

# The Parables of Jesus

## Lessons from the Master

### *Student Workbook*

#### *Book 1*

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# The Parables of Jesus

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# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 1

### *Why Did Jesus Teach Through Parables?*

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

Matthew 13:34 (re. Psalm 78)

#### **Lesson Goal:**

To better understand why Jesus taught with parables.

#### **Definitions:**

“The Greek word for parable literally denotes a placing beside... It is generally used of a somewhat lengthy utterance or narrative drawn from nature or human circumstances, the object of which is to set forth a spiritual lesson... In the New Testament it (the Greek word) is found outside the Gospels, only in Hebrews 9:9 and 11:19.” *W.E. Vine “Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words”*

“A short, simple story from which a moral lesson may be drawn; it is usually an allegory.” *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition*

Allegory: “A story in which people, things, and happenings have another meaning... allegories are used for teaching or explaining.” *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition*

#### **Commentary:**

People remember stories. Many people in the world do not know much about the Bible but it is remarkable how many know something about some of the stories/parables that Jesus taught. I suspect 90% of the population in the United States know the story of the Good Samaritan. It is commonly referenced not only by those of faith but also by those who claim no faith or belief in God at all. It is considered a nice example of going out of one’s way to help others regardless of race or creed. In fact, many states have what is called a “Good Samaritan Law” which is there to limit the liability of someone who has stopped to assist someone who has had an automobile accident or similar mishap. Likewise, many people know the parable of the Prodigal Son and use it as an example of unconditional love and the power of second chances. These parables have been passed down through the centuries and have been an inspiration to many. Why? Why are such simple stories so powerful and timeless?

Here are some things to consider.

- Using more of our senses.
  - The healthy person has five senses: hearing, touching, smelling, seeing, and tasting. For the average person, the more senses that are engaged, the more likely they will learn and retain the learning. Through the use of

parables, Jesus challenged His listeners to not only hear His message but to see it (in their mind's eye) and perhaps almost touch it and smell it and taste it. Jesus' parables were vivid pictures that captured more than the ear but also engaged the mind and the senses.

- Most of us tend to think in pictures: what is beauty? Show me a beautiful flower and I will know beauty. What is kindness and compassion? Show me a good Samaritan and I will know kindness and compassion.
- Parables were a common way to teach during Christ's time. They were (and still are) a way of getting people to see a message they may otherwise be missing.
  - The parable that Nathan told David (2 Samuel 12:1-9)
    - As soon as David heard the parable he was convicted of his sin and moved to repentance and action.
- The parables were practical. They were not just for meditation or contemplation. Jesus expected the lessons He taught through parables to be applied immediately.
- The parables were earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. Jesus used the things of this world to explain heavenly things.
- When His disciples asked Him directly why He taught in parables, Jesus said: *"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand"* (Matthew 13:13). The multitudes that Jesus taught were Jews who had heard the Books of Moses, the Law and the Prophets numerous times but they were not comprehending (understanding) what they heard and saw. Jesus taught through parables so that they might clearly and vividly understand the message as it pertained to them (Nathan opened David's eyes with a parable). Are we sometimes dull of hearing too? Do our eyes need to be opened? *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"*
- The principles of interpretation.
  - All parables are not allegories. Every object in the parable does not have to have a different meaning. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan is quite literal and forcing parts of it to be symbolic is not needed.
  - The parables of Jesus were spoken to be heard. They were not written so that the audience could later read them and dissect them for hidden symbolism. We have that luxury today and probably over-analyze the parables to our own harm. They were meant to have an impact on the hearer immediately. And they did.
  - What was the context? To understand the parable, we need to understand the circumstances surrounding it.
  - What was the message to those hearing the parable at that time and for us today? The entire message of Jesus' gospel was not contained in any one parable. Typically, one or two key points were being made.

## **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What is a parable?
2. Can you think of any parables you have heard besides the parables in the Bible?
3. Why is teaching through the use of parables effective?
4. What was Jesus' answer when He was asked why He taught through parables?
5. What was the parable that the prophet Nathan told King David (2 Samuel 12:1-9)? What were the circumstances? What was the result?
6. What is your favorite parable? Why?
7. The parables were originally not written down. They were spoken by Jesus and heard by the multitudes. The original hearers did not have the luxury of written copies of the parables. What are the advantages of having the parables in text so that we can read them? Are there any disadvantages?

## **Making Application**

Think about the methods you use to teach others. Do you spend most of your time telling the person(s) what you know and what you think they need to know? This isn't necessarily bad but perhaps you could occasionally work in an illustration, a story to make your point even more vivid. I believe Jesus was not only teaching through parables, but He was also teaching us how to teach.

# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 2

### *The Sower – Part 1*

*“All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them.”*

Matthew 13:34

#### **Text:**

Matthew 13:1-8; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-10

*“On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying ‘Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’”*

#### **The Context:**

This is the first parable that is recorded and it is recorded in three of the gospels (the gospel of John does not contain any of the parables). Matthew and Mark mention that Christ spoke this parable from a boat. The multitudes were pressing so closely on Him, that He separated Himself from them by getting into a boat. The multitudes indicate that there was great interest in what Jesus had to say. His fame had spread rapidly. The crowds were probably attracted to Him primarily because of the miracles He performed but they also regarded Him as a great prophet so they wanted to hear Him teach. The people were mostly Jews from the surrounding regions but there likely were a few Gentiles (non-Jews) present too. He had a great audience. What would He teach them with this first parable?

#### **The Message:**

- Belief, acceptance of God’s Word, and growth depend on the heart. The message (God’s Word) does not change. The same word that causes growth in some has little or no effect on others.
- Why is this? The soil (the heart) makes all the difference.
- I need to constantly monitor my heart. Is it hard and not at all receptive to God’s Word? Is my heart mostly in the world even though I go through the motions of following Christ? Or do I have the heart of a servant who is willing to listen and happily obey my Master?

## **Commentary:**

There are four types of soil mentioned in this parable:

- The soil by the wayside
- The rocky soil
- The soil with thorns in it
- The good soil

In this study, we will look at the parable in two lessons. In this first lesson we will consider the first two types of soil: soil by the wayside and soil on stony places. In the next lesson we will consider the soil among thorns and the good soil.

