarse wicked men. There was a possibility of pardon, of walking in ways that were higher and nobler, of making a new start. There was a disposition to honor this one who could lift her from the mire of her ways.

Around this woman's neck there was a little phial of concentrated perfume, which all Jewish women wore. These were called alabasters and were very costly. It was her intention to anoint the Lord's feet with the ointment. But she was so overwhelmed by gratitude for the hope and pardon that Jesus had given her, and his holiness and love that her tears inadvertently fell upon his feet. She seems to have viewed this as a fault and quickly corrected it by wiping them with her hair and then anointing them with the oil. Her kisses, lavished upon his feet, were a further expression of her love for the Son of God.

It appears at this point that the curiosity of Simon was satisfied. He had wanted to know is this man who has been heralded far and wide a prophet? His conclusion is: "If this man were a prophet he would know that this woman is a sinner. If he does not know it, he is not a prophet. If he does know it and still permitted her to touch him, he is not a righteous man. So any way you look at it the claims that have been made for this man are false."

Simon reveals that he was plagued with the malady of self-righteousness that inflicted the entire sect of the pharisees. At least two other parables are directed toward this evil spirit. There is a definite need today to repudiate this attitude.

The only thing that will completely shut a man off from God is a spirit of self sufficiency. It is a correct assesment that the greatest of sins is to be aware of none. The world likely needs today, more than anything else, a sense of sin. People are not coming to the Lord, because they do not believe they are sinners or that they have any need for the Lord. In the church we have those who merely inherited their religion. They have felt no guilt for sin and thus they see no relief in the gospel. We are gaining folks by generation rather than regeneration.

Self-righteousness not only hinders our service to Christ; it hinders others from coming to him. Simon felt goodness demanded no contact with a woman like this. We have many today, who would not want the outcast for whom Jesus died in their fellowship. Some who profess to be Christians would be scandalized if such a sinner were to walk down to the front in response to the gospel invitation. They want people who will add wealth, influence, and respectability to the church.

The Lord came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Let us not be guilty of holding back the gospel from the poor, the vagabond or the prisoner. Jesus loved them and died to redeem them. They can be transformed and made new creatures and prepared for heaven.

Simon may have thought that Jesus did not know the woman for what she was; but in a moment Jesus demonstrated that he knew Simon for what he was. At the most dramatic moment, Jesus said, "Simon I have somewhat to say unto thee". This proud unloving pharisee who had convinced himself that Jesus was an impostor icily said, "teacher say on". He was in for the shock of his life as the master began relating what may have seemed to Simon a harmless parable.

"Once there was a money lender who had two debtors. One owed him fifty dollars, and the other owed him five hundred. When they had nothing to pay he freely forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

The answer seems so natural and obvious to Simon that we can almost hear a note of contempt in his voice as he

replies, "I suppose he to whom he forgave most". "You are right", said Jesus. The Lord is about to make the application of the parable.

This is an appropriate place to insert that preaching and teaching with which God is pleased always has a point. There is a dearth of such preaching today.

Some act as if they are afraid to say anything controversial or that demands conviction. These professional pulpiteers, job seekers and office managers have nothing in common with soldiers of Christ like Stephen, Paul or the great pioneers of the Restoration.

Preachers, let us be aware lest we become so interested in social acceptability in the community that we preach in such vague terms that our neighbors go to Hell in good humor!<sup>4</sup>

John the Baptist had a point in his preaching—"It is not lawful for you to have her (Herodias)". Jesus had a point in his preaching—"Repent or perish." Paul had a point in his preaching—"He reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come". Pointless, compromising preaching filled with "smooth words" and comfortable error is a disservice to Christ and makes one guilty of serious spiritual crime.

Now Jesus makes his point with Simon. "Simon, seest thou this woman? Ever since I came into your home this woman has done her best to serve me, but you have done just as little as possible".

Simon had slighted and insulted Jesus by withholding the basin of water and the towel normally extended to a visitor. All that this proud pharisee withheld the sinful woman gave. Her tears replaced the water and her hair the towel. This included the customary greeting with a kiss and the anointing with oil. Out of love this woman supplied all.

How the heart of Simon the hypocrite must have quailed before such a denunciation. Simon who thought he was judging the Lord found himself the judged. His sneering smile froze on his pallid face as the judge of all men pronounced sentence upon him in his own house.

It is significant that Jesus announced forgiveness for this woman but there is no reference to the forgiveness of Simon. Simon had not even a reply to make, though we may suppose that both his conversation and appetite were now gone.

There are at least three lessons for us from this parable. There is first Christ's love for us. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever

believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). This parable beautifully illustrates the fact that Christ receives sinners. His trademark was to be friend to publicans and sinners.

We are also taught that our love for Christ is in proportion to our consciousness of sin. Simon was unaware of any sin but this woman could never forget she was a sinner. There was no awareness of God on Simon's part, though he may frequently have called on him in prayer, for when one has an awareness of God there always follows a sense of sin. This lack of a consciousness of sin and need for a savior was the basic difference in Simon and the woman.

It is a misapplication of the parable if we assume one must have forgiveness of great sins in order to have great love for Christ. This could prompt an idea that we should continue in sin that grace might abound. It is not so much the amount of sin but our awareness of sin that makes us appreciate the savior.

The parable further teaches the greatness of love. The sinful woman with all her faults, had love. All of Simon's scrupulous observation of the tradition of the pharisees could not replace love.

The first command of the kingdom is to love God with all one's self and the second is to love man as one's self. Love is basic. Nothing is worthwhile without it.

When Simon made no further answer to Jesus the focus shifted to the other guests. The judgment had also fallen on them. The Lord repeated what he had said, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace".

An examination of forgiveness is in order. Some think of forgiveness as a way to escape the consequences of wrong doing. This is not correct. David received forgiveness but the consequences of his deed followed him to the grave.

What then does forgiveness do for us? God does for us much the same as what we do when we forgive another. If we forgive a friend you do not merely refuse to inflict an injury he inflicted upon you. Instead you take him into your confidence again and trust him as though he never injured you. So God forgets our evil yesterdays and trusts us as if we never failed him.

Our response is to render a service of love. That's what the woman did. We need a similar manifestation of service.



Perhaps the reason our efforts are so feeble in world evangelism and in benevolence is because we appreciate our forgiveness so little.

Jesus attributed the forgiveness of the woman to her faith. She was told, "Go in peace". "Peace" was the Hebrew salutation. It is here used as a farewell, and means "Go in the abiding enjoyment of peace." Such is ours if we manifest the faith and love of this nameless woman.

#### FOOTNOTES

1 Neil R. Lightfoot, **Lessons From The Parables** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965) p. 51.

2 James Burton Coffman, **Commentary on Luke** (Austin, Texas; Firm Foundation, 1975) p. 159.

3 Clovis G. Chappell, **Sermons From The Parables** (Nashville: Abington Press, 1933) p. 115.

4 Spiritual Sword Lectures, "God Demands Doctrinal Preaching".

## CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

# The Lost Sheep

Luke 15:1-7

*Terry Varner*

### I. The Introduction:

- A. The Setting
- B. The Scope

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- E. The Necessity of Repentance
- F. Christ Was The "Lamb of God" Before He was the Shepherd
- G. Christ Receiveth Sinful Men

## I. THE INTRODUCTION

**The Setting:** The Parable of the Lost Sheep follows the next day after our Lord's dinner with "one of the chief Pharisees" (Luke 14:1) and preceded His atoning death by a few days.

**The Scope:** The scope of the parable shows WHY Jesus came into the world — "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10; Matt. 18:11) and "not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13). Consequently, the grace of God is portrayed in this great parable. The parable also shows the importance of one soul in God's sight.

## II. THE CONTEXT

**The Characters:** The characters composing this incident are: (1) "the publicans and sinners" (v. 1), (2) "the Pharisees and scribes" (v. 2), and (3) Jesus (vv. 1-3).

A. The publicans were infamous among the Jews because of their occupation as tax collectors. The sinners were notorious offenders against the traditions of the Pharisees. The Pharisees and the scribes detested both the publicans and the sinners.

The noble purpose of the publicans and sinners is described as they "drew near unto him...for to hear him" (v. 1). The Greek text indicates they "kept on drawing near." The publicans and the sinners found in Jesus One who did not reject them, but rather One who took a genuine interest in them by pointing out to them the road of salvation and life. They listened to Him — something they seldom did with the ordinary Jewish rabbi. They found in Christ none of the bitter contempt to which they were accustomed from the religious authorities of their day.

B. The Pharisees who were "separatists," and the scribes, who preserved, copied and explained the law, "murmured" (v. 2) amongst themselves against Christ. The Greek literally reads, "kept on murmuring." Why? Because He "receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (v. 2). The Pharisees and scribes had long been offended at His disciples for eating and drinking with the publicans and sinners (Luke 5:30-32). Now, having grown bolder with their criticism, they criticized Jesus for doing the same (v. 2). Note the contempt, "This man" or as Hendriksen<sup>1</sup> renders it, "This fellow." They were puzzled by His preference for these outcasts.

