

The Parables

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Chapter 1:

Overview

A parable is a simple story told to illustrate a profound truth. Jesus told parables as His way of helping His followers to grasp spiritual truths. This was Jesus' way of helping people to cross the bridge from the natural to the spiritual. Jesus told parables to reveal insights for those whom the truth was intended and to prevent understanding for those it was not intended.

Why would Jesus want to do this?

- To safeguard the secrets of God. The parables were designed to unfold the secrets to those whom He wanted to hear and to hide the secrets from those He didn't.
 - To keep the devil in the dark.
 - To keep those who are unspiritual or "in the flesh" in the dark.
 - To make known His secrets and truths at the proper time for whom they are intended.
- To teach of the Kingdom. In the parables you can view the whole picture of God's plan. The parables tell of conversion, the work of the Spirit and what happens when we die.
- To reveal the Spirit of God. Jesus revealed the work of the Spirit in all of the parables in some way. What He was sharing was what true spirituality looks like as it is lived out in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Three Principles of the Parables

As we study the parables, three main principles will guide us. It will be useful always to have these in your mind as you study and try to find the truth of what Jesus is trying to give us.

1. Not all parables point to the same truth. There are basically three truths which we need to look for.
 - a. Some teach about the work of the Spirit
 - b. Some teach about the end times
 - c. Some teach about our growth as Christians
2. Often a parable will have only one basic truth in mind. We must be careful not to read more into a parable.
3. Not every detail of a parable must have meaning. We need to be careful not to try to build more than what is there.

Chapter 2:

The Parable of the Sower

“A farmer went out to sow his seed...”

Matthew 13:1-23

The parable of the Sower is one of Jesus’ better-known parables. In it, Jesus is talking with His disciples. He had gone to the sea to rest. Yet there were so many people hanging around them, trying to catch any words that He would say. He just could not rest. So, Jesus went out in a small boat as the people stood on the shoreline and listened to Him.

One of the most interesting things about this particular parable is that it is easy to understand. Jesus Himself said it was easy to understand. It is also very plain. Jesus was giving us a simple teaching regarding the outcome of proclaiming the Word of God. It is explained. Jesus actually explains it. This is one of the few parables that Jesus explained.

Now Jesus told many parables. Sometimes the disciples did not know what He was saying. Yes, they hear the story, but still they did not always understand, for His disciples knew the things Jesus said always had a deeper meaning.

Let’s imagine the whole scene of this parable. Farming and fishing were the trades of the time. So, this scene would be familiar with them. In olden days they did not have the tools or equipment we have to plant their seeds. What they did was work up the ground by hand. Then they would place a bag of seeds over their shoulder and proceed to walk the land by throwing the seed on the ground by hand. Then they would work the ground up once more, covering up the seed. Finally, they would pray and hope that the seed would grow. Maybe it was a seed of wheat for the bread they will bake when they gather it in the fall. Maybe it was a seed of corn to feed their cattle so that they will have meat to feed their family. Maybe it was a seed of oats to ground up into meal to feed their family. Regardless of what the seed is, it is an important seed and the landowner wants it to grow and produce a good product.

For us we know that the Sower refers to a person who proclaims and shares the Word of God. The seed is the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says, “faith comes by hearing the Word of God.” The land of course speaks not of a place or an area; it is the heart of man. This seed, the Word of God, is very important and planting it in the heart of man is very important. God wants it to produce good fruits.

As I studied this parable I noticed some things. (1) Jesus does not start out explaining why we should share. He just starts out saying that when you share, this could happen or that could happen. It is as if it is a foregone conclusion that we are to proclaim the Word of God. (2) In line with that, it also seems that Jesus is saying we don’t share only to those who we think will accept readily. We should share with everybody no matter what their response will be. (3) This parable does not speak about those who heard and rejected the gospel. All these

people did receive but for different reasons, three of them fell away. (4) Jesus is also saying we can never tell from outward appearance who is saved or who is not saved. Not everyone who makes a profession of faith is saved. We are not to judge who is saved and who is not. (5) Jesus is not using this parable to talk about who is to blame for this falling away. Nobody should be blamed when people fall away. Maybe Jesus was trying to tell us we should actually never be surprised when people fall away. (6) The parable does not refer only to the saved. It is a reminder of how easily those of us who made a genuine conversion can later on have it stolen away; exactly like the first three examples in this parable did. Jesus is covering all the bases. This is why this is such a wonderful parable.

In all of these things the thought that keeps coming is that Jesus is telling us to proclaim the Word of God to all people no matter what. The one truth we find in this parable is **proclaiming the Word of God**. Speaking into the lives of both the unconverted and the converted. Jesus is telling us some of the results of those who do receive and why it might not stay. This parable was spoken to the disciples as Jesus was coming to the end of His ministry. In the next few weeks Jesus would be captured and crucified, so He was trying to say something important to them and to us.

Finally, we need to examine the reactions of those who heard the Word. Each type of person heard the Word of God, but they reacted with a different kind of profession of faith.

1. The first person who receives the Word of God in Verse 19 has a response to the Gospel in which the enemy manages to maintain control over the person hearing the message. When the seed is sowed in the heart of a man like this, it says it is like planting in someone who just does not understand. Scripture says in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel. This is what the devil wants to do, keep you from understanding, keep you blind. As soon as a person makes a profession of faith, the devil is right there within hours trying to snatch away the Word. The enemy is always trying to stop what God might do in a person's life. Jesus makes clear here that such a person is not saved. Jesus seems to be saying this as a fact, not just a thought. It is hard for us to think that there are those who choose nothing.
2. The next person Jesus talks about is the one who receives the seed as it falls on stony ground. This is a reaction to the Gospel that is enthusiastic and compliant. One who hears the message and wants to make an immediate commitment. But since he has no roots, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes, because of the Word, he quickly falls away. Perhaps because this type of person reacts so quickly, they have not thought through the implication of their decision. It doesn't necessarily mean that they were insincere. They could be excited by what they heard because they think it will be an answer to a personal problem. When the seed is sown in the heart of a man like this, and trouble comes, he stumbles and his profession of faith turns out to be superficial. These people seem to only glimpse the reality of God. Their God is a God that is to meet their needs and nothing else. In telling us about these people, Jesus is telling about a people who cannot lay hold of anything. Life just spins and spins with no meaning.
3. The next person Jesus talks about is the one who receives the seed as it falls among the thorns and thorns spring up and choke them out. These are those who react

positively to the Gospel but allow the message to be mixed up with worries and desires. These people don't have a superficial reaction to the Gospel but gradually fall away over time as they allow many other concerns to crowd in. Jesus called it the "worries of this life" and the "deceitfulness of wealth". The gospel message that the people received is closed out by the competition of worry about what people will think and is eventually choked by material cares. These people cry out but will not surrender. They have no peace and no stability. What a frustrating life.

4. Finally, Jesus described a fourth reaction to the Gospel; a solid profession of faith that lasts, in which the person hearing the Word receives it and allows it to take root in their life and grow. This fourth example is surely the only one of these people who are really converted. All the others were not converted. The Bible said they were lost. Yes, true Christians can fall, and the Bible makes an allowance for that, but that is not taught in this particular parable. When a seed is sowed in the heart of a man like this, the Holy Spirit is able to apply the Word effectively, creating life and giving these people the conviction that they are saved only by the blood of Jesus. Someone like this bears fruit and produces, some a hundred-fold, some sixty, and some thirty percent yield. They are overwhelmed by the knowledge that God's love and grace are theirs.

A believing heart is the good soil that Jesus described in the fourth person. The soil is the fertile ground of a heart that hears, believes and applies the Word of God. Can you say for sure that you belong to this fourth category of people? Yes, you can! There are three basic questions to ask yourself. (1) Do you have Godly fear and reverence for God? A reverent fear of the Lord is a prerequisite for understanding. An increasingly deep fear of Him is what will produce in your life a steadfastness as you progress in your relationship with Him. (2) Do you bear fruit? Jesus taught that persons who receive the Word of God in good soil will eventually produce much fruit as a result of that Word of God. (3) Do you allow the Holy Spirit to direct your life? Were you going in one direction and then the Holy Spirit came in to lead you in a completely different direction? And you followed? His leading is the answer to fullness in God.

Lastly, if as you study this parable you find that your commitment is not what it once was, deal with it. Be assured that this quickening means that God is still talking to you. Thank Him for anything He is saying. Take it with both hands. That is what Jesus wants us as believers to take from this parable. One day we will stand before Him and give an account of our life, and we will be glad that we walked in every bit of light God gave us.

Chapter 3:

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed”

Matthew 13:31-32

Jesus was very fond of the mustard seed. He used it in a parable in Matthew, Mark and Luke. He used it as an illustration in three ways.

1. Matthew 17:20: When His disciples could not cast out a demon from a child he said, “I tell you the truth if you have faith as small as a mustard seed you can say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” Here He is speaking about Faith.
2. Mark 4:30-32: When He presented this parable of the mustard seed He said, “What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it, it is like a mustard seed...” Here He is speaking about the Kingdom.
3. In Luke 17:4-6: He said to them, “If your brother sins against you seven times a day and seven times comes back to you and says ‘I repent’, forgive him...” He used this mustard seed to talk about Forgiveness.

Each of these are different, but each are also the same. Why do I say that? The whole time Jesus was on this earth, the topic He spoke the most about was the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. By using this small mustard seed in all these ways, I think Jesus was trying to get the people’s attention and lead them to make a **major shift in their thinking about the Kingdom**.