**What is the soil by the wayside?** Unlike modern farm equipment which allows the farmer to precisely plant his crops in rows, the ancient farmer simply broadcast (or threw) his seed on the ground knowing that some of it would take root and some of it would not. Similarly today, when we broadcast or spread the message of Christ, we do so indiscriminately. We teach it to all because we do not know the hearts of men and women. Sadly, many simply do not want to hear the message of God's Word. It is before them. It is available to them but they simply ignore it and go their own way. Just like the soil by the wayside, their hearts are hard. They are not receptive to God's Word. With time, the seed which was sown but ignored is eventually devoured by the birds. Many will look back on the day of judgment and ask themselves "why didn't I listen?" "why did I ignore the good news of Christ?" but it will be too late. *"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

To accept God requires work and engaging one's mind. People choose not to believe God and His Word for various reasons, such as:

- There is mental laziness.
  - "I don't want to be bothered."
- There is mental arrogance.
  - The Pharisees did not believe Jesus because of their arrogance.
  - Romans 1:22 *"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."*
- There is mental fear.
  - Psalm 53:1
  - "He denies the existence of God, not because he is intellectually convinced that God does not exist, but because he does not want God to exist."<sup>1</sup>

**What is the soil on rocky ground?** Unlike those with hard hearts who want nothing to do with Christ's gospel, there are those who listen and obey. They are fascinated by the message but their hearts have no depth. Tomorrow they may be fascinated by some other teaching. Jesus further explains that those in this condition *"have no root."* The soil needs depth in order to nourish the seed. Likewise, the heart must have depth. It must be soft so that it can nourish the word of God. If there is no depth to one's faith, in the heat of the day it will wither away. And you can be certain that your faith will be tested.

In Luke 14:25-33 Jesus warns the multitudes that following Him would not be easy. He tells them to count the cost and concludes by saying *"...whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."* That was a hard saying for many who heard Christ and it is a hard saying for many today. Consider Christ's teaching in another



place: John 6:26-27 “*Jesus answered and said, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.’*” and John 6:63-64 “*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him.*”

Notice especially verse 66 in John chapter 6: “*From that time many of His disciples went away and walked with Him no more.*” They had no root or depth of soil.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Why would Jesus use a parable about farming, seeds, and soil to teach the multitudes?
2. Read Isaiah 55:11. If the seed in this parable is God’s Word, what does this verse in Isaiah tell us about sowing the seed?
3. What is the soil by the wayside?
4. What is the soil on rocky ground?
5. In what ways will the life of a christian be difficult? Will the life of a christian ever be easy? If so, in what ways?

### **Making Application**

Make the parable of the sower personal. What about me? Have I counted the cost? Am I giving Christ little, much, or all? What will I do when following Christ becomes hard?

# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 3

### *The Sower – Part 2*

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

Matthew 13:22

#### **Text:**

Matthew 13:1-8; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-10

*“On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying ‘Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’”*

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#### **The Message:**

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- Why is this? The soil (the heart) makes all the difference.
- I need to constantly monitor my heart. Is it hard and not at all receptive to God’s Word? Is my heart mostly in the world even though I go through the motions of following Christ? Or do I have the heart of a servant who is willing to listen and happily obey my Master?

## **Commentary:**

**What is the soil with thorns in it?** As any amateur gardener knows, most soil looks good in the spring when it is tilled. But, if there were weeds in the soil last year, their seeds are still there. It will take constant attention in the form of hoeing and weeding to keep the weeds (or thorns) from choking out the good seed. Likewise, many start the christian journey with every intention of remaining faithful and growing but we live in a very sinful world. While we are urged to be “in the world but not of the world” (John 17:15-18) the temptations around us are very strong. It is easy to just go through the motions of being God’s child. One may still be at the assembly every Sunday but he is not fruitful. His heart is not in it. His heart is in the world. He is not growing. He is not bearing fruit.

In His explanation of this parable (Matthew 13:22) Christ identifies the thorns as “*the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.*” Satan, the ruler of this world promises much but delivers nothing but pain, sorrow, and death.

*“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition”* (1 Timothy 6:6-9).

**What is the good soil?** Notice the qualities of the good soil... the good heart.

- It is first of all receptive to the seed.
  - The power is in the seed not the soil. The soil is a place for the seed to grow and produce fruit. The heart of man is the receptacle for God’s Word (the seed). The power is in the Word of God but it needs a place to take root and grow. That is our part and it begins by allowing God’s Word into our hearts.
- It has depth to allow the seed to grow and take root in order to draw nourishment.
  - In this microwave world we live in, we tend to want everything immediately. We don’t like waiting. However, nature is not that way and Jesus uses some basic laws of nature (which He created by the way) to make His point in this parable. It takes time to grow and produce fruit. The seed must be watered and the soil (heart) tended (weeded). The sun needs to fill the young plant with nutrients. The new christian needs to be patient but persistent. Fill their heart with good things and seek life and growth from the Giver of life. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning”* (James 1:17).
- It keeps itself clean and free from the thorns and weeds.
  - The good soil also works at staying pure so that it can bear good fruit. *“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world”* (James 1:27).

- It produces fruit.
  - The purpose of sowing the seed is to bear fruit. When all the elements are in place: seed, good soil, water, nutrients (sun), etc. the seed will grow and bear fruit.
  - It is all part of God's plan.
  - Isaiah 55:10-11 *“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”*

Notice what is not required of the good soil.

- Education
- Status
- Money
- As with all of God's gifts, anyone who so desires can have this good soil (heart). It is not dependent on worldly circumstances. It is up to us.

### **STOP AND THINK!**

Consider the good soil on a personal level. Do I have these qualities in my life? Am I receptive to God's Word? Do I study it and meditate on it? Do I keep it in my heart constantly so that it can grow and guide my life? Do I make a conscious effort to keep myself pure and free from the influences of the world? Am I bearing fruit?

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Three of the four soils were not good. Comment on that.
  
2. Has the deceitfulness of riches always been a problem? Why or why not? How do we overcome this temptation?
  
3. What does it take to have good soil (a good heart)?
  
4. What types of fruit will the good soil produce?

5. How powerful is the seed (the Word of God)?

### **Making Application**

Consider Galatians 6:7-8 and how it might apply to the message of this parable and your application of the message.

*“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”*

# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 4

### *The Wheat and The Tares*

*“but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.”*

Matthew 13:25

#### **Lesson Goal:**

To better understand how Satan works against us.