C. **Jesus** was often in the company of the lost (Luke 5:27-29; 14:12-14). The words of the Pharisees, **“This man receiveth (welcomes) sinners, and eateth (publicly recognizes) with them”** (v. 2), were really words of highest praise to Christ, though intended as slander. The Pharisees never learned the very object of His coming was to call the wicked from their ways and save them from death (Rom. 6:23; Matt. 1:21; Luke 19:10).

D. **The Shepherd:** The Bible is filled with pictures and lessons of shepherds and sheep. The language of the parable is woven into the thought and the language of the Jewish people of His time. God promised Israel that He would **“raise up”** (Ezek. 11:16) to them **“one shepherd”** (Ezek. 37:23-24; 34:23). Jesus claims to be that **“one shepherd”** which He terms as **“the good shepherd”** (John 10:11, 14, 16). The shepherd in this parable sought out the lost sheep and represents Jesus seeking out the lost. Indeed, Jesus receiveth sinners.

E. **The Sheep:** The sheep in the parable of the Lost Sheep is a picture of the bewildered sinner (Luke 15:7). Unable to find his way back to the flock, exhausted from his lack of proper food and from his travel into the **“mountains”** (Matt. 18:12), the lost sheep is sought out and saved by the shepherd. The Parable of the Lost Sheep shows the importance of **one soul in God’s sight**. The shepherd had (1) **sought** the lost sheep, **“go after”** (Luke 15:4), (2) **“found it”** (Luke 15:5), and (3) **“rejoices”** when the sheep is found and returned (Luke 15:6-7).

F. **The Repentance and Joy:** Our Lord draws His own conclusion and makes application of the parable for the reader in Luke 15:7, **“I say unto you that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”** While one is saved by grace through obedient faith (Eph. 2:5, 8; Rom. 1:5; 16:26), this scripture (Luke 15:7) and others shows clearly that repentance is involved in one’s obedient faith and salvation (Luke 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22). When a sinner repents, he causes joy in heaven itself. Heaven knows about us, as sinners, and knows about us when we repent.

What of the phrase, **“more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance”** in the text? Does Jesus say that the Pharisees and the scribes, who are represented by the ninety and nine, did not need to repent? The answer is **“NO!”** The Pharisees and scribes considered

themselves as **“righteous”** (Luke 18:9-14) and thus were in no need of repentance. Our Lord, for the sake of the argument in the parable, accepts their claims about themselves. They posed as **“righteous”** — they were not — but on their false claim, our Lord condemns them for **“murmuring”** against Him in His receiving and eating with the sinners. This harmonizes with His statement to the Pharisees and scribes that, **“they that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance”** (Luke 5:31-32). The Pharisees reasoned that they did not need Christ as they were not spiritually sick (Luke 5:31) and thus in no need of repentance (Luke 5:32; 15:1-7).

### SOME LESSONS

**A. The Pharisees:** The Pharisees were unrelenting in their dealings with Christ. Determined that He was not the Messiah, they were determined that the common people also not accept Him as such. They continue to criticize, with contempt, **“This man”** (v. 2) for His associating with the publicans and sinners. Through the scriptures the Pharisees made various slandering charges against Jesus. They charged Jesus with (1) being a glutton (Matt. 11:18-19), (2) being a winebibber (Matt. 11:18-19), (3) casting out demons by the power of Satan (Matt. 9:34; 12:22-32), (4) being Beelzebub (Matt. 10:25; 12:26-27), (5) being a sinner (John 9:24), (6) violating the Sabbath (Matt. 12:2), (7) being a Samaritan (John 8:48), (8) possessing a devil (John 8:48), (9) deceiving the people (Matt. 27:63), (10) leading the people astray (John 7:52), (11) possessing an unclean spirit (Mark 3:30), (12) being no prophet because He came from Galilee (John 7:52), (13) being **“beside Himself”** (Mark 3:21), (14) transgressing the traditions of the elders (Matt. 15:2), (15) perverting the nation of Israel (Luke 23:2), (16) being an evildoer (John 18:30), (17) being not from God (John 9:16), and (18) making Himself a king (Luke 23:2).

**B. The Grace of God:** The parable teaches clearly the grace of God. Nothing the lost sheep did, in and of himself, merited the shepherd of the flock to seek, to find and to rejoice when he returned the lost sheep to the flock from which he had strayed; likewise, nothing that sinful and lost man (lost sheep) has done has merited the grace of God to seek, to find and to rejoice when He (the good shepherd) reconciles lost man to God (II Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 5:8-9). Thus, we are saved by grace through our obedient faith

(Eph. 2:5, 8; Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

C. **The Shepherd:** The Bible is filled with pictures of shepherds. Lessons abound for the Bible student from this pastoral scene, which will help us to understand the shepherd, in the parable of "The Lost Sheep."

1. **Shepherds in General:** Our Lord used the figure of the shepherd, which was easy for the people to whom he was addressing to understand and to identify with, in presenting His concern and care of the lost and Himself as the ever-seeking and compassionate Shepherd.

In biblical times the work of the shepherd in Judea was difficult, hard and dangerous with scarce pasture and a tremendous responsibility to his flock. The shepherd (1) was exposed to extreme heat and cold (Gen. 31:40), (2) ate food, generally, that was produced by nature; e.g., "the fruit of the sycamore" or Egyptian fig (Amos 7:14), the "husks" of the carob-tree (Luke 15:16), (3) must protect his flock from the various wild animals, such as lions, wolves, panthers or bears (I Sam. 17:34; Isa. 31:4; Jer. 5:6; Amos 3:12), and (4) must protect his sheep from robbers (Gen. 31:39).

The biblical shepherd was supplied with various items to accomplish his work and to survive. He had (1) a mantle, probably made of sheep-skin with the fleece left on, which he turned inside-out in cold weather (Jer. 43:12), (2) a wallet or scrip which would contain a small amount of food (I Sam. 17:40), (3) a sling (I Sam. 17:40), and (4) a staff, which served a dual-purpose of (a) a weapon against his various foes and (b) a crook for management of his flock (I Sam. 17:40; Psa. 23:4; Zech. 11:7). If the shepherd tended his flock some distance from home, he had a small, light tent which apparently was easily pitched and removed (Jer. 35:7; Isa. 38:12).

The duties of the biblical shepherd are outlined in the scriptures as follows: (1) in the morning he leads his flock from the overnight fold (John 10:4), (2) he would watch the flock with dogs (Job. 30:1), (3) if some strayed, he had to search for it until he found it (Ezek. 34:12; Luke 15:4), (4) he supplied them with water either from a running stream (Gen. 29:7; Psa. 23:2) or at troughs attached to or near a well (Gen. 30:38; Ex. 2:16), (5) in the evening he would return the sheep to the fold, seeing none were missing, by passing them "under the rod" as they entered the opening of the enclosure (Lev. 27:32; Ezek. 20:37; Jer. 33:13), and (6) keeping watch at night or acting as porter (John 10:3; Gen. 31:40; Luke 2:8).

2. **God the Shepherd; Israel the sheep:** The Old Testament pictures Jehovah God as Shepherd (Psa. 23:1, 80:1) who (1) leads his people "like a flock" (Psa. 80:1, 77:20), (2) feeds "his flock like a shepherd" (Psa. 23:1; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:14-15), (3) seeks and yearns to recover his flock when it strays (Ezek. 34:11-13, 16; Hos. 11:8), (4) saves his flock (Ezek. 34:22), and (4) prophetically promises "one shepherd over them" (Ezek. 34:23, 37:24; John 10:16).

3. **Jesus the Shepherd:** As Jehovah promised Israel, in the Old Testament, that He would "raise up" (Ezek. 11:16) to them "one shepherd" (Ezek. 37:23, 34:23), Jesus claims to be that "one shepherd" whom He terms as "the good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14).

When Jesus presents Himself as the "Good Shepherd," we have a picture of Christ so clear and so simple that a child can understand. When our Master used the picture of the shepherd and his sheep it is one that was easy for the Jews to understand. As the pastoral picture and figure is applied to Christ by Himself, we see Him as: (1) the seeking Shepherd who goes out into the mountains and hills, the valleys and ravines, the cliffs and crags to seek and to find the sheep which had become lost (Luke 15:4; Matt. 18:12), (2) the compassionate Shepherd who is moved for the people because they are like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34), (3) the knowing Shepherd who knows each of his sheep by name (John 10:3), (4) the protecting Shepherd who guards them and keeps them from danger (John 10:9-10), (5) the rejoicing Shepherd who "rejoices" when (a) a sheep (soul) which has been lost is found (Luke 15:6) or "over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:7) and (b) "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2), (6) the leading Shepherd who leads his sheep (Psa. 23:3; John 10:4), (7) the giving and self-sacrificing Shepherd who "giveth his life for his sheep" (John 10:11; Matt. 26:26-29), (8) the caring Shepherd (John 10:11-15), (9) the commanding Shepherd who has the words of eternal life (John 6:63, 68) and whose sheep hear his voice and follow him (John 10:3-4, 8, 14, 16), (10) the feeding Shepherd who "will feed his flock like a shepherd" (Isa. 40:11) by the word of God (Matt. 4:4; 5:6; John 6:63; Heb. 5:12-14), (11) the Shepherd of continuous care who gathers "the Lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Isa. 40:11) and "when he hath found it he layeth

it on his shoulders, rejoicing" (Luke 15:5), (12) the loving Shepherd who causes the sheep to "pass under the rod" (Ezek. 20:37) to see they have suffered no injury, (13) the one Shepherd promised of God (Ezek. 37:23-24; 34:23; John 10:16), (14) the courageous Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep (Luke 15:4) and who will not flee when his flock is in danger (John 10:12-13), (15) the unwearied Shepherd who loves his sheep, both the saved and the lost (Luke 15:3-7; John 10:11), (16) the raised Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:20), and (17) the coming Shepherd to give a crown of glory (I Pet. 5:4).

