

Parables of Jesus

Simple, memorable stories



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Part I
22 April to 8 July

Dear Friends,

The parables of Jesus contain most of his fundamental teaching. They are simple memorable stories, often with humble imagery, each with a single message. Jesus, for example, likened the Kingdom of God to yeast (an image usually meant as corruption) or a mustard seed. Jesus' parables were often surprising and paradoxical. The parable of the good Samaritan, for example, turned expectations on their head with the despised Samaritan proving to be the wounded man's neighbour.

We are going to look at all 46 parables in chronological order, or at least as close to chronological order as the academics can agree it! They will be in our morning sermons, and in our evening sermons.

The chronology is quite a lesson by itself. You can see that the first group of parables focuses on the fact that there's a new story being told, that it's not to be hidden, and it serves as a foundation for what's coming next. We then have the very important Parables #12 (sower and four types of soil) and #13 (weeds among good plants). This is followed by a group of "Kingdom of Heaven" parables (growing seed, yeast, valuable pearl, etc.). Now that the foundation has been built, Jesus gets into the behavior parables—how he would have you act as a Christian in different situations as a disciple, worker, or tenant. He then moves into using your talents well, remaining watchful, and finally into judgement. Basically it's the progression of a Christian life.

At the rear of this booklet I have reproduced a table of all the parables and the order we will be working through them in.

The material for this series, and some of the text above, is adapted from a really useful website <http://>

Parables of Jesus in Chronological Order				
	Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1	New cloth on an old coat	9:16	2:21	5:36
2	New wine in old wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37-38
3	Lamp on a stand (also see #6)	5:14-15		
4	Wise and foolish builders	7:24-27		6:47-49
5	Moneylender forgives unequal debts			7:41-43
6	Lamp on a stand (2 nd time, see #3)		4:21-22	8:16, 11:33
7	Rich man foolishly builds bigger barns			12:16-21
8	Servants must remain watchful (also see #44)			12:35-40
9	Wise and foolish servants (also see #42)			12:42-48
10	Unfruitful fig tree			13:6-9
11	Sower and four types of soil	13:3-8, 18-23	4:3-8, 14-20	8:5-8, 11-15
12	Weeds among good plants (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:24-30, 36-43		
13	Growing seed (Kingdom of Heaven)		4:26-29	
14	Mustard seed (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
15	Yeast (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:33		13:20-21
16	Hidden treasure (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:44		
17	Valuable pearl (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:45-46		
18	Fishing net (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:47-50		
19	Owner of a house (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:52		
20	Lost sheep (sheep as children, also see #29)	18:12-14		
21	The sheep, gate, and shepherd	(John 10:1-5, 7-18)		
22	Master and his servant			17:7-10
23	Unmerciful servant (Kingdom of Heaven)	18:23-34		
24	Good Samaritan			10:30-37
25	Friend in need			11:5-8
26	Lowest seat at the feast			14:7-14
27	Invitation to a great banquet			14:16-24
28	Cost of discipleship			14:28-33
29	Lost sheep (sheep as sinners, also see #20)			15:4-7
30	Lost coin			15:8-10
31	Lost (prodigal) son			15:11-32
32	Shrewd manager			16:1-8
33	Rich man and Lazarus			16:19-31
34	Workers in the vineyard, early and late	20:1-16		
35	Persistent widow and crooked judge			18:2-8
36	Pharisee and tax collector			18:10-14
37	King's ten servants given minas (also see #45)			19:12-27
38	Two sons, one obeys one does not	21:28-32		
39	Wicked tenants	21:33-44	12:1-11	20:9-18
40	Invitation to a wedding banquet	22:2-14		
41	Signs of the future from a fig tree	24:32-35	13:28-29	21:29-31
42	Wise and foolish servants (2 nd time, see #9)	24:45-51		
43	Wise and foolish virgins	25:1-13		
44	Servants must remain watchful (2 nd time, see #8)		13:35-37	
45	Three servants given talents (also see #37)	25:14-30		
46	Sheep and goats will be separated	25:31-46		

Future Studies

15 July	Morning	Parables 29-30
15 July	Evening	Parable 31
22 July	Morning	Parable 32
22 July	Evening	Parable 33
29 July	Morning	Parable 34
5 August	Morning	Parables 35-36
12 August	Morning	Parable 37
19 August	Morning	Parables 38-39
26 August	Morning	Parable 40
2 September	Morning	Parables 41-42
9 September	Morning	Parables 43-44
16 September	Morning	Parable 45
16 September	Evening	Parable 46

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I am really excited about this series and I pray that we see the message Jesus brought even more clearly as we journey through his parables together.

Grace and peace,

Neil Douglas

Using these notes

These notes are designed to be used with or without the sermon. The preacher may not read these questions when preparing the sermon; they will always bring what they feel God wants to say to Ebenezer. We do expect God will speak to us through the sermon, and that is why the first question is always about it for those who heard it.

The questions then provide a way of engaging with the topic each week regardless of whether you have had an opportunity to hear the sermon or not, but please do try to listen to the sermon as it should enrich your study of the topic. Some of the parables are so well known and Jesus' own explanation so clear that I haven't provided any leaders' notes; if you get stuck, stop and pray; praying before you start is the right thing in any event!

There are weeks where there are no notes, these are weeks where the preacher / topic is not part of this set. Please feel free to use these weeks creatively, or you may wish to devote them to extended prayer for the life of Ebenezer and God's vision for our future.

Date: 22 April - morning
Theme: Parables 1-4
Readings: Matthew 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke 5:36
Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-38
Matthew 5:14-15
Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49

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Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Parables 1 and 2. These are the first of Jesus' parables. Jesus told them around the same time as the sermon on the mount and the calling of his first disciples. What is the point he is making with a story about an old coat and an old wineskin?
2. The people in Jesus' audience were some disciples of John the Baptist (and perhaps some Pharisees). The parable had a special meaning for them. What was it? And what is the message for us today?
3. In what ways does following Christ require us to replace old habits with new ones? Why do we resist making these changes?
4. Parable 3, Jesus often refers to himself (or is referred to) as the "light of the world". What does he mean, then, by saying to humans, "you are the light of the world"?
5. Jesus uses two illustrations (city on a hill and light in a house). How might these apply to us? (Matthew 5:16)
6. Parable 4. This parable is the end of the sermon on the mount. What is Jesus' final message which he illustrates with the parable of building a house (Luke 6:46-47)?
7. Jesus says we are to do what he says. What did he just finish saying that we should do?

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8. How does the parable illustrate what Jesus says we should do?
9. What is the rock or the foundation upon which you should build your house? (1 Corinthians 3:11)
10. What is the main message in this parable? How can you apply it to your life today?

Leader's Notes

Q1. Jesus has a new message, the "good news," and if you try to fit it into the old Jewish religion, law, system of animal sacrifices, and so on, it isn't going to fit.

Q3. What Jesus brings is new, fresh, and transformational. It will rip apart anything that tries to force it into another way of doing, perceiving and experiencing. Becoming a Christ follower—a Christian—is a whole new life.

Q4. Jesus' disciples shine with His light by His spirit dwelling in us. We must never forget where the light comes from. It doesn't come from us. We are not the source. We are merely a reflector, like the moon. This means that you need to stay close to Jesus in order to reflect His light.

Q6. Jesus is speaking to the most religious people possible, the people in the right religion, Judaism. Jesus says in, "The problem is you call me Lord but you don't do what I say." That's the problem. I'm not looking for your curiosity, I'm not looking for your fascination. I'm not looking for your admiration. I'm telling you what it is to be a true follower. But He says it doesn't mean anything if you don't do what I say.

Q10. Remember, the key thing here is not to admire Christ, it's to obey Christ.

Date: 22 April - evening

Theme: Parables 5-6

Key Readings: Luke 7:41-43

Mark 4:21-22; Luke 8:16, 11:33

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What options did the moneylender have with people who owed him money?
2. Why do you think the woman came to the Pharisee's house? (a) to upset the Pharisee, (b) to ruin the party, (c) to seek forgiveness, (d) to minister to Jesus, (e) to confront her oppressors, (f) something else.
3. Jesus' parable about the moneylender seems an odd response. What was Jesus actually saying? (a) you can't know grace because you don't see yourself as a sinner, (b) you are a bigger sinner than the woman but you don't know it, (c) you may have sinned less than the woman, but you still need forgiveness, (d) the more you've sinned, the more your love for God, (e) the more you've been forgiven, the more your love for God.
4. Have you even felt like Simon when confronted with a person of questionable morals?
5. Who do you identify with in the parable?
6. Parables have layers of meaning, but usually a basic lesson. What is the fundamental lesson of this parable?
7. Parable 6. In Jesus' story about the lamp, what does the lamp represent?
8. Each of the three verses of this parable adds to the meaning of the whole. What do each of the lines mean? NO short answers! Elaborate!

9. What costs do we need to count in responding to Jesus? What costs of following Jesus seem especially high to you? What holds you back?

10. What does Jesus' illustration of salt mean? (14:34-35)

11. If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Leader's Notes

Q1. Our responsibilities for our family still remain. But it does mean that following Jesus takes first priority even if it is painful, difficult, and misunderstood. Our family's wishes don't come first; Jesus' direction and commands do.

Q2. Carrying your cross means that we must accept the death of our own self-directed life, die to ourselves daily, and be willing to face whatever physical, emotional, or social persecution that ensues—and follow Jesus.

Q5. Discipleship is a decision that demands the utmost seriousness and commitment.

Q7. If you don't have the willingness to give up everything to totally follow Jesus, then don't begin. Don't move toward a battle that you will surely lose. Figure out your resources and what you are willing to commit ahead of time. If you don't have it, don't commit your forces. Without enough strength they'll be chewed up, destroyed. Halfway measures are not adequate. It must be all or nothing.

Q10. It is possible for all the sodium chloride to be leached out of a mixture of salts so all that is left is stale and useless, i.e, it is possible for what appears to be salt to have all its true salt washed out of it. Even though the appearance remains, the essence is lost.

Date: 8 July - evening

Theme: Parable 28

Key Readings: Luke 14:28-33

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What does it mean when Jesus says to “hate” your parents, wife, children, siblings, and even your own life? Is Jesus saying to treat family members badly or with disrespect? (Luke 14:26 and Matthew 10:37)
2. What does it mean to carry your own cross? (Luke 14:27) Considering his audience (the crowd following him), why did Jesus use this illustration? How do Jesus’ conditions of following him seem to you today?
3. Think about planning to replace a kitchen. How can you be sure to take into account all of the costs? What happens if you miss something? What if the project isn’t finished? What will your wife, family, and friends say? Do you have any unfinished projects around?
4. What consequences result from not counting the costs before building? (14:28- 29).
5. How does this building illustration apply to discipleship (i.e., following Jesus)?
6. If a king didn’t have sufficient manpower to go to war, what was his best course of action? (14:31-32)
7. How do you interpret this second illustration (a king going to war) with respect to following Jesus?
8. Jesus presented the costs of discipleship in different ways at different times. How did people respond? (Luke 5:11, 5:27-28, Mark 10:21-22)

9. What sorts of things would God have you bring “out into the open?” (Vs 17)

10. Have you ever tried to hide your Christian identity or beliefs from other people?

Leader’s Notes

Q1. The moneylender could demand payment, possibly in other forms such as livestock or valuable objects. He could put the debtor in prison until the debt was paid for him. Or he could make the debtor his slave. Or, of course, he could forgive the debt, as required in Old Testament law: at the end of every seven years, creditors were to cancel all the debts they were owed by fellow Israelites.

Q3. To apply this parable to our lives, we must see the incredible forgiveness of God. For some, seeing God’s mercy is easy as their past is like that of the sinful woman or the debtor with the large debt. They know their past made them unworthy to be in relationship with God; and yet out of His great love, they have been welcomed into His presence. Out of incredible gratitude and love, they respond lavishly, honoring Jesus in every imaginable way.

However, some of us have “grown up in the church.” We paid attention in class. We weren’t the bullies in school. We are much more like Simon the Pharisee, who was compared to the debtor with the smaller debt. Like Simon, we too have difficulty seeing that we need forgiveness. Also, like Simon, we perhaps fail to honor Jesus. He is simply not the number 1 “guest of honor” in our lives.

Q8. Sometimes we misunderstand how this works. We think that shining brightly requires special training in evangelism, theological education, an outgoing personality and exceptional spiritual courage. This is not so.

Lamps don’t need classes or a formal education to light up. Just light the wick.

Date: 6 May

Theme: Parables 7-8

Key Readings: Luke 12:16-21; Luke 12:35-40

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. In Verse 15, Jesus said, "Beware." Is that a strong warning or simply a caution?
2. How does greed show up in a person's life? Do you see this in your life?
3. Is it wrong or a bad thing to be rich? If not, what's the big problem?
4. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon spoke of two items in this story. How does Ecclesiastes 5:15 fit in? How about Ecclesiastes 8:15? Is the Bible giving us conflicting advice?
5. Does this parable say you should not plan for retirement or that you should not save? In one sentence, what does being "rich toward God" actually mean?
6. With what parts of the parable can you identify? What parts of it make you uncomfortable? (12:16-20)
7. Why is it difficult for us to accept that our life and things are temporary? What step can you take this week to become less dependent upon your possessions?
8. Parable 8. What is it like to wait for someone without knowing when they are coming?
9. How were the servants to be while waiting for their master? (12:35-36) How long did Jesus say they should wait? (12:38) How does this apply to you today?
10. What happened to the servants who were watching properly? (12:37) What is shocking about this?

8. Parable 27. How do you feel when you plan a big event and it is poorly attended? What kind of excuses do you most resent others using?
9. In Jesus' days, it was customary to send two invitations to a party—the first to announce it and the second to tell the guests that everything was ready. How does the parable of this party (banquet) fit into Israel's history? How did the character of the banquet change given the new guest list?
10. There are many people in this parable: the master, his servant, those invited the first time, the crippled and blind, others on country roads. Who do you identify with and why?
11. What does this parable tell us is the main thing we should fear with respect to attending the banquet, i.e., entering heaven?

Leader's Notes

- Q2. In most of Jesus' parables, he asks the listener to interpret it, in this parable, Jesus tells the listener how to behave. He did not want anyone to miss the meaning.
- Q3. Humility to know our own sinfulness and weakness, and to feel our need of Christ, is the very beginning of saving religion.
- