

“The Parables of Jesus” - 40 of Jesus’ Most Beloved Parables

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Scattered and Growing Seeds

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All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world." - Matthew 13:34-35

Today we are beginning a new sermon series titled "The Parables of Jesus". Over the next several months we are going to explore many different parables found in the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Some of these parables are included in all 3 books, while others are in just 2 of them, and the rest in only 1. Most Bible scholars agree that there are no actual parables mentioned in the gospel of John.

Depending upon whose list you use (and I've seen several), there are anywhere from 25 to 60 parables. The number changes depending upon how one defines and/or characterizes a parable. For the purposes of this series, we are going to address 40 stories that I personally consider to be parables based upon my definition of the term. There may be others. These will include many very familiar stories such as the Good Samaritan and The Prodigal Son.

A parable is a simple story that is used to illustrate a spiritual truth or teach a spiritual lesson. Jesus spoke in parables quite frequently - often to the crowds, sometimes to His disciples, and on occasion even to His accusers. Parables feature common characters and circumstances that would have been quite familiar to His listeners. In a true parable none of the characters are specifically identified, but rather they remain generalized. The content of a parable is clearly fiction (but may be based on actual events), though its meaning is quite true. Though it may be very short, a parable presents a complete story or action.

Many of Jesus' parables speak to a common theme. Such parables can be grouped together based upon their related subject matter and can be studied simultaneously. Other parables, however, focus on a unique topic or issue. These are best considered independently. During this series, we will order our exploration of the parables according to their main emphasis or idea.

Our first topic in this study will be the Kingdom of God. Today we will discuss 2 similar parables that both concern the manner by which the Kingdom of God grows or increases.

I. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER - Matthew 13:3-9; Mark 4:3-9; Luke 8:5-8

The Parable of the Sower is included in all 3 synoptic gospels. Its rendering is very similar in all 3 accounts with no significant variation of details. Jesus delivered the parable while teaching from a boat positioned in the shallow waters of the Sea of Galilee just offshore. He was addressing a large crowd who had gathered there on the beach to hear Him speak.

The parable tells of a sower who went out to scatter seeds. Some of the seeds fell beside the road, on presumably hard-packed ground, where they were quickly eaten by hungry birds so that none were left to germinate and grow. Other seeds fell onto rocky soil where they were able to quickly spring up, yet unable to develop deep or strong roots. As such, when the scorching sun beat down upon them they quickly withered away. Still other seeds fell among thorns, and despite their coming up, they were choked out by the thorns and were ultimately unfruitful. Lastly, some of the scattered seeds fell on good soil. Unlike the others, these grew to maturity and produced desirable crops - some more bountifully than others.

Unlike many of the parables, this one includes an explanation. Sometime later, after the crowds had dispersed, Jesus pulled His disciples aside and explained its meaning. The seed represents the Word of God which is to be spread everywhere. Some will hear it, but Satan will come quickly and snatch it away so that it doesn't take root in their hearts. Others will hear it and receive it joyfully, but without healthy roots to sustain them, they will soon wither away due to the trials and persecutions of life. Still others will receive the Word and sprout up, but the cares of this world will captivate them and render them unfruitful. Finally, those that remain will hear the Word of God, apply it to their hearts, endure and overcome the trials of life, and mature into productive believers.

II. THE PARABLE OF THE GROWING SEED - Mark 4:26–29

The Parable of the Growing Seed is only included in the gospel of Mark. Apparently Jesus told this parable to His disciples during the same conversation in which He explained the Parable of the Sower - after the crowds had departed. Many Bible scholars believe that the Parable of the Growing Seed was intended to address concerns that arose among the disciples resulting from the Parable of the Sower.

This parable begins by stating that a man has cast seeds onto the ground. Following this, he goes on about his life sleeping at night and rising by day, paying little to no attention at all to the seeds' growth. Meanwhile, though the man doesn't know how, the seed germinates and begins to grow. Over time it develops into a full and healthy plant, without receiving any assistance from the man who had originally scattered the seed. Once it has fully matured, then the man harvests the crop.

The Bible does not give an explanation for this parable, but we can still ascertain its meaning. In this parable, the seed seems to represent the Kingdom of God itself. The man has nothing to do with its growth, nor does he truly comprehend how it grows. Even though he sleeps and is seemingly oblivious to its progress, the Kingdom still grows. This increase is due solely to God, not to the man, and it takes place just as the LORD wills and completely within His timing.

Although the man in this parable makes no attempt to nurture or care for the growing seed, it is incorrect to assume that such activity is forbidden. God repeatedly commands more mature

believers to teach, encourage, love, and support to developing Christians. This is absolutely necessary in order to make disciples. The neglect of the seed in this story intentionally emphasizes God's sole responsibility for its growth, and should not be interpreted as an endorsement for such behavior on the part of Christians.

III. UNDERSTANDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Before we seek to reconcile the meaning of these 2 parables, let us first consider their topic - the Kingdom of God. Many people are confused about the meaning of this phrase. Some think of it as Heaven or the dominion of Christ during the Millennial reign. Their understanding is akin to a political kingdom. While these depictions may be partially accurate, neither provides a complete understanding of the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps you have heard someone say that "The Church of God is not a place, but a people." While the word church can be used to refer to a specific location or building, it most often refers to those who have been born-again through faith in Jesus Christ. In a similar way, the Kingdom of God is not merely a realm over which Jesus rules supreme. It can also be understood as a people - namely, those who are its redeemed citizenship. Therefore, the Kingdom of God is present wherever its population is found (including Jesus Himself).

The Kingdom of God includes the righteous of all ages. The Church is but a subset of the broader Kingdom of God. The Kingdom also includes the faithful children of Israel as well as ancient believers who lived prior to Abraham. The Kingdom will also include Tribulation Christians who profess authentic faith in God despite the Church's absence on earth. Ultimately, the Kingdom of God abides in the hearts and lives of all of God's children.

CONCLUSION

The parables that we've discussed today both relate to the growth or expansion of the Kingdom of God. If we view the Kingdom as the citizenry of God, under the headship of Jesus Christ, we can more easily understand that it will grow as more and more people are saved. The Parable of the Sower teaches us to spread the gospel far and wide, so that some will hear it and join the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately, it also reveals that most who hear the message of salvation will reject it. This widespread rejection can lead to frustration on the part of the sowers (a truth I've experienced personally on more than one occasion)...

For those who feel that they've wasted much of their lives scattering unfruitful seeds, it is important to remember that God alone is responsible for the growth. This is the message of the Parable of the Growing Seed. So, as we consider these 2 parables together we learn that though Christians have been given an important role to play in the growth of God's Kingdom, ultimately God is responsible for its growth. Therefore let us not become discouraged by what seems at times to be a dismal failure, but rather let us keep faithfully sowing the seeds of God's Word while trusting that He will take care of the end result.

Next week we will examine 2 new parables that also deal with the growth of the Kingdom of God. While the parables that we discussed today were centered on the manner in which God's Kingdom grows, next week's parables will focus on the extent and magnitude of its growth. Until then, may we all go out and scatter more seeds...

From Meager Beginnings

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Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand. - Zechariah 4:10 (NLT)

Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived. He traveled throughout Galilee, Samaria, and Judea for around 3 years proclaiming wonderful truths about the Kingdom of God. Thousands of people came to hear Jesus speak, some from great distances, and they were greatly amazed by His wisdom. Some of these people literally followed Jesus for days and weeks at a time, so enamored by His words that they didn't want to go home.

Like any good teacher, Jesus was skilled at using everyday examples to explain deep and sometimes difficult concepts. He often used parables while speaking rather than direct teaching. These parables were simple, short stories that contained one or more lessons or morals. These stories were interesting and familiar, and made His teaching all the more enjoyable for His listeners. Still, many who heard these parables were unable to grasp their true meaning.

Last week, we began this new series with a message about the manner in which God's Kingdom grows. As we faithfully spread the Word of God, like a sower scattering seeds on the soil, the LORD will ensure that His Kingdom increases just as He desires. Today, in the second message of this study, we will consider the magnitude or extent of the Kingdom's growth. We have already learned how it grows, but what degree will it grow?

Again this morning we will examine 2 related parables. Both of them are very short. Together, this pair of stories emphasize how the Kingdom of God will expand immensely despite small and somewhat meager beginnings.

I. THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED - Matt. 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19

The Parable of the Mustard Seed is included in all 3 synoptic gospels. The story itself is told in virtually the same way in each instance, with no meaningful differences. However, the exact setting in which this parable was delivered is somewhat unclear. Matthew and Mark record this parable during the same discourse as those we studied last Sunday - spoken on the beach near the Sea of Galilee. Luke seems to suggest that it was delivered sometime later, perhaps at a synagogue on the Sabbath. It is quite possible that Jesus used this same parable on multiple occasions and in different places. Irregardless, the setting of its delivery is not as important as the story's meaning and application.

The parable tells of a man who planted a mustard seed in his field or garden. The tiny seed was smaller than all of the other seeds. But over time the little seed grew into a large tree, much

grander than all of the other garden plants that surrounded it. The tree's branches spread out so marvelously that the birds of the air came and nested in and upon them.

In this brief parable, the man represents Jesus and the mustard seed represents the Kingdom of God. The story beautifully illustrates the great magnitude to which God's Kingdom would grow. What had begun as a small movement among a handful of believers in Galilee would someday spread to encompass the entire world. From Jerusalem, the Word of God would go out to the farthest reaches of the earth. This expansion is detailed at length in the book of Acts, and it continues even to this very day.

Not only is the mustard seed small, but the mustard plant itself is not the most desirable. Many would consider it to be more of a weed than anything else. Yet this ugly and objectionable shrub would increase to become the most mighty and noble tree in the field. Ironic, isn't it? The Kingdom of God has always been viewed by some as an unwanted nuisance that should be uprooted up and cast out.

There are various also interpretations regarding the birds that nest in the tree. Since the seed represents the Kingdom of God, I tend to believe that the resulting tree would include all of God's children. Therefore the birds must be outsiders - namely impostors and/or false teachers - who settle themselves in the tree, enjoying its many blessings, yet are themselves not part of it. If so, this parable presents both a prediction of growth and a warning against charlatans.

II. THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN - Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21

The Parable of the Leaven is found in Matthew and Luke. In both gospels it was spoken immediately after and in conjunction with Parable of the Mustard Seed. The Parable of the Leaven further emphasizes the same main idea, only in a slightly different way. The entire story is contained in a single verse, making it one of the shortest parables that Jesus spoke.

This parable tells of a woman who hid a small amount of leaven in 3 pecks or measures of flour. Then, in just a relatively short period of time, the entire quantity became leavened.

The method used to make bread in ancient times did not include modern, commercially sold yeast. Instead, bakers would make and keep cultures of bacteria and wild yeast called leaven to be used again and again. Small amounts of this fermented dough would be mixed into flour as needed in order to bake bread. When even a small amount of leaven was added to the mixture, the yeast would rapidly spread to affect the entire lump.

This parable again pictures the quick and comprehensive spreading of God's Kingdom. What began as small and seemingly insignificant would end up having a remarkable and widespread impact. The 3 pecks mentioned in the story are estimated to be approximately 8 ½ gallons of flour - a huge amount. Yet, given sufficient time, all of it would become leavened due to the

pervasive and unstoppable growth of a tiny amount of yeast. In the same way, God's Kingdom would experience unrelenting growth.

Notice that the woman hides the leaven in the flour, as opposed to intentionally mixing it in. This choice of words is intentional. It reflects the offensive nature of the leaven which necessitates its being hidden. Yet, as its properties spread, the leaven can be concealed no longer due to its marvelous and visible increase.

CONCLUSION

It is noteworthy that each of these stories applies to a particular gender. The Parable of the Mustard Seed focuses on a man who is doing everyday agricultural work. The Parable of the Leaven speaks of a woman who was performing the common household task of making bread. By using both examples together as He taught, Jesus appealed to everyone present in the crowd - both men and women. He used this same approach on other occasions as well, which we'll discover later on in this series.

The two parables that we've discussed today primarily emphasize the expansive growth of God's Kingdom. Jesus foretold that His small following of disciples would end up becoming a huge throng of believers. Though it was considered insignificant and inconsequential at first, the Kingdom would ultimately become most glorious. Its presence would be evident to all. Without a doubt, the seemingly impossible growth of God's Kingdom from such meager beginnings into the world's largest religion testifies of the LORD's mighty work.

In addition to the physical aspect of Kingdom growth, there is also a spiritual application. What may begin as just a small kernel of faith within the new believer can and should blossom into an all-consuming dedication to Christ. Such is the nature of God's Kingdom within the heart and life of an authentic Christian. It envelopes them completely.

So far we have examined 4 fascinating parables. In them, we have learned about how God's Kingdom grows and the great expanse to which it has already and will continue to grow. Next week we will conclude Jesus' parables on the Kingdom with 2 additional stories that underscore the tremendous value of the Kingdom of God.

Of Immeasurable Value

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And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life." - Luke 18:29-30

We recently began a new series of messages over the parables of Jesus. Over the course of this extensive study, we will analyze around 3 dozen distinct parables that Jesus taught during His earthly ministry. These parables have been divided into several categories based upon their primary theme or topic. We will tackle them one category at a time over the next several weeks.

So far we have studied 4 parables dealing with the Kingdom of God. We have read about a sower faithfully scattering seeds on different types of soil, a plant that grows on its own without requiring any assistance from the sower, a tiny mustard seed growing into a glorious tree where many birds come to nest, and a small amount of leaven affecting a much larger lump of dough. These stories have focused upon the manner in which God's Kingdom grows and the extent to which it will grow.

In today's message, we will discuss the last 2 parables in this category. As Jesus continued to teach about His Father's Kingdom, He used this pair of stories to illustrate its immeasurable value. We have all heard the saying that "There are some things that money can't buy." This is certainly true when it comes to the Kingdom of God.

I. THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE - Matthew 13:44

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure is found only in the book of Matthew. It is expressed in a single verse, making it one of the shortest parables spoken by Jesus. In part due to its limited length, the story is very memorable and easily repeatable. It has been depicted in various works of art. The major thrust of this parable is to highlight and underscore the incredible value of the Kingdom of God.

The parable tells of a man who discovered a treasure hidden in a field. However, he did not own the field - he was perhaps a laborer who worked there. Upon finding it, the man quickly hid the treasure again so that no one else would locate it. He then joyfully went out and sold everything that he owned in order to accumulate enough money to buy the field. Presumably, once he owned the field, he would then have an indisputable claim to the treasure that was hidden there.

The parable begins by stating that the Kingdom of God is comparable to the hidden treasure. Obviously, it is of immense value. When a person comes to know Jesus and discovers God's remarkable kingdom, he or she should be overjoyed - just as the character was in the story. In

addition, the new believer should willingly give up all of their worldly possessions and pursuits in order to attain God's Kingdom. Such behavior speaks to its immeasurable worth.

It is important to note that the value of the treasure mentioned in this story is not demonstrated by its monetary measure (which is never stated) but rather by the man's willingness to sell all he had in exchange for it. The story could have just as easily been of a man who found a valuable treasure, took it for himself, ran off, and became extremely wealthy. But if this were the case, the acquisition of the treasure would have cost the finder absolutely nothing. This would have taken away from the meaning of the illustration. Jesus intentionally described a man who gave up all he had in order to attain something far greater.

The grace of God is freely bestowed upon all who will receive it. Jesus paid the full price for our sins, and offers forgiveness and salvation to all. It is wholly a gift - something we can't purchase or buy for ourselves. That said, the Bible also clearly and repeatedly teaches that the Christian life will be and is quite costly. We as believers are called to give up the things of this world in order to acquire that which is eternal. Simply put, just because something is free doesn't mean that it won't cost you anything...

This parable also presents a good opportunity to explain the dangers of over-analyzation. Someone who scrutinizes the details of this story might conclude that we are to hide or conceal the Kingdom of God so that we might be able to keep it for ourselves. Obviously, this is not the intent of this parable and is inconsistent with the broader teachings of Scripture. When seeking to understand the parables, we are wise to stick with the most obvious and pertinent interpretations and not try to generate or extract hidden meanings that may or may not have been intended.

II. THE PARABLE OF THE COSTLY PEARL - Matthew 13:45-46

The Parable of the Costly Pearl is included only in Matthew's gospel. It is coupled with The Parable of the Hidden Treasure, which we just studied above. As expected, these two parables share a common theme. Both stories, in uniquely different ways, ascribe tremendous value to the Kingdom of God. Like its partner, The Parable of the Costly Pearl, which is also known as the Pearl of Great Price, is also very short and easy to remember.

This parable tells of a merchant who was actively seeking beautiful pearls which he presumably intended to buy, sell, and/or trade. One day he came across a particular pearl, far more precious and spectacular than any of the others he'd ever seen. His desire to own it was so great that he sold all that he had in order to purchase this single, magnificent pearl.

Like the hidden treasure in the previous parable, again we are told about an item of immeasurable value. In this case, it is the Pearl of Great Price. Like the man in the field from before, this time around we are told of a merchant who willingly gave up all that he had in order to acquire the pearl. Again, the value of the prize is reflected by the sacrifice made to attain it.

The two stories are incredibly similar, and are generally regarded by most scholars as having the same meaning.

There is a difference worth pointing out between these 2 parables. The man who stumbled across the hidden treasure in the first story did so purely by chance while the merchant in the second story was intentionally searching for precious pearls. In the same way, the Kingdom of God is something that can be discovered suddenly and unexpectedly, but can also be something that can be and should be purposefully sought after.

In addition to the traditional interpretation of the parable, I want to offer an alternative. Look at the story again carefully. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God was like the merchant - not the pearl. This is quite different than before. When we consider the story from this perspective, it is the Kingdom of God that is doing the seeking rather than being found. In other words, the kingdom is finding us as opposed to us finding it. When understood from this vantage point, we are the pearl that Jesus himself sacrificed everything to secure. What a wonderful thought.

CONCLUSION

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is of far greater value than anything else we can ever possess. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and The Parable of the Costly Pearl both serve to illustrate its staggering worth. These 2 stories challenge us to give up any and everything we have on this earth if necessary in order to attain citizenship into this Kingdom.

Salvation is free, but discipleship is costly. Thousands of people have sacrificed greatly, some even to the point of martyrdom, for the Kingdom of God. Jesus set the supreme standard by leaving His heavenly home, coming to this fallen world as a man, suffering relentless ridicule and shame, and dying on the cross for us. He paid the ultimate price, and warned His followers that they'd pay a price too.

Don't be fooled my beloved... anything worth having will cost you something. Authentic Christianity, the that kind Jesus talked about, the kind described throughout the Bible, always requires some degree of sacrifice. It demands that we surrender every relationship, every possession, every ambition, and every aspect of our lives to the lordship of Christ. But rest assured my beloved... that which we are called to lose for Jesus' sake pales in comparison to the unspeakable value of that which we shall gain when we inherit the Kingdom of God.

Joy In Heaven

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In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. - Ephesians 1:7-8a

About a month ago, we began a new sermon series called “The Parables of Jesus”. We started off by discussing 6 different parables that Jesus used to describe some characteristics of the Kingdom of God. The stories we studied beautifully illustrate the manner and extent of Kingdom growth, and quantify its immeasurable value.

This morning we will move on to our second topic. Jesus told 3 parables that focus explicitly on the subject of redemption. Redemption simply means to free someone from bondage. It involves paying a price in order to secure the release of another. The story of the Bible is a message of redemption - specifically, that Jesus paid the price for man’s sin on the cross in order to free them from their slavery to sin. Those who accept His offer of salvation are redeemed or set free from their captivity to sin and death.

While redemption most often refers to the salvation of the lost, it can also be used to describe a Christian who has been liberated from some sin that had caused them for a time to stray from their faith. It is likely that we all know someone like this - a believer who has wandered from the fold, enticed by a particular sin, and has needed redemption from it. Perhaps we can identify with this waywardness personally.

The redemption parables seek to highlight the great joy that erupts in Heaven whenever a person is redeemed. Redemption brings much delight to God Almighty and results in cheerful celebration in heavenly places. Today we will focus on the first 2 of these 3 stories, and will discuss the third one next Sunday.

I. THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP - Matthew 18:12-13; Luke 15:3-6

The Parable of the Lost Sheep is also frequently called The Parable of the Good Shepherd. It is found in both Matthew and Luke. In Matthew, Jesus seems to direct the story at His disciples while teaching and preaching in Capernaum. In Luke however, Jesus uses the parable while traveling through Judea to confront the grumbling disdain of the Pharisees and scribes. On both occasions, the story is told in the same way.

The parable tells of a shepherd who tends a flock of 100 sheep. When he discovers that 1 of the sheep is missing, the good shepherd leaves the 99 in order to go and find it. If and when the lost sheep is found, the shepherd rejoices with his friends and neighbors because it has been recovered.

In this parable, the shepherd represents Jesus. In John's gospel, Jesus actually identifies and describes Himself as the Good Shepherd who "lays down His life for His sheep". The lost sheep can represent an unsaved sinner or a wayward believer. Jesus is so burdened by the lostness of His sheep that He lovingly and sacrificially pursues them. The friends and neighbors represent others in Heaven (such as angels), with whom Jesus rejoices after rescuing or recovering a lost sheep. These characters are made clear in Jesus' brief explanation following the parable.

This story amplifies the incredible joy that Jesus takes in the redemption of sinners and/or in the return of believers who've gone astray. It also demonstrates His unwillingness to just cut us loose, let us go, or give up on us. Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost, and we should be encouraged to know that He faithfully chases after us whenever we stray. The Lord never forgets about us, even when we wander away. And He rejoices whenever we are found.

This parable has often be misused when discussing evangelism. Some have suggested that Christians, particularly pastors, should elevate the needs of the 1 lost sheep above those of the other 99. In other words, finding the missing sheep is of paramount importance and justifies the neglect of the remaining flock. Such an interpretation is absurd, as one of the major roles of the pastor is to lead and care for his congregation. While we should always seek to lead the lost to Christ and likewise prayerfully strive to restore an erring brother to the fold, we should never abandon or minimize the care and fellowship of the righteous.

II. THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN - Luke 15:8-9

The Parable of the Lost Coin is written only in the book of Luke. It immediately follows The Parable of the Lost Sheep and the two stories share the same meaning. It was told in the same setting and was addressed to some scribes and Pharisees who were angry with Jesus for dining with sinners. They expected someone of Jesus' stature to shun the lowly tax collectors and sinners and to associate instead with more "righteous" people like themselves.

