

Eleven Parables and Teachings of Jesus

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The Parable of the Rich Fool - Luke 12 : 13-21

Introduction

What are we working for? What is the purpose of our lives? When we have got the job, the promotion, the degree or qualification we are working for, then what? Do we have any clear objectives? This parable talks about a very successful man who had not stopped to think about the true purpose of life.

Vocabulary

- v.14 *arbiter* - someone appointed by two parties to settle a dispute between them; a judge. The modern form of the word is *arbitrator*
- v.15 *abundance* - an amount much more than enough; plenty.
- v.16 *crop* - harvest.
- v.18 *barn* - a farm building for storing grain or vegetables etc.
- v.19 *laid up* - stored up; saved.
- v.20 *fool* - a stupid, silly, unwise person.

Observation Questions

1. (v.13) Who spoke to Jesus? What did he call Jesus? What did he ask Jesus to do?
2. (v.14) Was Jesus willing to do it?
3. (v.15) What did Jesus warn people about? He said that life is more thanwhat?
4. (v.16) Who is the character in the story? What was the rich man's business? Was it successful?
5. (v.17) What was the rich man's problem?
6. (v.18) What did he decide to do?
7. (v.19) What did he plan to do with the rest of his life?
8. (v.20) Who spoke to him? What did he say?
9. (v.20) What was the point of the story?

Interpretation and Application Questions

1. (vv.13-15) Describe everything we know or can infer about the man who spoke to Jesus.
2. (v.15) What is greed and what should be our attitude towards it? Why?
3. (vv.16-18) How would you evaluate the *actions* of the rich man?
4. (v.19) How would you evaluate his *attitude*?
5. (v.20) What are the dangers of success and prosperity? How did Jesus expose the man's false sense of security? When might we have a false sense of security?
6. (v.15) How does this parable illustrate that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions?
7. (v.21) Do you think that Jesus is condemning material prosperity in this parable? Is it possible to be prosperous without being greedy? If so, how?
8. (v.21) What does it mean to be *rich towards God*? What practical steps can we take to become spiritually rich?

The Teaching of Jesus - Luke 10: 25-37, The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Introduction: Who is a neighbour? Someone who lives nearby? Someone of the same race or religion? Someone of the same social group or class? In this parable Jesus overturns our traditional definitions and shatters our ideas of what it means to be a neighbour to those around us.

READ: Luke 10: 25-37

Vocabulary:

Samaritan: a native of Samaria, a country which bordered Judea. The Samaritans were of mixed race descended from Jews who had married non-Jews and so were generally despised by the Jewish people.

The Law: (v.26) the law of God which He had given to the Jews through Moses. (recorded in Exodus ch.20)

to justify himself: (v.29) to put himself in the right, or, to save his face

Jericho: (v.30) a town 17 miles from Jerusalem. The road which descended sharply toward the River Jordan was rocky and dangerous.

priest: (v.31) The priests were responsible for the Temple worship, especially the offering of sacrifices. They had to be descendants of Aaron (the brother of Moses).

Levite: (v.32) Levites were descendants of Levi (but not Aaron) who assisted in the Temple services.

reimburse: (v.35) to pay back

likewise: (v.37) the same (kind of thing, kind of behaviour)

Observation Questions:

- (v.25) Who asked Jesus a question? What did he call Jesus? What was his purpose? What was the question?
- (v.26) What was Jesus' reply?
- (v.27) The expert replied by quoting two commands. What were they?
- (v.28) How did Jesus respond to his reply?
- (v.29) Why did the expert ask another question? What was the question?
- (v.30) Jesus replied with a story about a traveller. What happened to him?
- (vv.31-32) Two people came along and saw the injured man. What did they do?
- (vv.32-35) A Samaritan came along and saw the man. What did he do?
- (vv.36-37) What was the point of the story?

Interpretation and Application Questions

- Why do you suppose Jesus made a Samaritan the hero of the story? (vv.31-33) Describe his actions from the point of view of a) personal inconvenience, b) financial cost, and c) risk (vv.34-35) How often do these factors keep us back from neighbourly actions? Any examples?
- Jesus' question was not intended to prove that Samaritans could be better neighbours than Jews. What was he getting at?
- Jesus told the law expert to 'Go and do likewise' (v.37). What exactly was Jesus telling him to do?
- In what practical ways can we 'go and do likewise' today?
- In what sense did the law expert 'correctly' answer his own question? (verses 27-28) Is it really possible to receive eternal life by keeping the law?