#### **Text:**

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

Matthew 13:24-30

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

#### **The Context:**

Jesus has just concluded His parable about the sower and the soils. He now adds another twist. What if there is a third party present, an enemy? The seed (God’s Word) is still good and powerful. The soil (the heart of the individual) may also be good, receptive, fertile and ready not only to receive the seed but to grow and bear fruit. Could anything else affect the growth of the good seed? Yes, there is a third party (Satan). He is an enemy and he will sow tares or weeds along with the good grain.

#### **The Message:**

- Satan is busy and is actively trying to destroy God’ work (1 Peter 5:8). Constantly be on guard.
- There will be a final judgment when the good seed and the bad seed are separated. Don’t let the sin around you get you down. God is in control and ultimately His righteousness and justice will prevail.

## Commentary:

At the end of this parable we have the luxury of reading Jesus' explanation of the parable. Let's consider Christ's own words (Matthew 13:36-43).

- Verse 37 – In this parable, Jesus is the sower. Through His personal ministry, then through His chosen apostles, and finally through His holy written word (the Bible), Jesus is sowing the seed of the gospel of man's redemption from sin. Notice in verse 24 that the seed is good and the result of Christ's sowing the seed is His Kingdom, His Church.
- Verse 38 – Where is Christ planting His seed? In the world. He is taking His message to those who are lost and dying in sin. Later, His commission to His Apostles was to continue to do the same. *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:15).
  - He goes on to explain that the seed He is sowing are His disciples, Christians. But the tares or weeds are *“the sons of the wicked one”* (Satan).
  - *“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do...”* (John 8:44).
- Verse 39 – In this verse Christ specifically identifies the one who planted the tares as the devil. The harvest will come at the end of the age when all stand before God to give an account for our lives (Revelation 20:12) and the reapers (those doing the harvesting) are God's angels. When we stand before God, we will be either wheat (good grain) or tares (weeds). This is consistent with what Jesus taught in Matthew 25:31-33 *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.”* In this parable, instead of separating the tares from the wheat Christ is separating the goats from the sheep. In either case, the message is clear: judgment is coming.
- Verses 40-43 – In the final judgment, the sons of the devil (the tares) will be separated from the sons of God (the wheat). Once the tares had been separated from the good grain, the farmer would get rid of the tares by burning them. So it will be with the unrighteous. *“And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire”* (Revelation 20:15). The *“wailing and gnashing of teeth”* represent not only pain but also regret. I believe many will be surprised in that day when they find the form of religion they practiced (even in the name of Jesus) was detestable to our Lord. In this parable, He says they *“practiced lawlessness.”* In other words, they did not strictly follow Christ's commands (laws) but allowed many unlawful practices to come into the church simply because they seemed good to them. We must always look for authority for what we do as God's children. After all, it is not our church. It is His church. Notice a parallel passage in Matthew 7:21-23 *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”*

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. In this parable, what is the wheat (grain)? What do the tares (weeds) represent?
2. Who is the enemy that planted the tares among the wheat?
3. Can the church be corrupted from within?
4. What will eventually happen to the tares?
5. What will eventually happen to the wheat?

### **Making Application**

We can become very discouraged when our efforts to lead someone to Christ are thwarted by Satan. We must never quit trying. Go out of your way to help someone who has become discouraged. Remind them (and yourself) that whatever the setback, it is only temporary. Christ has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us.



# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 5

### *The Mustard Seed*

*“For who has despised the day of small things?”*

Zechariah 4:10

#### **Lesson Goal:**

To better understand the message of this parable about a mustard seed.

#### **Text:**

Matthew 13:31-32

*“Another parable He put forth to them, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.’”*

Mark 4:30-32

*“Then He said, ‘To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.’”*

Luke 13:18-19

*“Then He said, ‘What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.’”*

#### **The Context:**

Jesus is telling another parable that uses plants and growth to make His point. Agriculture was something that just about everyone at that time understood. Even though there were cities, they were not large and most of the people lived in villages or small towns. None of them were very far from the country and most of them either passed by or worked in the fields daily. This parable, of the mustard seed, did not require one to be a farmer but just an observer of the plants and trees all around them. The mustard plant in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a garden herb and does not grow very tall. However, the mustard plant of Palestine in the 1<sup>st</sup> century did indeed grow quite large. “Mustard in Palestine was not a garden plant at all but a field plant because of the height to which it grew. It commonly grew to a height of seven or eight feet and its branches did look like the branches of a tree.”<sup>3</sup>

#### **The Message:**

- It’s not the beginning but the end state that matters.
- God causes the growth.

## **Commentary:**

The nation of Israel was about as small and insignificant as one nation could be when Jacob brought all his family to Egypt. We are told in Genesis 46:27 that *“all the persons of the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were seventy.”* But, in Egypt, they were nurtured and protected by God and their number grew into the millions. Exodus 12:37 *“Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children.”* Considering an equal number of women to men would raise the total to 1,200,000 and if there were 2 children for every man and woman, then the total would increase to 2,400,000 souls. Regardless of the exact number, it was a staggering increase. The only explanation was that God was at work. He had a plan for His people and He (not they) provided the increase.

There may have been those in the crowd who doubted Christ and could not see how his promise of a kingdom could ever amount to anything. In fact, we are told in John 6:66 that many stopped following Christ when he stopped feeding them and His teaching became hard (made them uneasy) *“From that time many of His disciples walked with Him no more.”* So Jesus told them a parable about the tiny mustard seed that, when watered and nourished, God causes to grow into a large shrub strong enough for the birds to *“nest under its shade.”* They all knew this to be true. They saw mustard trees every day. Christ was teaching them through this parable that when God causes the increase, there is no limit to its growth. After His resurrection, when Christ ascended into heaven to reign over His kingdom, the numbers were very small. *“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty)... (Acts 1:15).* Similar to the number in Jacob’s family when they first settled in Egypt. Similar to a mustard seed.

Today Christ’s gospel has literally has been preached throughout the entire world. He rules over a kingdom whose number only God knows (Acts 2:47) but it is vast and He will reign forever.

*“After these things I looked and behold a great multitude  
Which no one could number (only God knows the number ov),  
Of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues  
Standing before the throne and before the Lamb,  
Clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,”*

Revelation 7:9

Who are we to question small things when God is at work?

## **Questions for Discussion:**

1. In your own words, what did you learn from this parable?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. The parable of the mustard seed is one of the shortest parables. Is it short because the message is not all that important?

3. Who (or what) causes the mustard seed to grow?
  
4. Is there anything we can do to help the mustard seed grow?
  
5. I came to know about God and Jesus because when I was a small boy a neighbor of my parents crossed the street and invited them to a Bible study. This was a mustard seed that grew. Can you think of any similar mustard seeds in your life?