The New Testament portrays the Shepherd qualities of Jesus. He came in strength and courage to lead men back to God. As the Shepherd of His flock He watches over His people, He is, as He promised, "with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). With unwearied patience He bears with all of our foolishness and sins and gave His life that we might live and be saved. The New Testament shows these great qualities of Jesus in three great events of His life: (1) His death: His self-sacrificing statement, "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15), (2) His Resurrection: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20), and (3) His Second Coming: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I Pet. 5:4).

Sir George Adam Smith sums up the character of the shepherd and why it is not difficult to see how these great qualities reach their divine consummation in our Lord Jesus Christ. He writes:

Judaea, indeed, offers as good ground as there is in all the East for observing the grandeur of the shepherd's character. On the boundless Eastern pasture, so different from the narrow meadows and dyked hillsides with which we are familiar, the shepherd is indispensable. With us, sheep are often left to themselves; but I do not remember ever to have seen in the East a flock of sheep without a shepherd. In such a landscape as Judaea, where a day's pasture is thinly scattered over an unfenced tract of the country, covered with delusive paths, still frequented by wild beasts, and rolling off into the desert, the man and his character are indispensable. On some high moor across which at night the hyenas howl, when you meet him, sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, armed, leaning on his staff, and looking out over his scattered sheep, every one of them on his heart, you understand why the



shepherd of Judaea sprang to the front in his people's history; why they gave his name to their king, and made him the symbol of Providence; why Christ took him as the type of self-sacrifice. <sup>2</sup>

4. **The Elders as Shepherds:** The church is called the **"flock"** (Acts 20:28-29; I Pet. 5:2-3). Elders must learn **HOW** to shepherd the flock (church). The scriptures are clear in their instructions to elders. They are (1) to **"take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock"** (Acts 20:28), (2) to **"protect"** the flock because grievous wolves shall enter **"not sparing the flock...to draw away disciples after them"** (Acts 20:29-30), (3) to **"feed the church of God"** (Acts 20:28) and **"feed the flock of God which is among you"** (I Pet. 5:2), (4) to **"take the oversight thereof"** (I Pet. 5:2), (5) to **"be ensamples to the flock"** (I Pet. 5:3), and (6) to see that those who are overcome with sin are restored (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20). J. W. McGarvey has well stated the duties of the elder as shepherds when writing:

All the duties of a literal shepherd, as understood by the people who gave the word its religious significance, are embraced in these three: 1. To keep the sheep from straying. 2. To lead them to water and pasturage by day and back to the fold, when needed, at night. 3. To protect them against all danger by night and by day. The pastoral, or shepherd duties of the Eldership, as the nature of the title shepherd and the apostolic precepts both require, correspond strictly to these three. <sup>3</sup>

D. **The Sheep:** The Bible has more to say about **sheep** than any other animal. There were no cats in Palestine and the dogs, generally speaking, were outcasts, though they apparently at times were used in Job's day to watch the flock (Job 30:1). Horses were few. Asses, sheep and oxen were the main domestic animals. Of the three, the sheep was far more numerous and came closest to man. Thompson tells us that **"large parts of Carmel, Bashan, and Gilead are at their proper seasons alive with countless flocks"**. <sup>4</sup>

1. **Sheep in General:** In biblical times sheep, almost from the beginning, contributed to the wants and the needs of mankind. Sheep were an important part of the possessions of the Hebrews and their neighboring countries.

The earliest mention of sheep is found in Genesis 4:2 where Abel is described as **"a keeper of sheep."** It was of his flock that he **"offered to God a more excellent sacrifice"** (Heb. 11:4; Gen. 4:4-5) than his brother Cain.

We find that sheep (1) were used in the sacrificial offerings of Israel, both the adult animal (Ex. 20:24; I Kings

8:63; II Chron. 29:33) and the lamb (Ex. 29:38; Lev. 9:3; Num. 28:9; Lev. 27:27), (2) and lambs were an important source of meat (I Sam. 25:18; I Kings 1:19, 4:23; Psa. 64:11), (3) milk was an important source of drink being associated with cow's milk (Isa. 7:21, 23), (4) wool was used to produce clothing (Lev. 18:47; Deut. 22:11; Prov. 21:13; Job 31:20), (5) horns (ram) were used to make trumpets (Josh. 6:4), (6) skins (ram) were dyed red (Ex. 25:5) and used as a covering for the tabernacle, (7) were used as tribute by Mesha, king of Moab, to Jehoram, king of Israel (II Kings 3:4), (8) though normally were called to follow the shepherd (John 10:4; Psa. 77:20, 80:1) they were also driven (Gen. 33:13), (9) were given names as we give names to our cattle (John 10:3), (10) were at times household pets (II Sam. 12:3), and (11) each in the flock was important (Luke 15:3-7).

**2. Man Pictured As Sheep:** The nation of Israel was continually charged, rebuked, warned and taught under the pastoral concept of their being the "flock" or "sheep" of God (Ezek. 34:8, 10, 17, 31; Jer. 23:3; Isa. 53:6; Psa. 79:13; John 10:16) under God's care and protection, as sheep under a shepherd (Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:11-15). Israel's waywardness was described "like sheep have gone astray" (Isa. 53:6), as "sheep that are scattered" (Ezek. 34:12; Jer. 23:1-2, 31:10; Zech. 13:7; Matt. 9:36), and, they, as David said, went astray by forgetting "thy commandments" (Psa. 119:176). Israel was promised to be "gathered" (Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 34:11-15) and promised of God "one shepherd" (Ezek. 37:23-24, 34:23; John 10:16) whom God would "raise up" (Ezek. 11:16).

The Bible pictures the Gentiles as "sheep" not "of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16). "This fold" is speaking of the world-wide, universal religion of Christianity (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8) under a world-wide Shepherd and Saviour. "This fold" includes both Jew and Gentile in Christ (Eph. 2:11-22; 4:3-6), the church (Eph. 1:22-23, 2:16-22, 3:10-11, 4:3-6). "This fold," the church, is composed of Jews and Gentiles, who have been called by the gospel (II Thess. 2:14; Rom. 1:16) in "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5, 16:26), are to be united under the one Shepherd (John 17:20-21), as one flock or one fold or one body or church (John 10:16; I Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3-6).

**3. Lost Sheep A Perfect Analogy To Lost Man:** Sheep are

an adequate analogy to describe man's spiritual condition and to describe how man is to depend upon Christ, the Good Shepherd. In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the lost sheep represent the sinner, both the alien sinner and the erring Christian. Note two important analogies between the sheep and man.

a. **The Needs of the Sheep:** Sheep demand constant care from the time they are born until they die. Sheep while emblems of meekness, patience, tenderness and submission (Isa. 53:7; Acts 8:32) are also the most foolish and helpless of all animals. This need for constant care and attention shows their total dependence and yearning to be under a shepherd.

Man from birth needs to be taught the spiritual principles which will lead him to the eternal abode - heaven. The Bible teaches that children (a) shall be diligently taught the words of God when we "sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou riseth up" (Deut. 6:4-10), (b) be reared "in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:1-4), and (c) "hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck" (Prov. 1:8-9), so that trained in God's word and living under God's care "he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

The Bible teaches when man reaches accountability they are to (a) be obedient to the gospel which is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38), (b) live lives "hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3) as "new creatures" (II Cor. 5:17) living no longer "unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (II Cor. 5:15), and (c) have the mind of Christ in him (Phil. 2:5; Gal. 2:20; I Cor. 2:16) which is "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27) living as though "they loved not their lives unto death" (Rev. 12:11; 2:10; James 1:12).

b. **Sheep Become Lost:** In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the one sheep strays and becomes lost! The emphasis of the one sheep does not indicate how few are lost, but of the Lord's concern for a single lost soul!

The sheep in the parable became lost by straying from the flock. It is easy for sheep to go astray as he keeps his head down, busy nibbling, always satisfying only the needs of the stomach by wandering off to find new grazing pastures and losing sight of the flock.

The Bible uses the term "lost" or "wandering sheep" to

represent man who has become lost in sin "for ye were as sheep going astray" (I Pet. 2:25), "gone astray" (II Pet. 2:15), "I have gone astray like a lost sheep" (Psa. 119:176), "all we like sheep have gone astray" (Isa. 53:6), "what man of you having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them...go after that which is lost, until he find it,...I have found my sheep which was lost...joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:3-7).