The disciples loved the idea of the Kingdom, but Jesus knew that when the disciples thought of the coming Kingdom, they believed He would overthrow Caesar. Each time He talked about the Kingdom, they figured it wouldn’t be long until this happened. Jesus spent three years trying to help them make the transition from the natural understanding of the Kingdom to the spiritual understanding.

These parables served as an illustration of something new and different. They were given to reach people where they were and move them on to where they’d never been before. As we study the Parables, we will find that so many of them were all about this shift in thinking about the Kingdom. The people were all so convinced that the Kingdom of God would be both political and material and that it was immediately at hand.

The Kingdom that Jesus came to reveal was radically different from anything the disciples had thought of. Jesus’ task was to lead them outside their comfort zones, bringing them into the transforming power of the spiritual realm.

I don't know if you've realized it yet, but the whole of Christian life involves God leading us out of our comfort zones. Just as you begin to get comfortable with something, the next thing you know, God is leading you on to something new. The very concept of being changed from glory-to-glory means being lead out of our comfort zones. Jesus is happy to do that.

Why use the parable of a tiny mustard seed to change the hearts and minds of His followers?

As I said, the Kingdom, to the disciples, had always meant greatness and glory. They thought of the days of David and Solomon every time Jesus performed a miracle. When Jesus fed the five thousand, the people said, "surely this is the prophet foretold, who was to come into the world to be King" (John 6:14). Jesus was careful about performing miracles because He knew people would get the wrong idea about what He had come to achieve.

Jesus talked about this small mustard seed so often you would have thought people would get the clue. He was trying to tell them something. He was painting such a strong picture. The Kingdom was not going to be like the world. It was going to be God's Kingdom. A heavenly Kingdom that was greater and more powerful than any fleshly kingdom.

He started to change their perception dealing with four things in these parables. (1) Size. He wanted them to begin thinking that starting slowly and being small was not a thing to be discouraged by, but to see the potential. We know now what they did not know then. God loves to take a life that seems so unimportant and make it great in Him. (2) Success. In talking about this little mustard seed, Jesus wanted to show them that God can take the most unlikely person and turn them into a great person of God. In other words, God is saying, "the first shall be last and the last shall be first." If you have been looked down on or been passed over for a promotion or misunderstood by your friends or your family, God says to look at what this seed can do. (3) Surprise. Another point He made in talking about this mustard seed is that God can take the most unpromising situation and turn it into triumph and glory. The greatest event in the history of the world probably would not even have been covered by Fox News. It would have been nothing more than a very tragic and sad event. Yet it changed the world. In Hell, the devils rejoiced saying, "He is finished." But when Jesus said "It is finished", the veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-51).

Jesus did all this with the mustard seed; just a little, tiny seed that you can barely see in your hand. All of this was to prepare them for what God was about to do. Something that they would understand later when it all made sense.

The Prophetic Message of these Parables

As you think about and read these parables, you will see that there are three important principals. They are principles that are prophetic in nature.

1. In these parables Jesus was virtually announcing that a new order already had begun. Notice how He chose His words. "The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field." Jesus wanted to show His followers that a process had already begun. The Kingdom of God was indeed upon them. The

seed was planted and Jesus was making it clear to them what His followers should expect.

2. The planting of a mustard seed was to explain exactly what would happen when Jesus died on the cross. Nobody alive said, "Get ready for something big because Jesus is now on the cross." No, it was a day of disaster. Nobody was threatened when one hundred twenty disciples later began to pray that the Spirit would come down. Nobody worried about them because Jesus, their leader, was gone. Yet the Spirit of God came down on the Day of Pentecost, and the world was never to be the same. The prophetic purpose of the parable of the mustard seed was to speak to this dying and to the greatness to come.
3. The mustard seed, once it becomes a tree, will never be like the oak or cedar tree. It actually is a rather ordinary tree. Jesus wanted them and us to know that. He wants us to know that His Church, however visible, however much it affects people's lives, will never look terribly grand in the eyes of the world. Jesus was saying in these parables that His Kingdom is not of this world.

A couple of things that must be mentioned for us as individuals about this Parable. (1) The seed is about dying to self; allowing God to bring success in His time. To live like this, you will need true faith. (2) The seed is about faith. "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed." This is not about us looking to have perfect faith but us to have faith in a perfect God. God is simply looking for living faith. If it is real, it will grow. (3) Finally, the seed is about forgiveness. When He applied the teaching of forgiveness, He was talking about total forgiveness. The total forgiveness He gives us and the total forgiveness we give others. Of course, anyone who has died to self and is willing to become nothing has already planted a mustard seed full of faith and forgiveness.

The process of the seed coming to completeness takes time and we need to let it grow and allow God to do His work. There are always small days, inconsequential days, when we think nothing is happening. Yet if we remember the parable of the mustard seed, we know that we are growing and we are in the hands of God.

Chapter 4:

The Parable of the Yeast

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven,
which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened”

Matthew 13:33

The parable of the yeast follows the parable of the mustard seed. They are similar in their meaning and purpose but with one significant difference. The parable of the mustard seed refers to the Church. Jesus was foretelling how the Church would start as a small group of believers and grow in faith that would cover the globe. The parable of yeast refers to the soul of a person who is a believer. It refers to spirituality in the Church and how the gospel can change an individual. And so, Jesus said, “the Kingdom of God is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

The parable of the mustard seed refers to the outward growth; but the parable of the yeast refers to inward growth, what goes on in the soul of a believer.

What is yeast? It is a kind of fungus, sometimes called leaven, used as an agent in baking and brewing. It produces fermentation in dough. It makes the dough rise. The thing about yeast is that a little goes a long way. A tiny amount has the ability to permeate the whole dough. When yeast is added during the baking of bread, the result is that what would otherwise be just an unsalted cracker becomes a delicious loaf of bread.

What does the Parable of Yeast teach us?

1. It teaches us not to underestimate the potential of small beginnings in the Christian life.
2. It teaches us that when the Holy Spirit applies the gospel to a person, there is no limit to what can happen in their life. The Holy Spirit is like leaven. He affects everything.
3. It teaches us that all these things happen even when we are not aware that we are being changed. The work is silent.

Properties of Yeast

As I thought of why Jesus used yeast as a symbol of the Kingdom, I thought of four properties of yeast.

1. Yeast is a foreign element that is introduced into the flour in order to bring about a dramatic reaction. The yeast is radically different from the flour itself. It changes the whole mixture. The reaction is that the whole dough rises. This presents a picture of what it is like when we receive Jesus, and the Holy Spirit comes from outside us to dwell within us. The Holy Spirit comes from outside of us and is introduced into us to bring about a radical change in our nature.

2. Yeast has a supporting function. In other words, it gives support and help to the flour. The yeast and flour need each other for the intended reaction to occur. Yeast and flour can exist without each other, but not if this intended reaction, the rising of the bread, is to come about. So, the Holy Spirit can exist without us and we can exist without the Holy Spirit, but if life is to be changed, the Spirit must come into us. We are helpless to change ourselves without the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Deep inside every person is the need for God to come and dwell there with His Spirit and change us.
3. Yeast has to be applied. It is not enough simply to put yeast into flour and wait for something to happen. It must be applied. In doing that, we do what is called kneading. A process whereby the dough is pressed down and stretched to ensure that the yeast touches every part. Just as yeast must be applied, the Holy Spirit must apply the Word of God and the Gospel to our heart and mind. He must knead us, stretch and press us so that we become formed into the image of God. He must ensure that the things of God touch every part of our being.

Purpose of Yeast

The yeast has certain characteristics, that when highlighted, we can see even more of the characteristics of the Holy Spirit in us.

- It Spreads. The yeast affects the whole batch, just as the Holy Spirit affects the whole of our being, to the degree that when the yeast is applied, it does its work from beginning to end. So, the Holy Spirit works in us to bring us to “completion” (Philippians 1:6). The work of the Spirit begins with (1) calling us to Jesus, (2) growing us in God’s image, (3) making us whole in Christ.
- It is Strong. Just as a small amount of yeast affects a very large batch of dough. Sometimes we feel that we are weak Christians or that our belief is in a fragile state. Yet the Holy Spirit is the yeast of your faith, and He is strong and able to accomplish God’s work in you. Let the Holy Spirit in you and you can become a raging fire.
- It is Secret... You cannot always see what is happening when the yeast goes to work. You cover and put the dough in a warm dark place and by the end of the time, it has more than doubled. Though you may feel you are making no progress in your spiritual life, “He who began a good work in you will finish it.” Maybe God is fanning the flame today. Maybe your life has not taken off as it should, but it can still happen. Open yourself to the Spirit and quit worrying about what you do or do not do. The yeast kneaded into the dough has been working secretly and you will wake up one day and realize that God has been working in you.
- It is Savory. There is nothing more wonderful than the smell of yeast in flour. I remember when I was a young child and we would have yeast rolls in the oven. I loved it. The smell fills the whole house. When they are served, you cannot eat just one because it is so good. I think that is why I have liked bread all my life. The process of the Holy Spirit working in us begins to produce a wonderful fragrant aroma, and it is a pleasing thing to God.

Yeast does its work when it is mixed with dough. The Holy Spirit does His work when He becomes a part of our lives. Each of us needs to come to the place where we constantly say “Welcome Holy Spirit” and we are prepared to allow Him to work in us. The yeast is the means by which the dough rises, and the Spirit is the means by which positive results are brought about in us.

How does yeast work? I do not know. I am not a chemist. For me it is a mystery. All I know is that Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like that. This is how the Spirit works when He comes in. Do not try to figure it out. Just thank Him and let Him work in your life.

Chapter 5:

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and The Parable of the Fine Pearl

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.”

Matthew 13:44

“When he found one of great value,
he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Matthew 13:46

In the same way that the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast are similar in interpretation, the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl are often interpreted by many people to be alike. No one can deny the similarity between the two because both teach the idea of finding something of extraordinary value and selling everything in order to possess it. However, I believe that since Jesus told these two parables separately, He had a specific reason for doing so.

Meaning

There are two ways we can look at these parables. (1) It could illustrate the way in which God sees us, a fine pearl or a hidden treasure. Something of much value; so much so that He gave His only possession, His Son, to die on a cross for us. (2) Or it is about us recognizing the value of the things of God. Being willing to give all to receive them. As I study them, I believe that this is their primary meaning.

Let me explain. First, these parables are not about how to become a Christian. They are not showing us the way to be saved, for you can never buy your way into heaven. You don't need to literally sell all your possessions when you come to Jesus, because there are no such conditions. Salvation is a gift of God's grace, paid for by the blood of Jesus, that can only be accepted freely. Rather, these parables illustrate to us, in two separate incidents, people who come to realize the value and potential of something God has for them. They are stories, and the focal point of these stories are the treasures. Treasures are worth any sacrifice in order to possess them. So, if we find what the treasures are, we will find the meaning Jesus was trying to convey to His disciples.

Contrast

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure is a short one containing two main points. (1) A person discovers something of tremendous value by chance. (2) That person sells everything he has in order to possess it.

This parable introduces us to a man who was not very rich. We can assume that because of his great excitement in stumbling across the treasure. If he were rich, he might be quite pleased and simply add it to what he already owned.

He was an honest man, one who may have stumbled upon a jar filled with gold or silver coins or perhaps jewels. If he was dishonest, he would have simply taken it right then. In olden days, there was a law that governed the discovery of such riches. If a workman came across such treasure on the land he was working, it would become the property of the one who owns the field. Thus, he buried it first and then sold everything and bought the land. The treasure would now be his.

The message of this parable of the hidden treasure is of a man who found a love of God that he had never known before, a love that he could not live without.

In contrast, the Parable of the Fine Pearl refers to a merchant or businessman who is seeking to find a pearl. He is an expert who was looking to find a pearl of such value. He knew exactly what he wanted. The Parable of the Fine Pearl shows one man looking for one specific pearl and he finds that one pearl. The pearl was apparently worth a great deal of money. The merchant obviously regarded it as being worth the equivalent of everything he owned. He wanted it so much that he sold everything he had just to have that pearl for himself and he got it.

The message of this Parable of the Fine Pearl tells of a man who has known the love of God and wanted more of Him. It was everything he was seeking for, and he could not live without it.

In both parables, Jesus is speaking about ways that people come into a special relationship with God. In the Hidden Treasure Parable it is the anointing of the Holy Spirit that the man found. In the Parable of the Fine Pearl, it is the intimacy of a closer relationship with God which the man was seeking. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure is someone who seems to have just stumbled upon this special relationship, this anointing. The Parable of the Fine Pearl is someone who had been waiting, seeking after and longing for this special relationship, this intimacy.

You may think that's not fair. I have been looking, seeking and waiting on God; searching for a special and more intimate relationship and somebody else just stumbles into it. Like it or not, that is the way it is. This is why we will see, in the Parable of the Vineyard, that there are those who work all day long for their wages and then others who come to work at the eleventh hour, and they receive the same wages.

There are those who just stumble into a special relationship with God even though they were not seeking it. God allows this to happen because of His Sovereignty. Some people find a special relationship with God early in their Christian walk. But there are other Christians who sometimes wait for years and years, or even a lifetime before receiving this assurance. God is sovereign and He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. Sometimes He gives this blessing to an immature Christian while the most mature and knowledgeable are like the merchant; experts who know what they want and are seeking it.

Jesus told both of these parables to assure us all that He knows us. He knows every hair on our head. There is no right way except that, when we find Him, we hold on to Him.

Important points

- One very important point about both of these parables is that the men recognized what they had was of real value. The man who discovered the treasure sought to protect it. He buried it until he could own it. He did all the proper things in which to own it. The man who found the pearl knew what he had found. He did not have to go around asking for a second opinion. He knew the pearl was of the highest value and he knew he wanted it.
- Both men possessed four characteristic qualities, (1) Openness, (2) Intimacy, (3) Insight, and (4) Obedience.
 - Openness means that when you are seeking God, you will not try to restrict the ways in which God will work in you. It means that you will not try to limit God by being selective in how it looks.
 - Intimacy means that those people are committed to their walk with God. I am attracted to people who have an intimate relationship with God.
 - Insight means having an active expectancy and the ability to understand true meaning.
 - Obedience, not passive obedience, but active obedience which does not assume or take anything for granted. They are attentive, anticipating.
- The men in these parables did four things in order to acquire their treasure.
 1. They sold all. They saw the value of what they found. They examined everything that made up their life previously. They said these other things must go. Whether it seems good to you or not, they wanted more out of their life.
 2. They surrendered all. They had to choose never to allow things to get in the way of intimacy with God. Selling all and surrendering all means self-denial and forsaking self-esteem.
 3. They sacrificed all. It is one thing to recognize a hindrance in your life and surrender it willingly to God, but another to let go of something that is particularly dear to you. When you find out what displeases the Lord, you realize it must go.
 4. They secure all. By selling, surrendering, and sacrificing, you actually secure everything. With God, what you get in return for all this is always much more than what you lost.

As I finish this study of these parables, I find myself thinking that although these parables were all about seeking the things of God, one by accident, and the other by design, I wonder, if we really look, we will find that God, who knows the depth of us all, was behind our seeking all along. In a sense it was God seeking us after all.

Chapter 6:

The Parable of the Unjust Steward

“No servant can serve two masters.”

Luke 16:1-15

This parable tells us three things. (1) This is a typical situation in the world. We have all been involved in this type of situation or circumstance before. (2) The unjust servant comes out smelling like a rose. (3) There are those that do such selfish things. It's unfair. They don't have, or it seems like they don't have, any problems.

In the last half of verse 8 is an exhorting to us. Jesus is asking us some questions and pointing out some things. I don't think Jesus is telling us to be dishonest, as this unjust Steward is certainly a dishonest person. But I think Jesus is saying that this is a shrewd man. The definition of shrewd is being clever, or having an artful way of dealing with things. It is a single-mindedness, using all power (energies, intellect, determination of will) to accomplish a goal.

Jesus is telling us that this man has a plan to maintain his lifestyle and he is going to do something about it. Jesus is saying that this man is wiser than we are because (1) he values what he has. Jesus is asking us, as children of the light, does being children of the light mean as much to us as this man's lifestyle, his status? (2) This man has a strategy and a creative ability to live. Jesus is asking us, do we have a strategy for our life?

God created everything. The use of opportunity is our right. In verse 9, this man used unrighteous mammon to influence and win friends. He did it for his own selfish ways. You and I have a right too. In fact, you and I have a higher calling. Shouldn't we do more? For when the system fails, those you have influenced and won as friends will come and dwell with you ever-lastingly.

In verse 10, Jesus said that when we do things, we need to do them right where we are in our jobs, in our homes. We need to do this to the best of our ability and be our most creative. Then when big opportunities come, we will have learned how to handle them, because we have learned what we are to do in the small things.

We all come into this walk of salvation as sinners. Many people want to get things right before they do anything, before they “step out”. If you are not faithful to who you are and things in the kingdom where you are, then you will not grow. Verse 11 speaks to us about this. The more we step out, the more we do, the more we entrust to God's Kingdom, then the more we will receive, the more we will grow.

But what if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another? In verse 12, Jesus talks about your talents, your gifts. No matter how they come about being developed, by man or by God, if you don't use them, then they never will really be yours. You can't live by them, or

serve by them. So many people want to serve God in big ways because they think that's what He wants. But often times it takes serving Him by simply being creative and energetic as you know how.

Finally, Jesus tells us to get off the fence in verse 13. You will not survive on the fence. If a sinful person, such as this man, can be as clever and manipulating as this for his own selfish aim, then you and I who have the light, who have been called, chosen and loved by God need to determine what we stand for and what we live for. Then we need to choose to be effective in the smallest, most elementary way we can and grow.

Chapter 7:

The Parable of the Seed Scatterer

“The Kingdom of God is as a man scatters seed on the ground”

Mark 4:26-29

I chose this parable to balance out the one we just read about in the Unjust Steward. I believe we need to balance the creative ability that the last parable encouraged. We need to balance it with the patient trust in the truth that God is doing all things in His timing and His way.

God has given us vision, hope and creative ability. He wants to use us but if our vision, hope and creative ability fall short of the knowledge and assurance that God does all things, then we have done things in vain. What God is telling us in this parable is that God guides (you and me), He also provides the way. If God wants it, no one can stop it. If He doesn't want it, there is no way you and I can pull it off.

If we look at this parable closely, we can see five things we need to do to make sure that our creativeness, our plan, is truly His plan and His power.