### **Making Application**

In the big scheme of things, each of us is very small. We are one soul out of billions of souls who have lived and are living. But that doesn't mean we are insignificant. God not only knows and cares for each of us (he knows the number of hairs on our head) but He gave His Son to die for us. Live today knowing that God loves you and you are significant and precious to Him.

# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 6

### *The Growing Seed and the Leaven*

*“In the morning sow your seed,  
And in the evening do not withhold your hand;  
For you do not know which will prosper,  
Either this or that,  
Or whether both alike will be good.”*

Ecclesiastes 11:6

#### **Lesson Goal:**

To better understand the message of growth.

#### **Text:**

##### **The Growing Seed:**

Mark 4:26-29

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

#### **The Context:**

The parable of the growing seed is recorded only by Mark and follows the parable of the sower and the exhortation to not hide your light (faith) but to let it shine. In this parable, Jesus continues the farming themes of seeds and growth.

#### **The Message:**

Just as the farmer must have faith when he plants his seeds, so God’s children must have faith in Him to provide growth. Work and diligence is required on the part of the farmer and the christian but ultimately it is God who gives the increase.

#### **Commentary:**

In verses 26 & 27 we see the farmer sowing his seed and then going about his other daily tasks. He goes to bed, he rises in the morning. He goes about his business and gives no thought to the seed. He has done his part. He has sown it and he has every expectation that it will “*sprout and grow.*” Truth be told, he really doesn’t know how it grows. He just know that it does.

*“As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything”* (Ecclesiastes 11:5).

Likewise, it is through the power of God that our faith grows and, in turn, the kingdom of God. We know that the seed needs a fertile environment, rain, sun, and nourishment but

the actual growth comes from God. Likewise, Christ is teaching us to trust God with the growth of His kingdom (His church). Our job is to provide the soil, and plant the seed in a fertile place where it will receive the rain and sun necessary for growth. If there is not sufficient rain, we may also need to water the seed as it grows, however the actual miracle of growth comes from God.

*“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (I Corinthians 3:5-7).*

### **Text:**

#### **The Leaven:**

Matthew 13:33

*“Another parable He spoke to them: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.’”*

Luke 13:20-21

*“And again He said, ‘To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.’”*

### **The Context:**

This parable immediately follows the parable of the mustard seed and there is a strong parallel in that both parables address the spreading of the gospel.

### **The Message:**

God will cause the gospel of His kingdom to spread just as surely as a small amount of yeast will spread through the entire bread dough.

### **Commentary:**

Here we have a non-agricultural parable but, like the parables about seeds, soil, and growth, the fundamental element used in this parable is very common. Very few who heard the parable then or read it now would wonder “what is leaven or yeast and what does it do?” Like the mustard seed in the previous parable, the leaven is small but very powerful. And, similar to the mustard seed, the effect it has is gradual and almost imperceptible. Not visible outwardly but inwardly the leaven is working on the dough and with time the bread will rise and be ready to bake. How similar this is to God’s Word as it quietly does its work on our hearts. Outwardly, there is no perceptible change but inwardly we are growing day by day. Strength, hope, and faith come from within and take time to develop. Like leaven having its effect on the mixture of grain through fermentation, God’s Word is growing within us and will change our lives.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What did you learn from the parable of the growing seed?

2. What did you learn from the parable of the leaven?
  
3. Why did Jesus use items such as seeds and leaven (yeast) to teach his lessons? Why didn't He simply speak these lessons plainly without using examples from nature?
  
4. When God spoke to Job (chapters 38-41), what examples did He use to prove His deity, power, and righteousness? What effect did this have on Job? Why?
  
5. Have you ever planted a seed? How did you feel when it sprouted and grew? Did you consider that God was at work?

### **Making Application**

There is so much we don't know about growth. But we do know if we are not active, we will not grow. Determine to stay active in your faith everyday. Don't take a day off. Everyday may not be a stellar day (some days will be harder than others) but do something everyday to help yourself or someone else spiritually.

# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 7

### *The Fig Tree and The Barren Fig Tree*

*“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven  
Will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed;  
And the kingdom shall not be left to other people;  
It shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms,  
And it shall stand forever”*

Daniel 2:44

#### **Lesson Goal:**

To better understand the meanings of the Fig Tree parables.

#### **Text:**

##### **The Fig Tree:**

Matthew 24:32-35

*“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near – at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.”*

Mark 13:28-30

*“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near – at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”*

Luke 21:29-33

*“Then He spoke to them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.’”*

#### **The Context:**

Jesus has just spoken about the destruction of Jerusalem and has warned His disciples that they should be ready to flee the city when they see signs of the impending siege by Rome. In the spring of 70 A.D. the Roman Emperor Vespasian placed his son, Titus in command of the Roman armies laying siege to Jerusalem. The fighting was fierce with many casualties on both sides until the Romans final reached the second wall (enclosing the temple and the upper and lower cities) in mid June. These walls were the most formidable of all so Titus turned to starvation as his tactic for capturing the city. These are the horrors Christ is describing in the verses prior to this parable. Historical accounts

of the final days of the siege of Jerusalem are very graphic. “A certain amount of food had been smuggled into the city almost nightly during the siege. But now the Romans sealed off Jerusalem completely with a wall of their own, made of earth and some five miles in circumference. From the outset of the siege those attempting to get through the encircling lines had been caught and crucified. Sometimes the daily executions reached 500; the crosses were never bare. Inside the city starvation and disease claimed a mounting toll. Bodies filled the streets and were stacked in houses. Thousands of corpses were thrown from the walls into the valleys below.”<sup>4</sup>

### **The Message:**

As beautiful and magnificent as the temple was, it would be utterly destroyed and along with it the final vestiges of God’s covenant with the children of Israel. The old physical law had been replaced by a new and more perfect spiritual covenant through Christ. Flee the city and flee the temple. They would be destroyed one final time by the Gentiles. *“And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”* (Luke 21:24).

### **Commentary:**

Look at the fig tree or any tree that buds. In the spring time of the year you can see the changes in the tree as it prepares to bud and produce fruit. Just as certain as one can be that one season will follow another (springtime, summer, autumn, and winter), Jesus is saying that the destruction of the Jerusalem and the temple is just as sure and certain. As certain as summer follows spring, this temple will be completely razed *“not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down.”* And He further tells those listening that this would happen soon: *“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”* Many of those present would live to see this happen. And, as Christ promised, many did. Jesus was making this prophecy in the final days of His ministry, around 33 A.D. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 70 A.D.