The main character in this story is a woman who is keeping house. She has ten coins, but discovers that one is lost. Therefore, she lights a lamp and sweeps the floor carefully searching everywhere for the missing coin. When she finds it, the woman calls together her friends and neighbors to celebrate its recovery.

Some Bible scholars have suggested that the 10 coins were the woman's dowry, which were being worn as an ornament or piece of jewelry. If so, 1 of the coins must have fallen off and got lost. Others scholars state that these 10 coins were the family's savings, and somehow one went missing. Either way, for this poor woman it was a significant loss and led to a diligent search. For her, finding the lost coin was a cause for great joy.

Similar to the previous parable, in this illustration it is the woman who represents Jesus. The lost coin represents an unrepentant sinner or perhaps a rebellious believer. The friends and

neighbors are those who rejoice with Jesus in Heaven, like the angels, after the coin is found. Again, Jesus provides a brief interpretation following the story.

Just as He did with the parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven which we discussed earlier in this series, Jesus again tells two similar parables back to back with one featuring a male character and the other a female character. The first illustration speaks of a shepherd and the second a housekeeper. By doing this, He relates to and captures the interest of all of His listeners - men and women alike.

The primary emphasis of this parable is on the aftermath of the discovery. The rejoicing of women and her friends after finding the lost coin is likened to that of Jesus and the angels in Heaven after the redemption of a lost person. The parable is not necessarily a lesson about evangelism.

CONCLUSION

These are the first 2 in a sequence of 3 parables that Jesus spoke about redemption. They were directed toward a group of scribes and Pharisees who were mad at Jesus for eating with sinners. As Jesus spoke these parables, these pious leaders surely identified themselves with the 99 sheep and the 9 coins. Certainly they were not the lost ones, right? Imagine their surprise when Jesus declared that He found more joy in the recovery of the lost than in the others. What a strong rebuke!

These parables are not teaching that Jesus finds no or less pleasure in the faithful dedication of the righteous. On the contrary, living obediently for God day after day, walking closely with Him, and remaining in intimate fellowship brings Him continual pleasure. In other words, the Lord also delights in the 99 sheep and the 9 coins. These parables never attempt to undermine this truth. However, their focus is on that 1 which is lost and the joy that comes with redemption.

Next week we will study the third and final parable about redemption. It is, arguably, the most famous parable that Jesus ever spoke. Until then, may I ask if perhaps today you are the lost sheep or the lost coin? If so, can you hear the Good Shepherd calling out as He searches for you? Can you sense the frantic women looking everywhere trying to find you? It is Jesus, and He is desperately chasing you. Won't you make yourself known to Him today and be found, forgiven, and freed?

Once Lost, Now Found

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Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. - Psalm 103:13

I hope you are enjoying this new series of messages called “The Parables of Jesus”. More importantly, I hope that you are being challenged by the Lord’s words and are becoming more closely conformed to His image through the teaching of these parables. My prayer is that we all grow spiritually as a result of this series.

On a particular occasion while speaking in Judea, Jesus delivered 3 successive parables each dealing with the topic of redemption. These are documented in Luke 15. This trio of stories emphasized the incredible joy that takes place in Heaven whenever a person is redeemed. In last week’s sermon, we examined the first 2 of these parables - namely “The Parable of the Lost Sheep” and “The Parable of the Lost Coin”. We read of a good shepherd and of a thrifty housekeeper, respectively, who both searched diligently for something that had been lost and celebrated merrily once it had been found.

Today we will briefly study the third and final parable in this chain of illustrations about redemption. It is called “The Parable of the Prodigal Son” and is found only in the book of Luke. Over the centuries, this story has become one of the most beloved and well-known teachings of Jesus. Depictions of it have appeared in numerous works of art, drama, music, and literature. This familiar story is ingrained in the hearts and minds of most Christians, who have likely heard it numerous times since their childhood.

The parable tells of a young man who asks his father for his share of the inheritance. Upon receiving it, the young man ventures off to a far country where he proceeds to squander all of the wealth on wasteful and indulgent living. Once the money is completely gone, a famine breaks out and he suddenly finds himself in poverty. Starving and desperate, he takes a menial and deplorable job feeding pigs. Still he is hungry and is even envious of the pig’s slop. Eventually the young man decides to return home, hoping that perhaps he might become a servant for his father.

As he travels, the wayward son prepares and rehearses a formal apology for his father. But as he approaches his home, the father sees him and runs to greet him. The father cheerfully embraces his younger son, lovingly forgives him, and even tells his servants to prepare a celebration. Later that evening, when the older brother hears the sounds of the festivities rising from the house and discovers what is going on, he becomes exceedingly angry. The sanctimonious brother complains that his younger sibling is not deserving of such gracious treatment, but the kindly father explains that he must celebrate because that which was lost has been found.

The sermon today is focused upon the 3 major characters in this story - the prodigal son, his father, and his older brother. Each of these characters teach us important lessons about ourselves, about redemption, and about the nature of God.

I. THE LOST SON

The prodigal son saw his father merely as someone who could provide him with the wealth that he desired. His perspective was entirely self-centered, concerned only with what his dad could do for him. As such, the young man had no reservations about asking his father for his share of the inheritance even though doing so was highly insulting. The request was tantamount to wishing that his father was dead, and was grossly disrespectful and defiant to the authority of his dad.

Sadly, there are many Christians who treat their heavenly Father in a similar way. They are more interested in receiving God's material blessings for themselves than upon living in an authentic relationship with Him. They feel no shame in asking God for things that they fully intend to use for their own selfish benefit or pleasure. They readily squander the LORD's goodness and indulge gleefully in sinful behavior. They are always taking from God, and never giving back

Furthermore, the prodigal son fled from the presence of his father by traveling to a far country. There he committed all sorts of sinful deeds. In like fashion, many people foolishly think that they can escape the watchful eye of the Father and commit their sins in secret. Still others distance themselves from God in deliberate rejection of His lordship. Their separation from His fellowship and subsequent sin inevitably lead to painful loss and heartache.

After losing everything he'd once had and now finding himself reduced to tending pigs, the wayward son finally hit rock bottom. There in that filthy sty, the broken young man finally came to his senses. This moment was the critical turning point in his life. He heard the voice of God, finally acknowledged his own foolishness, and decided that - as difficult as it might be - he needed to return home. He needed to sincerely apologize to his father, repent of his sin, and accept whatever consequences might befall him.

Most of us can probably identify with the lost son. At some point in our lives, we have abandoned God our Father, run from His house, disgraced Him with sinful living, and ultimately found ourselves struggling with the repercussions of our sin. How long will we choose to wallow in the mud of our own stupidity? How long will we hunger and starve for the grace only our Father can give? When will we finally swallow our pride and come to our senses?

II. THE LOVING FATHER

Although his son's request was inappropriate and rude, the father humbly gave the young man all that he'd asked for. He abundantly blessed his son even when it was not deserved. Many would see such an act of grace as a sign of weakness. They would suggest that the father was naive and allowed himself to be taken advantage of. On the contrary, surely the father suspected his son's ill intentions yet still loved him enough to honor the young man's choice. So also, God blesses us beyond what we deserve knowing full well that we will often abuse His kindness by our own sinful actions. The Father's patience and longsuffering are not signs of weakness, but rather of great strength.

This parable never states that the father actively searched for his rebellious son, but there is no question that he worried about him every day. The fact that the father was watching and waiting for his son to come home, and that he rushed out to meet him, indicates the depth of his concern for the boy. The son may have been gone for a only few months or perhaps several years, but no matter how long it was his dad prayerfully waited, never giving up hope that he'd return. In the same way, God patiently waits for sinners to come home.

The young man expected his father to be angry and disappointed when he arrived, but instead his dad was overjoyed. Rather than condemning his son's sinful behavior, the loving father embraced him with open arms, readily forgave his foolishness, and celebrated his homecoming. This is a picture of our heavenly Father. God does not condemn repentant sinners. He receives them cheerfully and rejoices in their redemption.

If you have wandered from God and gone your own way, please know this - God has not given up on you. He is patiently waiting for you to come home and His heart aches in your continued absence. He is not angry with or ashamed of you. He stands ready to forgive your sin, shower you in His love, and give you a new and eternal life. What a wonderful Father He is!

III. THE LIVID BROTHER

During this entire time, the older brother never left home. He never callously asked for his share of the inheritance. He did not abandon his family in order to go live an extravagant and sinful lifestyle. Instead, he faithfully served his father day after day. He appreciated his dad and sought to contribute to the household. By his own estimation, he was the more righteous and dependable son. He considered himself to be "better" than his younger brother. Sadly, his opinion of himself was highly inflated.

When his younger brother returned home, the older son became terribly upset. He could not believe that his father would so easily forgive his brother and not hold him accountable for all that he'd done. Whatsmore, how could his father go so far as to celebrate the young man's arrival? The older brother was livid; for he expected his father to completely reject or at least punish the prodigal son severely for his heinous sin. After all, this is what his little brother deserved!

When the father threw a party for his younger son, the older brother's angry turned to jealousy. He complained that his father had never thrown a party for him. He insinuated that the father loved his younger brother more than him. The father answered that all he had was available to the older brother, implying that he could have had a party at any time if he'd truly wanted one. The truth is, the older brother didn't want a party... he was just bitter and spiteful.

Unfortunately, many of us can identify with the older brother also. Maybe we too have become smug and self-righteous. Because we have gone to church for years and have served faithfully in the Lord's house, some of us may have mistakenly begun to believe that we are somehow more worthy and more righteous than our brothers. We look down our noses at them and cast cruel judgments. But the fact is that there are none righteous - no not one. We are just as guilty as everyone else. Perhaps today we need to repent of our haughty, better-than-thou attitudes.

CONCLUSION

When Jesus originally told "The Parable of the Prodigal Son", he was speaking to a mixed crowd of people which included sinners, tax collectors, scribes, and Pharisees. In the original telling of the story, the wayward son represented the sinners and tax collectors while the older brother portrayed the scribes and Pharisees. For us today, the prodigal son represents any one who is separated from God who is living in wanton sin or facing the dire consequences of it, and the older brother stands for any self-righteous and arrogant religious elitists in our modern culture.

Some have called this story "The Parable of the Loving Father", because the father - not the prodigal son - is actually the main character in it. The father represents God Almighty. Like the 2 previous parables in this chapter, the major purpose of this illustration is to highlight the incredible joy that God expresses any time someone is redeemed. He is an amazing Father, and we are fortunate and blessed to be called His children.

Completely Forgiven

Originally Preached - 6/25/2017

Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. - Micah 7:18-19

Parables were an important part of Jesus' teaching ministry. Thus far in our study of the parables, we have considered 9 individual stories that we've divided into 2 categories. We began the series with 6 distinct parables that each dealt in some way with the Kingdom of God. Next, we covered 3 additional parables that all had to do with redemption. This morning we will move on to a third topic or category of parables.

Jesus told 3 parables that primarily focused on the theme of love and forgiveness. Forgiveness is one of the most compelling and amazing actions found in Scripture. Though we have all sinned against Him, God graciously chose to send His only son Jesus to die on the cross in our place, to bear the punishment that we deserve, and to make forgiveness of our sin possible. In Christ, we are washed white as snow and all of the sinful stains that once covered and defined us are completely and eternally forgiven!

Today we will contemplate the first of these 3 "love & forgiveness" parables. It is a brief story that has become known as "The Parable of the Two Debtors". In order to fully appreciate this parable, we will need to examine the circumstances that led up to it and those that followed thereafter. Having this fuller context will shed greater light upon what Jesus was trying to teach.

I. A SINFUL WOMAN - Luke 7:36-39

Based up the narrative of events immediately preceding this passage, it is likely that Jesus was somewhere in Galilee when this episode took place. Though His exact location remains uncertain, it is clear in these verses that a Pharisee named Simon approached the Lord and asked him to come over for dinner. Jesus accepted the invitation and showed up that evening at Simon's house. After arriving, He went inside and reclined at the table.

We tend to think of dinner at the table in terms of our own modern practice, but in Jesus' time people did not usually set in chairs and eat from a highly elevated table. Instead, in most cases they laid on their sides leaning on one elbow and eating with the other hand. The table, if any, was only a few inches tall. Because they were lying down with their legs extended behind them, someone could easily wash their feet without having to get under or even near the table.

So, while Jesus was reclining at the table, a woman slipped into the Pharisee's house. She had heard that Jesus was there and had come bringing with her an alabaster vial of perfume.

Approaching Jesus, she knelt quietly beside the Lord's feet. She was overcome with emotion and wept bitterly. Her tears fell upon and caused Jesus' feet to become wet, whereupon she washed them with her hair. As she did so, the woman also kept kissing the Lord's feet and anointing them with her perfume.

Seeing this, Simon the Pharisee was indignant. Apparently, he knew who this woman was or at least knew of her shameful reputation. Some Biblical scholars have suggested that she was a prostitute, and others have gone so far as to identify her as Mary Magdalene. Whoever she was, Simon thought to himself that if Jesus were truly a prophet He would know the sinful character of this woman and would presumably put a stop to what was going on.

II. A FITTING STORY - Luke 7:40-43

Knowing all things, Jesus perceived what Simon was thinking. Seizing the moment, He proceeded to tell a short parable to his host hoping to convey an important message. Unlike many of the others, this parable is directed toward a single individual, although others present certainly heard it as well. This parable is only recorded in the gospel of Luke and is known as "The Parable of the Two Debtors".

Jesus told of a moneylender who had 2 debtors. One of them owed 500 denarii and the other owed 50 denarii. In the Bible a denarius was equal to a single day's wages for the typical laborer. In other words, one man owed almost a year and a half's worth of income while the other owed about 2 months of income. In both cases, the person was unable to repay the debt. Fortunately for them, the moneylender forgave both of their debts.

After concluding this brief story, Jesus posed a question to the Pharisee. He asked Simon which of the 2 debtors would love their lender more? This was not a difficult question. Simon quickly answered that the man who'd been forgiven the greater debt would likely love the lender more. Upon hearing this response, Jesus stated that Simon was correct and then proceeded to offer an explanation of the parable.

III. A CRUCIAL LESSON - Luke 7:44-50

Jesus called Simon's attention to the woman who was sitting at his feet. As they looked at her, the Lord reviewed the evening's events. He began by stating that Simon had not offered Him any water to wash His feet as He entered the house, a courtesy that hosts typically provided to their guests. Furthermore, Simon had neglected to greet Jesus with a kiss as was commonplace in that day, yet this sinful woman continually kissed His feet. On top of that, Simon did not anoint Jesus' head with oil, but she had anointed His feet repeatedly with perfume. Jesus contrasted His host's poor manners with the sinful woman's obvious affection.

Then Jesus made the application of His parable. The forgiving lender represented God, the greater debtor was the woman, and the lesser debtor was Simon. Just as the greater debtor

would show more love to the forgiving money lender, so also the greater sinner would show more love to the forgiving Savior. For this reason, the sinful woman - who perceived her sins to be extremely numerous and vile - expressed a deeper and stronger love for Jesus. Simon the Pharisee, on the other hand, considered himself to be a good and righteous man with little sin in his life that needed forgiving, so he didn't feel a burden to purposefully extend basic kindness to Jesus. The lesson of the parable was simple - those who are forgiven more typically love more while those who are forgiven less typically love less.

The prepositions used in these verses can be a bit confusing, causing some to mistakenly believe that the woman received forgiveness because of the lovingkindness she showed. After all, she washed and anointed Jesus' feet before He told her that her sins were forgiven right? But is Jesus' willingness to forgive us contingent upon our love for Him? No, the preponderance of Scripture teaches just the opposite. Remember, it was Jesus' notoriety as a forgiving Savior that led her to come in the first place. She washed His feet because she knew Him to be forgiving, not as a means to secure His forgiveness. Jesus died on the cross making forgiveness possible even while we hated Him and were still in our sins. Thus, it is His gracious forgiveness that precedes and should naturally lead to our love for Him.

It is of note that all of the others there at the table were left in wonder by Jesus' story. Even though this lesson was narrowly pointed at Simon, clearly others overheard and were challenged by it. So it is with us today, as we read and consider this parable centuries later.

CONCLUSION

The Bible teaches that all people have sinned and fall short of God's glory. Everyone needs forgiveness because we are all sinners and we all stand guilty before a holy God. We all need Jesus! However, there are clearly some people who have committed more actual sins than others. Just as the moneylender forgave both debts, though they were of differing amounts, so also God forgives the repentant sinner's debt completely regardless of its size.

The severity of one's sin does not make some more guilty than others in the LORD's eyes, but it does affect our human perception of them. We tend to see some people as more sinful than others, and often see ourselves somewhere on this spectrum as well. This is the point that Jesus was making. Perhaps if we would all realize the true magnitude of our sins and the immeasurable depth of His forgiveness, we would each express a greater love for God.

Because God loves us, He offers us forgiveness. Because we are forgiven, we offer God love. Can you see the difference? The Father's great love for us led Him to send Jesus as the means of our forgiveness. When we understand and receive this wonderful forgiveness, it should motivate us to love the Lord with all of our hearts, souls, mind, and strength. May I ask... how closely is your appreciation of God's forgiveness correlated with the love you show Him?

Forgive Others

Originally Preached - 7/2/2017

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. - Ephesians 4:32

Have you ever wondered why the Bible instructs and urges Christians to keep asking the Lord to forgive them of their sins even after they've been saved? Once a person accepts Jesus as their Savior and becomes born again, aren't all of their sins forgiven and forgotten? As we learned last week, when a person repents God completely forgives all of their sin debt - no matter how great it may be. So again I ask, why should believers continue to seek the Lord's forgiveness after they've accepted Christ if indeed all of their sins have already been forgiven? Doesn't this seem redundant and unnecessary?

Jesus answered this question regarding the need for forgiveness during the Last Supper when He washed the disciples' feet. On this occasion, Peter asked Jesus to wash his whole body - not just his feet. Jesus answered that someone who had already bathed did not need to be completely rewashed, but rather just their feet needed washed for them to be entirely clean. During this exchange, Jesus was speaking about the need for forgiveness.

At the moment when a person receives salvation, they are spiritually bathed. All of their former sins are washed away and they stand completely forgiven and clean before God. This is a one-time event that does not need to be duplicated again and again. However, even spiritually clean Christians will still "get their feet dirty" as they walk through this life and struggle with the ongoing reality of sin. Thus, they will still need the Lord's forgiveness to wash their feet periodically as they journey through life.

There are 2 applications of forgiveness discussed in Scripture. The first is the forgiveness of sin as it applies to our eternal salvation. It leads to our pardon from death and the grave. Such forgiveness is complete and eternal. The second is the forgiveness of sin as it applies to our daily fellowship with God. It involves the removal of clutter and dirtiness from our earthly lives which hampers the effectiveness of our prayers and our intimacy with Him.

In "The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant", which we will discuss today, both applications of forgiveness are referred to. Knowing this in advance is critical to properly understanding the meaning of the parable.

I. THE BEAUTY OF FORGIVENESS - Matthew 18:23-27

This parable begins by introducing a king who has decided to settle all of his debts. In the course of doing so, he brought forward a man who owed him 10,000 talents. A single talent is worth about 6,000 denarii, so the total debt was around 60 million denarii - an exorbitant sum.

The king demanded payment but the servant was unable. Thus, the king commanded that he and his family be sold into slavery until repayment was complete. The indebted servant begged for patience and mercy. Hearing him, the compassionate king mercifully and fully forgave his servant's tremendous debt.

The inflated size of the debt owed in this parable clearly demonstrates the immeasurable debt that we as sinners owe to God. It is a price that we could never repay on our own. Fortunately our gracious heavenly Father, through the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross, lovingly forgives this enormous debt. We must simply receive the forgiveness that He offers. This is the only way to escape eternal slavery to death all Hell.

The application of forgiveness in view during the opening scene of this parable relates to our eternal salvation. God has completely washed our sins away, bathing us fully in His grace. He has, through Christ, forgiven us of a debt we could never pay.

II. THE UGLINESS OF UNFORGIVENESS - Matthew 18:28-31

Having been released from his own indebtedness, the relieved servant went out and found a companion who owed him money. This time the debt was much smaller - only 100 denarii. The servant demanded immediate repayment of this debt, but his friend was unable to repay. The fellow servant pleaded for patience and promised to repay if given time, but the unforgiving servant became angry and was unwilling to wait. He had his companion thrown into prison until the debt was paid in full.

Though he himself had been forgiven of a far greater debt, the unforgiving servant chose not to forgive the much smaller debt of another person. Sadly, this is the case for many Christians. Jesus has completely forgiven us of our all our sins, yet we often don't extend such forgiveness to others. We hold grudges and keep records of wrong-doing. Our unforgiving nature is appalling and it reveals that we have little appreciation for or understanding of what God has truly done for us.

Notice that the other slaves in this parable who saw what happened were deeply grieved and quickly went to tell the king. Beloved, those outside of the church are watching us. When they see the forgiven Children of God unwilling to forgive others, they too are saddened and upset. And why shouldn't they be? We have been forgiven so much, and in turn we should forgive much. Anything less is a disgrace.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNFORGIVENESS - Matthew 18:32-35

When the king heard what had happened, he summoned the unforgiving servant back to the palace. He reminded the servant that he'd forgiven his enormous debt, and then asked why the servant had not forgiven his friend's significantly smaller debt. Finally the furious king turned the wicked servant over to the torturers until all that was owed was repaid.

In this story, the king initially grants forgiveness and then later takes it back based upon his servant's inexcusable actions. God simply does not do this. The LORD's forgiveness is unconditional, eternal, complete, and irrevocable. Thus, there must be a different interpretation of this parable that is consistent with the broader teachings of Scripture. So, what is the message that Jesus is trying to communicate?

I think a major clue is found in the type of punishment that the king renders. Notice that it differs from the first instance to the second, though honestly neither is very pleasant. Why the change? I think this is representative of a greater truth. God will not reinstate our original punishment - condemnation to Hell, but He will impose other serious consequences upon us if we refuse to forgive.

The application of forgiveness in view during the final scene of this parable relates to our temporal fellowship with God. He is rightfully offended and angered by the unforgiving behavior of His children. So, as it pertains to the Christian's the daily walk with God - if we will not forgive others, He will not forgive us. This principle is repeated multiple times in the New Testament. While this does not affect our salvation, it certainly has a great impact on our earthly lives. Unforgiving people forfeit many of God's greatest blessings.

CONCLUSION

The forgiveness of God that leads to our eternal salvation is not contingent upon our willingness to forgive others. If it were, none of us could be saved. Even at our very best, the level of forgiveness that we offer is weak and flawed. God does not place artificial limits upon Himself based upon our imperfections.

However, the forgiveness of God that He gives to maintain our daily fellowship with Him is contingent upon our willingness to forgive others. If we as Christians harbor unforgiveness in our hearts toward others, or even allow unforgiven personal sin to build up in our lives, it will undoubtedly affect our closeness to God. In this regard, the LORD will not forgive those who refuse to forgive others. Such believers, though saved, will have a damaged or fractured relationship with God.

In closing, it is important to realize that Jesus told this parable to reinforce an answer He'd given to Peter's question about how many times we should forgive another person. In essence, He was teaching us that we should forgive others in the same manner as Christ forgives us. The Lord's unlimited forgiveness for us should be the model by which we forgive others.

Love Your Neighbor

Originally Preached - 7/9/2017

'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord. - Leviticus 19:17-18

We are in the midst of an extensive study through "The Parables of Jesus". Over the past few weeks, we have been dealing with particular parables about love and forgiveness. The Parable of the 2 Debtors teaches us that people who have been forgiven more by God tend to show more love to God. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant advises us as believers to forgive others freely and graciously, just as we have been forgiven by our LORD, and it gives us a ominous warning should we fail to do so. This morning, we will consider a well-known parable that illustrates how we are to love one another.

"The Parable of the Good Samaritan" has been depicted in all types of art and literature. The phrase "good Samaritan" is commonly used even in our modern society to refer to anyone who reaches out and helps another who is suffering. Many charitable ministries such as Samaritan's Purse, a nondenominational international relief organization led by Franklin Graham, borrow their name from this parable. In addition, many hospitals, clinics, and other such places reference this story in their institution's name.

"The Parable of the Good Samaritan" is recorded only once in the Bible and is found in the gospel of Luke. Jesus' exact location at the time He spoke this parable is uncertain and immaterial to its meaning. Of more importance is the occasion which led to the parable. A lawyer approached Jesus and asked what he must do to receive eternal life. Jesus asked him to summarize the Law, which the lawyer readily recited. The lawyer knew that he did not love everyone as himself, so he followed up with a second question seeking to identify exactly who his neighbor was. Jesus told the parable as an answer to this question.

The Law of Moses commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves. During His earthly ministry, Jesus referred to this as the second greatest commandment. But who specifically is our neighbor? Is it those who live nearby on our street? Is it our friends or those with who we are closely acquainted? Is it those who look like, think like, and act like us? Surely God does not expect us to love everybody as ourselves, or does He?

I. TRAGEDY ON THE JERICHO ROAD - Luke 10:30-32

Jesus opens this parable with a man travelling down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Along the way, he is attacked by a band of robbers who strip him, beat him, and leave him for dead. A while later, a priest passes by and notices the poor man lying beside the road. Unfortunately the

priest looks the other way and keeps going. Soon thereafter a Levite come wandering down the road. He too sees the hurting man lying there, but he also callously passes by.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was one of the more dangerous and perilous routes in ancient times. In the story, neither the priest nor the Levite stopped to render any assistance to the injured man. Certainly these 2 men would have both been quite familiar with the Law that commanded them to love their neighbor as themselves. Such love would have compelled them to stop and give aid. Yet, in both cases, what they knew should be done and what they actually did were quite different. Whatever their reasons, neither turned aside to help the poor man.

Some might reason that the priest and the Levite did not stop because the victim was not technically their neighbor in a strict sense, and therefore fell outside the parameters of the law. In fact, we don't have any idea who the beaten man was because Jesus intentionally did not describe him. We do not know his background, his occupation, his nationality, his race, his religion, or anything really. He could be anyone - and that is the point. Neighbors are not defined by certain characteristics - they can be and indeed are any and every one.

II. HELP FROM AN UNEXPECTED SOURCE- Luke 10:33-35

As the story continues, the man who'd been robbed continues to suffer beside the road near death. Finally, along comes a man from Samaria. The Samaritan sees the beaten man, is moved with compassion, and rushes over to help. He pours oil and wine on the victim's wounds to help provide relief and then bandages them up. Next, the Samaritan carries the injured man into town and puts him up in an inn where he can be taken care of. Finally, the Samaritan makes arrangements to pay for any additional care that is needed after he leaves.

In order to fully appreciate the provocative nature of this parable, one must understand the bitter relationship between the Jews and Samaritans. In short, they hated each other. The Jews despised the Samaritans and regarded them as a people of lesser value. Samaritans were the descendants of Old Testament Jews who had intermarried with pagans and followed after strange and foreign gods. They were called half-breeds. Furthermore, the Samaritans did not know or seek to follow the Law of Moses.

In the parable, it was a vile Samaritan who stopped to help the dying man while both the Jewish priest and Levite passed him by. What shocking irony! The pair of men who knew the Law failed to act on it, while the guy who did not know it showed love instinctively. Jesus used this parable to demonstrate that knowledge of the law is useless if it is not actually put into practice. Furthermore, a basic understanding of morality - the Law of God - is inherent to all men regardless of their religious heritage or background.

III. A QUESTION AND A COMMAND - Luke 10:36-37

As He often did, Jesus ended this parable with a question that was intended to test the listener's understanding of the message. Remember, Jesus was speaking to a lawyer who'd approached him earlier. So, when His story was complete, the Lord pointedly asked the lawyer which of the 3 passers-by had proven themselves to be a neighbor to the man who'd been robbed. Presumably unable to concede that it was the Samaritan, the pious lawyer instead identified him generically as "the one who'd shown mercy". Jesus then commanded the lawyer to go and do likewise - ie, to be merciful.

Notice that Jesus never directly answered the lawyer's question. He did not ever specifically identify who the "neighbors" were. Rather, Jesus instructed the inquisitive lawyer to be a neighbor to others by showing love and compassion. The lesson? Don't worry about who your neighbors are, but rather be neighborly to all.

CONCLUSION

While there are numerous other interpretations of this parable, I believe the explanation we've discussed today is the most accurate because it is most relevant to the lawyer's original question. The story also challenges racist and bigoted behavior against those who are different than us. In the end, Jesus' story shifts the question from who we are to love to how we are to love. Our love must be more than mere words we say, but rather something we actually do.

Jesus is the supreme example of the good Samaritan in that He shows mercy to the wounded and broken. He calls us to show neighborly love also. We too should display the virtues of the good Samaritan as we show genuine and sacrificial love to others. Many people have been beaten up and left for dead along the road of life. Do you see them lying there, and will you care enough to stop and help?

Equal Pay for All

Originally Preached - 7/16/2017

For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. - Romans 9:15-16

Today is the 9th sermon in our current series titled "The Parables of Jesus". Over the past 2 months we have been studying parables related to the Kingdom of God and to various characteristics of God. We have talked about His great joy whenever a person is redeemed, His desire to forgive sinners completely, and His neighborly merciful love. In each case, we have been challenged as Christians to imitate these virtues.

The parable in view this morning is called "The Workers in the Vineyard". Like those we've discussed previously, this story highlights yet another remarkable attribute of God. It deals with His amazing grace, through which salvation is made available to all. The LORD's gracious loving kindness is the only vehicle by which any person can be saved.

Matthew 19 opens with Jesus departing Galilee and heading southward. He comes into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan, meaning that He is actually on the eastern side of the Jordan River. While there He confronts a band of Pharisees, blesses the children, and converses with a rich young ruler. At the close of the chapter, the disciples ask what reward they will receive for leaving everything to follow Him. Jesus answers their question, then tells this parable to reinforce and clarify His answer.

The parable of "The Workers in the Vineyard" is recorded only in the book of Matthew. It is one of the more lengthy parables of Jesus. It was spoken directly to the disciples. Following this event, Jesus recrosses the Jordan and proceeds to Jerusalem where He is arrested, tried, and crucified. Thus, we can date the telling of this parable near the end of the Lord's earthly ministry. Over the centuries, this beautiful illustration has been depicted in various forms of art and literature.

In the verse immediately preceding this parable, Jesus states that many who are first will be last, and the last will be first. Then he tells the story of the workers in the vineyard, concluding it by repeating that the last will be first and the first will be last. Obviously this statement is critically to the meaning of the parable, as it is given both at the beginning and at the end. But what does it mean? Well, let's find out...

I. HIRING THE WORKERS - Matthew 20:1-7

The parable begins with a landowner who needed day laborers to work in His vineyard. Early in the morning he went to the marketplace and found several people. They agreed to work the full

day in exchange for one denarius each. After they have been working for a while, the landowner decided that he needed additional workers and went back to hire more. This time around he did not specifically state how much he would pay, but assured them that they will be given what was right. Apparently there was much work to be done, because as the day progressed the landowner went back to the marketplace 3 more times to hire more laborers, each time for an undisclosed sum.

In order to grasp the proper sequence of this story, we must have a basic understanding of how the time of day was measured by the Jews. The day started at 6am which was about the time of sunrise and ended at 6pm which was around the time of sunset. The 12 hours of the day were counted out based upon these endpoints. So, if we use our modern clocks, we could say that the landowner hired the first workers at 6am, more at 9am, even more at noon, still more at 3pm, and finally a few more at 5pm.

By the end of the day, the landowner had quite a few laborers toiling away in his vineyard. Some had been there much longer than the others. This applies to us as believers. God calls us at different times in our lives. Some people get saved when they are very young and are privileged to serve the LORD for their entire lives. Others hear His calling while middle-aged, and live the later half their lives for Him. Still others come to Jesus very late, perhaps even on their deathbed, and miss much of the blessing of working in God's vineyard for a long time.

II. PAYING THE WORKERS - Matthew 20:8-12

At the end of the day, the owner of the vineyard and his foreman called all of the laborers together in order to give them their pay. Those who had been hired last and had only worked for an hour were paid first. They received a full denarius. Presumably, the landowner continued paying those who were hired most recently, giving each of them a denarius apiece. By the time he came to the laborers he'd hired first, they expected to be paid more because they had worked all day long. However, the landowner also gave each of them a denarius. Upset, they began to grumble and complain.

I can understand their anger. Doesn't it seem unfair that the owner of the vineyard paid everyone the same despite the fact that some worked much longer than others? A fair employer would have paid the workers differing amounts in relation to the amount of time they actually worked. It seems only right that the reward one receives should be based upon the amount of work that he or she does. Isn't this the way it should be?

People are quick to react when they believe that they are being treated unfairly. As it pertains to the matters of this life, we should strive to treat everyone in a fair and just manner. But, as my mother often says, sometimes life is not fair and we have to accept it. However, when it comes to the issue of our eternal salvation, perhaps we should think twice about how "fair" we really want God to be. If the LORD offered us salvation upon the basis of our good works, no matter how many of them there might be, we would be in big trouble!

III. ANSWERING THE WORKERS - Matthew 10:13-16

At the end of the parable, the landowner reminded the grumbling workers that they'd all agreed to work a full day for a denarius. They were being paid accordingly and therefore had absolutely nothing to complain about. What the landowner chose to pay the other workers was completely up to him, and frankly not their concern. If he chose to be generous, so be it.

God is the gracious landowner and His children are the laborers. He is the sole provider of saving grace and it is His to distribute as He desires. Who are we as believers to question His generosity or accuse Him of being unfair? Instead, we should be thankful to have received that portion of His grace necessary to secure our eternal salvation in Heaven. Rather than grumbling, we such celebrate that the fullness of salvation is available to everyone.

An alternative interpretation of this parable compares the earlier workers with the Jews and the later worker with the Gentiles. It teaches that the Jews, who had received the calling of God centuries before, should be happy for the Gentiles who were just now being formally included into God's covenant. Both Jew and Gentile would be covered equally by the grace of God.

CONCLUSION

Immediately after concluding the story, Jesus restated what He'd said at the outset - "The first shall be last and the last shall be first". Oftentimes we have used these words to promote the idea that the humble shall be exalted while the mighty will be brought down. While this is certainly true and taught elsewhere in Scripture, in light of the parable a more accurate rendering would be "The first shall be rewarded the same as the last, and the last shall be rewarded the same as the first."

If you are a Christian, you have the promise of eternal life in Heaven someday. Whether you've been a believer for many decades or only for a few minutes this promise is still the same. That said, don't wait to be saved. Working for the the LORD in His vineyard is not a burden, but rather a blessing. There is no greater way to spend your life than living for and serving God. I am so grateful to have worked in His vineyard all these years and look forward to many, many more. Want you join me in the vineyard today, by accepting God's offer of saving grace through His Son Jesus Christ?

The Power of Jesus Over Satan

Originally Preached - 7/23/2017

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. - James 4:7

Jesus often used simple, relatable stories called parables while teaching to illustrate a point or answer a question. We are currently in the midst of an extensive study called “The Parables of Jesus” dealing with these stories. The past several messages in this series have focused upon particular parables that highlight certain characteristics of God and/or His Son Jesus. Before we begin today, let’s briefly review some of the godly attributes we’ve touched on already.

It is God’s deepest desire for all people to be saved, though He foreknows that many will not. That said, He rejoices along with all of Heaven whenever any sinner is redeemed. Furthermore, He both seeks the lost and receives the returning prodigal. The LORD exhibits neighborly love and compassion for those who are suffering, and calls His children to likewise. He forgives the transgressions of repentant sinners completely, and forgives the ongoing sins of believers as they forgive others. He graciously offers salvation equally to all who will accept it, no matter how early or late in life they do so.

In today’s message we will consider a brief parable that spotlights the power of Jesus over Satan. Specifically, this parable features the Lord’s ability to cast out demons. As He traveled about with His disciples, Jesus frequently encountered those who were demon-possessed. Time and time again He cast out these evils spirits, leading to the healing and restoration of the one who’d been afflicted. His power over demons caused wonder and awe among many, but it also led some to become suspicious.

“The Parable of the Strong Man” is found in all three synoptic gospels - Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There are subtle differences in each rendition of the story, which will be discovered in today’s message. However, the primary meaning of each is the same. Jesus received His power over Satan and demons from His Father God.

I. THE BEELZEBUB CONTROVERSY - Matthew 12:22-24, Mark 3:20-22, Luke 11:14-16

Jesus told “The Parable of the Strong Man” as a defense against the false accusation of His enemies. In Matthew’s account, the Lord had just healed a demon-possessed man who was both blind and mute. Luke only mentioned that the man was mute. Mark did not mention any specific healing immediately prior to the parable, but generally described several such healings in the preceding passages. In all three variations of the story, the while the crowds were amazed by Jesus’ power over demons the scribes and Pharisees had doubts.

They accused Jesus of casting out demons by the authority of Beelzebub. Beelzebub was an ancient pagan god of the Philistines who was also called “The Lord of the Flies”. Over time, he

became known as the god of dung or filth, and was completely detestable. The Jews used the name Beelzebub as an epithet for or descriptor of Satan. He was considered to be the prince of the demons. Therefore, the accusation against Jesus was that His authority over demons had been given to Him by Beelzebub. In other words, they claimed that Jesus was an agent of Satan who had been granted charge over the demons.

This episode in the life of Jesus has become known as “The Beelzebub Controversy”. Think about what was happening. Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, the only begotten Son of God was being publicly cast as a minion of the Devil by those who hated Him. This same phenomenon persists today. There are still people even now who see God as the Devil and hate Him, along with all of His Christian followers. Didn’t the Bible tell us this would happen?

II. A HOUSE DIVIDED - Matthew 12:25-28, Mark 3:23-26, Luke 11:17-20

Hearing their accusations and knowing their thoughts, Jesus responded to the scribes and Pharisees with good old logic. He answered that a kingdom divided against itself would be laid to waste and that a house divided against itself would fall. In other words, it was foolish to believe that Satan would be rebuking and casting out his own demons. Such behavior would be self-destructive and complete nonsense. The notion that Jesus was of the Devil, yet was openly disarming and rebuffing him at every turn, was simply ridiculous.

Jesus’ words “A house divided against itself cannot stand” were famously used by Abraham Lincoln in 1858 while he was still a senator in Illinois. In a speech by this title, Lincoln argued that the United States could never perpetually continue as half free and half slave. He insisted that the nation must become either all of one or the other, but could not remain both. It was a divided house. A few years after giving this speech, Lincoln became president and the Civil War followed. History records that words of his prophetic speech came true, and that our divided nation was unified with the complete abolition of slavery. Interesting, huh???

Returning to the Scriptures, Jesus had just exposed the folly of the scribes and Pharisees. But now He would go a step farther. His power over the demons did not derive from Beelzebub or Satan, but where did it come from? Could it be from God? Jesus used “The Parable of the Strong Man” to illustrate the true source of His authority over Satan.

III. BINDING THE STRONG MAN - Matthew 12:29, Mark 3:27, Luke 11:21-22, 13-16

By combining all three gospel accounts into one, we understand the parable as follows: There was a strong, formidable, and armored man who guarded over his house. An attacker came along and overpowered this strong man, disarmed him, bound him, and then plundered and distributed his property.

In this parable, the strong man represents Satan. His house is this world. The attacker represents Jesus. When Jesus came to the earth, He overpowered Satan and bound him,

figuratively speaking. While the Devil was certainly a formidable foe, Jesus was even mightier. Thus, Satan was helpless to prevent Jesus from exorcising demons (among other things), which is represented in the parable by the plundering of the house. In other words, Jesus did not derive His authority from the Devil but rather had received it from a higher and even stronger source - God Almighty.

Jesus was not working in cahoots with Satan. On the contrary, He was in combat against him. The demons were not dutifully obeying Jesus as one of their own wicked leaders, but rather were cowering before the intimidating authority their righteous enemy - the divine Son of God! Though they may seem strong compared to you and me, the Devil and his demons are powerless before Christ. Whenever we confront them in the mighty name of Jesus, Satan and his forces have no other choice but to flee.

CONCLUSION

As we wrap up the message today, I want to make an additional observation. Most Christians tend to picture Satan as an attacker because he constantly assaults people and tries to destroy their lives. But in this parable, it is Jesus who is raids the house taking the fight directly to Satan. Perhaps we as God children should follow the Lord's lead. The church is called to be on offense, beating back the gates of Hell.

God has granted Jesus with all authority over the heavens and the earth. He is all-powerful. Neither Satan nor his demons can stand withstand the unmatched strength of Jesus. He has the ability to bind the strong man and take that which He pleases. Perhaps right now you are captured in the Devil's evil clutches. If so, call upon the name of mighty name of Jesus, our powerful Savior, to come and set you free!

New Versus Old

Originally Preached - 7/30/2017

And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." - Luke 22:19-20

We are in the middle of a lengthy study called "The Parables of Jesus". Thus far we have examined 14 different parables. Some of these were fully developed and detailed stories told in several verses while others were expressed with a single statement. Regardless of their length or complexity, in each case the Jesus' parables presented earthly characters, items, and/or events to illustrate spiritual truths.

We began the series with 6 parables about God's Kingdom. These included the parables of the Sower, the Growing Seed, the Hidden Treasure, the Costly Pearl, the Mustard Seed, and the Leaven. With these examples, Jesus taught us how the Kingdom of God grows. He originally spread the seed of the gospel and now we are to do likewise. As we faithfully do so, God alone will take responsibility for His Kingdom's expansive growth. There is nothing greater, more beautiful, or as valuable as discovering the Kingdom of God personally.

Next, we covered 8 parables that dealt with various aspects of God's Character. These included the parables of the Good Shepherd, the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son, the Two Debtors, the Unforgiving Servant, the Good Samaritan, the Workers in the Vineyard, and the Strong Man. Jesus told these parables to illustrate certain virtues of God. He delights in the redemption of the lost and the restoration of the rebellious. He forgives the sinner's debt completely, and forgives the Christian as they forgive others. He shows neighborly love and compassion to the hurting soul and commands us to do the same. His gives salvation graciously to all who will receive Him and has overpowered Satan and His demons.

This morning we begin a third category of parables. The topic of these will be God's Covenant. A covenant is a binding agreement or contract made between 2 or more parties. In the Old Testament we discover that God actually initiated several covenants with differing individuals including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. In short, God promised to bless those who obeyed Him and curse those who disobeyed Him.

Over the centuries, the Jews misinterpreted these covenants by promoting a works-based religion. Strict obedience to the Law and adherence to God's commandments were viewed as the only means of salvation. This false idea was taught and reinforced for generations. By the time Jesus arrived on the scene most people believed that the only way to please God was through good works, and many were burdened by these rigorous requirements. But Jesus established a new and better covenant...

I. A QUESTION ABOUT FASTING - Matthew 9:14-15, Mark 2:18-20, Luke 5:33-35

This episode in the life of Jesus is described in all 3 synoptic Gospels. Early in His ministry, just after calling Matthew to be an apostle, the Lord was questioned on the issue of fasting. The Gospels suggest that this questioning may have taken place during a reception that Matthew held at his house for Jesus. There were numerous people at this banquet including many tax collectors, some Pharisees, possibly some followers of John the Baptist, and several others. Someone present at the dinner asked Jesus why His disciples did not fast like those of the Pharisees or John the Baptist.

Jesus answered with an analogy about a wedding. He stated that the attendants of bridegroom did not fast or mourn as long as the bridegroom was with them. Fasting was generally considered to be a somber practice, and was therefore was inappropriate in this setting. The attendants would fast only after the groom was taken away. Jesus identified Himself as the bridegroom and His disciples as the attendants. While He was with them physically on the earth, they were to celebrate His presence. It was a cause for great joy!

Beyond just the issue of fasting, there was a broader issue inherent within the question. Jesus was allowing His disciples to disregard certain Jewish customs and/or laws. Their blatant violation of these religious requirements made some angry, while sparking a curiosity in others. What was this new teaching that Jesus proclaimed? `

II. A NEW PATCH ON AN OLD GARMENT - Matthew 9:16, Mark 2:21, Luke 5:36

After answering the initial question on fasting, Jesus told 2 brief parables that both addressed the larger concern. Some Bible students combine this pair of illustrations and consider them together as a single parable. For the purposes of this study, we will separate them. The first of these is commonly known as "The Parable of a New Patch on an Old Garment".

Jesus stated that no one would use a new, unwashed piece of cloth to patch or repair an old garment. Because most clothes in Jesus' day were made of wool, this approach would be very unwise. The new patch would shrink when washed for the first time while the older garment would not, as it had already done so. This would cause the garment to tear.

With this parable, Jesus taught that His new teaching was not intended to fix or repair older Jewish rules and traditions. In other words, the message of Jesus was not merely a patch on the Law of Moses. The two were incompatible with each other. Any efforts to combine to the freedom found in the gospel with the obligations demanded by the Law would result in the ruin of both.