The Parable of the Great Banquet - Luke chapter 14: 15-23

Introduction: Jesus had been invited to dinner by an important Pharisee (a religious leader). While he was there, Jesus noticed how some guests were trying to get the best seats for themselves so he taught people to be humble and to take a lower seat until invited to take a more important place. He also said that people should not only invite their relatives, friends, and rich neighbours to dinner knowing that one day they would invite them back, but that they should also be generous and invite poor people who would never be able to invite them back. Jesus said that this kind of generosity would be paid back in heaven.

Observation Questions:

1. (v.15) What did one of the other guests say to Jesus?
2. (v.16) What was the form of Jesus' reply? What was the central theme of the story?
3. (v.17) What did the man do when the banquet was ready?
4. (v.18) How did the guests reply to the invitation? What did the first guest say?
5. (v.19) What did the next man say?
6. (v.20) What reply did another man give?
7. (v.21) How did the master feel? What did he do?
8. (v.22) What was the result after the servant had done what he was told?
9. (v.23) What did the master tell him to do next?
10. (v.24) Who would not be able to enjoy the banquet?

Interpretation and Application Questions

1. In this parable, who do you think is represented by the man, what is the feast, and who are the invited guests?
2. In your opinion, why did the guests who were originally invited change their minds?
 - Look at the excuses which the guests made.
 - Can we recognise their similarity to excuses which people make today?
3. What do you think is represented by the commands of the master and the activity of the servant in verses 21-23?
4. Why would the people who were invited not be able to get a taste of the banquet?
5. Verse 15 tells us that another guest at dinner in the Pharisee's house said, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." Why do you think Jesus responded to him by telling this parable?
6. What lesson do you think this parable has for us today?
 - In what way is it a warning?
 - In what way is it an encouragement?

The Parable of the Talents - Matthew 25 : 14-30

Introduction: People are not born equal. We live in an imperfect world and sometimes the inequalities seem unfair. As children we may be jealous of our brothers and sisters - or of our friends who may seem better off than we are. As we get older we may feel it unfair that we have had fewer opportunities than people who seem to be doing better than we are. This parable gives us a glimpse of the issues of inequality and fairness in God's kingdom.

Vocabulary: *talent* has two meanings a) a measure of money in ancient Greece or Rome. A talent was equal to several hundred pounds. This is the meaning in this parable. b) a natural ability, or gift

Observation Questions

1. (v.14) Who were the main characters in the story? What did the master do before going away?
2. (v.15) How much was given to each one? What was the master's reason for the way he delegated responsibility?
3. (v.16-17) What did the first two servants do? What was the result?
4. (v.18) What did the third servant do? What was the result?
5. (vv19-21) What happened when the master came back? What did the first servant say? What did the master reply?
6. (vv22-23) What did the second servant report to his master? What did the master say?
7. (vv24-25) What was the third servant's explanation of his actions?
8. (vv26-27) How did the master respond to the servant's explanation?
9. (vv28-30) What happened to the third servant? What did the master call him?

Interpretation and Application Questions

1. What do you think is the main point of the story?
2. Compare the reaction of the master to the first two servants (vv.19-23). What matters to him, and what does *not* matter?
3. As you look at the statements of the three servants (vv.20, 22, 24-25), what can you infer about their relationships with their master?
 - How might their relationships have affected their actions in verses 16-18?
 - Think of people you have done jobs for. How did your relationship with them affect your attitude toward the job?
4. What do you think Jesus wants us to learn about God from this story?
 - should we accept the third servant's view of the master as a correct portrayal of God?
5. How does our view of God affect our relationship with Him?
 - how does our relationship with God affect our attitude towards what we do?
6. What do you think of the teaching in v.29? In what sense is it a spiritual principle? How does it work?

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector - Luke 18: 9 - 14

Introduction : Prayer is a test of a person's relationship with God. Our prayers reveal what is most important to us. They expose our innermost feelings about ourselves and about God. In this parable we overhear the prayers of two men. If we listen closely, we can discover not only how God views their prayers but ours as well.

Background: *The Pharisees* were one of the groups of religious leaders. They were very strict about keeping religious laws and considered themselves much better than ordinary people. At that time Palestine was a Roman colony. *Tax Collectors* were thought to be cheats and traitors because they worked for the Romans and many used their position to cheat people and get rich. The Pharisees considered foreigners unclean because they worshipped idols and anyone who worked for the foreigners was also considered unclean.