The Bible teaches that by Adam sin entered the human race (Gen. 3; I Cor. 15:21; Rom. 5:12). Sin is defined in the Bible as: (1) "transgression of the law" (I John 3:4), (2) "all unrighteousness" (I John 5:17), and (3) failing to do good (James 4:17). Sin has its consequences: (1) by bringing men under it (Rom. 3:9), (2) by reigning in man (Rom. 5:21), (3) by having dominion over man (Rom. 6:14), (4) by making men captives (Rom. 7:23), (5) by dwelling in men (Rom. 7:17, 20), (6) by making men servants or slaves (Rom. 6:16-17), (7) it is universal (Rom. 3:23), and (8) by having wages which is death (Rom. 6:23).

Alien sinners, like lost sheep (Luke 15:4), have strayed from God (Isa. 53:6) by: (1) leaving that which is their proper place and are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1; Isa. 6:5), (2) are "alienated from the life of God through ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of the heart" (Eph. 4:18), (3) losing communion with God because their "carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7; II Cor. 6:14-16), (4) having no fear of God in them (Jer. 2:19), (5) walking "in darkness" knowing not where to go (John 12:35), (6) being unable to find their way home to God without the gospel and the call of Christ to come to Him (Rom. 1:16; II Thess. 2:14), (7) placing themselves in the dangers of sin, which if they remain they will be lost (Luke 13:3, 5; Rom. 6:23), (8) failing to obey the voice of God (Ex. 19:5), (9) failing to keep his commandments (Phil. 4:9; Psa. 119:176; John 14:15), (10) becoming exhausted, weary and heavy laden (Matt. 11:28-30), (11) trying to direct their own paths (Jer. 10:23), (12) often allowing the devil to take "the word out of their hearts" (Luke 8:12), and (13) yearning for the cleansing that can be found only in God's way (Acts 2:38; Rev. 1:5; Eph. 1:7; Acts 22:16). David cried, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psa. 51:7; Isa. 1:18) and "my soul thirsteth for thee..." (Psa. 63:1).

The erring Christian, like the lost sheep of Luke 15:3-7, has strayed from God because: (1) they have been influenced

by the world (John 17:14-16) in which they are to be "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13) and "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14-16), (2) they "have no root, and in the time of temptation fall away" (Luke 8:13; I Cor. 10:13), (3) they are "choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring forth no fruit to repentance" (Luke 8:13; Mark 4:19; I John 2:15-17), (4) they have allowed "the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word" (Mark 4:19), (5) they reap what they have sown (Gal. 5:17, 6:7-8), (6) they have failed to put the kingdom and his righteousness first (Matt. 6:33), (7) they have forgotten they were "purged from their old sins" (II Pet. 1:8-11), (8) they have become "overtaken" in sin (Gal. 6:1), and (9) he has "erred from the truth" (James 5:19-20).

**E. The Necessity of Repentance:** Repentance is essential to salvation (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38, 3:19, 17:30-31; II Pet. 3:9-10; Luke 15:6-7). Repentance results in the cessation of sinful practices and the severance of sinful relationships (Matt. 3:8; Acts 3:19; 26:20; I Cor. 5:1-13; Luke 15:6-7). What is repentance? Thayer defines repentance as:

the change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds...<sup>5</sup>

This harmonizes well with our Lord's instruction on the meaning of repentance in Matthew 21:28-31 concerning the father and the two sons.

**F. Christ Was The Lamb Of God Before He Was The Shepherd:** In The Old Testament, the lamb was a vital part of the sacrifices and offerings of the Jews (Ex. 29:38-41, 34:20; Lev. 23:12, 18:21, 28:27, 29:2; Num. 28:1-8, etc.) The blood of the lamb placed over the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt protected their firstborn from death when the angel of the Lord passed through Egypt (Ex. 12). The picture of the "Lamb of God" is most distinctly and definitely applied to Jesus: (1) John the Baptist says, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 36), (2) Peter reminds us that we are not redeemed with perishable things, as gold and silver, "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Pet. 1:18-19), (3) Philip explained Isaiah 53:7-8 to the Ethiopian Eunuch as applied to Christ who "like a lamb, dumb before his shearer" (Acts 8:32), and (4) Paul declares

that **“Christ our passover is sacrificed for us”** (I Cor. 5:7).

The picture of Jesus as the **“Lamb of God”** is a picture of the means of God’s deliverance of man from sin (II Cor. 5:18-22; Heb. 4:15-16). Jesus is the symbol of innocence, meekness and gentleness. He claimed to be **“meek and lowly in heart”** (Matt. 11:29). Paul addressed the Corinthians **“by the meekness and gentleness of Christ”** (II cor. 10:1). Jesus was innocent, pure and without sin (II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; I Pet. 1:18-19).

Jesus is pictured as the **“Lamb of God”** some twenty-nine times in the Book of Revelation. He is spoken of as the **“Lamb of God”** (1) who was slain (Rev. 5:6, 12), (2) in whose blood the Christians were washed white (Rev. 7:14), (3) who leads the faithful to the **“living fountains of waters”** (Rev. 7:17), (4) whose apostles are the apostles of the Lamb (Rev. 21:14), (5) of whom the redeemed are the firstfruits (Rev. 14:4), (6) who has power (Rev. 5:6), (7) who is a Lamb of wrath (Rev. 6:16), (8) who has the Book of Life (Rev. 13:8, 21:27), (9) who is a victorious Lamb (Rev. 7:14, 14:10), (10) who opened one of the seals (Rev. 6:1), (11) who is worshipped (Rev. 5:12, 14), (12) who is deity (Rev. 5:6, 7:17), (13) who is the light of heaven (Rev. 21:23), and (14) who marries His Bride, the church (Rev. 19:8-9, 21:9).

Christ became the **“Lamb of God”** before He became the shepherd of men’s souls!

**G. Christ Receiveth Sinful Men:** Our Lord was charged by the Pharisees and the scribes in the parable as **“this man receiveth sinners”** (Luke 15:2). This truth has been set to music and sung by rejoicing men through\* the centuries. We sing with great gratitude the hymn: **Christ Receiveth Sinful Men:**

Sinners Christ will receive:  
Sound this word of grace to all  
Who the heavenly pathway leave,  
All who linger, all who fall.

Sing it o’er and o’er again  
Christ receiveth sinful men;  
Make the message clear and plain:  
Christ receiveth sinful men! <sup>6</sup>

Let us be grateful that **“Christ receiveth sinful men!”**

## FOOTNOTES

1 **New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke.** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 744. See also, **The New English Bible: New Testament.** (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

2 **The Historical Geography of the Holy Land.** (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1895), pp. 311-312.

3 **A Treatise on the Eldership.** (Murfreesboro: Dehoff Publications, 1956), pp. 33-34.

4**The Land and the Book; Central Palestine and Phoenicia.** (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1883), p. 595.

5 **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.** (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1956), p. 406.

6 Hymn, **Christ Receiveth Sinful Men**, arranged from Neumaster, 1671. **Sacred Selections** (Kendallville, 1962), No. 643.

## CHAPTER THIRTY

# The Faithful And Wise Steward

Luke 12:41-48

*Phillip Dunn*

### INTRODUCTION

- A. The Master's exhortation begins in verses 35-40.
  - 1. The emphasis is on alertness and readiness (v. 35, 40).
  - 2. The Master returns from a wedding (v. 36).
  - 3. Note the delight of the Master (v. 37).
  - 4. There is the uncertainty of his return (v. 38).
  - 5. The thievery would be averted (v. 39).
- B. He admonishes all to be ready (v. 40).
- C. Consider Peter's question in v. 41.

### I. IN THIS PARABLE THERE ARE THREE MAIN POINTS:

- A. **Faithful** - Note Webster's definition.
  - 1. In Hebrew it means: "trustworthy; steady, steadfastness."
  - 2. God, Himself, is our example (I Cor. 1:9).
  - 3. He expects this quality in us (I Cor. 4:2; Rev. 2:10).
  - 4. Herein we find great difficulty in the church today.
- B. **Wise** - Observe Webster's definition.
  - 1. The Hebrew expresses the idea of "causing to understand, or to give intelligence."
  - 2. Again, God is our example (Rom. 16:27; Jude 25; I Cor. 1:19-25).
  - 3. We are to share in this wisdom (I Cor. 3:18; II Tim. 3:15).
  - 4. This is a great part of the challenge facing the church in our generation.
- C. **Servant** - Steward, manager, slave, bond-servant.
  - 1. Jesus presents the perfect example (Jno. 13:4-17).
  - 2. We are the ones portrayed in this parable (Lk. 12:42).



## II. PREPAREDNESS IS THE THEME OF THIS PARABLE

A. Watchfulness because of our ignorance of the time of His coming (vs. 40, 46).

1. Many predictions have proven false (Matt. 24:36; 25:13).
2. We are inclined to slumber spiritually (Rom. 13:11).
3. Note the possible implications of "the 2nd or 3rd watch" in v. 38.
4. We should be reminded of this constantly (I Cor. 11:26).
5. Contemplated because it is welcomed (Rev. 22:20).