III. NEW WINE IN OLD WINESKINS - Matthew 9:17, Mark 2:22, Luke 5:37-39

Jesus followed up with a second parable to further illustrate His point. He said that no one would put new wine in an old wineskin. If they did, the old wineskin would swell and burst. Wineskins were airtight bags or sacks made of animal skins that were used to hold wine.

New wine was still in the fermenting process and would emit gases. These gases would cause the sealed wineskin container to expand or stretch. While new wineskins still had the necessary elasticity to do this, older wineskins would have already expanded to capacity. Any additional pressure would cause them to break, which would result in the contents spilling out and both wine and wineskin being ruined.

This parable reinforced the incompatibility of Jesus' new teachings with the older religious practices of the Jews. The gospel could not be contained by the Jewish rules and regulations, and the message of salvation could not be constricted within the Law of Moses. Jesus declared that salvation came wholly by the grace of God through faith in Him, and was not the result of human works. These 2 theological systems did not go together.

In Luke's gospel only, an additional statement is recorded and is worth mentioning. Jesus noted that those who were used to drinking old wine tended to be satisfied with it and had no desire for something new. They said that the old was 'good enough'. Jesus was explaining that His new message of salvation would be rejected by those who rigidly clung to the old religious teachings.

CONCLUSION

The New Covenant is based on grace, while the Old Covenant is based on works. Jesus explained elsewhere in the Gospels that He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. In other words, He did not come to dismantle the requirements of God's law but instead He perfectly kept them. In so doing, Jesus rendered the Law obsolete in that His perfect righteousness is applied to us whenever we accept Him as our Savior. We do not have to keep the Law because Jesus did so for us, and His obedience is credited to our account!

God knew from the very beginning that man could never fully obey the Law. Sin was unavoidable. Thus, a proper understanding of Scripture reveals that salvation has always come by grace through faith. Since the Fall of Adam, this was and is the only means by which salvation is affected. The Old Covenant was intended to show the futility and impossibility of attaining salvation through works, thereby pointing people to faith in God. The New Covenant shed even greater light on this truth, allowing many to see it for the first time.

God graciously offers salvation freely through the sacrificial atonement of Jesus Christ. You do not have to earn it through good works, nor could you ever do so. Have you accepted Jesus yet? If not, would you do so right now?

There's Still Time

Originally Preached - 8/6/2017

But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. - Revelation 2:20-22

This morning we continue our study through “The Parables of Jesus” with a short story that is called “The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree”. This is the third parable in the category of those relating to God’s Covenant. It is only recorded in the book of Luke.

The parables of the New Patch and the New Wine, which we discussed last week, contrasted the Old Covenant with the New Covenant by illustrating that salvation by works is completely incompatible with salvation by grace. These 2 examples dealt with the basis of God’s Covenant. Jesus taught that salvation comes only by the grace of God through faith in Christ, and that obedience to the Law is unable save anyone.

In today’s sermon, we will consider the parties of God’s Covenant. When you consider the Bible as a whole, almost the entire Old Testament details God’s relationship with the nation of Israel. Beginning in Genesis 12, God set apart a specific people to Himself through the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These descendants became known as the children of Israel, later called the Jews, and were the recipients of the Old Covenant.

When Jesus the Messiah came preaching salvation, He first delivered His message to the Jews. After all, they were God’s chosen people through whom He sought to reach the entire world. They had been entrusted with the Law of Moses centuries earlier and were now hearing the gospel of grace. Jesus had come declaring a new and better covenant, but would the children of Israel accept and abide by it?

By the time of Christ, Israel had already enjoyed the privilege of being God’s chosen nation for almost 2,000 years. But with the advent of the New Covenant, what would happen with the Jews? Would they retain their special place or was a change imminent?

I. UNLESS YOU REPENT - Luke 13:1-5

The setting of this passage is unclear, however the occasion is not. Apparently, as Jesus was travelling about preaching the gospel some people came to Him with a horrifying report. They told the Lord that the Roman governor Pilate had slaughtered several Galileans while they were in the process of offering their sacrifices. According to the ancient historian Josephus, Pilate had

given his soldiers the order to ambush and kill them while they were peacefully worshiping in the temple.

Upon hearing this news, Jesus asked the crowd if these men had suffered such a tragic end because they were worse sinners than other Galileans. It was common for the Jews to believe that bad things happened to bad people, and therefore these Galileans must have been terrible sinners. Without waiting for their answer, the Lord responded “No”. If they weren’t worse than anyone else, yet still met this awful misfortune, then such a catastrophe could happen to anyone...

Jesus then referred to a widely-known incident that had occurred in Jerusalem. Apparently the Tower of Siloam had fallen and 18 people were killed in the collapse. This tower was likely on the wall surrounding the city, somewhere near the Pool of Siloam in southern Jerusalem. It was probably named after the famous pool. The Pool of Siloam was originally built by King Hezekiah in order to provide water to the city, and had been restored by Herod the Great during the time of Jesus.

Jesus reminded the crowd of this recent tragedy and then asked if the people who’d died in this accident were worse sinners than the remaining citizens of Jerusalem. Again, the Lord answered for the people by saying “No”. They were no more sinful than anyone else, yet still were the victims of this shocking disaster. His point once again, it could happen to anyone...

Jesus was trying to get the people to understand that tragedy could strike anyone at any moment. Being a good person does not prevent bad things from happening to you. Therefore, rather than waiting and believing themselves to be safe, these people needed to repent of their sins and turn humbly to the LORD lest they themselves meet a similar fate.

II. CUT IT DOWN - Luke 13:6-7

It is helpful to remind ourselves that Jesus was a Jew and that He was speaking predominantly to Jews. He was urging them to repent, knowing that if they failed to do so there would be dire consequences. With this in mind, Jesus told a brief parable to illustrate His warning.

The parable began by introducing a man who’d planted a fig tree in his vineyard. He approached the tree looking to see if it had produced any fruit, but unfortunately it hadn’t. Upset, the man complained to his gardener that he’d been watching the tree for 3 full years and was waiting patiently for it to bear fruit. However, his patience had finally run out, so he ordered his gardener to cut the fruitless fig tree down because it was a waste of resources.

In this story the vineyard owner is God, the gardener is Jesus, and the fig tree is Israel. The imagery of a fig tree representing Israel is used often in Scripture - in both the New and Old Testaments. God had planted Israel, nurtured her, and expected her to produce fruit. Most recently, He had sent John the Baptist followed by Jesus Himself to the Jews both preaching a

message of repentance. For 3 full years the people of Israel had heard this proclamation, yet as a whole they had rejected it. God was fed up. It was time to cut Israel down and move on...

III. LET IT ALONE - Luke 13:8-9

Jesus continued with His parable. Having been told to chop the fig tree down, the gardener lovingly interceded. He pleaded with the vineyard owner to wait another year before destroying the fruitless tree. The gardener said he would dig around the tree and fertilize it so that it might produce, but then agreed that if the tree did not bear fruit by next year he'd cut it down.

We've already identified the characters in this story. God had determined to suspend His covenant with Israel, but Jesus urged Him to wait a bit longer. Jesus would continue to proclaim the gospel and lovingly serve the Jews for another year, during which perhaps they would accept Him and repent. If so, the New Covenant would continue between God and Israel in place of the Old Covenant. But should Israel continue to reject her Messiah, the fig tree would fall and the parties of the New Covenant would have to change.

CONCLUSION

Notice that this parable never comes to a conclusion. Jesus does not tell his listeners what happened a year later. The fate of the fig tree is left unspoken. However, by simply reading the rest of the Bible we learn that about a year later the Jews had Jesus arrested, condemned, and crucified. They never accepted Him as their Savior, and sadly never came to the place of genuine repentance. In keeping with the storyline of the parable, the barren fig tree was cut down. Due to their own betrayal, God's covenant relationship with Israel was suspended.

It should also be mentioned that this parable can be applied to the individual. All of us are called to repentance - regardless of our race, nationality, or background. Should we fail to repent, disaster is imminent. How much longer will God wait before cutting the fruitless sinner down? How much longer will Jesus make an appeal for them? Today is the day of salvation! If you have never turned from your sins and placed your faith in Jesus for salvation don't wait. Your time may be short!

A New Assignment

Originally Preached - 8/13/2017

"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts. - Malachi 3:1

We are in chapter 3 of our study titled "The Parables of Jesus". We began with parables about the Kingdom of God and then moved on to those about the Character of God. Now we are discussing those parables that focus upon the Covenant of God. This morning we will consider the fourth parable in this category which is known as "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen".

There are 2 prominent covenant relationships described in the Bible. The first of these is called the Old Covenant and is the main subject of the Old Testament. It was a covenant between God and the children of Israel. The basis of this covenant was the Law of Moses. If the Jews (collectively called Israel) faithfully obeyed the Law they'd be blessed, and if not they'd be cursed. The second covenant, or the New Covenant, is the main subject of the New Testament. It is a covenant between God and the Church, the collective name for all Christians. It is based upon grace. Those who place their faith in Jesus Christ will be saved, while those who reject Him will be condemned.

There are various perspectives regarding the relationship between Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament. These differing viewpoints have a significant impact on how one understands the Bible as a whole. As we continue our study of the parables that deal specifically with the Covenant of God, let's pause to briefly consider 3 common approaches to reconciling God's relationship with Israel versus His relationship with the Church.

The first approach is called Replacement Theology. It advocates that the Church has completely and permanently replaced Israel as the chosen people of God. According to this view, all of the promises that God made to Israel as a part of the Old Covenant have either already been fulfilled or are no longer valid. The Body of Christ, made up of all Christians, which is also called the Church, has taken Israel's place. The Old Covenant is obsolete, the people of ethnic Israel have no role in future events.

The second approach is called Covenant Theology. It teaches that the Church has always existed per se, but consisted primarily of Israel during the Old Testament. After Pentecost the Church formally expanded to include Gentiles from all nations, but it still didn't exclude faithful Jews. In short, all believers - including those from ethnic Israel - who embrace the terms of the New Covenant make up the Church. Thus, any unfulfilled Old Covenant promises that God made to Israel are still valid and are now transferred to the Church of which the true Israel is an important part.

The third approach is called Dispensational Theology. It suggests that the Church has temporarily replaced Israel as the chosen people of God, but that at some future point Israel will resume its rightful place. During the Millennium, God will reestablish Israel as the ruling nation of the world. From Jerusalem Jesus will reign over the earth as King, and all of God's Old Covenant promises to ethnic Israel will be fulfilled. God's covenant relationship with Israel has been suspended for a time during the Church Age, but it will be renewed someday.

As your pastor, I consider myself to be a Covenantal Dispensationalist. In other words, I believe in a combination of both Covenant and Dispensational Theology. I see a great continuity between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church, and though there are clearly some distinctions, I do not divide them as sharply or distinctly from one another as many others do. At the same time, I also believe in a literal Millennium in which God's promises to both Israel and the Church will be fulfilled. This perspective greatly influences the way I interpret the Bible and, in particular, today's parable...

I. THE MISTREATED SLAVES - Matthew 21:33-36; Mark 12:1-5; Luke 20:9-12

This parable is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There are only slight variations between each rendering. In all 3 places, the story is told during the last week of Jesus' life while He was teaching in the temple at Jerusalem. Among the throngs of people present to hear Him were the Pharisees and chief priests who longed to see Jesus arrested and crucified. They represented religious Israel, and the story was directed at them.

Jesus opened the parable by describing a man who'd planted a vineyard then built a wall, vat, and tower for it. After fully preparing it, the man rented the vineyard out to tenant farmers to tend it while he was gone. When harvest time came, the man sent a slave to collect his portion of the produce. The tenant farmers beat the slave and sent him away with nothing. So the vineyard owner sent another slave, who was also beaten and mistreated. The man sent more slaves, but they continued to be beaten or killed each time.

In this parable, the vineyard owner represented God. The tenant farmers represented Israel as a whole - those who had been entrusted to keep the LORD's vineyard. The slaves represented the many Old Testament prophets - those who God had sent periodically to address His chosen people. Just as in the parable, historically the Jews rejected the message of God through His prophets and their calls for the nation's repentance. Instead, the children of Israel often rebuked the prophets and on occasion even physically harmed them.

II. THE MURDERED SON - Matthew 21:37-39; Mark 12:6-8; Luke 20:13-15a

Jesus continued the parable by building to a climactic moment. Finally, the frustrated vineyard owner decided to send his son to collect his share of the produce. He reasoned that, despite their repeated mistreatment of his slaves, surely they would respect his son. But when the son arrived, the tenant farmers conspired together and killed him also.

Obviously, Jesus was the son in the parable, the only begotten of His Father. Over the centuries God had sent numerous prophets to His covenant people, but in the fullness of time He finally sent His son Jesus - the promised Messiah. But just as they had done previously, again the Jews had rejected the one whom God had sent. In just a few short days after He told this parable, the Jews would have Jesus arrested, beaten, and killed also...

III. THE MODIFIED ARRANGEMENT - Matthew 21:40-41,43; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:15b-16a

After finishing the story, Jesus asked His listeners what the vineyard owner should do. After all, his tenant farmers had mistreated several of his slaves and even murdered his beloved son. Without waiting for their answer, Jesus concluded that the man would destroy the current tenants and then rent his vineyard out to others. He reinforced this statement by referring to a familiar passage in Psalm 118:22-23.

The chief priests and Pharisees clearly understood the reference and knew that Jesus was talking pointedly about them. God planned to expel Israel from its special place and to institute the New Covenant with the Church instead. All Christians, saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, would be entrusted as the new keepers of God's vineyard. The Church would formally take up the role that Israel had once played.

I don't believe that God is through with the nation of Israel yet, but I do believe that the parties of the New Covenant differ from those of the Old. That is the primary meaning of this parable.

CONCLUSION

In the Old Testament God called the geographical nation-state of Israel to be His chosen people through whom He sought to draw the entire world unto Himself. Ultimately, they failed to accomplish this purpose. In the New Testament, God formally established the Church and reassigned the task of worldwide evangelism to it. The Church is not comprised of a single nation, state, or ethnicity, but rather is made up of all believers. We as Christians now have the responsibility of reaching the world with the life-saving message of Jesus.

Improperly Dressed

Originally Preached - 8/20/2017

But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles." - Acts 13:45-46

I have had many great teachers over the years and have benefited tremendously from their knowledge and expertise. However, I have found none better than Jesus. His ability to teach deep spiritual truths to ordinary people like me is unparalleled. The Lord's simple, easy to understand stories and illustrations, have opened my eyes to things I simply didn't see before. I hope that you are experiencing this same type of glorious illumination!

Today we will cover the 19th parable in our current sermon series titled "The Parables of Jesus". It is recorded in both Matthew and Luke, but the occasions and renditions of the story are notably different between these 2 accounts. As with some of His other parables, it appears that Jesus shared this story more than once during His travels and altered the details as appropriate each time. Because of the variation, this parable is routinely called either "The Parable of the Great Banquet" or "The Parable of the Wedding Feast" depending upon which version is read.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem and has stopped to dine at the home of a Pharisee on the Sabbath day. While He is there, He heals a man who is afflicted with dropsy. Dropsy is a serious condition in which the body retains fluids resulting in significant and uncomfortable swelling. After healing and dismissing the man, Jesus tells a few parables to those at the dinner including "The Parable of the Great Banquet".

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus is preaching in the temple during the final week of His life. Immediately after telling "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen" which we studied last week He follows with "The Parable of the Wedding Feast". On this occasion, His recitation of the story is slightly longer, depicts a wedding specifically, and includes some additional elements not found in Luke. Despite the disparity, this is in essence the same story in both places.

There are a couple of reasons why I think it's better to identify today's story as "The Parable of the Great Banquet". First, there is another parable also called "The Parable of the Wedding Feast" that we'll discuss in an upcoming sermon. Rather than being confused by 2 stories with the same title, let's use different names. Second, while a wedding feast is always a type of banquet not all all types banquets are wedding feasts. In other words, "The Parable of the Great Banquet" is an appropriate title for both versions of the story.

Today's story is the last of the Covenant Parables. It's major emphasis is again on the transition from Israel to the Church as the secondary party of God's covenant. Let's begin...

I. UNWILLING GUESTS - Matthew 22:1-6; Luke 14:16-21a

This story begins with a man (or king) who is planning to hold a large banquet (or a wedding feast for his son). In preparation for the event, he sends out numerous invitations to those who wish to attend. As the day of the dinner approaches, the nobleman sends out his slaves to determine how many of those invited are actually planning to come. To his great dismay, all of them offer excuses saying that they are not coming. In some extreme cases, those who'd been invited even mistreat and kill the nobleman's slaves.

In this parable, the nobleman or king represents God. The slaves represent God's faithful followers and messengers. These are the true believers, such as the prophets, who carry the LORD's invitation of salvation. Those who have been invited represent Israel as a whole, God's chosen people to whom He'd initially revealed Himself. This portion of the story figuratively illustrates Israel's widespread rejection of the gospel and their general refusal to accept the LORD's gracious invitation to Heaven.

II. UNDESIRABLE GUESTS - Matthew 22:7-10; Luke 14:21b-24

Upon hearing that none of his original invitees are coming, the nobleman becomes angry - particularly with those who'd murdered his slaves. In response the man sends his armies to destroy them. Furthermore, he labels these ingrates as unworthy and sends his remaining slaves out into the highways to invite others. This time the invitation is open to all who hear it including those who are generally considered by society to be undesirable, whether they are bad or good. Before long, the wedding hall is full of guests!

The recipients of the nobleman's second invitation are the Gentiles. After the Jews rejected Jesus and His message, God formally extended the gospel to the Gentiles. We see this change played out vividly in the book of Acts as we read about the spread of the early church from Jerusalem and Judea into Samaria, Africa, Asia Minor, Europe, and beyond. The Church does not exclude those Jews who accept Jesus as the Messiah, but it certainly includes Christians of all other nationalities worldwide.

It is important to realize that God offered salvation to Gentiles in the Old Testament as well. The story of Jonah is perhaps the premiere example, though not the only one. God spared the entire city of Nineveh - all Gentiles - after they heard Jonah's warning and repented of their sinfulness. God has always sought the salvation of Gentiles. Under the terms of the Old Covenant the Jews were called to carry this message to Gentiles. By and large, they didn't do this but rather looked down upon Gentiles with disdain and contempt.

III. UNWELCOME GUESTS - Matthew 22:11-14

This final portion of the story is told in Matthew's gospel but not in Luke's. It goes as follows...

The wedding hall is now full of people, so the king comes to inspect his guests. Among the crowd he notices a man not wearing the required wedding garment. The king confronts this man and he is left speechless. The king instructs his servants to bind the improperly dressed man and to throw him out. He is not welcome at the wedding feast.

To understand this part of the parable, it is important to know that special wedding garments were often provided to guests during Jewish marriage banquets. Choosing not to wear them would be considered extremely disrespectful and highly inappropriate. Apparently, the man in this parable thought his own clothing was acceptable so he did not put on the garments he'd been given. Though he had been invited to attend, the man was not permitted to stay because he was improperly dressed.

God has made an appeal through Christ to all people urging them to repent and be saved. No one is excluded from this universal invitation. However, there is only one way to receive acceptance from the king. We must be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. If we attempt to enter Heaven dressed in our own self-righteousness, we will not be permitted in. Salvation by grace through faith in Christ is the only way.

CONCLUSION

In Matthew's recording of this parable Jesus concludes by saying, "Many are called but few are chosen." His story clearly explains that both Jews and Gentiles have heard the calling of God. An untold multitude of people over the centuries have heard the LORD's invitation to salvation. Unfortunately most have rejected it outright and others have responded to it inappropriately. Of the many who've been called, only a smaller few have rightly received it and been accepted or chosen by God.

By rejecting Jesus, the Jews effectively declined God's invitation. As such, the Gentiles became the primary recipients of the gospel message. Under the Old Covenant of the law, God's people (Israel) consisted of mostly Jews with a few Gentiles. Under the New Covenant of grace, God's people (the Church) are mostly Gentiles with a few Jews. Either way, the righteousness of Christ is the only covering by which anyone is or ever has been saved!

Signs of the Times

Originally Preached - 8/27/2017

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. - 2 Timothy 3:1

We are now halfway through our extensive series of messages on “The Parables of Jesus”. In today’s sermon we will consider the 20th of the 40 parables on our long list. It is a brief illustration known as “The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree”. It is recorded almost word-for-word in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. After teaching in the temple all day long, Jesus and the disciples departed to the Mount of Olives for some privacy. That evening, just a few days before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus told them this brief but chilling parable.

“The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree” is the first of a new category of parables that deal with the end times. There are 7 parables altogether in this group, and we will discuss each of them over the course of the next month. Collectively, these stories teach us the importance of being watchful and ready for Christ’s return while warning us of the judgement that will follow during the last days. We will call this portion of our series “His Coming”.

The first set of parables that we studied focused on “His Kingdom” and illustrated the manner, value, and size of the Kingdom of God. The second set of parables highlighted “His Character” and described several of the LORD’s characteristics such as His love, grace, forgiveness, power, and delight in the redeemed. The third set of parables dealt with “His Covenant” and pictured the contrast between the God’s Old Covenant with Israel and His New Covenant with the Church. Now we are beginning the fourth set of parables that relate to “His Coming” during the final days of the earth.

People have always been fascinated and intrigued by stories about the end times. There seems to be an innate human curiosity about this topic. For this reason, I suspect that the parables we’ll study over the next few weeks will be of particular interest to many of you - just as they were to Jesus’ followers centuries ago.

I. KNOW THE SIGNS - Matthew 24:3-31; Mark 13:3-27; Luke 21:7-28

There are many warning signs given throughout Scripture which indicate that the end is near. Some are rather vague while others are more specific. Jesus mentions a few of them just prior to telling “The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree”. Let’s touch on 5 general signs that the Lord lists during His conversation with the disciples on the Mount of Olives.

As the last days approach, there will be an increase in the number of false prophets claiming to be Christ. They will deceive many with their empty theology and flattering speech. Multitudes of well-meaning and good-hearted people will be led astray by these charlatans who profess a

form of godliness while denying its power. The church will gradually weaken as it is infiltrated by more and more of these teachers.

Outside the Church wickedness and lawlessness among people will grow. Sin will be pervasive; its immoral effects will taint and poison every aspect of society. There will be intense persecution of Christians. As the world's hatred grows, authorities will seek to silence believers. If and when that fails, thousands will be martyred for their faith. Despite this heavy oppression, the gospel will go forth to all the earth.

The relationship between nations will continue to deteriorate. There will be ongoing and widespread war and rebellion. Thousands of soldiers and civilians will die as a result of the fierce conflict. Tensions will be high, accompanied by constant threats and accusations. Diplomacy will fail as tempers flare. Peace will be hard to come by and turmoil will run rampant.

The frequency and severity of natural disasters will rise - such as violent earthquakes, devastating famine, and unrelenting pestilence. Other catastrophes including hurricanes, typhoons, tidal waves, flash floods, landslides, wildfires, volcanic eruptions, and tornadoes will kill thousands. Infectious epidemics will spread around the globe while others will die of thirst and starvation.

There will also be signs observable in the heavens. The sun will be darkened, such as in the case of a solar eclipse. The moon will appear as blood, otherwise known as a blood moon. Stars will fall from the heavens, perhaps a reference to shooting stars, meteors, or comets. All of these celestial events will mark the final days.

II. RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS - Matthew 24:32-33; Mark 13:28-29; Luke 21:29-31

After naming some of the signs, Jesus told a simple, illustrative parable about a fig tree whose branch had become tender and whose leaves were beginning to sprout. These are the characteristics of a plant in the springtime, after the long, cold winter has ended. They indicate that summer is drawing near. In the same way, the visible and recognizable signs that Jesus mentioned earlier signal the closeness of Jesus' return.

As we learned in a previous message, a fig tree is often used in the Bible to represent Israel. This being the case, what happens in, around, and to Israel is of particular importance to the careful observer. This tiny nation is certainly the focal point for end times warnings. While all 3 gospels point specifically to the fig tree, Luke also encourages us to look at "all the trees". In other words, cautionary signs can be seen in and among all countries, but there is a special emphasis on Israel.

III. HEED THE SIGNS - Matthew 24:34-35; Mark 13:30-31; Luke 21:32-33

Bible prophecies often have multiple fulfillments. They point to both an imminent event and a parallel yet much more distant event. By successfully predicting something in their own lifetime or that of their listeners, a prophet's message is validated. In other words, because they were right in the near term we can trust their warnings over the long term. The destruction that Jesus spoke of on this occasion was and is such a prophecy - it has a dual fulfillment.

Jesus stated that "this generation would not pass away" before seeing the end come. He was referring first to the fall of Jerusalem and the demolition of the temple. This occurred in A.D. 70 when the Roman army led by Titus ransacked the city. Many who were alive at the time of Jesus's original statement were still living then. The second and parallel fulfillment will come when Jesus returns. This will be followed by judgment and destruction of the entire earth. The generation of the Church, which started with the apostles, will not pass away until then.

Ultimately, both the old heavens and earth will pass away and be replaced with a new heavens and earth. We read about this in the final chapters of Revelation. Though these things will change, the Word of God - including the accuracy of Jesus' prophecy - will remain both constant and accurate.

CONCLUSION

"The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree" figuratively teaches that there are clear signs which indicate that the coming of Christ and subsequent tribulation is drawing near. While some of these are a bit scary, we should not fear. Also, we should remember that these signs are only the beginning of the birth pangs. They do not point to an exact moment or day, but rather reflect a season of nearness. We should not panic or try to set certain dates - as no one knows the day or hour - but rather should simply be aware of the warning signs all around us which reveal that the end is getting closer.

Be Ready

Originally Preached - 9/3/2017

So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. - Revelation 3:3

Last Sunday we began discussing the collection of Jesus' parables that focus upon the end times. The first of these was called "The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree". In it, Jesus indicated that there were recognizable signs that would precede His second coming. He advised His followers to be aware of these warnings, yet not fearful of them.

This morning we will consider 2 more end times parables that both deal with the same topic. Jesus will return at a time we don't expect, and therefore we should always be ready for His arrival. While there will be many signs and indications that appear before He comes, ultimately what will Jesus find us doing when He actually returns? Will we be waiting expectantly or caught unaware?

Those who don't believe in Jesus or don't understand the Bible's teachings on the end times will be shocked and totally surprised by the Lord's return. They will be startled and woefully unprepared for it. As for Christians, while we don't know exactly when He will arrive, we should be expecting Him to return at any moment and should not be surprised when it happens. Unfortunately, many of us are not watching or paying close attention...

I. STAY ALERT - Mark 13:34-37; Luke 12:35-38

"The Parable of the Watchful Slaves" is recorded in both Mark and Luke. In Mark's gospel Jesus shared this story with His disciples on the Mount of Olives as a follow-up to "The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree", which we studied last week. This would have been near the end of His earthly ministry, just a few days before the crucifixion. In Luke's gospel, however, Jesus told the story to large crowds of people sometime during His earlier travels from village to village. Differences in the setting and minor details of the parable again suggest that Jesus told variants this story on multiple occasions.

The basic elements of "The Parable of the Watchful Slaves" remain unchanged in each rendition of the story. A master has left his home - perhaps to attend a wedding feast - and put his slaves or servants in charge during his absence. Apparently, he intends to return sometime at night, but the exact time is uncertain. Thus, his slaves are advised to be alert and ready - particularly the doorkeeper - so that when their master arrives they will be found doing what they've been tasked to do. The master will graciously reward those slaves whom he finds faithful at his return.

The master in this parable represents Jesus and the slaves are Christians - those who've been born again. While Jesus abides within Christians spiritually through the person of the Holy Spirit, physically He currently sits at the right hand of God the Father in Heaven. However, Jesus has promised to physically come again to the earth for his children. We don't know exactly when He is coming, but we fully expect it to happen soon. While He is gone, we as believers have been called to faithfully obey and serve Him in numerous ways. If we heed His words, when the Lord returns we will be found ready.

II. BE ON GUARD - Matthew 24:42-44; Luke 12:39-40

"The Parable of the Indifferent Homeowner" is found in both Matthew and Luke. Matthew places this story during the same conversation as "The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree" which, as previously indicated, was spoken to the disciples on the Mount of Olives. Luke records it immediately following "The Parable of the Watchful Slaves", which we just described above. The parable is relatively short, and is told quite similarly in both locations.

Jesus describes a homeowner who has inadvertently allowed his house to be broken into, specifically because He was not on guard. Had he been watching out and aware that the thief was coming, this negligent homeowner would have been prepared to protect his property. But being caught unaware, he was burglarized and suffered loss.

In this illustration the homeowner represents all people while the thief, interestingly enough, is Jesus. Many people are completely oblivious to the impending return of Christ, and have - figuratively speaking - left their houses exposed and unguarded. Their souls have not been redeemed and secured by the saving power of Jesus. Others have knowingly and willfully rejected the Lord's warning. All of these non-believers are currently in grave danger and will endure great loss should Jesus come, because they are not adequately prepared. We must be constantly on guard!

III. NO EXCUSES

Though both of these parables urge us to be ready for the Lord's return, they approach the subject from differing perspectives. "The Parable of the Watchful Slaves" describes servants who have been put on notice and told to be alert by their master. They, therefore, have no excuse for inattentiveness. They have been adequately warned to expect his return. This parable then describes how the watchful believers will be blessed by the Jesus when He returns. It is a wonderfully positive message.

On the other hand, "The Parable of the Indifferent Homeowner" describes people who do not expect to be robbed. As such, they are not on guard. While one might argue that their ignorance is an adequate excuse for their unpreparedness, ultimately it will not prevent catastrophe when the thief comes. This parable speaks of the calamity that awaits those who aren't ready for the Lord's second coming. It views the Lord's imminent return from a negative vantage point.

I can recall being pulled over for speeding not long ago on the outskirts of a nearby town. The police officer asked me if I knew what the posted speed limit was in that area, to which I replied "No". I had not seen the sign, so I didn't know. That said, I was still speeding and still got a \$100 ticket. My ignorance did not excuse my behavior or dismiss the punishment that followed. As a matter of fact, my naivete and lack of awareness was the real reason why I got the ticket. In the same way, ignorance of the Lord's return is not an acceptable excuse.

CONCLUSION

Jesus' return is certain, but the exact moment is unknown and unpredictable. Therefore, we must always be ready for it. But what does such readiness entail? How are we to prepare for His second coming so that we will be found faithful?

First and foremost, we must accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We must repent of our sin and accept the forgiveness found in Christ. This is the starting point of a life-long relationship with Him. After we have been saved, we should commit our lives to serving Him every day. By studying His word carefully, we can become more familiar with the Lord's commandments and learn how to love and obey God as He desires. In this way, we can live in a godly manner and be prepared for Jesus' appearance.

So... are you ready?

Reward & Punishment

Originally Preached - 9/10/2017

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. - Revelation 22:12

Over the past several months we have been studying “The Parables of Jesus”. These parables have focused on an array of topics, which we have categorized thus far into chapters called “His Kingdom”, “His Character”, and “His Covenant”. We are currently in chapter 4 of this series which includes parables about “His Coming”.

The second coming of Jesus Christ is a major tenet of the Christian faith. While there various denominational and individual views regarding the particular details, it is almost universally accepted among Christians that Jesus is indeed coming again physically to the earth at some future point. To this end, the Bible names several warning signs that will precede His return and urges believers to be ever watchful and ready for it.

Though Christ’s arrival is both immanent and certain, the exact timing of it is unknown. Had God made known to us specifically when Jesus was coming back, there would be no ongoing incentive for Christians to live expectantly. The unpredictability of His return should be a major cause for us to walk obediently and righteously every moment. In part because the Lord has patiently tarried, many born-again Christians have “fallen asleep” and disregard the very real possibility that Jesus could come at any moment.

In today’s message we will study a pair of parables that address differing outcomes for professing Christians following the Lord’s arrival. What will be the fate of those who are found ready? What will be the fate of those who are found unprepared? Great questions... let’s see if we can discover the answers.

I. BE OBEDIENT - Matthew 24:45-51; Luke 12:41-48

“The Parable of the Faithful Servant” is very similar to “The Parable of the Watchful Slaves”. They may have began as a single story, that ultimately evolved into 2 distinct stories. Some theologians consider them to be parts of the same parable, while others see them as separate. Mark seems to combine them both into a single abbreviated form while Luke seems to tell one as the continuation of the other. Matthew, however, clearly tells “The Parable of the Faithful Servant” apart from and without details from “The Parable of Watchful Slaves”. Therefore, I consider them to be alike, but distinct.

“The Parable of the Faithful Servant” describes a master who has set a slave over his household to distribute food at the proper times while he is gone. If the master returns to find the slave doing what he was told to do, then the slave will be blessed. The master will put the

faithful servant in charge of his possessions. On the other hand, if the returning master finds the slave acting wickedly and disobediently he will punish him. The unfaithful servant will be assigned to an awful place along with the unfaithful and hypocrites.

In this parable the master is Jesus and His servant is a professing Christian. The faithful servant is one that the Lord finds ready and obediently serving at His return. The reward for such a servant will be great. The unfaithful servant is one that the Lord finds acting sinfully and recklessly at His return. The punishment for such a servant will be severe. The description used is that of Hell itself. Pretty straightforward, isn't it?

II. BE WISE - Matthew 25:1-13

“The Parable of the 10 Virgins” is found only in the book of Matthew. It is yet another selection from a long sequence of end times parables that Jesus spoke to His disciples while on the Mt. of Olives near the end of His life. Earlier in this series, we pointed out that Jesus sometimes told parables that had a particular feminine appeal to accompany those that appealed more expressly to men. The inclusion of this parable in His discourse suggests that there were likely some women among the disciples with Jesus that night.

The story describes 10 virgins, or bridesmaids, who went out at night to wait for the bridegroom. Each of them took a lamp, but only 5 took extra oil for use in the event that they needed it. As they waited, the bridesmaids fell asleep and their lamps faded. At midnight, the groom arrived and called for them to come out. By this time all of the lamps were almost extinguished, so the 5 wise virgins refilled their lamps while the 5 foolish virgins asked to borrow some oil. The wise virgins did not have enough to spare, so the foolish virgins had to go buy more. While they were gone, the groom and the 5 wise bridesmaids went on to the wedding feast. When the 5 foolish bridesmaids arrived later, the door had already been shut and they were not permitted to enter.

In this parable, Jesus is the groom who is coming for His bride. The bridesmaids, or virgins, are professing Christians. Those who are prepared when He comes, as symbolized by the 5 wise virgins with lit lamps, will return with Him to the Heavenly feast. But those who are unprepared, as symbolized by the 5 foolish virgins, will miss their opportunity and not be given a second chance. We must be ready when Jesus comes, because we will not be given any additional time to get ready thereafter.

III. BE REAL

Both of these parables contrast the consequences that will befall those who are found ready and those who are not when Jesus comes again. Both parables are addressed to professing Christians - those who have been adequately warned that Jesus is coming again. The servant knew that the master was returning and the bridesmaids knew that the groom was coming. They all should have been ready! Sadly, both parables suggest that some of these professing Christians will be excluded from entrance into heaven and instead be condemned to Hell.

There is a big difference between a professing Christian and an actual Christian. Jesus clearly describes people who claim to be saved when in fact, they aren't. They are charlatans - wolves in sheep's clothing - who appear to be righteous externally but are, in fact, unrighteous internally. They may pose as servants and bridesmaids, but ultimately they have no true allegiance to either the master or the bridegroom. If they did, they'd be much more concerned about His coming than they are.

CONCLUSION

Before we finish, let me go back for just a moment. In Luke's account, Jesus ends his rendition of "The Parable of the Faithful Servant" by stating that the professing Christian who does not prepare for the Lord's coming will be 'beaten with many stripes" while the lost person who neither knew of it or prepared for it will be "beaten with fewer stripes". This seemingly indicates differing degrees of punishment for these 2 types of sinners - those who knew and those who did not. We discussed possibility this during our "Heaven and Hell" series earlier this year.

Furthermore Jesus also says that much will be required of those who have been given much, and much will be expected of those who have been entrusted with much. He is teaching that along with privileged responsibility comes increased accountability. We as Christians will be judged more severely if we choose to neglect that which God has revealed expressly to us. We are privy to glorious truths that the world around us doesn't know. How horrible would it be for us to disregard such a precious revelation?

Judgment Day

9/17/2017

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. - 2 Corinthians 5:10

Over the past month we have been discussing parables that deal with the end times. These parables have taught us several important lessons. We have learned to watch for signs that will precede the Lord's second coming. We have been urged to live expectantly and always be ready because Jesus could appear at any moment. We've been warned not to slumber as we patiently await His return and have been told that there will be no second chances to prepare after His arrival.

Today's message covers the last two end times parables that we'll mention in this series. Both of them deal generally with the judgment that will follow the Lord's return. The Bible actually speaks of multiple judgments during the last days, including the Bema Seat Judgment of the righteous and the Great White Throne Judgment of the unrighteous. A third judgment, often referred to as the "Sheep and Goats Judgment", is also described in Matthew 25. All of these judgments will take place during the end times.

Many Bible students consider the "Sheep and Goats" passage to be a parable. You will find it included on most listings of Jesus' parables. For that reason, I felt it necessary to briefly explain why I am not including it in this series. While I believe that the "sheep and goats" narrative has some parable-like elements, I would argue that it is not a true parable. I believe that the passage is extensively and directly describing a literal heavenly event, and is not representative to the degree of an actual parable. A comparison is made, but it does not constitute a parable in my view.

That said, "The Parable of the Tares" and "The Parable of the Dragnet" are definitely parables. They are both found in Matthew 13. They are part of a lengthy discourse of parables that Jesus tells in this chapter - 8 stories in all, many of which we've already talked about in this series. While the details of the 2 parables are quite different, they both have a similar meaning.

I. WEEDS IN THE FIELD - Matthew 13:24-30

"The Parable of the Tares" is about a farmer planted his field with good wheat seeds. However, while he and his laborers slept, the farmer's adversary came along and scattered bad seeds among the good. Over time the wheat began to grow and bear grain, but the tares (weeds) grew up alongside it. The farmer's slaves asked how the tares got there, and the farmer answered them that his enemy must have been responsible. The slaves then asked if they should go through the field and pull the tares up, but the farmer said to leave them there for the time being.

Uprooting the tares might damage the good wheat. He explained that the reapers would gather and burn the tares at harvest time, thereby separating them from the wheat.

The tares that Jesus described in this parable are believed to be a weed called darnel. Darnel looks like wheat until the point of maturity. In the past darnel was a serious problem for wheat farmers. Modern advances in agriculture have helped, but these improvements weren't around in Biblical times. Because of their similar appearance, farmers could not easily recognize or distinguish wheat from darnel until adulthood. By then, there was little the farmer could do to remove the weeds without harming his crop. Thus, he often ended up with a field that contained a mixture of good wheat and undesirable darnel weeds that would grow together side-by-side to be separated at harvest time.

II. AN EXPLANATION GIVEN - Matthew 13:36-43

After sharing this and other parables with the crowds outdoors, Jesus and the disciples went inside. While in the house, the disciples asked Jesus to explain "The Parable of the Tares". Jesus identified the sower of the good seeds as The Son of Man, the enemy as The Devil, the field as the world, the wheat as the children of God, the tares as the sons of the evil one, and the reapers as angels. Jesus explained that during the last days there will be a final judgment, depicted as the harvest, during which the angels will gather the unrighteous and cast them into Hell while leaving the righteous to remain in God's Heavenly kingdom.

It is important not to misinterpret this story. Jesus made it clear in His explanation that this parable is about the judgment. It reveals the Lord's patience to withhold His wrath on the unrighteous for the sake of the righteous until judgment day. It is not intended to teach that some people are created as wheat and others as weeds. In fact, the Bible teaches that we are all sinners and can only find salvation and forgiveness in Christ. In terms of this parable, we are all weeds and can only become wheat through a saving relationship with Jesus. The planting of separate wheat and tares in the beginning of this parable is necessary to set up the proper ending, but it is not an adequate basis to conclude that some people are created specifically for condemnation to Hell. Such an idea is Biblically inaccurate and is not the point of this parable.

III. THROW AWAY BAD FISH - Matthew 13:47-50

"The Parable of the Dragnet" tells of fisherman who had cast a dragnet into the sea. Fish of various kinds were caught in the net. When it was full, they drew the net up and dragged it onto the beach. There they sat down and began to separate the good fish from the bad. The good fish were placed in containers to be kept and sold, while the bad fish were thrown away.

Jesus provided an explanation of this parable immediately after telling it. His explanation was practically identical to the one we just discussed. He associated the bad fish with the wicked and concluded that they would be separated from the righteous during the judgment and would

be cast into the fiery furnace of Hell. On the other hand, the good fish - who represented the redeemed children of God - would be spared.

CONCLUSION

Because "The Parable of the Tares" and "The Parable of the Dragnet" both vividly describe a separation of the righteous from the unrighteous I believe these 2 stories must depict the Sheep and Goats Judgment in which Jesus places believers on His right and unbelievers on His left. This is the only judgment discussed in Scripture in which both the saved and unsaved are dealt with at the same time. I believe it will occur when Jesus comes physically to the earth following the tribulation and sets up His earthly millennial kingdom.

Judgment day is coming. The Bible is clear that someday everyone will stand individually before Jesus to be judged. Some will be declared righteous and receive eternal life in Heaven. Others will be declared unrighteous and will be consigned to eternal Hell. As uncomfortable as this may sound to the world today, it is the plain unadulterated teaching of Scripture. There are only 2 possible outcomes - life or death.

Knowing this, we as Christians are compelled to share the gospel of Jesus with lost people. He is the only way for anyone to be made righteous. Salvation through Christ is the only thing that can forgive and atone for sin. Apart from Him we are all bad fish trapped in a dragnet and unwanted weeds growing in the field. Jesus is our only hope. Give your life to Him now, before it is too late!

Use It or Lose It

Originally Preached - 9/24/2017

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. - 1 Peter 4:10

Good morning. Our study through “The Parables of Jesus” continues today as we examine “The Parable of the Talents”. This story is also commonly referred to as “The Parable of the Minas”. It is the 27th parable in this series and is the first of a new category of parables titled “His Children”. This section includes stories and illustrations that describe specific behaviors or attitudes that we as God’s children should practice or possess.

Variations of this parable are found in Matthew and Luke. There are notable distinctions between these renditions of the story, but the primary message is the same in both. As we’ve seen several times throughout this series, Jesus often told the same basic parable in modified forms as appropriate for the particular setting or audience He was speaking to at the time. This is certainly the case with “The Parable of the Talents”.

Before delving into the major point of this story, let’s briefly consider a secondary lesson found especially in Luke’s version (verses 12,14-15a, 27). Generally speaking, the parable tells of a man who has gone on a journey and left his slaves in charge until he gets back. Luke further describes him as a nobleman who is leaving specifically to be crowned king, so that when he returns he will actually reign over the entire kingdom. Luke also mentions many citizens who do not want him to be their ruler and explains that when this newly crowned king returns these enemies will be destroyed. This portion of Luke’s presentation depicts the judgment of rebellious sinners following the return of Christ as King and fits more aptly into the end times chapter of parables which we’ve discussed over the last month.

The main teaching of this parable, however, is not about the man’s (or king’s) return or subsequent judgment but rather is about the actions of his servants while he is gone. The primary focus is on how God’s children should live their lives now, as they seek to serve the LORD each day.

I. GOD ENTRUSTS US - Matthew 25:14-18; Luke 19:12-13

As stated in the introduction, “The Parable of the Talents” is recorded in both Matthew and Luke. In Matthew, Jesus tells the story while speaking to His disciples on the Mount of Olives just a few days before His arrest. In Luke, the story is told to a crowd of followers as Jesus travels from Jericho toward Jerusalem for the Passover. We will try to observe slight differences between these renderings as we consider this parable.

The story opens with a man leaving home on a journey. He leaves his servants in charge while he is gone. Before his departure, the man gives each of his servants some money (measured in talents or minas) and instructs them to do business with it while he is away. He gives some servants differing amounts and others the exact same same amount (depending upon which version of the parable you read). In either case, the master entrusts his slaves with some portion of his money.

In this parable, the nobleman is Jesus and the servants are His followers. The LORD has entrusted to each of us certain gifts, talents, resources, and blessings. These were not given for our benefit necessarily, but rather for His glory. We as Christians have been commanded to use these gifts accordingly.

Not all of us have been entrusted with the same measure or degree of giftedness. Some have been called to more grandiose settings, given greater resources, and provided with greater influence. This disparity should not be a cause of jealousy or contention among believers, but sadly it often is. Rather, each one should be content with the portion that God has entrusted to them and not envious of other servants who may have been given more.

II. GOD EXPECTS US - Matthew 25:19-27; Luke 19:15-23

After having been gone for some time, the man returns home. One by one he calls his slaves before him to give an account of what they did with their master's money while he was away. All of the good slaves have increased their original amount, some 10-fold, others 5-fold, and others doubled the money (depending upon which version of the parable you read). Though there were differing outcomes, the main point is that each good servant obeyed the master's charge by using the money they'd been given to make a profit.

One of the servants - the bad servant - hid his money for fear that it would be lost. He did not make any effort at all to increase the amount and instead intended to return to the master exactly that which had been given to him. When the master heard this, he was furious at the servant for disobeying his instructions. The servants were told to use the money to produce increase, not hide it away and do nothing with it. The fear of loss should not have kept him from seeking gain.

In the same way, God expects His children to use the various gifts, talents, and resources He's given them in order to expand His kingdom, achieve His purposes, and produce His desired results. He knows that not all will reach the same level of fruitfulness, but that's okay. For those who choose not to obey, and instead waste God's blessings due to idleness, laziness, or fear, the LORD will be rightfully upset with their blatant disobedience.

Though neither version of the parable addresses this, I've often thought that even if the servant had lost the money in a bad business deal the master would still have been more satisfied with him than he was with the one who did nothing. At least he would have obeyed the master and

tried, right? But just as the Word of God never returns void, so also the faithful use of God's gifts will always result in some measure of godly increase (even if we don't see it).

III. GOD EVALUATES US - Matthew 25:28-30; Luke 19:24-26

As and/or after addressing each of his servants, the man evaluates their dealings and judges them accordingly. Those who have acted obediently by doing business with his money are rewarded, while the disobedient slave who did nothing is punished. Even the original talent that was given to the lazy slave is taken away and given to the most productive slave. The lesson is this - those who have proven to be trustworthy stewards will be given even more responsibility, while those who have shown to be poor stewards will lose everything.

Because we already have spent ample time in this series dealing with the judgment, there is no need to belabor this point. This greater issue here is not the judgment itself, but rather our behavior prior to it that will determine its outcome. Are we being good stewards of the blessings that God has granted to us?

CONCLUSION

There are several lessons we can derive from "The Parable of the Talents". Some are related to the second coming of Jesus and the judgment that will follow. But the main emphasis of this parable is stewardship. God has entrusted each of His children with certain gifts, talents, and resources. He has called each of us to certain tasks and ministries. He has equipped each of us individually and uniquely to meet the challenges before us.

We do not all start with the same amount, but we all start with the right amount for our particular calling. Likewise, we are not all expected to end with the same amount. The objective is not to attain equal results, but rather positive results. We are called to simply move the ball forward. The goal is to make the most of what God has given to us individually. He has entrusted each of us with a portion of His riches, and we are each expected to use them for His glory. So, are you being a good and faithful steward of God's blessings?

You're Fired!

Originally Preached - 10/1/2017

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. - 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

For the last several months we have studied "The Parables of Jesus". We have read and discussed parables about His Kingdom, His Character, His Covenant, and His Coming. Last week we began the final chapter of this series which includes 14 parables about His Children. Jesus told this set of stories to help teach His followers how to live godly lives. They cover several topics such as stewardship, discipleship, humility, responsibility, and prayer.

Before we begin I want to briefly mention the passage that follows today's parable. It is the story of "The Rich Man and Lazarus" (Luke 16:19-31). Many Christians believe it to be a parable also, but I do not agree. I consider this to be an account of actual events. Jesus is talking about a specific person who was literally named Lazarus that died and went to Abraham's Bosom, the Old Testament Heaven. The events and characters in the Lazarus passage are not general, symbolic, or representative as they are in a parable. While there may be some exaggeration in parts, I consider this to be a direct account of real events. Therefore, we will not include this story in our series.

Moving back to this morning's message, "The Parable of the Unjust Steward" is found only in Luke and is one of the most complicated parables to understand. A simple reading of the story can cause confusion. On the surface, the parable seems to commend sinful behavior. For years this bothered me, until I was finally able to comprehend the true meaning of the parable. Hopefully, today's message will make this clear to all of us.

I. THE PROBLEM - Luke 16:1-3,10-12

Luke includes "The Parable of the Unjust Steward" in a lengthy series of parables and teachings that spans several chapters in the middle of his book. Jesus directs this story primarily to His disciples, but apparently others are present and listening too. The Pharisees who hear this parable take particular offense to it, because it's meaning challenges their management and use of worldly wealth.

Jesus begins by telling of a rich man who has employed a manager to run his business affairs. Apparently, this rich man rents or leases out properties to various tenants. After some time passes, the rich man receives a report that his manager has been mishandling and/or squandering his property and money. So the rich man calls a meeting in which he demands that the manager give an account for his actions. The manager is unable to justify his misbehavior,

so the rich man fires him on the spot. Because he has no other marketable skills, the newly unemployed manager wonders what he will do now in order to survive.

The parable never clearly explains how the manager was mishandling his responsibilities, which allows the reader to speculate. That said, he did lose his job as a direct consequence of his poor management, or stewardship, of the master's resources. In the same way, when we wastefully squander or selfishly mishandle the earthly wealth that God entrusts to us, we risk judgment. Following this parable, Jesus asks a series of questions that basically boil down to this - if God cannot trust us to be good stewards of earthy money right now why should He trust us with heavenly riches in the life to come? That wouldn't be very wise now, would it?

II. THE PLAN - Luke 16:4-7

Realizing that he is out of a job, the unrighteous steward immediately devises a plan. He reasons that if he can make friends of the rich man's tenants, perhaps they will provide for him while he is unemployed. He must act quickly however, before they learn that he has already been fired. So he quickly summons each of them and asks them how much they owe the rich man. One answers 100 measures of oil and he tells them to reduce the debt to 50, and another says 100 measures of wheat so he tells them to reduce the bill to 80. Apparently he has the authority to do this. We can assume that both debtors are extremely pleased with the manager for reducing their indebtedness.

It appears (to me) that the unrighteous manager had been marking up the amount of debt or rent payments being charged unbeknownst to his employer. When the debtors paid, he would keep the markup for himself and give the rich man the remaining amount. Thus, when he reduces the tenants' bills after being fired, it really does not affect the amount that the rich man receives. The unrighteous manager simply eliminates the amount that he was scamming off the top. Though the tenants are getting a reduction, in actuality it is what they should have been paying all along. He had been cheating them to pad his pockets.

Obviously, the tenants are unaware at this point that the manager has been fired. They do not know that he is and has been acting deceptively, scheming to provide for himself. As such, these debtors are quite happy with the manager when he lowers their bill. All he has to do now is wait a few days and then tell them that he's been let go. Perhaps they will be more inclined to take him in...

III. THE PRAISE - Luke 16:8-9

The parable never says what happened to the unrighteous manager. His outcome is not the emphasis of this story. Maybe his plan worked, or maybe it didn't. Who knows? Instead the scene now shifts to the rich man. He has somehow learned what his former manager has been doing - possibly from the overjoyed tenants themselves who may have contacted him to say thank you. The rich man finally puts it all together and realizes what's been going on.

Surprisingly, the parable ends with the wealthy owner actually praising his former manager for acting shrewdly or astutely. He is not applauding the manager's deceit, but rather his savviness. Many prominent businessmen, politicians, and so on achieve their worldly success by making decisions that are advantageous to themselves or the bottom line, but are utterly dishonest and immoral. To make a comparison, this would be like describing someone as "a really good liar." Let's face it, some people are really good at being bad.

Corrupt sinners are usually able to navigate in a fallen world more effectively than righteous believers. They are most comfortable in such an environment. Christians are more concerned about godly wisdom that leads to eternal life than earthly wisdom that leads to temporal success. Using the unrighteous manager as a negative example, Jesus concludes this parable by urging His disciples to use their earthly money and material possessions to serve others. In this way, all of those who have been blessed by the disciple's kindness in this life will someday welcome them in Heaven.

CONCLUSION - Luke 16:13

In His explanation of and commentary after telling this parable, Jesus concludes that no one can serve both God and money. Either he will use his money to serve himself (like the unrighteous steward does), or else he will use it to serve God (by blessing others). The parable describes a person who exploits others for his own personal gain. While it acknowledges his earthly shrewdness and cunning, ultimately it teaches Christians to act righteously.

Don't be like the unjust steward. Use the money that God gives you to help and serve others. Greed, dishonesty, and selfishness might serve some well in this life, but they will lead to destruction in the next. When the money runs out - and it will sooner or later - where will you be then? Be a good steward of that which God allows you to manage.

You Can't Take It With You

Originally Preached - 10/8/2017

For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. - 1 Timothy 6:7

Today's message is the 21st in our series titled "The Parables of Jesus". Of the 40 parables we will study, there are 3 that deal primarily with the topic of stewardship and/or money. During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke extensively about this issue. As a matter of fact, the Lord talked about money more than almost any other single topic. He explained that a Christian's attitude toward money and their management of earthly wealth is highly indicative of their true loyalties. Is God the priority of their life, or is their bank account?

The first parable of this trio is "The Parable of the Talents" which we discussed 2 weeks ago. In it, God's children are commanded to use the blessings and riches that they've received for His glory and benefit. Last week we discussed the second of these stories, which is called "The Parable of the Unjust Steward". In it, Jesus contrasted the dishonest and self-serving money management of the world with the righteous stewardship that He desires.

This morning we will consider the last of these 3 stewardship/money parables. It is known as "The Parable of the Rich Fool". This story is recorded only once in the synoptic gospels, specifically in Luke chapter 12. Jesus tells this parable to emphasize the utter folly of pursuing and accumulating earthly wealth.

King Solomon was one of the wealthiest men who ever lived. He was also the wisest. Over the course of his life, Solomon discovered that earthly riches could never satisfy his soul. In his Old Testament book Ecclesiastes, Solomon describes the inability of money to bring true contentment within a person's life. Furthermore, he points out that earthy wealth does not carry over into eternity. Jesus echoes this sentiment as He tells "The Parable of the Rich Fool".

I. BICKERING BROTHERS - Luke 12:13-15

While the specific time and place is not given, it is clear that Jesus is teaching a large crowd of people. As He is speaking, a man in the crowd cries out to Him. This man has an issue with his brother regarding the family inheritance. Apparently, he believes that the inheritance is not being divided fairly or correctly. It has been suggested by some theologians that perhaps this man was a younger brother, and did not think it right that his older brother should receive a double portion under Mosaic Law.

Whatever the case, Jesus chooses not to involve Himself in this dispute. He makes it clear by His response that He will not serve as an arbitrator. Instead, Jesus recognizes and speaks to the true hidden motivation behind the man's request. The man in the crowd is not really

concerned about the issue of fairness, but rather he simply wants to receive more money for himself. Have you ever noticed that most people will complain when they get less than someone else, yet keep silent when they receive more?

Jesus cuts through the smokescreen and goes straight to the point. He tells the entire crowd, in particular this man, to guard themselves against every form of greed. Greed is an intense, selfish desire for something - in this case money. It is one of the "Seven Deadly Sins", a list which originated in the Catholic church but is commonly referred to among all Christian denominations. Jesus goes on to say that, no matter how wealthy a person becomes, their life does not consist of the abundance of their possessions. Then he follows up with a parable.

II. BIGGER BARNS - Luke 12:16-19

The main character of the parable is a rich man who owns much property. His land is extremely fruitful and productive, to the point that he runs out of room to store all of his surplus. The rich man considers what he should do with all of this abundance. He decides to tear down his existing barns and build even bigger ones in their place in order to store all of his grains and goods. The rich man delights that with such a great amassed fortune he will never have to work again and can spend the rest of his days seeking pleasure and self-gratification.

The man in this parable seems to have realized what we call today "The American Dream". While all people should have the ability to pursue happiness and economic prosperity, Scripture strongly warns people about "the love of money". Greed is never satisfied and the more someone has, the more they tend to want. Chasing the dollar draws people away from chasing God, who is the One we should be pursuing wholeheartedly. "The American Dream" often becomes "The American Nightmare" for those who find financial success.

The rich man already has large barns filled with wealth, but these are not enough. Like an addict he needs even more, and tight-fistedly clings to every penny. He saves it all for himself, above and beyond what he truly needs, without any thought for how his abundance could help others. The man is captivated by the Devil and consumed by greed.

III. BRIEF BENEFITS - Luke 12:20-21

The story ends with an ironic twist. As this man envisions a future prosperity filled with ease and comfort, God suddenly appears to him saying that he will die that very night. The LORD also calls the wealthy man a fool due to his greedy accumulation of worldly wealth. This does not mean that all affluent people are fools. Job, Abraham, King David, and many other prominent Biblical characters were wealthy during parts of their lives. But these righteous men used their wealth to serve and honor God, rather than hoarding it for themselves.

Lastly, God asks the rich fool, "Who will take ownership of your wealth now?" This question highlights the fact that we can't take our money with us when we die, and that ultimately

everything we have gained and saved will someday pass on to someone else. Why spend your life amassing and saving something that you can't keep? Why not use your fortune for the good of others while you are still living, while it is still under your control? There is no telling how it might be used (or misused) after your death!

While we might consider it honorable to leave a large inheritance and/or estate to our children and grandchildren, often times it creates conflict and division. I have seen families torn apart fighting over money that was intended for their benefit. This was plight of the man in the crowd who'd originally approached Jesus, remember? Selfishness and greed can so easily poison the hearts of good people. Money is a dangerous commodity.

CONCLUSION

After teaching this parable, Jesus continues by urging the crowd not to worry about material possessions. God knows our needs even better than we do ourselves. We can trust Him to provide for and take care of His children. We should learn to be thankful for and content with what we have. While we are all called to work, to earn a living, and to provide for our ourselves and families, we are never to rely on our money but instead to lean on God alone.

Perhaps you exhibit more faith in your retirement nest-egg than you do in God himself. Perhaps you have trusted in your weekly paycheck more than God's daily favor. Perhaps the false security of your earthly wealth has replaced your reliance on Jesus Christ. True, money is often the means of God's provision in our lives - but don't exchange the Provider for the provision. Has your love of money tainted your love for God? Let me be blunt... don't be a rich fool.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Originally Preached - 10/16/2017

You shall therefore love the Lord your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments. - Deuteronomy 11:1

Perhaps nothing captures our attention more than a good story. When restless people or even young children won't listen to anything else, oftentimes they will sit willingly and attentively to a story or tale that they find interesting. Because each of our lives tells a story of its own, I believe we as humans relate naturally to and find great pleasure in the hearing and telling of stories.

As your pastor, sometimes I try to incorporate stories and illustrations into my sermons. All good teachers do likewise, using stories as examples to demonstrate the concepts being taught. No one was better at this artful exercise than Jesus Christ. He was a master at using simple stories, called parables, to present and explain spiritual truths. Together, we have examined and discussed many of these during our study through "The Parables of Jesus" this year.

Jesus told parables on a wide array of topics. Currently, we are considering those of His parables that teach us how to live as godly, righteous disciples. For the past 3 weeks we have talked about the importance of good stewardship and money management in the life of a Christian. This morning we will focus on obedience, and will discover that actually doing what the LORD asks of us is much better than simply saying what we think He wants to hear.

The story for today is called "The Parable of the Two Sons". As the father of 2 sons myself (and a beautiful daughter in between), I have a special fondness for this little story. Since becoming a parent several years ago it has crossed my mind many times, and I have sometimes applied it to the behaviors of my boys. That said, the message of this parable challenges my behavior as well, and it trust it will challenge yours too...

I. THE CHALLENGE - Matthew 21:23-27

"The Parable of the Two Sons" is recorded only in Matthew's gospel. In the days following His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus is teaching large crowds of people in the temple. Besides the throngs of ordinary people who have gathered, there are many religious leaders present. By now these chief priests and elders have become extremely hostile toward Jesus and are actively searching for ways to undermine His authority and destroy His reputation.

On this occasion, Jesus tells 3 pointed parables directed squarely at these pious religious leaders. We've discussed 2 of these already in this series during the brief chapter on His Covenant. Jesus forewarned the Jews that because of their contempt for Him the New Covenant of grace would be established with the Church instead. In this parable Jesus highlights the empty lip-service given to God by these Jewish elites.

Jesus is once again being challenged by the chief priests and elders, this time to identify the source of His authority. He quickly turns the tables by asking them a question in response. The Lord asks them whether John the Baptist's authority to baptize comes from God or men. If they answer from men, the people will likely revolt because they regard John as a prophet. But if they answer from God, Jesus will simply assert that His authority comes from God as well. Thus, with no viable option, the Jewish leaders answer, "We don't know". This emphasis on John the Baptist sets the stage for the parable that follows.

II. THE PARABLE - Matthew 21:28-30

The story is about a father who has 2 sons. The father approaches his sons individually and instructs each of them to go work in the vineyard for the day. The first son abruptly says, "No!", so the father moves on to the second son. The second son readily consents to his father's command saying "Yes, sir, I will go." However, as time goes by the first son begins to feel guilty and he goes to the vineyard to work after all. Meanwhile, the second son puts it off and never actually gets around to going to the vineyard as he'd promised to do.

It is notable that the father, who has the rightful authority to command his sons to do whatever he wishes, chooses not to force their compliance. He certainly did not have to tolerate their insolence and disobedience, but he lovingly did so. In the same way, God is almighty and sovereign over His creation. The LORD is not obligated to endure our disrespectful misconduct. We should be ever grateful for His patience and longsuffering - that He allows us the freedom to choose to serve rather than conscripting us into service.

Notice that neither son is perfect. The first disrespects his father through his words, while the second son disrespects his father through his deeds. Both made mistakes. Ideally, these 2 sons should have kindly agreed to their father's command and then faithfully followed-through with it. The message is clear... God is calling His children to obey His voice, and we should wholeheartedly say "Yes, LORD!" and then do whatever He asks of us.

III. THE EXPLANATION - Matthew 21:31-32

After telling the story, Jesus asks the chief priests and elders which son did the will of his father. The emphasis is not on what the boys said, but rather upon what they actually did. This is an important distinction. The religious leaders correctly answer, "The first son." They probably feel a sense of pride seeing that earlier they couldn't answer His question at all. However, they have unwittingly made Jesus' point and again condemned themselves and their own actions.

Jesus explains that the first son represents "the tax collectors and prostitutes". These are representative of all Gentiles, a vile and perverse group according to most devout Jews. The Gentiles had never committed to follow God's Law or commandments, but when they heard John the Baptist preach they fell under conviction and repented nonetheless.

On the contrary, the second son represents the Jews - specifically the religious elite such as the chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees, and so forth. They had heard and joyfully received God's Law centuries earlier, and had pledged to obey it time and time again. However, when John the Baptist arrives on the scene preaching repentance, baptism, and a soon coming Savior these haughty Jews outright reject him. Even as they watch Gentiles turning to God by the droves, they still refuse to believe.

CONCLUSION

"The Parable of the Two Sons" contrasts the empty talk of the religious Jews with the heart-felt repentance of the humble Gentiles. It reveals to us that God is more interested in what we do than in what we say. His desire is that we be obedient to His commandments, that we lovingly do His will, and that we exhibit a faith that is more than mere words. Yes, our words are important and we shouldn't ever say no to the LORD, but even more so we should actually do what He desires... even when we may not want to.

Is the Lord speaking to you today? Is He asking you to do something, but you've refused? If so, repent of your stubbornness and submit to His request. It's not too late. Have you said yes to Jesus already, but have still not gotten around to doing what He asked? Do you ever really intend to? Maybe today is the day to get started doing something that you promised to do long ago. Delayed obedience is disobedience. May we all learn to respect our heavenly Father in both word and deed.

Shine Brightly

Originally Preached - 10/29/2017

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." - John 8:12

Jesus frequently used parables as a way of teaching His disciples how to live godly lives. We have already discussed 3 such parables that dealt with righteous money management and good stewardship. In our previous message, we studied a parable that emphasized the importance of obedience to the Lord's commands in both word and deed. As we continue our journey through "The Parables of Jesus" this morning, we will examine a widely-known illustration that instructs us to shine the light of Jesus openly.

In terms of its inclusion on our list of parables, "The Parable of the Lamp under a Bushel" is somewhat unique. It is recorded in some form or fashion in all 3 synoptic gospels - Matthew, Mark, and Luke - but often reads more like an analogy than a parable. An analogy is a simple comparison between 2 things such as "You are the light of the world", where as a parable is an actual narrative story. In Luke's gospel this teaching is presented twice, both times in the form of a short illustration which describes a fictional character with a lamp. For this reason, it is generally considered to be a parable and therefore, is the subject of our sermon today.

The comparison of darkness and light is found on numerous occasions throughout Scripture, even outside the gospels. It is a fairly common Biblical theme. In Matthew, Jesus spoke about "the salt and the light" during the famous Sermon on the Mount. In Mark's account, Jesus shared this illustration and a few other parables with His disciples after having taught large crowds by the sea earlier that day. In Luke 8 and again sometime later in Luke 11 Jesus taught this parable to large crowds of people as He traveled from village to village.

Jesus told "The Parable of the Lamp under a Bushel" repeatedly and in various forms to emphasize different points and teach multiple lessons. The concept of light applies to spiritual truth in several ways. We will explore a few of these this morning.

I. THE LIGHT FILLS - Luke 11:33-36; Matthew 6:22-23

In this rendition of the parable, Jesus tells of a person who takes a lit lamp and places it on a lampstand in the house so that anyone who enters can see. Obviously, he doesn't place it in the cellar or under a basket, otherwise the light would be prevented from filling the house. The emphasis here is upon the filling nature of the light.

In the verses that follow, Jesus compares the light that fills the house with the light that fills the body. He is talking about the glorious spirit of God that indwells and fills everyone who has accepted Christ. This is accomplished through the presence of the Holy Spirit within the

believer. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. In Him resides the fullness of God's glory in all of its radiant brilliance. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit resides within a person's life their body is filled internally with the marvelous light of Jesus.

This inner-light allows the Christian to see things more clearly. It illuminates their eyes to view life from a spiritual perspective rather than a worldly one. It allows believers to recognize the value of eternal things over temporal things. Inner-light helps the redeemed understand and appreciate the truths of God more readily. It provides comforting warmth to the human soul. There are numerous ways in which the filling light of Jesus benefits His followers.

II. THE LIGHT EXPOSES - Luke 8:16-17; Mark 4:21-23

As in the previously discussed passage, Jesus again tells of a person who lights a lamp and places it on a lampstand in the house so that all who enter can clearly see. Common sense prevents him from covering it with a container or placing it under the bed where the light would be blocked. Because the light illuminates the room, everything becomes visible. The emphasis in this instance is upon the exposing nature of the light.

In the subsequent verses, Jesus explains that there is nothing secret or hidden that will not become evident or known. The LORD is all-knowing. The light of God reveals everything, even those ugly and unpleasant sins that are often kept private. It exposes all unrighteousness and wickedness, which can lead to shame, embarrassment, and even guilt. Hopefully such revelations eventually result in conviction and repentance, rather than anger and bitterness.

When Christians allow the light of Jesus to shine in and through their lives, not only does it expose their own hidden sins but it discloses those of others. Have you ever seen cockroaches darting for a crack and crevice when someone turns on the light? The same type of thing often happens when a light-filled believer enters a room filled with unrepentant sinners. It can make them feel uncomfortable, causing them to grow silent and to act differently. While this doesn't always happen, I've seen it take place more than once. Such an occurrence demonstrates the power of light over darkness, and its ability to expose sin.

III. THE LIGHT DRAWS - Matthew 5:14-16

During the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches that no one lights a lamp only to hide it under a bushel or basket. On the contrary, they put it on a lampstand in order to provide light for all who are in the house. In this same passage, Jesus also calls His followers "the light of the world" and states that "a city on a hill cannot be hidden". With these examples, He is emphasizing the visibility of the source of the light.

Jesus urges Christians to let their light shine before men so that others might see their good works and glorify the Father in Heaven. We have already seen that this inner light is not actually our own, but rather comes from the presence of Christ within us. In the same way, our good works

are merely a reflection of the Lord's goodness inside. He is the source of the light. Thus, by allowing it to shine forth from our lives, others will be able to see Jesus in us. His light safely draws those who are lost and searching to Himself.

Jesus also compares His disciples to salt, which is meant to temporarily preserve those who are dying in their sin. The presence of Christians in society delays its eventual decay. Nevertheless, the world is still spiraling toward judgment. Thus, believers must also glow with the light of Jesus for those who are dying to see. The salt and light go together. Just as light in the darkness can be a tremendous source of hope to those who have lost their way, so also Jesus is the only hope for sinners groping in the shadows of life.

CONCLUSION

In each variation of His parable, Jesus instructs His followers not to hide the light within them - otherwise it cannot fill, expose, or draw as it should. This must mean that people have the ability to shield or prevent the light of Christ from shining as it should. I like to think of each Christian like a dimmer switch. They can shine the Lord's light fully, not at all, or at any level in between. Our thoughts, behaviors, words, and attitudes can damper the amount of light that radiates out from us.

Jesus urges each of disciples to shine brightly! We must live righteously and openly for the Lord. We must first be filled with the light of Jesus. We must then cast His light to expose the sinful deeds of this world. Finally, we must shine His light so that those living in darkness can see Jesus and be drawn to Him. So... let your light shine! Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine...

Practice Humility

Originally Preached - 11/5/2017

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves. - Philippians 2:3

Several months ago we began a series of sermons covering “The Parables of Jesus”. We have been reading and learning much from the various parables that Jesus told. Over the course of this entire study, we will discuss 40 parables in all. This morning we are going to focus upon the 32nd and 33rd selections on the list. These 2 stories, while not identical in meaning, do teach similar lessons. They are called “The Parable of the Wedding Feast” and “The Parable of the Master and the Slave”.

In our previous message, we considered the importance of shining Jesus’ light brightly in and through our lives. The parables that we will examine today provide us with a powerful way to do just that. Christ had an unassuming character and sought no acclaim for Himself but rather gave all glory to the Father. We can put Jesus on display for others to see by practicing this same type of humility...

I. DON'T EXALT YOURSELF - Luke 14:7-11

Jesus has been invited to the home of a prominent Pharisee to enjoy a delicious meal. It is the Sabbath day, and just prior to telling “The Parable of the Wedding Feast” Jesus heals a man who’d been suffering from dropsy. His actions have upset many of the lawyers and religious leaders who are present. As Jesus watches them grumble, He notices that some are picking out the most honorable seats at the table for themselves. This observation leads Jesus to share a brief parable.

He presents this parable directly those who are listening and includes them in the story. In other words, unlike most of His other parables which are told in the third person, this story is told in the second person. Jesus speaks of a man who is holding and wedding feast and has invited them to come. He then advises them not to sit in a place of distinction or honor, because the host may have invited someone more notable and might ask them to move. Such an occurrence would be humiliating and disgraceful. Instead, Jesus instructs them to intentionally sit in a more lowly seat. Seeing this, the host might come and ask them to move up to a more prominent seat, thereby elevating them in the presence of others.

In this parable, Jesus is focused upon the behavior of the guests. He is teaching them to practice humility. He is comparing an earthly wedding feast to a spiritual Wedding Feast in which Christ Himself is the host. The Lord will ultimately humble those who are pridefully puffed up and who place themselves in positions of honor, and will ultimately honor and exalt those who practice lowliness and humility.

II. DON'T SERVE CONDITIONALLY - Luke 14:12-14

After directing the Pharisees and other guests not to seek notoriety for themselves, Jesus elaborates even further. He now turns His attention to the one particular Pharisee who had invited Him to the meal. Jesus points out that this man has only invited his friends, relatives, rich neighbors, and other notable persons in the community to the dinner. Apparently he did not want other less desirable types in his house...

Jesus identifies an underlying motivation that drives many to act in such a manner. People expect to be repaid. "If I invite someone to my party, I expect them to invite me to theirs. If I buy your lunch today, then you'd better buy mine next time. If I do you a favor, then you owe me one in return. I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine." These are the sentiments of a person who gives conditionally, showing kindness because they anticipate receiving something back. Thus, they favor certain people who can be of benefit to them. Under these circumstances, a person receives their full reward here on earth.

Jesus encourages the host to invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind to his receptions instead. These do not have the means to repay or reciprocate his hospitality. By doing this, the host will be blessed and will be repaid bountifully at the resurrection of the righteous in the life to come. The LORD will lavish His everlasting blessings upon those who love, give, and serve others unconditionally without any expectation of repayment.

III. DON'T EXPECT GRATITUDE - Luke 17:7-10

Later in Luke's gospel we read of another occasion in which Jesus is speaking to His disciples. He is giving them several different instructions, urging them not to become stumbling blocks for others, to practice ongoing forgiveness, and to remain faithful. During this educational discourse, the Lord shares yet another parable. This brief story is called "The Parable of the Master and the Slave".

This parable is also presented in the second person. Jesus presents a scenario in which one of the disciples (to whom He is speaking) has a slave. This hypothetical slave has just come in after working all day in the field. Would they, as the slave's master, allow this slave to sit and eat first or would they expect him to change clothes, prepare dinner, and serve them first? The logical conclusion is the later - after all, he is a slave...

Jesus explains that this hardworking slave should not expect to receive thanks or be rewarded simply for doing that which his master required. Spiritually speaking, Christians should not serve God in order to receive His praise or recognition. Nor should they serve other people for this reason. The LORD is the holy, divine Master of all and even the most righteous believer is still just an unworthy slave. God's children should not expect gratitude for simply doing what He has commanded them to do.

CONCLUSION

We have examined 2 parables this morning which, when considered together, paint a grim picture of a particular type of person. Jesus describes someone who lacks humility and associates only with those who can be beneficial to him personally. Furthermore, this person expects others to praise him for the things that he does. On the contrary, Jesus teaches His followers to be humble and not exalt themselves. He adds that they should lovingly serve those who can't repay them and not expect a "pat on the back" for doing so.

Don't get me wrong... it is nice to say thank you to those who have blessed you, and it's okay to graciously receive such thanks from others. In addition, it is wonderful when someone repays you for a kind deed that you've done previously. Furthermore, it is a blessing to be acknowledged and honored for something good you've accomplished. These parables do not necessarily condemn such things. Rather, Jesus is simply teaching that it is inappropriate to exalt yourself, or to serve conditionally in order to receive either repayment or gratitude.

If you never garnered any benefit for yourself or received any measure of thanks for serving Jesus from anyone in this life, would you continue to humbly serve Him anyway? Would I?

A Strong Foundation

Originally Preached - 11/12/2017

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, - Ephesians 2:19-21

We are now only a few weeks away from concluding our sermon series on "The Parables of Jesus". In the remaining messages we will discuss parables relating to the cost of discipleship, effective prayer, and the believer's responsibility. Each of these are important aspects of the Christian or the prospective Christian experience. However, this morning we will focus upon the critical nature of building one's life on a strong and sturdy foundation.

"The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders" is one of the more popular stories that Jesus told. It is recorded in both Matthew and Luke. In Matthew, this parable comes at the conclusion of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount". It neatly ties together all of the various lessons that He taught in that message. Both gospels indicate that Jesus is speaking to a large audience of people when He delivers this powerful illustration. The details in the parable are very similar in both renditions.

While the meaning of this parable is rather apparent, it has been interpreted in a couple of different ways. Both understandings are Scripturally accurate and consistent. We will consider these 2 interpretations this morning during our discussion.

I. THE STORMS OF LIFE - Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49

The story begins with a description of a wise builder who first lays a strong, solid foundation and then constructs his house upon it. Meanwhile a second man - the foolish builder - builds his house upon the sand, choosing not to lay any foundation at all. After they finish their work, severe storms develop including heavy rain, flooding, and fierce wind. Because of its sure foundation, the wise builder's house successfully withstands the stormy weather. Unfortunately, the foolish builder's house lacks any firm base or grounding, and therefore falls and is completely destroyed as a result of the storm.

"The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders" compares an actual construction project with the building of one's life. It stresses the importance of having a strong foundation. The foundation, as Jesus explains, consists of both hearing and acting upon the Lord's teachings. When a person listens to and then obeys His commands, a sturdy foundation is laid in their life upon which they can build. In contrast, if a person hears but disregards Jesus' commands their foundation will be non-existent or shaky at best.

The construction of the house itself represents a person's thoughts, words, and deeds. These things must be supported by and anchored upon the teachings of the Bible. The stormy winds, rains, and floods represent the various trials and pressures that test us in this life. Those who build their lives upon Jesus and the things that He taught will successfully endure and overcome. But without Him as their strong foundation, a person's life will inevitably succumb to the sinful influences and forces of this fallen world.

II. THE STORMS OF JUDGMENT - 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

While the most common interpretation of this parable deals with the trials of this present life, it can also be understood from an alternative point of view. Not only does the foundation of Jesus Christ provide believers with a stable basis upon which to build their lives now, but its presence or lack thereof is also the single determining factor during the judgment. In other words, a person's eternal destiny is dependent upon their foundation...

Paul elaborates on this more fully in his first letter to the Corinthian church. Like the parable, He also highlights the importance of having a solid foundation. Paul explains that there is only one foundation which will endure God's judgment - namely, Jesus Christ. Throughout their lives, Christians metaphorically build upon Him with various materials such as gold, silver, gems, wood, hay, and straw. One day the fire of God will test the quality of each person's work. Those whose works remain will be rewarded, but - notably - even if all is burned up that person shall still be saved solely because of the existence of the foundation in their lives.

This perspective can also be applied to "The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builder". Taking this approach, the winds and rains represent the judgment of God. Those who've repented of their sins and subsequently built their lives upon a faithful, dependent commitment to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will stand on Judgment Day. Sadly, the millions who have rejected Jesus will collapse in light of God's judgment, and their fall will be great.

III. SAVED TO BUILD

This parable illustrates that, after the foundation has been laid, a house should be built upon it. Clearly the foundation is the most important part, but it isn't the only part. A bare slab without any building on it at all will not provide any shelter from the storm. Likewise, a shabby or poorly built shack will leak rain drops and allow the cold windy drafts to blow through. The Bible teaches Christians to practice righteousness, to walk in a worthy manner, to live in obedience to the Lord, and to lovingly and sacrificially serve others. By doing these things, they will build a house that will protect them from the tumultuous weather of life.

Even the grandest and most formidable structure will fall without a firm foundation. Likewise, a person's most gracious and compassionate deeds are useless apart from a saving faith in Jesus Christ. That said, foundations are also laid to be built upon, and those who have been born again are called to and expected to build something. Far too many believers never build

much of anything in their lives or they build shoddy structures that are unacceptable to God. But Jesus has set a higher standard, and is lovingly calling us to build lives of significance that are pleasing to Him. To put it simply, people are not saved by their good works but rather are saved to do good works. Christians have been saved to build...

CONCLUSION

“The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders” stresses the importance of having a strong foundation. This foundation can be understood as either the teachings of Jesus, upon which we should build our lives, or the person of Jesus, upon which our salvation rests. Perhaps to fully understand this story one must consider both meanings... the truth is, Jesus and His teachings are inseparable.

If you are relying on anything or anyone else but Jesus to get you into Heaven, you’re building on the sand. Salvation only comes through Jesus Christ. He is the one strong and sure foundation of life. Everything else will soon collapse. Will you repent of your sins, turn to Him, and receive forgiveness today?

If you’ve already accepted Jesus as your Savior, can I challenge you to reflect upon the manner of your Christian life? The foundation has been laid, but what type of house are you building on it? Is it pleasing and acceptable to God? Will it protect you through the turbulent storms of life?

Count the Cost

Originally Preached - 11/19/2017

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. - 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

The passages that we have studied during “The Parables of Jesus” series have all come from one or more of the synoptic gospels - Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These are called the Synoptics because they are similar to each other, each sharing several common elements. The gospel of John is notably different in its composition, and contains no parables. While there are many likenesses between Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there are some important differences as well.

John Mark was an associate of the apostle Peter, and his book was written first. It is the shortest of the gospels, and was likely based mostly upon the testimony of Peter, seeing as Mark was just a boy during the time of Jesus’ ministry. Mark was written for a Roman audience. Of the 40 parables we will study in this series, only 10 are mentioned in Mark.

Matthew was one of the 12 apostles of Jesus. He was a Jewish tax collector who wrote primarily to a Jewish audience. As such, Matthew often quoted passages from the Old Testament which would have been familiar to his Jewish kinsmen. He sought to show that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah that Israel had been promised. 24 of the 40 parables that will be covered in this series are found in Matthew.

Luke was a physician and a traveling companion of Paul. He was a Gentile and, fittingly, his gospel was directed towards the Gentiles. Luke did extensive research, likely interviewing several witnesses, in order to compile his gospel. He placed particular emphasis on Jesus’ kindness to the Gentiles and Samaritans. He also focused extensively on the teachings of Jesus, and therefore included more parables in his book than the others did. There are 30 of the 40 parables we’ve included in this series recorded in Luke.

Anyway, this morning we will discuss 2 more short parables. Jesus told them together during the same lesson as he was teaching large crowds of people. They both stress the importance of counting the cost when it comes to discipleship.

I. DON’T START IF YOU CAN’T FINISH - Luke 14:28-30

“The Parable of the Tower Builder” is a brief illustration presented in the form of a question. It describes a man who wishes to build a tower. Before he begins the construction, it is critical that he consider how much the entire project will cost. If he does not have enough money to complete the whole job, he shouldn’t even start. Jesus warns that, should he not be able to finish the work, his adversaries will ridicule him.

Over the years I have seen this story played out in real life on numerous occasions. I have come across building projects, including new churches, that were only partially completed. Apparently the funds ran out before the construction was completed. Each time I encounter such a structure, it makes me sad to think that the work was abandoned before it could be finished. It makes me wonder what might have happened and how much was wasted as a result.

When it comes to following Jesus, prospective Christians are challenged to count the cost of discipleship up front. When those who claim to be followers of Jesus lose hope, give up, and walk away from the faith it brings shame upon themselves and the church at large. The Lord's enemies - and there are many of them - find great delight in seeing the those who were once believers turn from their former faith in God. So... don't start if you can't finish.

II. DON'T FIGHT IF YOU CAN'T WIN - Luke 14:31-32

"The Parable of the Outnumbered King" is another short illustration told in the form of a question. It describes a king on the verge of battle. Before the conflict begins, the king should evaluate the strength and size of his army relative to that of the enemy. He must determine if his army is strong enough to overcome the adversary. If he goes into battle hopelessly outnumbered and/or outgunned the results will be devastating. Jesus states that if the king doesn't think that he can win the fight, he should seek to negotiate terms of peace instead.

In the early summer of 1876 Lieutenant George A. Custer led a small column of the US Cavalry into battle against a camp of Sioux Indians. He greatly underestimated the size of his enemy and found himself outnumbered 3 to 1. Another group of Indians rallied to the battle after it had already begun making Custer's situation even worse. When he realized his mistake and saw that there was no escape, he ordered his men to shoot their own horses hoping to build a barrier with their bodies. In less than an hour, Custer and all of his men were killed. The Battle of Little Bighorn was a fight that Custer couldn't win.

Satan and his minions are waging all out war against the children of God. Living for Christ is a constant battle. The enemy will strike time and time again, relentlessly seeking to inflict as much damage as possible. Those who have been Christians for many years often carry the scars of a faithful soldier. While Jesus assures His followers of the final victory, in the meantime many battles are won and lost. Through them all, believers are called to be conquerors. That said... don't fight if you can't win.

III. DON'T FOLLOW IF YOU CAN'T COMMIT - Luke 14:26-27, 33

In the verses immediately before and after these 2 parables, Jesus names some of the costs of discipleship. The first has to do with relationships. Disciples are commanded to value their relationship with Jesus more than any other - including those with their own parents, children, other family members, friends, spouses, and even themselves. This doesn't mean that

Christians are to callously neglect or forsake the ones they love. It simply means that Jesus must always come first, even if it requires that earthly relationships be severed.

The second cost deals with personal will. Disciples are expected to carry their own cross as they follow Jesus. No one else is going to carry it for them. In New Testament times, carrying a cross meant only one thing - that death was imminent. With this statement Jesus is commanding His would-be disciples to “die to themselves”. This means absolute surrender to the Lordship of Christ. Every selfish dream, ambition, and desire must be submitted to Him. The will of the true disciple is to faithfully do the will of Jesus.

The third cost involves material possessions. Disciples are required to give up all of their “stuff”. This doesn’t literally mean that they can’t have anything, but rather that they desire the Lord more than anything and everything they have. Sadly, many people long for money, property, mansions, cars, and other earthly possessions more than they do for Jesus. Such people spend more time chasing the dollar than they do chasing the Lord. Here’s the bottom line... when it comes to Jesus, don’t follow if you can’t commit.

CONCLUSION

Salvation is free, but discipleship is costly. Jesus expects His disciples to love Him more than anyone else, to place His will above their own, and to desire Him more than any material thing. This is a steep calling - one which should not be entered into lightly. As such, people are advised to consider the costs of discipleship before making any commitment to Jesus. Half-hearted or unthoughtful decisions will inevitably lead to ridicule and ruin. Following the Lord isn’t easy, nor has it ever been. But let me close by saying... it is so worth it!

The Attitude of Prayer

Originally Preached - 11/26/2017

The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and His ears are open to their cry. - Psalm 34:15

Over the past several weeks we have been studying those parables of Jesus which provide instructions for godly living. We have talked about the significance of good stewardship, of building one's life on a strong foundation, of practicing humility in everyday life, of obedience to the Father in both word and deed, of shining the light of Jesus brightly everywhere we go, and of counting the cost of discipleship. Each of these lessons have challenged us to walk more closely to the Lord.

Today's message covers "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican". This is the first of 3 parables that deal with the topic of prayer. When someone prays, it is critical that they approach God with the proper attitude. The LORD will not hear or answer prayers that are offered inappropriately. An effective prayer life is of paramount importance for any believer.

This parable reminds me of the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel. God commanded these 2 brothers to bring Him a sacrifice. Cain brought an offering of fruit from his fields, while Abel brought a firstling from his flock. God accepted Abel's offering, but rejected Cain's. Some scholars have suggested that God was pleased with Abel's offering because it was a blood sacrifice, but doesn't the Mosaic Law make provisions for acceptable grain offerings as well? That said, I suspect that the real reason why God delighted in the one and refused the other had a lot to do with attitude and motivation of the giver.

Just as in the case of Old Testament sacrifices, so also our prayers are to be offered to the LORD with a proper attitude. This is the emphasis of today's featured parable.

I. TWO MEN COME TO PRAY - Luke 18:9-10

The Bible does not provide the specific setting in which Jesus tells this parable. However, it does state that Jesus is talking to some people who "trust in themselves" and believe themselves to be righteous. Such people are called self-righteous. The self-righteous think that God will accept them on the basis of their own obedience and goodness. Their confidence rests in self, rather than in Christ.

The Bible further describes Jesus's audience as people who view others with contempt. In other words, they look down upon other people. Self-righteous people often have an inflated opinion of themselves and tend to view others critically and judgmentally. They trust in their own religious activity as the means of salvation, and are quick to find fault in the non-religious crowd. They are arrogant, haughty, and puffed up.

Jesus begins telling “The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican”. He describes 2 men who are going to the temple in Jerusalem to pray. The first man is a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a devout Jewish sect that was prominent and influential in Judea during the time of Christ. They were known for their pious posture and self-righteousness. The second man is a publican, or tax-collector. Jewish publicans collected taxes from their Jewish kin on behalf of the Roman government. As such, they were widely despised and considered to be traitors.

By comparing the prayers of these 2 men, Jesus teaches His self-righteous listeners an important and pertinent lesson. That said, His message is more broadly beneficial to everyone. It reveals the proper attitude of prayer.

II. THE PHARISEE’S PRAYER - Luke 18:11-12

The Pharisee offers his prayer while standing in the temple. One can safely assume, based upon the context of the story and what is known about the Pharisees, that he is standing in a prominent place that is visible to many others. Most likely, he stands in a confident and stately posture as he prays loudly for all to hear. Notice that he isn’t truly praying to God, but rather to himself. The purpose of this entire exercise is merely to put on a show in front of several witnesses.

The words of the Pharisee’s prayer further indicate his prideful attitude. He begins by thanking God that he is not like other types of sinful people - especially the tax-collector. His words strongly insinuate that he thinks of himself as better than or more worthy than they are. He bases this lofty opinion of himself on the frequency of his own fasting and the consistency of his tithes. The Pharisee doesn’t humble himself before God, but instead boasts about himself.

Many nominal and even false Christians offer prayers similar to that of this Pharisee. They brag about their own perceived goodness and/or cast stones at others as they pray. Some use prayer as a tool to spread gossip throughout the church. There are many ways that people misuse and even abuse prayer. This happens because of an improper attitude.