Observation Questions

1. v.9 To whom did Jesus tell this parable?
2. v.10 Who are the chief characters in the story?
3. v.10 Where did they go and why did they go there?
4. v.11-12 What did the Pharisee pray?
5. v.13 What did the Tax Collector pray?
6. v.14 According to Jesus, whose prayers were answered?

Interpretation and Application Questions

1. The Pharisee addresses God, but to what extent does God occupy his attention?
2. On what positive and negative facts about himself does the Pharisee depend? (vv.11-12)
What does this reveal about his attitude to himself and to God?
3. How many times does the Pharisee compare himself with others? (v.11)
What does it do to you when you compare yourself with those you look down on?
4. How did the tax collector view himself? Contrast his attitude with the attitude of the Pharisee.
5. Notice the positions, postures and gestures of the Pharisee and the tax collector.
What conclusions can we draw from these contrasts in their body language.
6. Considering that the Pharisees were treated with great respect, while the tax collectors were generally despised as traitors, what conclusions can we draw from Jesus' teaching that the tax collector was justified before God rather than the Pharisee?
7. What does it mean to be 'justified before God'? (See Romans 5: 1-11)

The Rich Man and Lazarus - Luke 16: 19 -31

Introduction Karl Marx said that religion is the opium of the people, dulling their senses and making them put up with hardship in this life in the hope of a better life after death. But true religion demands a genuine, practical concern for the poor and the oppressed. Yet the Bible does teach us that pain and suffering in this life *can* be replaced by joy in the next. This parable also teaches us that wealth and power in this life do not guarantee them in the next.

Vocabulary

- (v.19) *lived in luxury* always had and enjoyed the best and most expensive things.
- (v.22) *Abraham's side* a name for heaven; Abraham was the ancestor of the Jewish nation and of all who have faith in God, so he is with God in heaven.
- (v.23) *hell* the place of punishment for sin.
- (v.23) *torment* suffering
- (v.24) *agony* extreme pain and suffering
- (v.26) *chasm* a deep, hollow place such as may be found between the peaks of high mountains.
- (v.30) *repent* confess sin and be willing to change

Observation Questions

1. (vv 19-20) What two people are mentioned? Describe their lifestyles.
2. (vv 20-21) What was their relationship?
3. (v.22) What happened to the beggar?
4. (vv 22-23) What happened to the rich man? What was different about his death?
5. (vv 23-24) How did the rich man feel? What did he ask for?
6. (vv 25-26) What did Abraham reply? Why was the rich man's request refused?
7. (vv 27-29) What did the rich man ask for next? Why was his request refused?
8. (vv 30-31) Why did the rich man ask for the same thing again? What was Abraham's reply?

Interpretation and Application Questions

1. (v.25) Do you think that this parable teaches that Lazarus went to heaven *simply because* he had been poor and that the rich man went to hell *simply because* he had been wealthy on earth?
2. (v.26) What is the point of the mention of a *great chasm* fixed between heaven and hell?
3. (v.31) Why does God not send messengers from the dead to warn us?
 - Why did the resurrection of Jesus fail to convince people of his day, and why does it still fail to convince people today?
4. If we choose to listen, what are Moses, the Prophets and this parable saying to us?

The teaching of Jesus - Matthew 13: 1-23, The Parable of the Sower and the Seed

Introduction: Why is it that when people read the Bible there are very many different responses to it? Why do some people find it hard to understand the simplest and most obvious spiritual truths while others are transformed by them? Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed explains why. This parable is important because it provides more clues than any other parable as to the nature of the parables and how they should be interpreted. The parable is followed by Jesus' own interpretation and discussion of its contents.

Definition: **parable** - a story based on everyday life which has a deeper spiritual meaning.

Introductory Reflection

In your opinion, why are some people more open to spiritual things than others?

Read Matthew 13: 1-23

Observation Questions

1. (verses 1-9) What was the parable about? What method of sowing was used? What kinds of results were obtained? How was this parable well suited to the personal experiences of the crowds gathered around Jesus?
2. In verse 10, the disciples asked Jesus, 'Why do you speak to the people in parables?' How would you summarise his answer? (verses 11-16) - how do parables help Jesus' followers understand more about his kingdom? - how do parables hinder the understanding of some people?
3. (v.17) Can you give a specific example of the people Jesus was talking about here?
4. (verses 18-23) Jesus explains the meaning of the parable to his disciples. The seed is the message about the kingdom (v.19). Who is the farmer, and who is the soil?
5. What do the 'birds' (v.4) represent? (v.19). What did these hearers lack?
6. (v.5) What does the rocky soil represent? (verses 20-21) (v.6) What kind of person does the third type of soil describe? (v.22)