What lessons are there in this parable for us today? Here are just a couple and I am sure you can think of others:

- It is popular today to take these passages describing the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and make them into something called the “rapture.” This false teaching suggests that some will be taken (to reign with Christ for a thousand years) while others will be “left behind.” Of course Christ nowhere teaches this but His message and the message of His apostles was consistently *“and as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27). Don’t be taken in by this false doctrine. Know what Jesus is teaching in these scriptures and be prepared to kindly correct your friends who do not understand.
- We shouldn’t get too caught up in the physical things of this life. The Jews were admiring the beauty of the temple when Jesus taught them more perfectly that all physical things (even the temple) are only temporary.

*“Then, as some spoke of the temple,  
How it was decorated with beautiful stones and donations,  
He said, ‘These things which you see –*



*The days will come in which not one stone  
Will be left upon another that shall not be thrown down.’”*

- True and lasting beauty is spiritual. Christ’s kingdom is spiritual and it will never be destroyed.

### **Text:**

#### **The Barren Fig Tree:**

Luke 13:6-9

*“He also spoke this parable: ‘A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. The he said to the keeper of his vineyard. ‘Look for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But, if not, after that you can cut it down.’”*

### **The Context:**

Jesus had just finished teaching a lesson about taking individual responsibility for your life and actions instead of being critical of others. Twice He charges them to look at themselves first *“unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”* Then He tells this parable about the fig tree that did not produce figs.

### **The Message:**

God expects us to bear fruit. He is longsuffering and willing to wait for us to mature and become fruitful but He will not wait forever.

### **Commentary:**

Jesus, in response to an inquiry about sins and the consequences of sins (verses 1-5), tells the crowd that they should be less concerned about the sins of others and more concerned about their own sins... repent or perish! To drive this point home He offers this short parable about a fig tree that for 3 years produced no fruit. I am no horticulturalist but I do know, from experience, that some fruit trees do not produce fruit every year. Many years ago I owned a small house with an apple tree in the yard. Some years it was loaded with apples while other years it produced hardly any. By waiting three years, the owner of the vineyard was being patient and also understanding that the tree might not produce fruit every year. But what good was the tree if in three years it had produced absolutely nothing? It was taking up space in his vineyard that could be used to plant other trees that would produce fruit. The lesson for us is very clear: God is patient with us but He expects us to do more than simply take up space in His garden.

This isn’t the first or only time that Christ used the example of being responsible with what God has given us and producing fruit or, if we don’t, God will cast us out.

- The vine and the branches. *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit”* (John 15:1-2).
- The parable of the talents: *“Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will*

*have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:28-30).*

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What are one or two things you learned from the parable of the fig tree that was tender and ready to bud?
2. Read Luke 12:54-56. What is the context in the previous verses (49-53)? Christ is being critical of the multitudes for being aware of signs in nature and in weather but not being aware of more important signs all around them? What are your thoughts on this? Are there signs today?
3. During His ministry, most of Christ’s disciples believed His kingdom would be earthly and that He would reign in Jerusalem. Today, this is still a very popular theology e.g. the thousand year reign on earth (the millennium). Why do you suppose it was so popular then and still popular today? Why do so many fail to believe in a spiritual kingdom?
4. Why is it important for us as God’s children to grow and produce fruit?
5. What is required for growth?

### **Making Application**

Are you growing? How do you know? What are your spiritual goals for this year, this month, this week? Challenge yourself to grow by establishing significant goals; then commit to achieving your goals.

# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 8

### *The Good Samaritan*

*“But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”*

Luke 10:29

#### **Lesson Goal:**

To better understand the message of this parable.

#### **Text:**

Luke 10:25-37

*“And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, ‘Teacher what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’ So he answered and said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’ And He said to him, ‘You have answered rightly; do this, and you will live.’ But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ Then Jesus answered and said: ‘A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down the road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?’ And he said, ‘He who showed mercy on him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘God and do likewise.’”*

#### **The Context:**

Only the physician Luke records this parable and there do not appear to be any special circumstances surrounding it. One very learned in the Law of Moses, probably a scribe or Pharisee, stood up to test Jesus. This was a common practice among the Pharisees. They were constantly trying to find a way to trick Jesus into saying something contradictory to the Law so they would have something of which to accuse Him. But, of course, they never succeeded in this. He never contradicted the Law of the Old Covenant which He, as a Jew, was under. Instead He more fully explained it and then told of the New Covenant which would come through His death. Nevertheless, this self-righteous lawyer smugly asked “who is my neighbor?” and the parable that Jesus told in response to his question is the most famous parable ever told. It has been faithfully repeated and taught in every corner of the world.

## **The Message:**

Understanding God's commands is an excellent first step. It is necessary but not sufficient. Faith without works is dead. There are two parts necessary if our religion (faith) is to be pure and acceptable to God: knowing and doing. *"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"* (James 1:27). The lawyer was keeping himself unspotted from the world but he wasn't visiting orphans and widows.

## **Commentary:**

Jesus was the master of answering a question with a question. Notice in verse 29 that the lawyer asked *"And who is my neighbor?"* I dare say that 99% of us, if asked this question, would try our best to come up with an answer. And Christ could have done that. It was not that Jesus did not know the answer but Jesus knew that if he could lead this man to answer his own question, the answer and the results would be much more powerful. Also, there was a crowd of people watching and listening. They too needed to consider the question more carefully and provide their own answer. In verse 36, at the conclusion of the parable, Jesus simply asks the lawyer, *"So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among thieves?"* To be a great teacher one needs to ask the right questions.

Traveling alone on foot was a dangerous thing during this time. Bands of robbers were lurking in remote areas ready to pounce on the unsuspecting, rob them of their things, beat them and leave them for dead. While most were able to travel safely, robbery was something that happened frequently enough that Jesus could use it in His parable and the listeners would readily understand that it could happen. In fact, it could happen to any one of them and, if it did, they could sure use a neighbor. Notice the condition of the man: robbed, stripped, and beaten. Things taken from him: his possessions, pride, and health. And make special note of the three men who saw him and his deplorable condition:

- First a priest. Not only a Levite but of the lineage of Aaron. The most "righteous" of all Jews.
- Secondly a Levite. One devoted to the service of the temple. Holy and set apart to serve not only God but others also.
- Thirdly, a Samaritan. A mixed breed despised by the Jews.