III. THE PUBLICAN’S PRAYER - Luke 18:13-14

Meanwhile, the publican is also praying elsewhere in the temple. He is some distance away, presumably in a more remote and less conspicuous location, where he prays privately. Though he stands, his head is bowed humbly and he doesn’t look up toward heaven. Instead he beats on his chest, a sign of sorrow and penitence. His position, posture, and expressions all indicate his contrition before God Almighty.

The short prayer spoken by the publican also reveals the condition of his heart. He opens by directing his request to God. He asks the LORD to have mercy on him because he is a sinner. Rather than praising himself and his own righteous deeds, this tax-collector recognizes his own wretchedness and rightly describes himself as a sinner. He does not compare himself to any

other person, but rather only to God's holiness - a standard which no one can measure up to. He humbly pleads for the LORD's mercy.

Christians should come into God's presence with the attitude of this publican. They should understand their own sinfulness and filthiness in light of His beauty and perfection. They should appreciate the privilege of prayer - that a holy God would even allow unworthy people to approach Him. When people pray, they should do so with a repentant and humble spirit.

CONCLUSION

Jesus concludes this parable by stating that the publican goes home justified while the Pharisee does not. To be justified means to be made righteous. In other words, the self-righteous Pharisee's prayer is not acceptable to God but the lowly publican's prayer is. Why the disparity? It's simple. The publican prays with a humble and reverent heart, while the Pharisee prays with arrogance and boasting. The attitude with which we pray is just as important, if not more so, than the words we say.

After telling this story, Jesus repeats an expression that He states on multiple occasions throughout the gospels. He declares that those who exalt themselves will be humbled while those who humble themselves will be exalted. He had previously made this statement after sharing "The Parable of the Wedding Feast", which focused upon the importance of living in humility. We studied this story earlier in this series. In "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican" Jesus applies this same idea to our prayer life.

Are your prayers being answered? Why or why not? Are you offering them with a humble and contrite heart? Perhaps our attitude is hampering the effectiveness of our prayers...

Pray Without Ceasing

Originally Preached - 12/3/2017

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Last week we began studying “The Parables of Jesus” that deal specifically with prayer. We talked about the importance of approaching God with a humble attitude. We learned that the LORD will not justify those who speak to Him with a prideful and self-righteous heart, while those who have a contrite and reverent spirit will be both heard and justified. Staying on the same issue, this morning we will examine 2 additional parables that teach us another important aspect of an effective prayer life.

In his first letter to the Thessalonian church, Paul advises his fellow believers to “pray without ceasing”. Obviously, a person cannot literally pray all the time and never stop. Thus, this verse must have another meaning. The Greek word used in this phrase actually translates incessantly. Someone who is incessant never gives up. They are unrelenting in their pursuit of the goal. Though they may fail time and time again, they continue striving until they get whatever it is that they want. Therefore, perhaps a more understandable interpretation of Paul’s instruction is to “pray persistently”. This is the theme of today’s message.

“The Parable of the Friend at Night” and “The Parable of the Unjust Judge” are both found exclusively in Luke’s gospel. These stories are told on separate occasions, in both instances as part of a broader teaching on the topic of prayer. Over the years these parables have been depicted in various drawings, etchings, and paintings. These 2 stories share a common message, and therefore we will consider them together.

I. LEND ME BREAD - Luke 11:5-8

Jesus tells of a friend who comes to your house at midnight and begins pounding on your door asking to borrow 3 loaves of bread. Your friend explains that one of his friends, who was travelling by night, has arrived unexpectedly at his house and needs something to eat. Unfortunately, your friend has nothing to give him. Already having laid down to sleep with your family, you tell your friend to go home and leave you alone. However, your friend continues to knock until finally you get up and give him all that he needs.

Jesus says this parable to His disciples after He finishes praying at a certain place. Apparently, they were listening and wanted to learn how to pray like Jesus did. Immediately before He tells the parable, Jesus teaches them “The Lord’s Prayer”. As He had done on a few other occasions, Jesus tells this parable from the second-person perspective. This allows the Lord to actually include His listeners as characters in the story. Perhaps the disciples were picturing one of their own friends knocking at their door late at night as they listened to Jesus speak.

After telling “The Parable of the Friend at Night”, Jesus instructs His disciples to ask, seek, and knock. Remember, He is teaching them to pray. But more than that, He is explaining that they must keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. They must be persistent in prayer - not giving up immediately if they don’t receive an answer. One of the ways that God tests the Christian’s faith is by delaying His actions and/or answers. In this manner, the LORD can determine if who believes enough to persist and who doesn’t.

II. GIVE ME PROTECTION - Luke 18:1-8

Jesus describes a widow who approaches a judge in her city hoping to secure legal protection from her opponent. However, this particular judge is corrupt, fearing neither God or man, and initially refuses to help her. Though she continues to come before him and plead her case, he still remains unwilling. The widow doggedly refuses to give up, until finally the unjust judge consents to her request simply because of her constant bothering and pestering.

Jesus tells “The Parable of the Unjust Judge” in order to demonstrate to His listeners that they mustn’t lose heart when they pray. While it is unclear who all Jesus is speaking this parable to, clearly the disciples are chief among the audience. The widow in this illustration simply wouldn’t quit badgering the judge, until finally he gave in. In like fashion, they are commanded to persistently pray knowing that the LORD will bring justice to them quickly.

This parable, like most of the others, is told from the third-person point of view. It is followed by “The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican”, the focus of last week’s message. At the end of this story, Jesus asks whether or not He will find faith on the earth when He comes again. When this question is considered in the context of this parable, it seems that the Lord is referring to the type of faith that would be needed to persist in prayer. In other words, by the time Jesus returns will people still be praying adamantly or will they have already lost hope?

III. FRIENDLY AND JUST

The primary meaning of both parables is that the followers of Jesus should persist in prayer. However, there is a secondary observation that is important to point out. It involves the character of God. Notice that in both parables, the person to whom the petition is being made is originally uninclined to help. The sleeping friend is hesitant to get up, fearing that he might wake his family, and the unjust judge isn’t sympathetic enough to assist the widow. Neither one of them are noble or gracious enough to help without some arm-twisting...

But Jesus is not an unwilling friend. On the contrary, He is the Christian’s dearest friend. He is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Jesus told His disciples that they were no longer to be called slaves, but rather to be called friends. Also, Jesus is not an unjust judge. On the contrary, He is a righteous judge who can be trusted to render judgments fairly and without bias. In other

words, the Lord is a better friend and a more just judge than the characters mentioned in these parables. He is a good God. He doesn't need to be awakened or bugged to death.

This leads to a final thought... if the drowsy friend and the corrupt judge both eventually decided to help - albeit somewhat begrudgingly, how much more so will a Best Friend and a Righteous Judge be willing to help? The LORD eagerly waits to hear His people pray and takes great delight in answering them. He wants to give them the desires of their hearts. That said, when the disciple prays he can take comfort in the character of God knowing that He is both willing and able to respond.

CONCLUSION

Sometimes it might seem that God is not listening to our prayers. We pray with the right attitude, we pray in accordance to His will, we pray with expectant faith... and yet the answers don't seem to come. The problems don't go away, the sickness doesn't subside, and the cupboards remain bare. Still we must persist in prayer and never lose heart. We must realize that the LORD does hear us. Perhaps we are just one prayer away from receiving His answer.

That said, even if God never gives us what we ask of Him still our persistence reveals the true depth of our faith. Our prayer life says more about us than it does about God. Will we continue to trust in Him and cry out to Him even when He is silent? True faith doesn't stop believing... ever, no matter what. So keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. Persist in prayer!

Now What?

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Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. - James 4:17

After several months of intensive study, this morning we will finally conclude our sermon series titled "The Parables of Jesus". Over the course of this journey together (including today's message) we have examined 40 different parables. These have been categorized by topic into 5 different chapters - His Kingdom (6), His Character (8), His Covenant (5), His Coming (7), and His Children (14). We have carefully broken down each story to discover its meaning so that we might better understand the teachings of Jesus.

As was mentioned earlier in this series, Matthew 13 is known as the "Parabolic Discourse". In this chapter Jesus tells 8 distinct parables, some to the large crowds gathered by the sea shore and others to His disciples after going back to the house. The first 7 of these parables are the Sower and the Soils, the Tares and the Wheat, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Hidden Treasure, the Costly Pearl, and the Dragnet. After teaching all of these, the Lord shares a final parable that neatly ties them up in a bow. In the same way, this parable provides a fitting conclusion for this entire series...

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD - Matthew 13:51-52

Jesus has just finished sharing several unique parables - some with explanations and others without. Having come to the end of His speech, Jesus asks the disciples if they've understood everything He's said. He is checking to make sure they don't have any additional questions. The disciples answer "yes", indicating that they've both heard and understood all of the things that Jesus has taught them that day. Their affirmative response prompts Him to tell one final illustration called "The Parable of the Head of the Household".

Jesus describes a person who is the head of their household. In other words, they are the leader of those who are living in their house - usually their children and/or other family members. As such, they are ultimately responsible for the provision and protection of their dependents. That said, the head of the household should manage their possessions - both old and new - in such a way as to benefit the entire family.

In the same way, Christians are responsible for how they manage the things that they've learned. As disciples of the Kingdom, they are privy to stories, lessons, and other revelations from God that together constitute a treasury of truths - both from the Old and New Testaments. These should be applied personally, and should be shared with others, to ensure that the household of God is properly cared for and that it operates effectively. Those who have heard and understood the teachings of Jesus are obligated to implement them in their lives.

CONCLUSION

My friends, we have meticulously studied and sought to understand many of “The Parables of Jesus”. Now what? Is just knowing them enough? No. We must also incorporate what we’ve learned into our daily lives. It is our responsibility to do this. Therefore, as we draw this series to an end, let’s briefly review the many lessons that we’ve learned...

- Although God is sovereignly and wholly responsible for His Kingdom’s growth, He still calls and uses believers to spread the gospel message to all people knowing that some will receive it and others will not.
- Though it started very small, the Kingdom of God has and will continue to spread and grow into a mighty expanse.
- The Kingdom of God is of such immeasurable worth that people should joyfully be willing to give up any and everything as necessary in order to acquire it personally.
- God actively seeks the lost and takes great delight, along with all of those in Heaven, in the redemption of sinners.
- As a heavenly Father, God lovingly and longingly waits for the return of His wayward children, always ready to forgive and receive those who repent and return to Him.
- God forgives all repentant sinners completely, regardless of the relative magnitude of their sin, often leading those who feel as though they have been forgiven more to openly exhibit a greater love for Him.
- God will not forgive Christians who harbor unforgiveness toward others. Though they are still saved, the closeness of their fellowship with God and effectiveness of their Christian life will be severely hindered.
- Jesus shows neighborly love, compassion, and care for all people regardless of race, ethnicity, status, or any other factor - especially those who are hurting and/or in need - and He commands His followers to do likewise.
- God graciously offers the fullness of salvation equally to all who come to repentance and faith in Christ, regardless of how long they may have been unsaved before making that decision.
- Jesus received the power to cast out demons and perform other miraculous deeds from God Almighty. He is mightier than Satan, has the strength to bind him, to plunder his house, and to deliver that which He desires.
- The New Covenant established by Jesus and based upon God’s grace is incompatible with and can not be contained by the Old Covenant of the law which was based upon works.
- God presented the New Covenant first to His chosen people Israel, but they initially rejected it. Jesus pleaded for the Father’s patience, but warned the Jews of God’s coming judgment if their rejection continued.
- The children of Israel were party to the Old Covenant, but because they repeatedly mistreated God’s prophets and ultimately killed His Son Jesus, the LORD established the New Covenant with the Church instead.

- The invitation of God has been formally extended to the Gentiles. That said, only those who have been covered in the righteousness of Christ under the terms of the New Covenant will be acceptable to God.
- Jesus has identified several observable signs that will precede His second coming and serve as warnings that the end times are near.
- Because the exact timing of Jesus' second coming is unknown, Christians should always remain alert so that when He arrives they will be found ready as opposed to others who will be caught unaware and unprepared.
- When Jesus returns only true believers will join Him and receive their heavenly reward, while false believers will be shut out from His presence and suffer punishment along with the unrighteous and hypocrites.
- At the final judgment, Jesus will instruct His angels to gather the unbelievers from among the believers and cast them into fiery Hell.
- God expects His children to be good stewards by utilizing the various gifts, talents, riches, and blessings that He has entrusted to them in order to bring Him glory and accomplish His desired purposes.
- Worldly money managers seek to take care of themselves first, often at the expense of others, but godly stewards use their wealth to serve others who will someday gratefully welcome them into Heaven.
- Greedy accumulation of excessive wealth for oneself in this life is foolishness, because it cannot be carried over into eternity after a person dies.
- God desires that His children be obedient to Him, both in word and - more importantly - in deed.
- Born-again believers have been filled with the light of Jesus and should allow it to shine brightly in their lives so that sin will be exposed and others will be able to see Christ through them.
- Jesus taught His children not to exalt themselves, but rather to practice humility by serving God and others unconditionally without any expectation of repayment or gratitude.
- God's children have been called to build their lives upon the strong foundation of Jesus Christ and His teachings in order to withstand the stormy winds and rain that will come against them.
- Those who desire to follow Jesus should count the cost of discipleship before making the commitment.
- Christians should pray with a humble and repentant attitude, realizing that God will not accept prayers offered in pride and self-righteousness.
- God's children should persist in prayer even if their petitions seem to go unheard and/or unanswered.
- Those who have heard and understood the teachings of Jesus are responsible for teaching them and applying them to their lives.

May the timeless truths of these parables abide always in our hearts and minds, leading us to walk more closely with Jesus and in sweeter fellowship with God our Father every single day.

“The Parables of Jesus” Table

HIS KINGDOM - Parables concerning the Kingdom of God	
<p><u>The Sower and the Soils</u> (Mt 13:3-9, Mk 4:3-9, Lk 8:5-8) <u>The Growing Seed</u> (Mk 4:26-29)</p>	<p>Although God is sovereignly and wholly responsible for His Kingdom's growth, He still calls and uses believers to spread the gospel message to all people knowing that some will receive it and others will not.</p>
<p><u>The Mustard Seed</u> (Mt 13:31-32, Mk 4:30-32, Lk 13:18-19) <u>The Leaven</u> (Mt 13:33, Lk 13:20-21)</p>	<p>Though it started very small, the Kingdom of God has and will continue to spread and grow into a mighty expanse.</p>
<p><u>The Hidden Treasure</u> (Mt 13:44) <u>The Costly Pearl</u> (Mt 13:45-46)</p>	<p>The Kingdom of God is of such immeasurable worth that people should joyfully be willing to give up any and everything as necessary in order to acquire it personally.</p>
HIS CHARACTER - Parables concerning the Character of God	
<p><u>The Good Shepherd</u> (Mt 18:10-14, Lk 15:4-6) <u>The Lost Coin</u> (Lk 15:8-9)</p>	<p>God actively seeks the lost and takes great delight, along with all of those in Heaven, in the redemption of sinners.</p>
<p><u>The Prodigal Son</u> (Lk 15:11-32)</p>	<p>As a heavenly Father, God lovingly and longingly waits for the return of His wayward children, always ready to forgive and receive those who repent and return to Him.</p>
<p><u>The Two Debtors</u> (Lk 7:41-43)</p>	<p>God forgives all repentant sinners completely, regardless of the relative magnitude of their sin, often leading those who feel as though they have been forgiven more to openly exhibit a greater love for Him.</p>
<p><u>The Unforgiving Servant</u> (Mt 18:23-25)</p>	<p>God will not forgive Christians who harbor unforgiveness toward others. Though they are still saved, the closeness of their fellowship with God and effectiveness of their Christian life will be severely hindered.</p>
<p><u>The Good Samaritan</u> (Lk 10:25-37)</p>	<p>Jesus shows neighborly love, compassion, and care for all people regardless of race, ethnicity, status, or any other factor - especially those who are hurting and/or in need - and He commands His followers to do likewise.</p>
<p><u>The Workers in the Vineyard</u> (Mt 20:1-16)</p>	<p>God graciously offers the fullness of salvation equally to all who come to repentance and faith in Christ, regardless of how long they may have been unsaved before making that decision.</p>
<p><u>The Strong Man</u> (Mt 12:29, Mk 3:27, Lk 11:21-22)</p>	<p>Jesus received the power to cast out demons and perform other miraculous deeds from God Almighty. He is mightier than Satan, has the strength to bind him, to plunder his house, and to deliver that which He desires.</p>
HIS COVENANTS - Parables concerning the Covenants of God	
<p><u>The New Patch</u> (Mt 9:16, Mk 2:21, Lk 5:36) <u>The New Wine</u> (Mt 9:17, Mk 2:22, Lk 5:37-39)</p>	<p>The New Covenant established by Jesus and based upon God's grace is incompatible with and can not be contained by the Old Covenant of the law which was based upon works.</p>
<p><u>The Barren Fig Tree</u> (Luke 13:6-9)</p>	<p>God presented the New Covenant first to His chosen people Israel, but they initially rejected it. Jesus pleaded for the Father's patience, but warned the Jews of God's coming judgment if their rejection continued.</p>
<p><u>The Wicked Husbandmen</u> (Mt 21:33-41, Mk 12:1-9, Lk 20:9-16)</p>	<p>The children of Israel were party to the Old Covenant, but because they repeatedly mistreated God's prophets and ultimately killed His Son Jesus, the LORD established the New Covenant with the Church instead.</p>
<p><u>The Great Banquet</u> (Mt 22:1-14, Lk 14:15-24)</p>	<p>The invitation of God has been formally extended to the Gentiles. That said, only those who have been covered in the righteousness of Christ under the terms of the New Covenant will be acceptable to God.</p>

HIS COMING - Parables concerning the Second Coming of Christ	
<u>The Budding Fig Tree</u> (Mt 24:32-35, Mk 13:28-31, Lk 21:29-33)	Jesus has identified several observable signs that will precede His second coming and serve as warnings that the end times are near.
<u>The Watchful Slaves</u> (Mk 13:34-37, Lk 12:35-38) <u>The Indifferent Homeowner</u> (Mt 24:42-44, Lk 12:39-40)	Because the exact timing of Jesus' second coming is unknown, Christians should always remain alert so that when He arrives they will be found ready as opposed to others who will be caught unaware and unprepared.
<u>The 10 Bridesmaids</u> (Mt 25:1-13) <u>The Faithful Servant</u> (Mt 24:45-51, Lk 12:41-48)	When Jesus returns only true believers will join Him and receive their heavenly reward, while false believers will be shut out from His presence and suffer punishment along with the unrighteous and hypocrites.
<u>The Tares and Wheat</u> (Mt 13:24-30) <u>The Dragnet</u> (Mt 13:47-50)	At the final judgment, Jesus will instruct His angels to gather the unbelievers from among the believers and cast them into fiery Hell.
HIS CHILDREN - Parables concerning righteous living for God's Children	
<u>The Talents</u> (Mt 25:14-30, Lk 19:12-27)	God expects His children to be good stewards by utilizing the various gifts, talents, riches, and blessings that He has entrusted to them in order to bring Him glory and accomplish His desired purposes.
<u>The Unjust Steward</u> (Lk 16:1-13)	Worldly money managers seek to take care of themselves first, often at the expense of others, but godly stewards use their wealth to serve others who will someday gratefully welcome them into Heaven.
<u>The Rich Fool</u> (Lk 12:16-21)	Greedy accumulation of excessive wealth for oneself in this life is foolishness, because it cannot be carried over into eternity after a person dies.
<u>The Two Sons</u> (Mt 21:28-32)	God desires that His children be obedient to Him, both in word and - more importantly - in deed.
<u>The Lamp under a Bushel</u> (Mt 5:14-15, Mk 4:21-25, Lk 8:16-18)	Born-again believers have been filled with the light of Jesus and should allow it to shine brightly in their lives so that sin will be exposed and others will be able to see Christ through them.
<u>The Wedding Feast</u> (Lk 14:7-14) <u>The Master and the Slave</u> (Lk 17:7-10)	Jesus taught His children not to exalt themselves, but rather to practice humility by serving God and others unconditionally without any expectation of repayment or gratitude.
<u>The Wise and Foolish Builders</u> (Mt 7:24-27, Lk 6:46-49)	God's children have been called to build their lives upon the strong foundation of Jesus Christ and His teachings in order to withstand the stormy winds and rain that will come against them.
<u>The Tower Builder</u> (Lk 14:28-30) <u>The Outnumbered King</u> (Lk 14:31-32)	Those who desire to follow Jesus should count the cost of discipleship before making the commitment.
<u>The Pharisee and the Publican</u> (Lk 18:9-14)	Christians should pray with a humble and repentant attitude, realizing that God will not accept prayers offered in pride and self-righteousness.
<u>The Friend at Night</u> (Lk 11:5-8) <u>The Unjust Judge</u> (Lk 18:1-8)	God's children should persist in prayer even if their petitions seem to go unheard and/or unanswered.
<u>The Head of the Household</u> (Mt 13:52)	Those who have heard and understood the teachings of Jesus are responsible for applying them personally and sharing them with others.

Notable Exclusions

A parable, by definition, is an earthly or natural story or illustration that teaches a spiritual or moral lesson. The parable itself is an analogy. It presents a particular idea or principle *indirectly* and/or by comparison, much like a simile or metaphor.

The details of “The Sheep and Goats Judgment” passage found in Matthew 25:31-46 clearly and directly describe a heavenly or supernatural event. This passage explicitly pictures Jesus, the Divine Judge, dividing the righteous from the unrighteous. This is stated at the outset. While there is a passing comparison to a shepherd separating his sheep, it is obvious based on the dialogue of the story that Jesus is dealing with people - not sheep. The characters are specifically identified. Whatsmore, there is no unspoken moral or lesson in the story. The preponderance of the passage is not representative at all. Thus, in my view it is not a parable. It is a direct and literal description of a future heavenly judgment. This is to be compared with language found in the “The Parables of the Tares and Wheat” and “The Parable of the Dragnet”.

Again, the details of “The Rich Man and Lazarus” passage found in Luke 16:19-31 clearly and directly describe a heavenly or supernatural event. This passage explicitly describes what happened to a specific, actual person named Lazarus after he died. Though the rich man is not named, he is also a specific person. These characters, along with the others named in the story, are not broadly representative of other people. Also, there is no unspoken moral or lesson presented here. In this passage Jesus relays a literal, first-hand testimony of an actual supernatural occurrence. Though there may be some similarities, by my estimation this story is not a parable.