Interpretation and Reflection

1. (v.19) What can we do to help people understand God's message? How do we respond to the teaching that 'the evil one' is involved in preventing the message from taking root?
2. Have you met any people who have responded like those described in verses 20-21? What is the chief reason for their falling away? If we want to follow Jesus, what can we do to prevent it happening in our own lives and in the lives of other believers?
3. (v.23) How can a believer avoid being choked by the weeds and thorns which Jesus mentions?
4. (v.23) What kind of person would you expect the one described as 'good soil' to be? In your opinion, why are different percentages of harvest mentioned? What does that tell us about the good soil?
5. Which of the four kinds of soil do you most identify with? Explain your answer.
6. Is it possible for us to change and become 'good soil'? Can we offer some practical suggestions?

The teaching of Jesus - The Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son - Luke 15: 1-32

Introduction: People sometimes think: 'If people really knew me they would reject me.' So they often wear 'masks' to present themselves in a way that they think others will like. We often feel the same way about God. We think we are rejected and condemned rather than welcomed and loved. We do our best to please Him but feel we can never come up to His standard. In these three parables Jesus makes clear what God's attitude to sinners really is.

Read Luke 15 verses 1 - 32

Observation Questions

1. (vv 1-2) What bothered the Jewish religious leaders, and why?
2. (vv 4-7) What was lost? What was the proportion of loss? What did the shepherd do? What was the outcome?
3. (v. 7) What was the point of the story?
4. (vv 8-10) What was lost? What was the proportion of loss? What did the owner do? What was the outcome?
5. (v.10) What was the point of the story?
6. (vv 11-24) What was lost? What was the proportion of loss? What did the father do? What was the outcome?
7. (v.24) What was the point of the story?
8. (vv 25-32) What was the attitude of the older son? What did the father do?
9. (vv 31-32) What was the point of the story?
10. Any other observations to make about these stories?

Interpretation Questions

1. Who is represented by the central characters (or objects) in each of the three parables?
2. How do you account for the intense reaction of the shepherd, the woman and the father to their losses and to their recovery?
3. Looking more closely at the third parable, how might the Pharisees and the teachers of the law have felt about each of the actions of the younger son? (see verses 12-16)
4. How might they have expected the father to behave when the son returned home?
5. How did each of the three lost things get lost?
6. What do the details in verses 20-24 reveal about the attitude of the Heavenly Father towards sinful people?
7. Instead of concluding the story in verse 24, Jesus goes on to describe the reaction of the older son. What additional point do you think he wished to make?

Reflection and Application Questions

1. From these parables, what does it mean to be lost?
2. How can the portrait of God in these parables help us feel accepted by Him even though we are sinners?
3. What can we learn about the different ways in which the lost things were found?
4. If we have been found, what should our attitude be towards those who are lost? What can we do to help them?

The Unforgiving Servant - Matthew 18: 15, 21-35

Introduction: In this parable Jesus clearly teaches the consequences of unforgiveness. In someone who has never experienced God's forgiveness, unwillingness to forgive others may be understandable, but what can we say about an unforgiving Christian?

Introductory Discussion: It has been suggested that a critical, unforgiving person is often someone who is struggling with guilt feelings of their own. Can you suggest why that might be true?

Observation Questions: Read Matthew 18: 15, 21-35

1. (v.15) What should we do if someone sins against us? What is the purpose of the action?
2. (vv.21-22) What did Peter ask Jesus about forgiveness? What was the answer?
3. (v.23) Who is the chief character in the story? What did he decide to do?
4. (vv. 24-27) How much did the first man owe? What was going to happen to him? What did he do? What did the master do?
5. (vv.28-30) What did the forgiven debtor do when he met someone who owed him money?
6. (v.31) When other people saw what happened how did they feel? What did they do?
7. (vv.32-24) What was the master's reaction to the servant's behaviour?
8. (v.35) What was the point of the story?

Interpretation and Application Questions

1. What view of forgiveness does Peter's question in v.21 reveal? What was the point of Jesus' answer?
2. Ten thousand talents (v.24) was equal to several million U.S. dollars. How do you think the man felt before and after the king cancelled his debt?
 - Who does the king represent? Who does the man represent?
 - How real is our sense of indebtedness to God?
 - How real to us is the marvellous possibility of forgiveness?
3. A hundred denarii (v.28) is a trivial amount compared to ten thousand talents. What lesson do you think Jesus intended?
 - How should comparison of the two sums affect our view of the sins of others?
 - Think of someone you have difficulty forgiving. How would it help to compare their actions to the sin that God is willing to forgive you ?
4. What is Jesus saying about those who profess to believe in God and to have received His forgiveness and yet are not willing to forgive others?
5. What happens to our spiritual freedom and our fellowship with God when we are critical and unforgiving?