B. The picture and reward of watchfulness.

1. Notice that watchfulness isn't mentioned in vs. 42-48, but it is pre-supposed as motivation.
2. Our service is rendered because we know He will return (Rom. 14:12; II Cor. 5:10; Rev. 4:13).
3. "Faithful" and "wise" in discharging responsibilities.
4. Notice the extension of the reward (v. 44).

C. The picture and doom of the unwatchful servant.

1. The pre-supposition of the Lord's delay (v. 45).
2. We can forget our role of responsibility (vs. 45, 46).
3. Cruelty and sensuality are the consequence of our dimmed expectation.
4. There will be severe punishment of appointing "him his portion with the unbelievers." (Rev. 21:8).

## CONCLUSION

A. Christ, the King, rings an alarm for us all (vs. 47, 48).

B. May God help us to be watching as faithful and wise servants!

In order for us to properly appreciate the Lord's warning in this parable, we need to observe the previous verses 35-40. The passage reads as follows:

Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may straightway open unto him. Blessed are those servants whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and shall come and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, and if in the third, and find them so,

blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what hour the thief was coming, he would have watched, and not have left his house to be broken through. Be ye also ready: for in an hour that ye think not the Son of Man cometh.

Here we can clearly see that the Master is emphasizing that we are to be awake and prepared to carry out the responsibilities as His stewards. We would benefit by recognizing the relationship that is mentioned "...and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their Lord..." Perhaps much of our problem of preparedness stems from the fact that we really don't regard Jesus as our Lord. "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say" (Lk. 6:46).

Let us also notice that upon returning from the marriage feast the Master is delighted to find his servants watchful and carrying out their duties. To express his great pleasure he compels them to allow him to serve them. This gives us some insight into the joy that our Master has in those who are faithfully committed to diligently serving Him day by day. He will delight in presenting the faithful to His father. "...Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:..." (Matt. 25:34).

Jesus stresses the certain uncertainty of his return in verses 38-40. The point He makes in this is how essential it is that we be watchful and prepared. We can recognize that the stage is set for our parable in verse 40. "Be ye also ready..." Isn't that plain as can be? It's right to the point.

But Peter, seemingly not understanding the application of the Lord's parable, asks if He was speaking to the apostles, or to all. It is interesting to note that our Master did not reply directly to his question but instead gave the parable under consideration: "...who then is the faithful and wise steward..." Obviously, this is for general application to all who are members of God's family.

It should be carefully noted that there are three major points involved in this parable. These are "faithful," "wise," and "steward," all of which are interrelated as the Master portrays them.

"Faithful" is defined by Webster as: 1. Full of faith; disposed to believe, esp. in God. 2. Firm in adherence to promises, contracts, treaties, etc; loyal. 3. True in affection or allegiance. 4. Worthy of confidence and belief; accurate. All of these ideas are included in the Biblical use of the term. The Hebrew gives the concept of "trustworthiness,

**steadfastness and stability.**" The Greek term "**pistis**" presents the same idea.

God, our Father, is portrayed in the Holy Scriptures as the supreme example of faithfulness. In I Corinthians 1:9, Paul says that God is faithful. In the light of divine revelation, who can deny the accuracy of this claim. Indeed, God says what He means, and means what He says. Jesus Christ shares this same quality of deity as does the Holy Spirit also.

Obviously, He expects us to partake of this aspect of the divine nature (II Peter 1:4). But, unfortunately, there are some within the kingdom who do not. This accounts for the terrible amount of indifference and delinquency in congregations throughout the country. Many times in our attempts to restore precious souls it becomes highly evident that they feel no real sense of importance in this matter of being faithful. We need to put more stress on I Corinthians 4:2 and Revelation 2:10 as we deal with these who have "**quit**" the Lord and His church. Often today, when we are discussing the faithfulness of members the basic criteria we use is whether they make an occasional appearance at services. If this is the "**faithful steward**" Jesus speaks of in our parable, then I fail to understand the importance of vs. 42-44. The Master is describing that steward who is diligently carrying out what he understands to be his obligations. This, perhaps, accounts for the reason that we frequently refer to the "**faithful few**" as we think of those who can be counted on to respond to requests for workers. It is interesting to note that Unger says, "**The Faithful was the general and favorite name in the early church to denote baptized persons.**" Unfortunately, it cannot be generally applied to many members today. In viewing v. 42, it appears to me that there is a special warning to elders and preachers, who share in the sober responsibility of "**feeding the flock.**"

The second point the Lord makes in the question presented in the parable is that this is a "**wise**" steward. This word as defined by Webster is: 1. Discerning and judging soundly concerning what is true and false, proper or improper; discreet—opposed to foolish. 2. Dictated or guided by wisdom, judicious, sage. 3. Cognizant; aware; informed, etc. Certainly all of this is included in the way Jesus uses the term. He is exhorting His followers to be prudent and discerning in their relationship to God.

The Hebrew word often used denotes "**to cause to understand, to give intelligence.**" Also the Greek term

means to be **“mindful, prudent or provident.”** This is exactly the message that the Lord is emphasizing in this parable, and elsewhere as well. This point is made throughout God’s inspired Word.

Again we can see that God is an example to all believers. In Romans 16:27 and Jude 25, He is referred to as **“the only wise God.”** Then in I Corinthians 1:19-25, Paul declares that no other wisdom can compare with that of Deity. Thus Jesus teaches that we are to share in this wisdom. We are told to seek this kind of wisdom, **“...If any man thinketh that he is wise among you in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise.”** (I Cor. 3:18). Timothy was told, **“...that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”** (II Tim. 3:15).

Here we find another contributory to the prevalent problems in most congregations. Why do we have to prod our members to study God’s Word? The apathetic attitude of so many is the result of an ignorance of the Truth. We are no longer known as a **“people of the Book.”** We are becoming more dependent on **“programs”** and **“gimmicks”** than the proclamation of that which will really make us wise. A lot of the **“busy-work”** we become involved with is not causing us to **“understand or give us intelligence”** to be ready by serving. Notice that Jesus praises that wise steward who is **doing** what is expected of him (v. 43). Let us be sure that we are wise enough to be **doing what the Lord has entrusted to us.** (v. 42). Beloved, we need more of such wisdom in our stewardship.

Our third point in this parable is **“steward.”** This important term is defined thus: 1. An officer or employee in a large family, or on a large estate, to manage the domestic concerns, supervise servants. 2. An administrator, or supervisor; a manager. Jesus is using the expression in precisely this sense. He describes our role as servants bound to him. This is the Holy Spirit’s emphasis in I Corinthians 6:19,29; **“...ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body.”**

We have the perfect example of Jesus in stewardship in John 13:4-17. In this experience our Lord demonstrates that the servant is not greater than his master and that greatness in the kingdom comes by serving. Notice please that it involves not only **being**, but **doing**. We are the ones commissioned by the Master to follow the examples of the apostles (Matt. 28:20). We are called to serve. Many have

the concept of Christian service as "serve-us."

At this part of our message we want to focus on the theme of "preparedness" that Jesus is stressing. Why is it so important for us to be reminded of this basic of Christianity? As we recall the Master says, "...I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 15:3). Over and over again we have his promise of his Second Advent. But when will this be?

We are quite aware of the empty predictions that many have made down through the years. And they are still speculating. When will men learn? Jesus Christ meant just what He said, "Be ye also ready: for in an hour that ye think not the Son of Man cometh....the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not....and in an hour when he knoweth not..." (vs. 40,46). In this we can see the similarity to the warning of Matthew 24:36, "But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only."

I am reminded of a discussion a few years back with a good lady who contended that the Lord would return next year (1984). When I confronted her with this plain statement that no man could accurately predict the day or hour of the Lord's return, she responded by arguing that He did not say we could not compute the year of His Second Advent. It is quite obvious that she and many others fail to understand the point of the warning given in this parable.

The Lord is reminding us of our inclination to slumber spiritually. Paul says in Romans 13:11, "...already it is time for you to awake out of slumber, for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed." It is so easy for any of us to grow lethargic about our stewardship. The old devil has so many ways of distracting us from our real purpose.

We might make a brief observation about the 2nd and 3rd watch that the Master mentions in v. 38. It may be that He is indicating that His return would not be as soon as impatience expects, nor as late as carelessness supposes. The 1st and 4th watch, though not mentioned, are not necessarily excluded. Remember God does not operate on man's timetable. The point is simply, be ready! The Lord would have us to be reminded constantly; as we read in I Corinthians 11:26, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come." This event of His coming is to be contemplated because it is welcomed, thus the New Testament closes with the

thought, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." This is the sentiment of the faithful and wise steward.

In this exhortation the Master gives us a beautiful picture of the reward of watchfulness. Notice, however, that watchfulness is not mentioned. Nevertheless, it is pre-supposed as the principle motivation for the activity of the faithful and wise steward. Our service is rendered because we know He will return. With our sense of responsibility we recognize that we must fulfill our trust as those who will give account as we learn from Romans 14:12, II Corinthians 5:10 and Revelation 14:13. This is what constitutes a faithful and wise stewardship. We must not overlook the "extension" of the reward to the faithful and wise steward, as stated in v. 44. Jesus promised the good and faithful stewards: "...thou has been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Matt. 25:21,23). Who knows what is in store for the faithful and wise steward?

But our Lord also depicts the doom of the unwatchful servant. The great folly is in the pre-supposition of the Lord's 'delay' (v. 45). It is very evident that we can forget our role of responsibility. The error of the impossibility of apostasy isn't to be found in the teaching of this parable or anywhere else in the New Testament. Observe that the drastic development in this foolish and unwise steward is two-fold in nature. Cruelty toward others for whom he has direct responsibility, as was noted in the definition of steward and in v. 42. Those that he should care for becomes the object of his inhuman treatment. Also, he indulges in sensuality caring only for his own pleasure. All of this is the consequence of a dimmed expectation of the Lord's coming. The evidence of this unwatchfulness can readily be seen in the world, and even in the church. What's happening in our heart relative to the Lord's return will determine how we're treating others and ourselves (v. 45).

There will be severe punishment for such foolish and unwise stewards. Jesus says, "...he shall cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the unfaithful." (KJV—"unbelievers") Note that previously he was a believer, but now he is an unbeliever destined to suffer with all the other wicked; "...But for the fearful, and unbelieving...their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death." (Rev. 21:8).

It is rather fruitless to speculate about the degrees of punishment and miss the solemn warning that the Master is

giving. Who wants to receive even the few stripes mentioned. The point is; "...that servant who knew his lord's will, and made not ready, nor did according to his will..." because, "...to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required..."

May God help each of us to recognize how much has been given to us, for which we shall give account, that we might be ready and watching as faithful and wise stewards.

## CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

# The Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

*Grady Miller*

The parable of the ten virgins is familiar to every student of the Bible. The perfect simplicity of the story, as well as its serious theme and sobering conclusion make it a powerful tool emphasizing and illustrating the nature of our Lord's Second Coming and the end of the world.

### BACKGROUND OF THE PARABLE

The parable finds its setting during the week leading up to the death of Jesus on the cross. Matthew records our Lord's entry into the city of Jerusalem in chapter 21. During the next several days we find Him cleansing the temple of the moneychangers (21:12-13), debating with His enemies (22:15-23:39), defending His authority to preach and teach (21:23-27), and speaking in parables to the people (21:28-41, 22:1-14).

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

Jesus' response to these questions is recorded in a somewhat abbreviated form in Mark 13 and Luke 21.



Matthew, however, devotes chapters 24 and 25 of his biography to this discourse and gives us a much fuller context. This lengthy session on the Mount of Olives is sometimes referred to as Christ's Eschatological Discourse, the Discourse on Last Things, or, perhaps better, the Olivet Discourse. At any rate, it must be kept in mind that chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew are to be viewed as one unit of study, and that the subject matter being discussed concerns the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world.

After dealing with the fate of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation (24:4-35), Jesus turned His attention to the Second Coming (24:36ff). The contrasts between these two judgments are significant: there would be signs preceding the destruction of that great city of the Jews (cf. 24:15), but no warning would be given before the end of the world (24:37-39). When the citizens of Jerusalem saw the gathering of enemy armies outside their walls they could know that Jerusalem was doomed (24:15; cf. Luke 21:20). But, the end of the world will come without warning, completely unexpected, sudden, and catastrophic. Our Saviour's wise counsel, in view of these facts, is to "watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (24:42).

Jesus then delivered three parables to amplify and underscore His teaching on the Second Coming: the parable of the Faithful and Wise Servant and the Evil Servant (24:45-51), the parable of the Ten Virgins (25:1-13), and the parable of the Talents (25:14-30). Each one of these parables emphasize the following points: (1) The sudden and unexpected nature of the Lord's return. (2) The delay of His coming. (3) The attendant blessings and punishments to be meted out upon His return. (4) The need for personal preparation and readiness as we await the return of our Lord.

### THE LESSON TAUGHT BY THE PARABLE

The one great thrust or primary lesson of the parable should be obvious to all at first reading: the need for personal preparedness at the coming of the Lord. Some will be ready for His return, and some will not. Which will we be—wise or foolish?

As is the case in all His parables, Jesus based His lesson on a custom, practice, common occurrence, or universal attitude that the disciples readily understood and proceeded from there to draw spiritual insight. The disciples were

familiar with the marriage custom of their day, having no doubt seen countless wedding processions and perhaps even having been participants themselves. They knew how the bridegroom and his companions travelled to the home of the bride, met her and her attendants, and then proceeded to a place of celebration. They knew that other friends, wishing to share in the joy, would be waiting for the wedding party, and, upon the news of its coming, would go out to meet it. And, too, since the disciples knew that marriages customarily took place at night, they could well imagine the young ladies ("virgins") awaiting the coming of the groom, falling asleep while he delayed, rising up to trim their lamps when alerted as to his arriving, and then going out to meet the wedding procession and accompanying them to the place of celebration. Surely, it is the mark of a Master Teacher when a story so simple can be used to teach truths so profound.

The five foolish virgins of the parable were not called foolish because they were wicked, mean, unconcerned or lazy. Their only failure was a lack of preparation and foresight. They apparently never considered or dismissed the possibility that the bridegroom's arrival would be so long delayed, that they would have need for additional oil for their lamps, that oil would not be provided for them by others, or that the bridegroom would come at such a late hour that the vendors selling oil would be difficult to find. They especially did not consider that, having missed the wedding procession, they would be denied entrance into the great celebration. It was their surprise to arrive late at the marriage and find the door shut; it was their shock to seek admittance and be told that they were not part of the wedding party and would not be allowed in.

So it will be at the time Jesus returns in judgment. Even among His own disciples, some will be caught unprepared. In spite of the fact that Christian duty and responsibility is clearly outlined in the word of God, and attention focused on the need to "work while it is day" (John 9:3), the danger of neglect and the folly of being unprepared is ever present. The seriousness of this failure is seen in the groom's rebuke and condemnation of the foolish virgins: "I know you not" (25:12).

Then, too, the foolish virgins were without excuse. They knew what was expected of them and were graciously invited to take part in the wedding procession and celebration. Through their own negligence they were absent when the bridegroom arrived. When barred from entering

into the celebration, who could they blame but themselves? Not the groom; not only had they disappointed him by their absence and unreliability, but it was his right to include and exclude whom he would. Not the wise virgins who brought an ample supply of oil of themselves; they had no surplus to give away. No; the foolish virgins had a simple task and responsibility to fulfill and they failed. Those of our generation caught unprepared at the coming of the Lord will also be without excuse. A failure to be ready for the judgment will be our own—it cannot be blamed on others, circumstances, or even the church!

### OTHER LESSONS TAUGHT IN THE PARABLE

Generally speaking, in the interpretation of a parable every detail is not to be pressed. In other words, we are not to make the parable “walk on all fours.” Our Lord was emphasizing one great and central truth in this simple story. We may well jeopardize the integrity of the parable by seeing how many points and lessons we may glean from it.

Still, it is safe to make these observations from the parable. First, the parable is based on several assumptions. Some of these are: the children of God are to be tested and tried in this life on earth; God requires certain things of man—those who comply with His instructions please Him and will be blessed, while those who neglect these matters displease Him and will be punished; there is the real possibility that we will fail in our duty; there will be a day of reckoning or judgment. The Bible clearly teaches each of these points. The parable of the ten virgins will make no sense at all if we discount any of these matters.

Second, in each of the parables taught by our Lord during the Olivet Discourse there is mention made of a delay in the Second Coming of Christ. The Evil Servant abused his authority and responsibility when his Lord delayed his coming (Matt. 24:48). The ten virgins fell asleep because “the bridegroom tarried” (Matt. 25:5). The servants receiving talents were brought before their Lord to give an account only after a “long time” (Matt. 25:19).

Certainly, the first century church looked for the soon and immediate coming of Christ in judgment. Titus was encouraged to look for “that blessed hope, and glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13). The apostle Paul thought it necessary to write to the church in Thessalonica and caution them in their zealous expectation of the soon return of Christ (II Thess. 2:1,2); he

revealed to them that certain events had to transpire before the day of the Lord arrived (verse 3). The aged apostle John prayed on the island of Patmos for the return of Jesus: **"Even so, come, Lord Jesus"** (Rev. 22:20). Still, there is no reason to suppose that the primitive church settled on to a course simply because of their disappointment in the failure of Jesus to return a few years after His departure into heaven; He had given ample warning and instruction as to that possibility. The various theories that **"scholars"** advance to explain the Christian faith (for example, the supposed rivalry of Petrine and Pauline Christianity) are usually found more on fancy rather than Bible.

Third, the folly of hasty, last minute preparation finds little support in the parable of the ten virgins. It was while the five foolish virgins were out buying oil for their lamps—something they should have and could have done earlier—that the bridegroom arrived. And yet, many today are apparently counting on a feverish flurry of service for the Lord later to set aside the waste they enjoy now. Why gamble away one's soul? The stakes are much too high. **"Behold, now is the day of salvation"** (II Cor. 6:2). **"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"** (Heb. 2:3).