1. Evaluate the seed. Is what we are planning to do an extension of the Kingdom as best as we can understand? Does it fit God's purpose? Will it bring us and others close to Him? Is He guiding you?
2. Give the plan, the idea, to God. Commit the seed unreservedly to God. Always put the plan in His power (verse 27).
3. Allow God to move things as He sees fit. Our determination must be controlled by the power of God (verse 28). We know that a seed must die in order to grow. All our plans, concerns and situations must pass through this same process of dying and then they will grow. It must be God's plan.
4. Trust the seed to grow to maturity. A pastor I knew talked about going out to see if his garden was growing. He said it is tempting to keep pulling up the vegetables to check on them or keep re-evaluating the plan of how he planted them. But this is where trust comes in. We need to trust that in God's power, the plants will come to their fullness.
5. Enjoy the harvest. Share the victory. Share the strengthening of your hopes, dreams and plans when they come to harvest. Give God all the glory for the great things He has done. Philippians 1:6 tells us that “He who has begun a great work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”. Isaiah 43:19 says, “Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth!”

Chapter 8:

The Parable of the True Vine

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.”

John 15:1

When I heard the parable of the true vine, I always identified with the branches. Such a reaction is a natural, selfish way of looking at things. When we look at the part of the branches, we see carnally because we fail to see the whole. The adamic nature always looks for itself, tries to find itself in the picture. But the nature of God looks for the whole and the plan of the whole.

God tends the ground to prepare it for the inhabitation of His seed, the vine. God's Spirit moved over the deep and in another location He breathed His spirit into man. This is the healing of the ground. The Spirit plants the seed in the darkness, the earth, which is us. We are the many membered body. The seed for the vine comes from Christ. This seed can produce only what it is.

The branches are part of the whole and should not be focused on, but should be seen only within the whole. How serious is the problem of seeing only in part? If we become focused on just the part, then the total becomes perverted. As saints, we cannot focus only on the branch. We must place our gaze on the whole in order to then act properly.

A proactive person sees the whole, the distant future, and plans accordingly. He is not affected by the current. Isaiah 46:9-10 states that it may not appear that the Lord has things under control, but do not be deceived. “Things may not yet be done” as the verse states, but that is not to be confused with the thought that the way things are is the way they will be.

A farmer rejoices at the first fruits because he knows what will follow. He shouts for joy at the first fruits, not because of them, but because he knows that they indicate the harvest that is about to take place. Sometimes I think Christians are hunters rather than farmers. They are always hunting, trying to find the one person that needs to be saved. Hunters seek out one but do not stop to plan and raise. Hunters get excited and rejoice over the one that they “bag” for the Lord. The vision of the hunter is for the immediate, that which is presently before their eyes. The farmer, on the other hand, looks for the end result and sees the first fruits as confirmation that the end will be just like the beginning.

Chapter 9:

The Parable of the Persistent Widow

“Yet because this widow keeps bothering me,
I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t wear me down.”

Luke 18:1-8

The parable of the persistent widow is one of my favorite parables. I love it because the bottom line is basically “Never ever give up on prayer”. The parable is Jesus’ way of letting us know that God does not always answer prayer immediately. Sometimes He will wait a good while. Sometimes He might wait years. Some of the parables are hard to interpret, but this one was made easy for us since there was an introduction to the parable, with the main point in the first verse.

What’s it about?

This parable is about an insensitive man who was in a position of power and kept denying a widow’s request on matters that were obviously very important to her. We don’t know if Jesus was making up a story or recounting a real-life situation of which He was aware.

On the surface, the widow’s request seems rather selfish. But Jesus said that it is her asking that is important and she just kept it up. She did not give up when the man seemed indifferent to what she was asking. He finally did take action on her behalf. It wasn’t because he cared about her, it was actually because he was annoyed by the situation; she would not stop asking. He finally says yes to her. Jesus said, “how much more will our loving heavenly Father say yes to His elect.” These are the ones who keep crying out to Him day and night.

So that is the point. Here was a situation in the world in which an insensitive judge finally granted a request. We have a loving heavenly Father who would not withhold anything good from us. How much more will our Father in heaven grant our request?

Why is this Parable important?

1. This parable talks about the importance of prayer. How important is prayer to you? In a sermon many years ago a preacher once said that we should pray thirty minutes a day. That time stuck in my mind. I don’t always do it, but I know that the longer I talk with God the more I relax. The more I can hear. The more I am open to Him and to the Kingdom. But I read somewhere that the average time the people in Britain and America pray is about four minutes a day. We wonder then why we are powerless in our walk with God. We wonder why the Church/Body is so weak.

2. This parable implies that God DOES NOT always answer prayer immediately. Why else would such a parable be necessary? If God answered prayer the first day you asked Him, you would not have to encourage people to pray. God is a sovereign God and He wants to see if we love Him. I have come to see in all these parables we are studying that God's delays are for a reason. He wants us to keep spending time with Him. Jesus' words are an encouragement not to give up. If God doesn't answer prayer, He has a reason; but don't stop asking. Have you lived long enough to thank Him for a closed door? Have you lived long enough to thank Him for unanswered prayer? The encouragement to pray and not give up is a theme throughout the whole of the gospel.
3. The framework of this parable shows us that we should want more from God than we do; that He will do it. Jesus, when He taught His disciples how to pray at the Sermon on the Mount, talked about this. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead. How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" (Luke 11:11-13). So often we stop ourselves from going to God for everything, small or large. I have heard people say that God has much bigger things to do. If you don't trust God in the small things, how will you trust Him in the big things? Is God in charge of all? Or are there things we must do for ourselves?
4. This parable is also important because it is proof that God does answer prayer. Maybe you are praying for a loved one to be saved? Maybe you are praying for a pay raise or a different job? Maybe you are praying for a husband or a wife? Jesus says, "don't stop". Ask for anything you want and until He says No, just keep on praying. One of the reasons God doesn't answer right away is to see whether you are serious about it. He is serious about answering prayer. He wants you to be serious too.

Zechariah and Elizabeth prayed for a son. He did not come for twenty-five years. God was right on time. One of my sayings is "there is a time and a place for everything." Sometimes, like Zechariah, we have even forgotten about prayer. But God never forgets. He answers in spite of our forgetting.

What are some principles of praying?

As I read this parable I saw three principles about prayer.

1. We will get our prayers answered when it is the will of God. You may say, well how do I know the will of God? I think in this idea of knowing the will of God for answered prayer it is all about having a prayer language. When we pray in our prayer language, we don't know what we are saying. Using the Spirit helps me know that I am praying in the will of God. After my prayer, the Holy Spirit gives me an interpretation or a quickening in my spirit. He also might just encourage me to continue to pray for God's will. I believe God wants you to hear His will in your life. Sometimes, God just says no. It is not His will for you. If He does this to you, believe Him. Don't fight it. Let go and accept. If you persist in asking for this something, God may just grant such a request. If this ever happens to you, I guarantee you will be sorry.
2. Prayer will be answered in God's timing even if we have forgotten or no longer want the answer. This is kind of scary in a way. This happens so that we line up with the will of

God. Now we already have a prayer in the works. 1 John 5:14 says, “now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” Maybe we have turned directions in our life, or at the time of our prayer we were younger or unafraid. Zechariah had forgotten the prayer for a child and now he did not want this son. The angel Gabriel struck Zechariah dumb when he found him in unbelief.

3. Sometimes in prayer, God allows you to know the answer to your prayer. There are times when the Holy Spirit immediately gives you a witness that this prayer is going to be answered. He comes and reveals to you in your spirit that something will happen, and you know that it's as good as done. You may not be told the time or place, yet you know deep within that your prayer was answered. Then all you need to do is wait for the answer to materialize. It doesn't happen to me all the time. It doesn't mean you are unspiritual if it doesn't happen. Sometimes God gives you this assurance and sometimes He doesn't.

Some additional thoughts

Jesus ended this parable by making an interesting comment. “When the son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” Why did He make this statement at the end of a parable about prayer? I think He was referring to the prayer and the coming of the “day of the Lord” and the coming of the “Son of man”, which is not the same the Son of God. When Jesus came the first time, they did not recognize who He was. They were not ready for God to answer the prayer for a Savior the way He did. I believe the phrase “when the son of man comes” means when “The Christ” comes. How ready are we for this coming? Will we be ready in faith? Will we be ready like Zechariah, like the Israelites? It is a warning, I think, to keep a watch over the prayer of “the day of the Lord” and be ready for “The Christ” to come and answer that prayer? God is planning on answering this prayer. His point is that when all is said and done, it is all about faith. Will we lead the way in believing God for answered prayer? Only faith pleases God. Prayer makes God in charge.

Finally, I think the message of this parable is, don't give up. Take this verse seriously and don't go back to your old requests. Stay faithful and He is faithful to you. You may be praying for something as big as revival or it can be something as simple as give me justice against my adversary.

Chapter 10:

The Parable of the Prayer by the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

“God be merciful to me a sinner”

Luke 18: 9-14

Immediately following the parable of the persistent widow, which encourages us to pray and keep on praying, Jesus told a parable about how not to pray. If you are intent on offending God, Jesus said, then pray like this. In telling how not to pray, it is also a parable in which we can learn how to pray if we want to draw closer to God.

The parable tells of two men who went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a Tax Collector. The Pharisee, being supremely confident of his standing before God and also extremely self-righteous, prayed loudly about the strength of his religious convictions and about all he did to honor God. The Tax Collector, however, stood at a distance, head bowed and simple muttered “God have mercy on me a sinner.” Jesus said the Tax Collector rather than the Pharisee was the one who went home justified before God. The reason? “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14).

The purpose of the parable

The first purpose of this parable is to reveal what true righteousness is. As with the last parable, we are told from the beginning why Jesus is teaching it. Verse 9 says that Jesus told this parable because of “some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else.” Jesus chose a Pharisee, the most popular and pious type of person of that day and made him the bad guy. He told us how the Pharisee used his own righteousness in praying to God. In fact, he was so confident in his own righteousness that he compared himself with others. You can almost hear how good it made him feel as he actually thought what he was doing was communion with God. He believed that.