The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds - Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Introduction

We often hear people say: If there is a God and He is good, why does He allow evil in the world? But somebody has said: If God were to destroy all evil at midnight tonight, who would be left at 1 a.m.? In this parable Jesus tells us why God allows good and evil to coexist in the world.

Vocabulary

- (v.37) *the Son of Man* a title which Jesus used when speaking about himself. It came from the Old Testament book of Daniel which spoke of the Son of Man as a heavenly figure who is entrusted by God with authority, glory and sovereign power.
- (vv.38-39) *the evil one, the devil* a supernatural being opposed to God but whose power is limited.
- (v.40) *the end of the age* the time set by God for judgment.
- (v.42) *gnashing of teeth* grinding the teeth together, the phrase is used here as a sign of regret or remorse.
- (v.42) *fiery furnace* an apparatus in which things may be subjected to a continuous intense heat; or (modern) an enclosed fireplace for central heating of a building.
- (v.43) *the righteous* those whose sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus and are made righteous by God.

Observation Questions

1. (vv.24-25) What is the main subject of the parable? Who are the two main characters in the story?
2. (vv.24-26) What did they both do? What happened when the wheat sprouted?
3. (vv.27-28) What puzzled the owner's servants? What was the explanation?
4. (vv.28-29) What did the servants offer to do? Why did the owner refuse their offer?
5. (v.30) What did the owner propose to do?
6. (vv.36-39) In Jesus' explanation of the parable what did the following represent? the sower of the good seed; the field; the good seed; the weeds; the enemy; the harvest; the harvesters.
7. (vv.40-42) At the end of the age, what will happen to everything that causes sin and all who do evil?
8. (v.43) What will happen to 'the righteous'?
9. (v.43) Why did Jesus tell this parable?

Interpretation and Application Questions

1. According to this parable, what is the source of evil in the world?
 - What impression do you get from the parable of how it appears and develops?
 - Do you think this reflects how evil appears and develops in modern society ?
 - What does the enemy's activity in this parable tell us about the devil's plan and influence in the world?
 - In the context of this parable, how can people become 'enemy agents'?
 - What should be our attitude to such people?
 - Do you think that Jesus meant we should not try to get rid of evil from our society? Should we just 'turn a blind eye' and mind our own business?

1. How does this parable help you understand God's patience and plan for dealing with evil?
 - Do you think it means that God never deals with evildoers in this life?
 - What do we understand about God's reasons for delaying action in dealing with evil?
 - What hope does this parable offer us?

The Widow and the Judge - Luke 18: 1-8

Introduction: Today many people are suffering from lottery fever. Spurred on by the excitement of the TV shows and the hope of winning millions of pounds, they queue to buy their tickets every week even though the chances of winning are said to be about 13 million to one. You would think they would soon get discouraged yet they keep on and never lose hope. In contrast, people who say they believe in God often pray without much hope. Or else they start off hopefully but soon get discouraged and give up.

Do you think we should always expect God to hear and answer our prayers? Why or Why not?

Read Luke 18: 1-8

Observation Questions

1. (18:1) Why did Jesus tell this parable?
2. (18:2) Who was the first character mentioned in the parable? How was he described?
3. (18:3) Who was the second character in the story? What did she want ?
4. (18:4) What did the judge do?
5. (18:5) Why did he change his mind?
6. (18:6) What did Jesus call the judge?
7. (18:7) What was the point of the story?
8. (18:8) How will God act?
9. (18:8) What question did Jesus ask in conclusion?

Interpretation and Application Questions

1. What impression do you have of the two characters in the story?
 - Why do you think the judge refused to act for the widow?
 - Why was the widow so persistent?
 - What finally motivated the judge to act?
 - Do you think that Jesus means us to understand that God is like the unjust judge?
2. Use your imagination to fill in details about the people mentioned in verses 6-8:
 - who are *his chosen ones* (v.7) ?
 - how would you describe them and their circumstances?
 - why do you think their prayers are so desperate?
3. In what ways can we expect God to do more for *his chosen ones* than the judge did for the widow?
4. Jesus told this parable so that we should always pray and not give up (v.1).
 - How should we explain the uncertainty of his final question in verse 8?
 - When might we be most tempted to give up praying about someone or something?
 - How can this parable encourage us to keep on praying?