Fourth, all ten of the virgins were to be part of the wedding procession and celebration—wise and foolish alike. The foolish virgins do not represent alien sinners or those outside the church, the body of Christ. Some of the Lord's own will be refused entrance into **"the joy of the Lord"** (Matt. 25:21). While this point is not stressed in the parable of the ten virgins to the extent found in, say, the parable of the tares, it is present nonetheless.

Fifth, it is often observed that the neglect of the foolish virgins could not be covered by the generosity of the wise. This is consistent with the New Testament teaching on personal accountability before God. Each one must stand—or fall—on his own record. **"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God"** (Rom. 14:12).

Sixth, the foolish virgins were given no opportunity to make amends for their neglect after the arrival of the bridegroom. So, too, we have a definite and limited time to prepare for the judgment to come. Each one of us is accountable for the deeds **"done in his body"** (II Cor. 5:10). The Scriptures teach that judgment follows death (Heb. 9:27). There will be no second chance following death.

## CONCLUSION

The parable of the ten virgins is a powerful illustration of our need to be ready for the coming of the Lord. To be ready, the **sinner** must first obey the gospel (cf. II Thess. 1:7-9). To stay ready, the **saint** must be busy, be faithful, and be ever alert.

## CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

# The Parable Of The Tares

Matthew 13:24-30

*Max Miller*

The parable of the tares is made plain, it is easily understood. It teaches truth in a direct, concise, and plain manner; likewise it refutes much religious error. It is one of the two parables interpreted by Jesus, both the tares and the sower, recorded in Matthew's gospel.

The parable of the tares is one of the kingdom parables; a delineation of the trials to which the kingdom of heaven was to be exposed from its first introduction into the world, and unavoidably connected with it. The parable is intended to represent the obstacles with which the kingdom of heaven meets, and which it has to overcome.<sup>1</sup> As in the natural earth tares and weeds rapidly spread, til they threaten to destroy the precious grain, so the corruption in the world threatens to choke that of the kingdom of heaven. Our purpose is to expound the parable, elicit the truth by discussion, and see how it is that **"the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way"** (Matt. 13:24-25).

**"He That Soweth The Good Seed Is The Son Of Man"**  
(v. 24, 37)

For some eighty times the term **"Son of man"** is applied to Jesus the Christ. The term is not applied directly to him by any of the New Testament writers except in passages which refer to His heavenly exaltation. Stephen, after Christ's ascension into glory, a moment before death said, **"I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God"** (Acts 7:56). John, in a heavenly vision, saw the Son of man dressed in radiant glory (Rev.

1:13-20). Again he sees the Son of man sitting on a white cloud, wearing a crown of gold, ready for the harvest of vengeance (Rev. 14:14-20). Jesus does not deny His deity by addressing Himself as the Son of man for He also speaks of Himself as the Son of God (cf. John 9:35-37; 10:36). He also applies the term, Son of man, to His glorified state: "The Son of man shall come in his glory...he shall sit upon the throne of his glory" (Matt. 25:31). It is apparent that He used the term to indicate both His humiliation as man in the earth, and His exaltation as the glorious One of heaven itself. The true origin of the term is traced to Daniel 7:13,14: "...one like the Son of man come with the clouds of heaven, and come to the Ancient of days...and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom...an everlasting dominion...and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

Jesus was to reveal gradually Himself to the world. His entrance into the world at Bethlehem was announced to few. For thirty years of His life He was known only (as was supposed) the son of Joseph (Luke 3:23). In the earlier days of His ministry He charged "His disciples that they would tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ" (Matt. 16:20). An immediate declaration of His being would have been incomprehensible to His disciples, and likely would have meant an immediate end to His work. As His work unfolds as Son of man people would want to know more of Him. By His wisdom and teachings, by His miraculous deeds of healing, raising the dead, stilling the stormy waters, they would begin to see Him as much more than an ordinary man. "The people answered him," on an occasion, "We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth forever; and how sayest thou, The son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?" (John 12:34). Nicodemus said "...thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). The sinful woman at Sychar saw Him as a man athirst, as a Jew, then as a prophet of God, then announced to her companions, "come, see a man...is not this the Christ...indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4).

He came as Son of man, not as Scribe, or Pharisee, or Essaeian, or Nazarite, or Jew, or anything apart from humanity at large, or as a representative of a school or class, but simply as a man—the man Jesus Christ, the elder brother of the race.<sup>2</sup> He was the Son of man, not the nationalistic Messiah of Jewish expectation, but "the Savior of the world" (John 4:42; I Tim. 4:10).

## **"The Field Is The World" (v. 38)**

Emphatically stated, **"The field is the world (kosmos)."** All creation is under the dominion of the Christ. **"All power (authority, ASV) is given unto me in heaven and in earth"** (Matt. 28:19). The throne of His glory is in the heavens, yet His kingdom rules over all, and even the worms of this earth are not below His cognizance, nor from under His dominion.<sup>3</sup> **"For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills...for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof"** (Psa. 50:10,12). **"All the earth is mine"** (Exod. 19:5). Not only the worms, cattle, fish, and fowl, but also all mankind come under dominion of God's laws and rights of claim. **"The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, and they that dwell therein"** (Psa. 24:1). When God gave the earth to the children of men He still reserved to Himself the property, and only let it out to them as tenants.

The field, the world of creation, includes all human kind; those who willingly serve in holiness, and those who are unwilling to serve Him in any way. No creature stands independent of God.

The seeds sown, the wheat and the tares, are sown in the same field. Both are reaped from the same field in which they were sown, Again, the field is identified by Jesus as the world of creation. He speaks of that field as **"his kingdom"** (v. 41). The kingdom He here speaks of, the kingdom from which shall be gathered out (harvested) all things that offend, is not His spiritual kingdom, the church, the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:18,19), but the world.

## **The Seed Sown Are Identified As Both Good And Bad (v. 38)**

**"The good seed are the children of the kingdom."** These are those who accept and submit to the authority and reign of Jesus Christ. These are those who are begotten unto God through His word (James 1:18,21; I Pet. 1:22,23). From these good seed come fruit that brings glory and honor to God. **"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be my disciple"** (John 15:8). These good seed are naturally and of necessity in the world of humanity. They have a certain place and relationship in the world. They are not to be of the world; not to partake of its evil spirit and follow after its sinful ways. Jesus said of His disciples, **"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world"** (John 17:16). He Himself was in the world,



yes, in that field, but He did not become a part of its sinful and shameful works. The good seed, in the natural course of life, mix and mingle with others in the world, even with those who are sinful. For one to be completely separated at all times from evil ones of the world, **"then must ye needs go out of the world"** (I Cor. 5:10). For awhile, until the end of time, the good seed are to be in the field which is the world, living among those that are evil.

The tares are sown in the same field with the good seed (v. 25). The word tares is from "zizania which means vomiting. The effect of eating darnel (tare) being to produce violent nausea, convulsions, diarrhea which frequently ends in death".<sup>4</sup> The sower of the tares is the devil; the poisonous seed represent the children of the wicked one. They are the wicked in the world. Jesus spake to them and identified them clearly: **"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it"** (John 8:44). The tares, those of Satan, are in His kingdom (v. 41). These are those citizens in His kingdom who hate Him and say, in essence, **"we will not have this man reign over us."** Furthermore, Christ identifies them as **"mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them"** (Luke 19:14, 27). The sower of the good seed is the Son of man (v. 37). Satan, the enemy of both Christ and all mankind, is the sower of the tares (vs. 28,39). The devil sowed the tares while men slept, in the darkness of night. The tares resemble the wheat. Satan wants his children to resemble God's children; false doctrine to assume a near likeness of the truth. His children, tares, are sickening; their doctrines are deadly.

### Reaction Of The Servants (vs. 27-29)

They likely looked on the crop as indeed promising, thickly sown, and anticipated a great harvest for their labors. But, Alas, the tares! When the tares reached a certain state of growth they were recognized for what they truly were. The servants were alarmed, perhaps greatly provoked to anger. **"Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?"** (v. 27). The servants recognized the age-old problem of evil in the world. As the natural tendency of the ground to produce noxious weeds, thorns,

and briars, hence, the parable is intended to represent the obstacles with which the kingdom of heaven must meet, and which it has to overcome.<sup>5</sup> Lust in the hearts of men bring forth sin in the world (Jas. 1:14-16). As long as men are in the world, sin and corruption will be a part of the world. As long as the world stands good and evil exist together.

The servants indicated a desire and a willingness to root up the tares in order that they would not ruin the wheat (v. 29). Their will to do so was not approved; "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest..." (vs. 29, 30). The servants would have taken rash action, destructive in nature. Their ire was much as was Peter's in defense of his Lord when he stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, "Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:51,52). Not only were the servants rash, they were presumptuous. They were not the reapers. That work was to be given unto others. They would have been premature in their actions; the time of harvest was not yet come.

The reaction of the servants is a significant point of the parable. Are the righteous to wage violent warfare against the forces of evil? Shall Christians shoulder weapons of carnal nature and with physical force overcome the enemy of righteousness? Truth forbids. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:3-5). The righteous cannot purge the wicked except by converting them to Christ. In conversion the evil old man is put to death, buried with Christ in the water-grave of baptism, raised a new creature in Christ (Rom. 6:3-12; II Cor. 5:17). The righteous servants of Christ are to be patient and forbearing, leaving the judgment of the world to the Lord, "the righteous judge" who will judge all men (II Tim. 4:8).