The hardest person on earth to talk to is a person who doesn’t think that they have done anything wrong. They just cannot see themselves as God sees them. They cannot recognize that they need the covering of Jesus’ righteousness. You can be a brilliant person with a high IQ and yet still be blind to a sense of sin. The Bible says, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

What about the Tax Collector? Jesus chose him as the good guy. This was a person who was hated by all the Jews. He was the lowest you could get and still be a Jew. There was nothing about him that would have made you think this was the man who would go home completely justified before God.

The second purpose of this parable was for Jesus to teach that true righteousness is by God's grace, not by works. Jesus was the first to teach justification by faith alone. We can see this in the Sermon on the Mount. But here Jesus taught very boldly that we are justified before God not by our works, but because of His grace. The Tax Collector asked for mercy, and he knew that God could give or withhold it as He chose. This parable shows us how to become a Christian and live a Christian life.

The paradox of this parable is this; a good man is described but he is entirely wrong. A bad man is also described and he is entirely justified. It turns out that this person whom you would call a good man was categorically rejected by God despite his many pious acts. The "bad" guy, the Tax Collector, was accepted by God. All of this was to show us that it is God's righteousness not man's righteousness that God wants from us. He covers us, we don't cover ourselves.

What people say or think about you is irrelevant. You may have people pointing the finger at you and declaring that you are not a Christian. There wasn't a hint, as the Tax Collector comes to God, that he would be received by God. Yet, He was the one who got through to God. He was the one who was heard. His righteousness was faultless, because God provided his righteousness for him.

This parable shows us how to become a Christian. The Tax Collector's prayer is the nearest you get in the Bible to what we call the "sinner's prayer". If you want to become a Christian, this is how to pray, "God have mercy on me, a sinner".

Finally, this parable explores the depth of our sin and the wonder of God's grace. Jesus was trying to reveal to people that they are lost without God's righteousness. There are people who give you the impression that they are godly when they are not. They may have the look and there may be things about them that give you the impression they are close to God, but it is those who say, "I am nothing", who really know His presence. That was the Tax Collector. He stood far off, He couldn't even look up to heaven but beat his breast.

Jesus died for the ungodly. He justifies them. "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). That is the way you will see yourself when you are under the searchlight of God. Why is our righteousness rejected? Because it competes with God's way of doing things. All God's ways point us to the cross. It is all about knowing that we cannot save ourselves.

Below are some similarities and differences between the two men.

Similarities:

1. They both stood to pray.
2. They both addressed God directly.
3. They both wanted to be heard by God.

Differences:

1. The Pharisee was self-justifying. We are told that he stood up and prayed about himself. The Tax Collector stood far off, and asked God to justify him. "Have mercy on me."

2. The Pharisee compared himself with others to make him feel good about himself. The Tax Collector accused himself. He did not feel worthy to go near a Pharisee. He knew his place. He actually believed that the Pharisee was a cut above him.
3. The Pharisee actually deceived himself. He focused entirely on himself. It is a dead giveaway that he had no concept of the nature of God. The Tax Collector had no righteousness of his own. He was spiritually bankrupt and he knew it.

Some final thoughts:

It is very interesting that this parable comes as part of a long series of parables that Jesus gave in response to the Pharisee's accusation that He keeps company with sinners. The very ones who were the righteous people of Jerusalem thought God would reject the ones He actually accepted. In the parable of the persistent widow, God was on the side of the widow. Here in this parable, we have perhaps the boldest example of how the religious people of the day could reject Jesus and still feel good about it. Yet God gave the blessing to the unacceptable, to the Tax Collector.

Chapter 11:

The Parable of the Householder

“Therefore, every scribe instructed concerning the Kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasury things new and old.”

Matthew 13:52

Matthew chapter 13 holds eight parables. Some do not count this one as a parable, just as a spoken teaching. Yet Jesus Himself, a few verses earlier, said that he would speak only in parables in order to confound the wise and give wisdom to the foolish. Whether a parable or not, Jesus was teaching us something about our walk in the Kingdom.

It seems as if Jesus is using this parable to wrap up all the parables in this chapter. Jesus starts this parable by asking the disciples, who He was teaching, “do you understand what I have been saying?” They of course say they did. When the disciples said this, I thought I am sure that they were sincere but I doubt that they understood the depth of what Jesus was saying. Sometimes when we understand more than we used to, we think that we understand everything. Jesus is saying in this parable basically two things.

1. Teach what you have learned
 - a. If you understand, then you must live, walk and share with others what you have learned.
 - b. Jesus was giving them a charge and a responsibility to teach what they have learned.
 - c. Further, I think Jesus was actually bestowing on them the status of a teacher. When He used the words “every scribe”, He was putting them in the class of the educated scribes who were teachers of the law. Maybe by using these words, He was also hoping that those who were educated teachers would also become teachers through Him.
2. Everything we have, be it new or old, is within and is a treasure
 - a. In verse 52 when Jesus says He “brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old”, the word old is referring to the Old Testament Word and the word new is referring to the New Testament Spirit. He was saying that the old teaching, the law, and His teaching, the spirit of the law, are in perfect harmony to each other. The law and grace, the written word and the power of God, these are our treasures.

Battle Plan

As I studied this parable, the Holy Spirit kept quickening me that Jesus was trying to bring forth something very important to the disciples and to us, although upon first reading it and examining it, I did not think it was a significant passage. I thought Jesus was just wrapping up things with all the parables He had spoken.

And then it almost leapt off the page; not a bolt of lightning, just a gentle understanding. Jesus is talking about walking in the spirit and with the law. Having equal passion for the law and the Spirit. They are both treasures within us. We should value them equally. This is our Battle Plan.

All that Jesus did and taught was about bringing a new dimension of the law. This was why the Pharisees did not see Him. They were looking for the law of the old dimension. Jesus is saying the old is imperfect without the new. Likewise, the new makes little sense without the old. The old and the new go together. It is the Holy Spirit that brings it all together. When we combine the law with the Spirit, we are rich. We can fight the battles and win.

Jesus had taught in so many places that the law by itself was incomplete. He said He came to fulfill the law, not do away with it. We need the law and we need the Spirit. In the Kingdom of God, everything moves out of the energy of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:26 Jesus said He, the Holy Spirit, (1) “will teach you all things”, and the law (2) “brings to your remembrance all things (by the Spirit) that I said to you.”

People who learn more and more of the word but do not have the Spirit will find that although their knowledge increases, their lives don’t change. They are like people who know their doctrine and if a minister makes just one little mistake, they are ready to correct them. This is called Religious Addiction.

People who have the Spirit but not the Word are, as they say, “no earthly good”. They are ones who seem to always be learning but never coming to knowledge (2 Timothy 3:7). They never grow up and mature. This is called Romantic Addiction.

Sometimes when we read the Word, we don’t always understand what it says. The Holy Spirit understands. Sometimes we hear something and hope that we can remember what was said. The Holy Spirit can remember. Even when we have put together a foundation of teaching in our life, which comes from the Word, from the law, it is the Holy Spirit who quickens us to what we know when we need it.

A knowledge of the word combined with the insight of the Spirit will bring about revelations of truth. The “truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). When you are open to the working of the Spirit in your life, you will see things that you have never seen before. It is a fine-tuning of truth. Jesus was saying, know the law of the Old Covenant but discover the new revelation of the New Covenant. When we understand the Word, law, and the Spirit, the old and the new, we will bring into being a powerful way of living. We hold a treasure within.

When I know God as Life, then I will discover the Law of the Spirit of Life. That is the only law for a son of God. Then, when the Spirit of Life leads me to eat, I will eat. When the Life prompts me to drink, I will drink. When the Life anoints me to fast, I will fast. When the Life quickens me to sing, I will sing. When the Life commands me to speak, I will speak. When the Life orders me to be silent, I will be silent. When the Life stirs me to go, I will go. When

the Life tells me to stay, I will stay. When the Life directs me to work, I will work. When the Life guides me to rest, I will rest. When the Life impresses me to wait, I will wait. When the Life draws me aside to a season of separation, I will turn aside. When the Life speaks that I should go here or there, I will go. When the Life urges me to give, I will give. You see, my beloved, with Christ there are no regulations, no rules, nothing to do by rote, only the indwelling commandment of His Life. In this Kingdom of the Spirit, today is not a matter of law, or ordinances or traditions or observances or regulations but wholly a matter of the indwelling Christ. Each of God's elect is learning the new way of the Kingdom, living the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.

Chapter 12:

The Parable of Peter the Rock

“And on this rock, I will build my church”

Matthew 16:13-20

This is an interesting passage. One that has much to tell us. In this passage there is (1) a metaphor, (2) a parable and (3) a mystery of understanding.

Jesus wasn't trying to build up Peter's self-esteem or fishing for some kind of affirmation of Himself. What was He doing? There are three things that we can hear.

1. Jesus was not looking to the masses and what they were saying about Him. He knew He was being called many things by the public. He was looking to His committed followers and what they were thinking.
2. He was looking to see who would answer His question. When Jesus said, “Who do ‘you’ say I am?” it was a plural “you”. I think when He asked this question He was still talking with all the disciples. However, it was only Peter who spoke up and said “you are the Christ...” Matthew could have said it; so could John and James. All of them could have said it. It was only Peter who said it.
3. What Peter said was so powerful that it would change Peter's life forever. And God would reward him with a privilege and a responsibility beyond his wildest dream. This is probably the most important reason for the passage.

What Peter said was the first formal confession that Jesus was “the Son of the living God”. Peter was the first person to express that theology. I am sure He did not think of it as a theology. Yet that confession of faith is the bedrock of our Christian faith. It is all about the Trinity. For when Peter made that confession, it was the beginning of Christianity. When you and I say that Jesus is the Son of God we are confessing the deity of Jesus. Christianity is founded on this view that Jesus is God.

Now I know to say that Jesus rewarded Peter with being the chosen one to start the church is a no, no. We as Protestants have come to overreact to the extreme manner in which the Roman Catholic Church have embellished this blessing. However, we must read the passage and accept what is being said and done here. We need to also know what this text is not saying. (1) It is not saying anything about Peter's successors. (2) It certainly was not saying anything about exclusive authority. These are all the things the Catholic Church have built this text out to be.

What Jesus was doing was foretelling that Peter would be a powerful builder of the early Church. In reading and studying the Book of Acts, we have come to see that Peter dominated the first part of the book. In fact, Peter did start the Church. On the Day of Pentecost, God gave Peter such a great power to preach. Thousands and thousands came to God. The Church means the “called out”. Certainly Peter, a man who earlier denied Jesus, was the one who called out the believers. Peter certainly was the elect within the elect.

I’ve thought of two things. Why Peter? Was it his personality? Was it his temperament? Was it his intelligence? Was it his education? As far as we know, Peter had no training for his new role. He was a fisherman. Uneducated. What he said was not something he thought of on his own. Jesus said the Spirit revealed it to him. (1) What we see here is that Peter volunteered. He stepped up. It should be a thrill to us, that this is all God is asking for us; to step forward and He will use us. (2) God, who knows the end from the beginning, chose a man who at a crucial moment would deny Christ. Surely this was a bad choice. We might be tempted to think that. Yet I think He did this to encourage all of us. We have all let the Lord down and yet He stays with us. I am glad God chose Peter. He chose Peter because He can choose us.

Here was a man who preached the inaugural sermon of the Church with such powerful, unquestionable wisdom and great knowledge of scripture that thousands came to Christ. God can do that with us as well.

Promise

Jesus also gave us a promise in this passage. Jesus said what wouldn’t happen. The word Hades means death. The word gates refer to the strength of Satan. Jesus promised that the Church will not be defeated by the hosts of darkness. In a word, the Church cannot die. Never believe for one minute that the church can die. God has never left Himself without a witness. Even when the Church appears to pass behind a cloud and Satan appears to be triumphing, don’t believe it. God sees the end from the beginning. The elect will be saved and the Church will flourish. No doubt, when Peter denied the Lord, some cynic said, “Oh where is the promise now?” At the lowest tide it may appear that the outlook is hopeless, but in no time, God turned Peter around and He can do it again to us and others today.

Chapter 13:

The Parable of the Wineskin

“No one pours new wine into old wineskins”

Luke 5:36-39

At the end of Luke 5, Jesus responds to a challenge regarding His disciples by telling three short parables in succession. They come from a complaint the Pharisees give to Jesus. Luke 5:30 asks, “Why do you eat and drink with Tax Collectors and sinners”? Luke 5:33 asks, “Why do the disciples of John (John the Baptist) often fast and pray and likewise those of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking”? These three parables were in response to these remarks.

Jesus, in essence, was doing what He had done time after time; trying to tell them and us that the Kingdom was something new and different. It was different from anything that had ever come along before.

I have no doubt that the Pharisees complained like this to John the Baptist too. For when John came out of the woods preaching repentance, his ministry shook up all of Israel at the time. We all know that when something new comes along, often those who were in the middle of what God was doing yesterday will attack what God is doing today. Usually what happens is those who were in the center of what was happening yesterday want things to stay the same. They had to stretch for this new way and get out of their comfort zone. Then along comes something new. God is moving on and they want to rest or stay.

This was what was happening here. The ministry of John the Baptist was radical, but the ministry of Jesus was even more so and people weren't prepared for it. Jesus was saying to them “don't think you can stick the new thing I am bringing you on top of the old things you've already got.” It is just not going to work. That is why He told the parable of Fasting with the Bridegroom and the New Garment. Plus, the Parable of the Wineskins. All of them were making the same point. I want to examine and look more closely at the Parable of the Wineskins as it is the core of what, I think, He was trying to bring to light.

What was the aim of this Parable?

It was a well-known fact that there was a connection between Jesus and John the Baptist. Jesus had asked John to baptize Him. John's attitude was that if his followers were to be obedient, they would now follow Jesus. The trouble was, there were many disciples of John who wanted to stay with John. This was evident when we studied the book of Acts. Paul found many people still following the teachings of John the Baptist.

John's disciples had begun the discipline of praying and fasting. When they first started, it was initially something that made them uncomfortable. It made them have to get out of their comfort zone. Yet soon they were quite used to it. They probably enjoyed it and wanted to get others to do it as well, especially Jesus' disciples with whom they had this natural connection. In fact, it was John's followers who were also ones to raise the question of why they were not praying and fasting.

But Jesus was telling them, "You can't combine the old with the new". It just won't work. You will ruin both. Jesus used the image of the wineskins. He made the point that it was not practical to put new wine into an old wineskin. Why? Back in those days people used animal skins to hold wine since, at that time, there was no such thing as a bottle. A new wineskin had to be used to hold recently made wine because the wine would change in character and expand as it fermented. The wineskin had to be pliable and able to expand along with the wine. Old wine, of course, had already fermented and would not undergo any further chemical changes. The process was complete and the alcohol content was stable. But if new wine was added to the old wineskin the result would be disastrous. The expanding wine would burst the skin. The wineskin would be destroyed along with the wine.

Jesus was saying that you cannot have it both ways. Don't think you can pour My new wine into your old wineskin. By old wineskin He meant old structure, traditions and comfort zones. The new wine was the new work of the Spirit that was upon them. The two do not mix.

What is the application of this Parable?

Jesus was not only telling a parable, but He was also setting a pattern for future behavior. The kind of behavior that is required of all of us in an ever-increasing measure. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:18, we are being changed from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord.

We are ever crossing over from the old to the new, from the natural to the supernatural. Jesus knew that new wine could only realize its potential in a new wineskin, so we must welcome the new things that God wants to do in our lives. Again, this calls for an even greater openness to the Spirit.

Even after we have been changed into glory, we will still want to be changed into more glory, and that will continue. This is the meaning of being renewed. There are saved people who will go to heaven when they die, but who have only a small glimpse of being changed into glory; and that was enough for them. They are like the followers of John the Baptist who, when John said, "he must increase and I must decrease" said "No, we want to stay with John."

The Christian faith has not been designed to create a new superior kind of comfort zone in which we can remain unchanged. It has been designed to create new hearts that are continually being renewed. If we don't walk in the light, our personal relationship with God is not right and so when the new wine comes, we will say, "Oh, I don't like this, I want the old". Jesus knew that when He said in verse 39, "No one after drinking the old wine wants the new, for he says the old is better". This is the way we human beings are. So, something has got to happen to us that will change our tastes.

I don't like wine. Never have. Yet I know that there are those who are, what you call, connoisseurs of wine and they develop a certain taste. They get used to the taste and aroma of

a certain quality of wine and when they are presented with a young or new wine, they don't want it. So, it is in the Church. When "old" Christians are presented with new wine, a new style of worship perhaps or new songs, they don't want it.

What is the argument of this Parable?

I believe Jesus is saying there are two kinds of Christians. There are those who stay in their comfort zone and those who are willing to keep moving out of their comfort zones. The latter type is in the process of growing in the Kingdom.

Sometimes we have to do painful things. You can't have your cake and eat it too. You can't follow both John the Baptist and Jesus at the same time. We have to leave what God has been doing previously and move into what He is doing now. We all have ways of justifying our own particular comfort zones, but our duty is to be new wineskins for the glory of God.

Every new generation of believers needs new structures in order to continue God's work. My grandmother believed many things in her life, and she drew me to God. But I know more than she would have ever dreamed. I am not saying that I am better. I am saying that God has consistently put new tastes in my life.

Jesus however was not teaching that we should do completely away with the old. He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). In other words, He was saying, "do not think that the old has no value". We built on the old; one precept on another precept. What Jesus was saying was when it comes to the Kingdom of Heaven, change is here to stay. Changing will be God's way until the "day of the Lord" or our death.

1. New wine requires new wineskin. The Holy Spirit is the new wine. We are the new wineskin and we must change to accommodate Him.
2. New wine calls for new structure. Instead of doing the same old things year after year, we must be open to new patterns of worship, praise and prayer. We must always have an expectancy of God doing something new.
3. New wine means a continual moving out of our comfort zones. As we need new wineskins to receive God's ever refreshing new wine, so we will be made continually uncomfortable by the requirements of His word and His spirit.

The key is to listen to God. If you will take the time to wait on Him and listen to what He says to you, you will not be taken by surprise when the new wine comes, and God begins to do a new thing. God's strategy is always changing but if you listen to Him carefully, even though there may not be an exact understanding of what is happening, He will always show you what to do.

The bottom line is whatever the Holy Spirit wants to do, do it. Don't be afraid of people who say, "Hey they are drunk on new wine." I can tell you that when you develop a new wineskin, you can take in the new wine, and you can cope with the mocking and the criticisms when they come your way.

Chapter 14:

The Parable of the Talents and of the Ten Minas

Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27

The Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Ten Minas somewhat overlap. Although, if we study them, we see that they each have a distinct meaning. However, I believe Jesus tells each of them for the same reason. In the Parable of the Ten Minas, we hear the reason more clearly. Luke 19:11 says, “While they were listening to this, He went on to tell them a parable, because He was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the Kingdom of God was going to appear at once.”

Jesus knew what they were thinking. It is amazing how we can be so right in some things and so wrong in others. The people who knew Jesus were convinced that He was the One for whom they had been waiting and they were right. But they were also convinced that the Kingdom of God would come in power and authority as soon as Jesus set foot in Jerusalem. Those people around Jesus, even the disciples, believed that at any moment Jesus was going to unveil His glory, show Himself to be a Moses or David, and put to shame the Roman soldiers who controlled the area. It was what they desired to happen so much that they did not consider any other alternative. Instead of hitting them over the head with this wrongness, Jesus set out, as He had so many times, telling them a parable of what the Kingdom of God was really going to be like.

The Parable of the Ten Minas tells of a man of noble birth who was traveling to another country to be appointed king. We can hear that this is Jesus telling them, in a roundabout way, that He would be going away soon. He was going to be appointed King once He went away. This nobleman called his ten servants to him and gave each of them a mina. In the account of the ten minas, each person was given the same amount. A Mina was money. Actually, when I looked it up, it says that this was about three months wages. What he said to them was “put the money to work” while he was away. When He returned each of the servants would give an account of how they had invested the money.

In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus told the story a little differently. He said a man was traveling to a far country and he called his servants to him. He entrusted them with varying amounts of talents. He gave to them according to their ability. He told them that when he returned, he would ask them to report on how they had used these talents.

There in lays the difference between the parables. The minas were about money to be invested for the Kingdom. The talents were about how they would use the Talents.

In the Parable of the Talents, most of the servants had done well, except one, who buried his Talent in the ground to hide it. In the Ten Minas, the one who did not do well had hid his Mina in a cloth rather than investing it.

In studying these parables, we recognize and realize that each one stands to show a different aspect of the Kingdom. The difference in the parable of the Ten Minas was that Jesus was focusing on the “work” to be done as the Kingdom comes. He was telling them how to be faithful and be responsible. In the parable of the Talents, Jesus was focusing on the “wait” for the Kingdom to come. He was telling them how to be productive and accountable as you walk in the Kingdom. In order to understand more, we need to take each parable separately and individually to see what Jesus wanted to tell us in these parables. This will help us to see more clearly and how we can glean more from them.

Ten Minas: Faithfulness and Responsibility

In this parable of the Ten Minas, Jesus was trying to relay to His disciples more than just to hang in there. There is a job to be done. Be faithful and responsible. In the parable, the master gave them all the same amount of money. This was not a competition between them. Everyone is equal in the Kingdom. It was a matter of how they invested this money in their life.

Jesus knew that His coming back may be a long, long time away; a time only God knew, not even Jesus knew. Would they be able to stay faithful in that waiting time? What about when the going got rough? Somehow, He needed to plant in their minds that they are a part of the Kingdom coming. They had been given something in advance; something to work on while they waited. It is how they were to walk life out. The very idea of them putting the enemy under their feet would hasten the fullness of the Kingdom, and keep them faithful and responsible. They have a responsibility in the waiting time; to be faithful, to produce.

In this parable of the Ten Minas, the master did not come back immediately. Yet when he did, he held all accountable. He said, “let me know how you have done.” This is what scripture says, that when we stand before God, He will judge us. What have we done? This is not about talents. It is about investing. Faith without works is what this parable is all about. But more than that, it gives us meaning to keep going.

As I said, all had done well except the third servant. He had hidden his Mina, therefore he was not responsible nor faithful. His waiting was a waste. He was not ready for the King to return.

In driving home His point that this servant did not remain faithful or responsible, Jesus told how the King took away this servant’s Mina and gave it to the one who already had ten because Jesus said “to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.” To be unfaithful and irresponsible is to have nothing.

The parable is telling us a meaning to life. What Jesus was trying to say to them is that it is how you work now, not the end, that matters. Yes, we can hear the reward and when we stand before God, we pray that He will say “Well done my faithful servant.” This happens if we are open and honest to the jobs God has given us. We are to use what He has given us. “If you save your soul, you will lose it. If you lose your soul, you will save it” (Matthew 16:25). Every day you have an opportunity to use all that God has given you. We sometimes get caught in the

end or the goal. When we do, we lose the whole point of the Kingdom. God delays for a reason. Waiting is all about growing and giving meaning to life.

What are the Minas?

In thinking of the jobs or work that God would give us, I found myself thinking of the Functioning Gifts and the Ministerial Gifts. Each of us, upon our Salvation, receive a Functioning Gift. A gift to be able to have purpose and meaning in the Body and the Kingdom.

The Ministerial Gifts are what God has called us to do within the Body, within the Kingdom; a gift to invest in the Kingdom. We are to listen for the call of the Holy Spirit into which work we are needed to advance the Kingdom. We also know that Jesus told the disciples to wait on the coming of the Holy Spirit after He was gone. The power of the Holy Spirit activated the disciples into spreading the gospel and the Kingdom throughout the world.

We can see that all of this points to the very idea of what Jesus was trying to share with the disciples and with us. If we just hold and never risk, we will end up like the one servant with no reward and cast out in the dark.

THE TALENTS: ACCOUNTABILITY and PRODUCTIVITY

The difference between this parable and the last one is that each of the servants were given talents, which were given according to their ability. Therefore, the focus as I said in this parable, is all about accountability and productivity.

In order to get ahold of what Jesus is trying to tell the disciples in this parable; we need to first define the word talent. Is this parable about money? I didn't think so. If we look at the words in the parable, it says it was given "according to their ability". This is not like in the Ten Minas parable where something was given that was equal. This had to do with the individual's ability. The key is the word "ability".

If we listen to the parable, it sounds more likely that in telling this parable, Jesus is saying the man is calling his servants and giving them a commission; giving them a job to do. A job which varies from individual to individual. For some he gives five talents, a high measure of accountability, some two talents and to another one talent.

Luke 12:48 says "from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded and from that who had been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." I cannot hear this as the gifts of the Holy Spirit as this is all about living according to their "ability". Truly the gifts of the Spirit are His to show forth in our life, as the Spiritual Gifts are for the edifying of the Body. These talents, I believe, are for the health and welfare of ourselves and those we live with every day.

For that reason, I find myself thinking that these talents that Jesus is talking about in the parable refers to the character traits of the person. An additional thought for this idea is that we are created in the image of God. In the parable, Jesus says the man gave unto them "goods". God has truly created us like Him but also uniquely as ourselves.

I think Jesus is trying to show them and us a way of living in such a manner that we will find satisfaction, accountability and productivity in all that we do. We can be living a full life here and now. And when finally, the “day of the Lord comes”, we will be ready.

In looking then at this parable we can see, I think, that Jesus was trying to tell the disciples that living in the Kingdom is all about being who God made us. Jesus is telling us how to wake up every day and to practice being that person. God has a plan for your life and my life. In telling this parable, He was trying to draw a picture to what God is commanding us as believers to do in the work of the Kingdom. Yes work. The word work is a good one.

This is why in telling the parable, Jesus was so strong in the way He handled the slothful and lazy servant. Again, to live in a way to not show forth the qualities of our life is to not show forth who God created.

So, what was the fate of the one talent servant? Did he lose his salvation? No. Neither of these parables are talking about salvation but about ones inheritance. They are saying that there will be saved people who will gnash their teeth because they did not walk in who they were, so they lost their anointing and their reward. It always starts with who you are. There have been people who have had five Minas given to them in high profile ministries that have blown it and are now out of the ministry. There are those with one Mina and one Talent who developed great ministries to God. We must live in such a way as to avoid losing our personhood and our reward in heaven by risking and going forth in Jesus’ name.

Character traits

As we think of this strong parable, I think of just what those personal qualities, those talents God has given us would look like.

1. Graciousness: Civil, cordial, kind. This means that each day you let anyone and everyone off the hook. You may be able to throw the book at them and point the finger. But you don’t. You remain gracious. You can’t know when God is going to come. If you make exceptions, ah, this is the hour He may come. You are expected to forgive totally all those around you.
2. Gentleness: tenderness, quietness, mildness. This one puts me to shame. I can be so strong. I pray always for God to make me gentle. I want to be found gentle, not stern or losing my temper. It may seem justified, but later we realize we were wrong. I don’t want God to come and find me angry.
3. Giving: Dedicated, charitable. This means going the extra mile when you are tired or doing without complaining. Think on the good things, not the bad. Being willing.
4. Gratitude: Gratefulness, appreciation, thanks. We want to be found showing gratitude, thanking Him for every little thing and missing nothing if I can help it. I want to be found thanking God. I want to be grateful for His goodness.
5. Generosity: Bighearted, open handedness. When it comes to finances, we give everything to God. He has said it all belongs to Him. We want to be found believing and being faithful.

This doesn't mean we have to be perfect, but it does mean we are walking in all the light that God has given us. This is how we must live. Then we won't be ashamed when God turns up either in death or by His Spirit.

Chapter 15:

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

“Then the Kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.”

Matthew 25:1-13

For many years the parable of the ten virgins has been one of my favorites. It was one that I used to talk about when I was preaching on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, as oil was always representative of the Holy Spirit. The three points I made in this parable were asking the question, “are you ready?” The points were...

1. Somewhere I heard some preacher talk about the present time being “five minutes to midnight”. So, my teaching would be about “the day of the Lord” coming soon; coming very soon. It was my strong point to push for the second blessing; to push for the Baptism with this point.
2. I have taught that Jesus was implying that there would be those in the last days who would realize their great need for the Holy Spirit in their life. At that time, it might then be too late then. Reach for it now.
3. Jesus is expressing in this parable there will be some in the church who will be asleep and not ready. To anticipate and keep our oil fresh and ready is important. We need the Baptism.

All of those things are true and important. The parable does emphasize the importance of being ready for “the day of the Lord” and having to stand before Him on the day of judgment. However, now I saw additional thoughts:

4. This parable is not talking about whether you are saved or lost. They all had oil; the Holy Spirit.
5. This parable does not refer to unsaved people. Like it or not, the church has always had people in various stages of growth.
6. This parable is not about people losing their Salvation. We are all in a process. Yes, there is certainly an evangelistic appeal for any unsaved person to see the need for being “ready”. However, it is mainly an appeal to the church, to Christians, to wake up.

What I saw for the first time was that this parable is all about how Christians can slip backwards and in the end, end up not receiving his or her reward in Christ.

I think one of the reasons of this parable is simply to say, are you ready for the “Day of the Lord”? I believe the main reason is that the foolish virgins are those who missed out on what had been “planned” for them which was the celebration of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. They lost their reward. They missed out on what could have been theirs. Jesus is saying do you want to miss out?

The parable of the 10 virgins is primarily about the end times. It is all about when God comes for you either in death or in His Spirit. It describes a scene that is most uncomfortable to read, and one we don’t like to think about. But there will be things that some people will miss out on, and they are going to wish they had been more faithful. Jesus was wanting to show, as he did again and again in the parables, what the Kingdom looks like. In this parable He is showing what it is going to be like for Christians who take for granted the responsibility that is theirs.

There is strong imagery that Jesus uses speaking about a wedding to take place. It is strange that Jesus speaks about the bridegroom but never uses the word bride. He speaks of “10 virgins”. Now the Church is seen as the Bride of Christ, yet what that is presenting is that we are not yet married. We are only engaged. Is that what Jesus is trying to tell us? We are in this process of being engaged waiting for the wedding? Are we being faithful as we wait?

Why is it that one day a person can say genuinely, “Lord, you know I love you” but the next day temptation comes and they give right into it? Why? Jesus said to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7, “You have forsaken your first love.” You have lost your first love. Can you remember that time when Jesus was so special to you, so real and so precious? Could Jesus be telling this parable to challenge us to go back to our first love?

Why in the world would you take a lamp with you but not take sufficient oil? What would it mean? To do that is like having the Word without the Spirit. It is like the Scriptures without the power of the Holy Spirit. As I read, I thought, could Jesus be telling us in a roundabout way that the oil, the Holy Spirit, is like the engagement ring between the Bride and the Bridegroom? That we need to take this oil, the Holy Spirit, more seriously and maintain our engagement?

Another point about the Holy Spirit is that sometimes the Holy Spirit is symbolized by fire, as on the Day of Pentecost, but fire comes from oil. If there is not enough oil, then there will be no fire. Do we have fire in our relationship with the bridegroom?

In speaking of the 10 virgins, Jesus speaks of five being wise and five being fools. What is Jesus trying to communicate to us with this idea? Maybe we should look up in scripture the words wise and foolish. When we look in scripture it says in Proverbs 12:15, “The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice” and in Proverbs 23:9 “do not speak to a fool for he will scorn the wisdom of your words”. A fool does not listen to corrections. He is unteachable. The foolish one’s folly will be exposed, but not until the bridegroom returns. Some people, some day will be found out.

It is an interesting point to me that if the bridegroom had come sooner, the foolish virgins would never have been found out, because there was a time when everybody had oil. It was because the bridegroom tarried that some didn’t have enough oil; that they were not ready. Perhaps one reason God delays His coming is to let everyone see what we are really like.

2 Timothy 2:23-26 says the wise are open to correction and discipline, but the foolish are not. A wise person listens. A wise person also accepts a rebuke. Proverbs 1:5 tell us that the proof that you are wise is that you love it if someone tells you the truth. We should want to get it right. When you are defensive that is a bad sign.

In the passage Matthew 25:4, Jesus indicates that a mature Christian knows not to proceed without the Spirit. They will ensure that they have an adequate supply of oil. We are told that the wise took oil in jars along with their lamps, because they wanted to be safe.

Chapter 16:

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats

“Come you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance,
the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”

Matthew 25:34

This was the last of Jesus’ parables. Certainly it is the last major one in the gospel of Matthew. As I looked up this parable, it was not recorded as such. In fact, it was spoken of as a prophecy told by Jesus. In reading it I found that it does mix prophetic words with parable type language. So, I decided to continue to consider it a parable.

We saw in the parable of the Ten Virgins a revelation telling us to wake up and stay awake. For we do not know when the day of the Lord will take place. We saw in the parable of the Ten Minas and the Ten Talents how faithfulness is rewarded at the end of the ages. In this parable of the sheep and goats, we see that Jesus is standing in judgment on the lost and the saved.

Why is this parable hard to understand?

1. This is not an easy parable. None of the parables are easy. However, this parable is more so in that although all Christians should live their lives with the expectation and preparations for the Lord’s coming, there are many different interpretations in the details of Biblical information concerning the future. I will look at this with my belief that Jesus is speaking of the “very last days” when the Kingdom is complete.
2. It is also difficult because in reading quickly, the first idea that comes is that it is all about earning your salvation. Those who have fed the poor and visited people in prison are the only ones going to heaven, while those who don’t will go to hell.

We are told that those on His left were rejected, while those on His right were welcomed. As we read it more, you can see that Jesus is speaking about those already saved who are getting a reward versus those who are lost being cast away.

If we can see the parable in the light of saved people who are getting their inheritance, versus the lost, it does not yet explain fully Jesus’ intent or rationale for judgment in this parable. But it does help to understand things better.

What does this Parable tell us?

1. The parable is a reminder that all will give an account of the things they’ve done while they were on earth, whether those deeds are good or bad. In thinking of the parables, we are also reminded that God doesn’t forget what we have done. We so often do forget.

He knows what we have done and what we have not done. 2 Timothy 2:19 says, “The Lord knows those who are His.”

2. This parable is a reminder that it was God who created Hell. He created it for the “devil and his angels”. In creating Hell, we need to remember that Hell is eternal, “everlasting punishment” just as Heaven is eternal, “eternal life”. We are quite happy for Heaven to be eternal, but many people are unhappy that Hell will be eternal.
3. This parable reminds us that Jesus will have the last word. This parable shows us how true it is that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. The Father has truly given Him authority over all things. That means he had the first word and He will have the last word. He is the judge in all of these.

The Judgment

“All the nations will be gathered before Him” (Matthew 25:32). Nations, in the Bible, always refer to people. So, it could be read that every kindred, tribe, tongue, race, village, province, every accent, every dialect, all the people of the world will stand before Him. You and I will be there. Every single person who has ever lived will be there. He will be sitting and we will be standing.

How will the nations be gathered? They will be summoned. It won't be a polite invitation on a pretty card. We will all be summoned. We are told in the book of Revelation that those who are afraid will do everything within their power to escape. “The Day of the Lord will be a terrible day”. Revelation also speaks “the Day of the Lord will be a wonderful day”. It all depends on where you are coming from.

We are told that Jesus will do the separating. He will separate people on the basis of what He already knows. This will not be a time to plead your case. That time is over. This is judgment time.

Then the King will address those who are saved and who have an inheritance. This is not about dealing with, are you saved or not saved. He is here to judge and affirm immediately those who have an inheritance. “Take your inheritance the kingdom prepared for you since the creations of the world” (Matthew 25:34). All that we are going to have has been planned for us, it is not an afterthought.

To those on His left He will say “Depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”. They are called cursed because they must bear their own sins. Jesus has already borne the sins of the saved, but those who will not trust what He did on the cross will bear their own sins and they are called cursed.

Why were they separated?

The strategy of the judgment was simply “did you believe”. Not only that but did you act upon that belief. This is the one truth Jesus was speaking to them and to us. The standard of judgment based on this parable is how people have treated the Church. The way you look after the Church of God, the way you care for the people of God and the way in which you deal with other Christians. Those who were saved were those who cared about the Church and fellow Christians. They are the ones with an inheritance. Those who were lost showed contempt for the Church of God and for Christians, that is the stand of judgment.

There will be surprises

There will be surprises on both sides. Christians are unaware that they have done anything great. They have taken seriously the words of Jesus, and they have done their duty. They have just lived their life. The goal was there but not the reward. There will be Christians who have felt they were doing the things God has called them to do yet they find themselves on the wrong side of Jesus (Matthew 7:23)

From the moment God conceived the plan of redemption. God also planned our inheritance. Nothing could be more painful than for you and me to find out what you might have been and what the Lord envisioned for you. One of the things that will make hell so terrible will be realizing how things might have been.

There will be the lost, on the other hand, who are unaware that they have done anything wrong. They saw no need to care for the Church or the people of God. The implication is that, had they known, they would have acted differently. They didn't realize that it was Jesus they were not serving. These are the lost and the judgment will reveal selfish and defensive and self-righteous people.

Jesus was saying "You ought to see Me behind needy people". In life we should strive to be consistent in the way we treat others, to give equal time to the poor and to someone who is middle class. Do all you can because you never know whom you are reaching.

This is a sobering parable. I don't like it. I only know that they are the words of Jesus spoken to the disciples. My heart cries that I and you, when that time comes, will all be on the right side. So when I complain about the fire of life, may I remember the verse in 1 Corinthians 9:27 when Paul said, "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