No mention as to why the priest and Levite did not stop to help. They both *"saw him"* but chose to *"pass by on the other side."* Too busy (on a tight schedule)? Too important to concern themselves with such lowly things (let someone else stop and help him)? Just had their robe and outer garments cleaned (might get blood on them)? Let me suggest (and this is just my opinion since Christ did not say why they passed by) that they lacked compassion. What caused the Samaritan to stop while the others passed by? He had something that the priest and Levite lacked. In verse 33 Jesus said that the Samaritan *"had compassion."* In Matthew 23, when Christ rebuked the scribes and Pharisees, he did not condemn them for strictly keeping the law, He condemned them for their lack of compassion *"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone"* (Matthew 23:23). The real test of discipleship, and the lesson the lawyer needed to learn, is not do I

appear righteous and holy and Godly but am I righteous and holy and Godly. *“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?”* (James 2:15-16).

The remainder of the parable (verses 34-35) describes the depth of the Samaritan’s compassion: he personally cared for the beaten man, he brought him to a place where he could rest and further recover, out of his own pocket he paid for this stranger’s care. The extent of his love and compassion seem hard to imagine until one realizes that this is exactly the love and compassion that Christ has shown for each of us. And, it is the love and compassion He requires us to show to others.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Do a little research on the Samaritans. Who were they? Where did they come from? How did they get into this region of Palestine? Why were they so despised by the Jews?
2. What lesson was Jesus teaching the lawyer?
3. Why do you suppose Jesus chose a priest and a Levite as the other “men” in this parable?
4. Is there any indication that the Samaritan knew the man he helped? Why did he help him?
5. Who is your neighbor?

### **Making Application**

It is easy to pick and choose who we show kindness to. We may prefer to help those who look and think like us. There is nothing wrong with that (it is never wrong to do good). Challenge yourself to also help someone who is very different than yourself... perhaps in age, race, abilities, etc.

# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 9

### *The Rich Fool*

*“For what will it profit a man  
If he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?”*

Mark 8:36

#### **Lesson Goal:**

To better understand the dangers of covetousness.

#### **Text:**

Luke 12:13-21

*“Then one from the crowds said to Him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’ But he said to him, ‘Man, who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you?’ And He said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.’ Then He spoke a parable to them saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*

#### **The Context:**

Someone was complaining that his brother was not sharing their inheritance fairly and he wanted Jesus to intervene on his behalf. Jesus quickly saw through the request to the root of the problem: covetousness. He replied that He would not intervene as a judge or arbitrator in physical matters and saw an opportunity to teach a lesson on covetousness.

#### **The Message:**

Beware of covetousness. What is covetousness? Webster’s dictionary says simply that it’s being greedy. As one of the ten commandments in the Law of Moses, God was very specific when He said *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house, you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s”* (Exodus 20:17).

#### **Commentary:**

Through covetousness, Satan tempts us to start looking around at others and to covet what they have or simply to just never be satisfied with what we have. That was the problem this rich farmer had. He was not content. He wanted more. He wanted more even though his barns were full and overflowing. That’s the problem with covetousness.

Enough is never enough. The one who covets money, or power, or status, always wants more. Lists are made identifying the world's richest people. It used to be a list of millionaires. Now it is a list of billionaires. Having a million dollars is no longer the goal. The rich always want more. While the world values (and even worships) wealth, Christ reminds us of a simple fact *"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses"* (verse 15). Did you catch that? The true value of one's life cannot be measured in terms of a bank account or the things that one possesses. If that is the case, then of what should my life consist? What will bring true value or profit to my life? Christ gives the answer at the close of the parable. Those things that profit my life are those things that will last beyond my death and the grave. The rich farmer was about to learn a hard (and eternal) lesson: *"Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."* Beware of covetousness!

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Read Philippians 4:11 (and the context). Explain this verse in terms of contentment vs. covetousness.
2. Consider Ecclesiastes 12:13 in terms covetousness, death, and a "successful" life.
3. Consider Matthew 6:19-21. What happens to earthly treasures? Why does our heart follow our treasures?
4. Consider 1 John 2:15-17. Does it's message relate to this parable? In what ways?
5. It is apparent that covetousness was a big problem in the time of Christ (and also in the time of Moses). Is it a problem today? Why or why not?

### **Making Application**

Some people make a "bucket list" of things they want to do before they die. While this is not necessarily wrong, perhaps it is better to concentrate on living today... living each moment to the fullest. Often the things we think will bring us joy do not but actually bring us disappointment, while the greatest joy may come from the things we pass by every day. Value what you have!

# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 10

### *The Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant*

*“O can we say we are ready, brother?  
Ready for the soul’s bright home?  
Say, will he find you and me still watching,  
Waiting, waiting when the Lord shall come?”*

Hymn: When Jesus Comes to Reward His Servants  
Fanny J. Crosby

#### **Lesson Goal:**

To better understand the messages found in these parables.

#### **Text:**

Matthew 24:42-51

Luke 12:35-48

*“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, the when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

*“Then Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?’”*  
*“And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who know his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.’”*

#### **The Context:**

In the Matthew text, Christ has just concluded a warning about the destruction of Jerusalem and then teaches this parable about the two servants: one faithful and watching and the other one evil and lazy. In Luke’s account, Jesus is urging His disciples to be vigilant and ready. *“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an*



*hour you do not expect*” (vs. 40). Peter, always a little impatient and inquisitive, asks if the parable is meant for all people or only the Lord’s disciples. Beginning in verse 42, Jesus answers Peter’s question indirectly by continuing the parable but now with specific roles and applications.

### **The Message:**

Faithfulness needs to be 24/7 (there is no such thing as a part time Christian). *“To whom much is given, from him much will be required.”*

### **Commentary:**

In this parable, Jesus is the master and His disciples (Christians) are the servants. Jesus describes two types of servants:

- Those who are faithful and provide for the master’s household while he is away.
- Those who are evil and lazy. Since the master is absent, they take this time to party and to be abusive to the servants the master has put under their care.

This addresses Peter’s question. Jesus is telling Peter that he has a responsibility to care for weaker Christians. *“...Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep”* (John 21:16). And the same charge is given to each of us

*“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit,  
But in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.  
Let each of you look out not only for his own interests,  
But also for the interests of others.”*

Philippians 2:3-4

Jesus is telling us that with privilege comes responsibility. We who have been privileged to receive salvation through Christ have a responsibility to share this gift with others. The Lord will not be pleased if, when He returns, He finds us eating and drinking and pleasing ourselves but neglecting the needs of others. This was a problem among Christ’s disciples then and it remains a problem today. Those of us who have been given much have a choice. We can either sit back and feast on God’s blessings and ignore the needs of others. Or we can share our blessings with others. When our Lord returns, what will He find us doing?