### The Harvest Is The End Of The World (v. 39)

At the end of this age the world comes to its end. The end of time is spoken of as "the day of the Lord." It will "come as a thief in the night: in the which the heavens

shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up...the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat" (II Pet. 3:10,12).

With the end of this age, the destruction of "the field," all come to the judgment. John previews that awesome scene: "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hades delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:11-15). Every man shall reap as he has sown. "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7,8). As one stands in judgment so shall one abide in eternity.

### And The Reapers Are The Angels (v. 39)

Angels, messengers and servants, are sent forth at the command of the Son of man (v. 41). "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:31). "The Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him" (Matt. 25:31). "They shall gather out of his kingdom [the world] all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (v. 41). Those who have spawned false doctrines, practiced vain worship, willed to do according to one's own dictates, will all be rooted up and out.

Those that have offended Christ and truth by false doctrines taught or practiced, or by immoral acts, shall be cast into the furnace of eternal fire and suffering. "There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (v. 42,30). This is the fire prepared for the devil and his angels and shared with those who work iniquity, the enemies of righteousness.

The righteous shall be exalted and shall "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of the Father" (v. 43). These are

the good seed that are to be gathered "into my barn" (v. 30). Such, now in time on the earth, are honored to be called the sons of God (I John 3:1). Yet, the greatest honor remains for the ages to come when in eternity they "shall shine as the brightness of the firmament...as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:3). There in the glory of heaven they shall realize the quest of life and be made in the likeness of the Son of man, having in the resurrection their vile body fashioned anew like His glorious body; to see Him, and to be like He is (Phil. 3:21; I John 3:2).

### Correct Interpretation Guards Against Error

Several false doctrines are associated with this parable. Some would have the field to represent the Lord's church with the good and the evil to continue together until the judgment. Clearly the field is the world (*kosmos*). The seed were sown in the field; the harvest was from the same field. The Lord Himself stated "the field is the world." It is not the church.

The parable refutes premillennial heresies. It denies the Rapture; the ascension of all the righteous to Christ in the air, leaving on earth only the evil. Both good and evil were to continue until the end of the world (literally, end of this age). There will be no Battle of Armageddon for the righteous are forbidden to wage carnal warfare against evil men. There will be no thousand year reign of Christ with the righteous on the earth, another resurrection, the losing of Satan, the end of time and the judgment. All these heresies are taught in contradiction to the truth of this parable and all other revealed truth of God.

The final perseverance of the saints is not taught or alluded in this parable. The evil are not to be destroyed, not because one cannot know who the evil are, but it is not the nature of Christianity to wage bloody war for any cause, not even the cause of righteousness.

### Conclusion

The righteous are to realize they are in the world of evil men. Their victory over them is not through carnal warfare but spiritual. Conquest will be by the sword of the Lord which is the gospel of Christ. Judgment day will bring eternal separation of the evil and the good. While here let us with truth convert evil men, that they might become a new creation in Christ.

## FOOTNOTES

1 John Peter Lange, **Commentary on the Holy Scriptures**, vol. 8: **The Gospel According To Matthew**, trans. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, new edition 1960), p. 246.

2 Cunningham Geikie, **The Life and Words of Christ**, 2 vols. (London: Strahan and Company Limited, 1879) 1:158f.

3 Matthew Henry, **Commentary on the Whole Bible**, 6 vols. (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., "n.d."), 5:319.

4 H. D. M. Spence and Joseph H. Exell, eds., **The Pulpit Commentary**, vol. 15: **The Gospel According to Matthew** (vol 2), (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, reprint ed. 1961), p. 7.

5 Lange, 8:246.

## CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

# The Parable Of The Talents

Matthew 25:14-30

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### INTRODUCTION

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

#### I. THE TRUST OF THE TALENTS OF THE LORD.

“For it is as when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey” (Matt. 25:14-15).

(1) The Lord has given responsibility to every servant He possesses, “It is as when a man, sojourning in another country, having left his house, and given authority to his servants, to each one his work commanded also the porter to watch” (Mark 13:34). This responsibility directly relates to our natural gifts with which we are endowed. Every man does not possess the same natural talent nor is he given the same opportunity, therefore, each does not have the same degree of responsibility. But each must be faithful.

(2) Yet, the Lord requires one thing of each of us — **faithfulness**. While God does not require me to be great, God does require me to be faithful, for each servant was

judged on his **faithfulness** to perform in light of his ability and opportunity, cf., “His Lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” (Matt. 25:21), and “Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (I Cor. 4:2).

(3) If ever there was a sober warning to preachers, elders, deacons and members it is found here. God requires we use our talents and not only use them, but to use them **faithfully!** Woe, betide the brother or sister that shirks their responsibility, for their eternal destiny hangs in the balance as we shall see.

(4) We need to remember we are slaves and we belong to our Master. We are His as it relates to our time, strength, ability and opportunities, “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth.”; and “for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries” (I Cor. 16:9).

## II. THE TEMPTATION OF THE TALENTS OF THE LORD

“Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents. In like manner he also that received the two gained other two. But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money” (Matt. 25:16-18). God demands active service not merely negative innocence. There is a tremendous temptation for all three classes of Servants.

(1) First, the very gifted tends to rely on what he has or is not worried about increase, because he has so much already. Few are truly gifted, but those who are have the weightiest responsibility of all. A few are head and shoulders above all others, so indolence, ease and self-satisfaction can be absolutely strangling. The best gifts demand the best service and the best result..

(2) Secondly, the two talent man is not as gifted as the five, but twice ahead of the one, so he can stagnate into mediocrity! He is Mr. Average. The great majority of mankind stands right here. To be safe, contented and comfortable, for this one, is enough. He can envy the five-talented man and rejoice over being greater endowed than the one-talented man and waste time on both endeavors!

(3) Thirdly, the one-talent man is the recluse of the slothful. Only one talent, so why worry. "Just keep what you've got," "Hang on," "barely making it" and a host of other philosophies sap our energies, beguile our hearts and make us forget what God demands, cf., "When I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5); "For we are his workmanship, a created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:9); "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58). All such passages push us to our limits not allowing us to preserve the status-quo, but rather challenging us to excel for God! Remember only the one-talent man was lost.

### III. THE TERMINATION OF THE TALENTS OF THE LORD

"Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them. And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord thou deliveredst unto me five talents, lo, I have gained other five talents. His lord saith unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that received the two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: lo, I have gained other two talents. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter; and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast thine own. But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest. Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath the ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away. And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be



the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:19-30).

(1) Reckoning day does come! So few realize or believe that the "eternal tomorrow" will finally come to an end. Few prepare and fewer still are ready when the Lord, does finally come. God has given most of us ample time to prepare cf., "But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:8-9); "and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given him, wrote unto you" (II Pet. 3:15).

(2) Each servant must give account of himself unto God, "for we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10); "For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, to me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:11-12).

(3) God's entire approbation is based upon quality not quantity. The widow's two mites is a case in point. The amount of the achievement is not the thing, but the quality is. The industrious servant prevails while the lazy servant fails.

(4) No higher commendation can be heard than: "Well done thou good and faithful servant." God looks for fruit and a lot of us have only a few, small gnarled apples to offer the Father of all mankind!

(5) The failure of the one-talent man is the burden of the parable. The failure is not found in the squandering of his talent, only its neglect! Whole churches will be brought to account at this very juncture, churches that refused to stretch themselves. Elders who refused to increase the budget to challenge the congregation. Congregations who refused to add the good works so vital to their growth. May God help us to wake up to God's demands before it is too late!

#### IV. THE TRAGEDIES OF THE TALENTS OF THE LORD

Awesome lessons must be learned from this tragic, tragedy of failure.

(1) This man denied the justice of God. He felt the Lord

was unjust. Rather cf. (Gen. 18:25). Can anyone imagine the creature replying to his Creator that His demands are greater than we are able to meet? How often today men use this excuse.

(2) Plain laziness caused the loss of this Soul. No wonder preachers push us to work constantly. No immorality or overt disobedience is implied, just lazy, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot" (Rev. 3:15).

(3) Small ability does not justify a lack of faithfulness. God always requires the same — faithfulness. Some have greater obligation, some lesser, but each must be faithful where he is.

(4) God overlooks no one, regardless of the size of the church or the delay of the Master's coming — when He does come each servant must give his own account.

(5) God always demands our best. Partial obedience, half-way service and lackadaisical attitudes will not be tolerated at the last great day.

(6) God makes no mistakes. Each one is rewarded or punished as he deserves.

(7) God says neglect is "wickedness" and punishes accordingly. My, how we need this lesson today. Brethren, lets go to work and put our talents to work! Use them or lose them!

## CONCLUSION

What an awesome responsibility is ours. Neglected gifts perish, while improved gifts multiply. This is an unalterable law of God. No creature dare make a criticism of the creator. Hell is the inevitable result of neglect, procrastination and failure. May God have mercy on us!