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. To whom was this parable intended?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Do you think a Christian might become complacent? Why?

3. Read 2 Peter 3:3-4. How do we keep ourselves from becoming complacent when those around us laugh at our faith?
  
4. What does it mean to have your waist girded and lamps burning?
  
5. What does “*For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required*” mean?

### **Making Application**

Make a list of ways you can serve others. We all have different talents and opportunities so don't expect that you can do everything but, at the same time, do not limit yourself. By seriously looking to help and serve, you just might find talents you never knew you had.

# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 11

### *The Great Supper*

*“All things are ready, come to the feast”*

Hymn: Come to the Feast  
Charles Gabriel

#### **Lesson Goal:**

To better understand the message of this parable.

#### **Text:**

Matthew 22:1-14

Luke 14:15-24

*“Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, ‘Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!’ The He said to him, ‘A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So that servant came and reported all these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. ‘For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’”*

#### **The Context:**

In this chapter in Luke, Jesus has been invited to eat in the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees. He used this occasion to teach a parable about pride, humility, and loving those who have been outcast by society.

#### **The Message:**

The Pharisees certainly thought very highly of themselves. They were prideful and arrogant and looked down on others who they believed did not meet their high standards (see Luke 18:10-14). In this parable, Jesus is teaching them (and us) that pride will be their downfall and those whom they consider unworthy will be the ones who will partake of the heavenly feast. In the end, the humble win and the prideful lose.

## **Commentary:**

Revelation 19:8 says *“Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”* There is a great supper (or banquet) coming that you do not want to miss. God Himself is the host and He invites all of creation to come and be a part of the festivities but sadly many choose not to attend. Instead they make weak excuses for not attending and insult the host. The Pharisees would not humble themselves and accept that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus came first to the Jews for they held the promise in their hands. They knew the scriptures. They were waiting for the savior. Yet, when the savior came, they ridiculed Him. *“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him”* (John 1:11). So what is the master to do? The feast has been prepared but the guests one by one decline the greatest invitation they will ever receive. If the Pharisees are too busy or prideful then the master says to “go the sinners.” Notice how those who repeatedly listened and obeyed Jesus were the: sinners, tax collectors, and publicans. Those who were to receive a place of honor in the banquet hall have refused to come so those who have been looked down upon will now fill the chief seats. *“Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.”*

Picture, if you will, the Pharisee who had invited Jesus into his house. We can be sure he had invited none of the publicans and sinners that Jesus had just described. Jesus is telling this Pharisee quite plainly that those who you despise will be given your place in the kingdom of heaven. He is essentially repeating what he had said in verses 8 through 11 when he suggested that they (Pharisees) had seated themselves in the chief seats but they would be asked to move to a lower seat when those who are now greater in status (the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind) are provided the best seats. This had to hit the Pharisee like a ton of bricks. But, Christ’s message to the arrogant Pharisees is not quite finished. There is one more group of people to be invited to the feast: the Gentiles. “Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in that my house may be filled.’” Not only were the self-righteous Pharisees to be replaced at the banquet by the poor, the crippled, and the outcasts of society, but those who were not Jews would also now be invited and come and sup and enjoy the wonder and glory that could have been the Pharisees.

*“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”* (Revelation 7:9-10).

Ultimately, the Pharisees chose pride over salvation.

*“For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.”*

What about you? What about me?

## **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Do you see any characteristics of the Pharisees in Christians today?
2. Why would one choose not to be part of God’s banquet?

3. Read Revelation 3:20. Compare Jesus' appeal (in Revelation) to dine with an individual to the appeal in this parable to come and join many others in a banquet.
  
4. Why do you think the Pharisees were so arrogant and self-righteous? Could this be a problem today?
  
5. In this parable God invited the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind to His feast. What class of people does this represent? Why were they more receptive to the invitation than the Pharisees?

### **Making Application**

Determine to live every day as though the Lord were returning any moment. Live in the present. Be ready. Don't postpone righteous living. Do it today.

# The Parables of Jesus

## Lesson 12

### *The Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son*

#### *Part 1*

*“God is calling the Prodigal, come without delay.”*

Hymn: Calling the Prodigal  
Charles Gabriel

#### **Lesson Goal:**

To better understand Jesus’ response to the scribes and Pharisees when they asked Him why he ate with sinners.

#### **Text: (for part 1)**

Luke 15:1-8

*“Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’ So He spoke this parable to them saying, ‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”*

*“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece I lost!’ Likewise, I say to you there is joy in the presence of God over one sinner who repents.”*

#### **The Context:**

In the opening verses of Luke chapter fifteen, the Pharisees and scribes are complaining that Jesus *“receives sinners and eats with them.”* In response to their criticism, our Lord spoke three parables. In each of the parables, a person had lost something of value. In the first parable, a man had lost a sheep (one out of one hundred). In the second parable, a woman had lost a coin (one out of ten). In the third parable, a man had lost his son (one out of two). In the first two parables, that which was lost was property (an animal and some money). In the last parable that which was lost was a person: a son. The first two people searched diligently for their lost property until they found it but the man who lost his son could only wait, hope, and pray that his son would *“come to himself”* and come home.

## **The Message**

God values every soul and so should we. The scribes and Pharisees “looked down their noses” at the tax collectors and sinners. They literally considered them to be second and third-class citizens. Jesus teaches them the value of all people through these parables.

## **Commentary:**

The scribes and Pharisees could not understand why Christ would bother to spend His time with sinners, the outcasts of society. His answer, through the parables, was simple: they were lost and He needed to find them and call them to repentance. In another instance, when asked why He ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners, Christ answered “*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners, to repentance*” (Luke 5:31-32). If the scribes and Pharisees could see that it made sense for a shepherd to look for his lost sheep and for a woman who had lost a very valuable coin to sweep her house until she found it, surely they could see that Christ should look for His lost sheep who were far more valuable than any earthly possession. Sadly, they would not allow themselves to see the obvious. They still would not associate with tax collectors and sinners and continued to condemn Christ for doing so.

Owning livestock, particularly sheep, was a very common theme in Palestine. Everyone understood the value of the sheep and even if one (out of 100) went astray, it was important for the shepherd to find the lost sheep and bring it back. The people also understood that sheep are not the smartest of animals and could easily wander away and get lost. Notice two important lessons from this parable:

- When one lamb out of one hundred is lost, it is reasonable to look for it and try your best to bring it back into the fold. If this is true, why would it surprise the Pharisees that Jesus would look for his lost lambs (the tax collectors and sinners)?
- When the shepherd finds the lost lamb, he can’t wait to tell his friends and share the good news. It is a time of rejoicing! The Pharisees should also be rejoicing when Jesus found lost sinners and brought them back into the fold

Which one of us has never lost something around the house? How frustrating and how stressful if it is something very valuable. We can all relate to the woman in this parable. Notice also that in this parable there were only 10 coins where in the previous parable there were 100 sheep. This adds even further to the stress and to the urgency of finding the missing coin. She will do whatever is necessary to find that which was lost. She gets out the broom and starts sweeping. She will not stop until she has covered every square inch of the house. Since the woman in this parable represents all of us who have ever lost something of value, making the connection to lost souls should not be difficult. One soul is worth more than all the gold in the world. Why shouldn’t Christ be doing all He can to find those lost souls and bring them back home? Why would the Pharisees be amazed and critical of him?

## **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Why were the scribes and Pharisees criticizing Christ in Luke 15? What was He doing that bothered them?
2. How did Christ answer their criticism?
3. What were the lessons of the lost sheep, and the lost coin?
4. Have you ever lost something? How did it make you feel? If you eventually found what you lost, how did that make you feel? Why?
5. Read Jonah 4:10-11. Compare the message in these verses in Jonah to the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin in Luke 15.

## **Making Application**

How are you helping others? Do you see sinners and avoid them or do you reach out and try to help them? It is easy to become like the Pharisees and not help others. It takes work to help others and make ourselves vulnerable. Resolve this week to reach out to someone less fortunate than yourself.



The Parables of Jesus  
Lesson 13  
***The Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son***  
***Part 2***

*“It was right that we should make merry and be glad,  
for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found”*

Luke 15:32

**Lesson Goal:**

To better understand the lessons in the parable of the prodigal son.

**Text: (for part 2)**

Luke 15:11-32

*“Then He said: ‘A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with wasteful living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. and am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’*

*And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.*

*Now his older son was in field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf. But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you*

*are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.”*

### **The Context:**

In the opening verses of Luke chapter fifteen, the Pharisees and scribes are complaining that Jesus “*receives sinners and eats with them.*” In response to their criticism, our Lord spoke three parables. In each of the parables, a person had lost something of value. In the first parable, a man had lost a sheep (one out of one hundred). In the second parable, a woman had lost a coin (one out of ten). In the third parable, a man had lost his son (one out of two). In the first two parables, that which was lost was property (an animal and some money). In the last parable that which was lost was a person: a son. The first two people searched diligently for their lost property until they found it but the man who lost his son could only wait, hope, and pray that his son would “come to himself” and come home.

### **The Message:**

- God values every soul and so should we. The scribes and Pharisees “looked down their noses” at the tax collectors and sinners. They literally considered them to be second and third-class citizens. Jesus teaches them the value of all people through these parables.
- We who are saved need to understand the value of what we have been given.
- We need to rejoice when that which was lost was found.

### **Commentary**

The third parable (the prodigal son), although fitting perfectly in this sequence of three parables to answer the scribes and Pharisees, contains even more far reaching lessons. This is one of Christ’s most well known parables (along with the parables of the sower and the good Samaritan) and is often quoted and used in sermons and Bible studies. Let’s look at one specific (and often overlooked) lesson from this parable. Let’s look at the other son and his attitude.

- *“A certain man had two sons.”* vs. 11
- The younger son asked for (or demanded) his inheritance and the father gave it to him. Actually it says that *“he divided to them his livelihood”* which would indicate that BOTH sons received their inheritance. vs. 12
- Seeking to please himself, the younger son wasted all of his inheritance in a far country. vs. 13-16
- The younger son *“came to himself,”* determined to return home and demonstrated true repentance by taking action *“he arose and came to his father.”* vs. 17-20
- The father gladly received his son back with no reservations. In fact, he clothed him with the best clothes and prepared a great celebration in his honor. vs. 20-24
- The older son was away working when his brother returned and learned about the celebration from a servant. vs. 25-27
- *“But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.”* vs. 28
  - Picture in your mind the Pharisees full of rage. They lacked mercy.; essentially declaring that God was not just.

- The father cannot understand why his older son would not be happy to see his brother turn from riotous living and come back home.
- *“So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.’”* vs. 29
  - These were the exact thoughts of the scribes and Pharisees. They could proudly claim that they had “never transgressed your commandment at any time.” But they also had failed to show even the least bit of compassion and mercy to others (Matthew 23:23). Keeping God’s commands was commendable but they had failed to apply the greatest command: love!

**STOP AND THINK!** Do we ever have similar thoughts and feelings?

- *“But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.”* vs. 30
  - Everyone was rejoicing except the brother. It was a time of rejoicing just like with the lost sheep and the lost coin. Only a lost person had far greater value. The brother’s attitude seems to indicate that he wished that he too had participated in all of these sinful acts. His heart was not pure. His faith (and religion) was rote; not from the heart.
- *“And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’”* vs. 31-32
  - I think this is the key point that the Pharisees were missing: we who are faithful to God are living a blessed life. Every day we have access to our Father’s love, grace and mercy. We truly are rich. He protects us and provides for us and helps us in ways we don’t begin to comprehend. The prodigal’s brother was richly blessed but he neither understood or appreciated all that he. And this led to an even bigger problem. Likewise, the Pharisees could not bring themselves to rejoice when good things happened to other people. Caught up in their own self-pride (I keep all of your commandments) they *“neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith”* (Matthew 23:23).
  - And what does the Lord require of us (Micah 6:8)?

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What was the attitude of the father when the prodigal son returned?
  
2. What was the attitude of his brother when the prodigal returned?
  
3. Why the difference in attitudes?

4. What blessings do we enjoy today as children of God?
  
5. Did the scribes and Pharisees show justice, mercy, and faith (see Matthew 23:23)?

### **Making Application**

What are the lessons you learned from these three parables? How can you apply these lessons in your life? Challenge yourself to have a pure heart and rejoice with others. You will make someone else's day brighter and you will find your day will be brighter too.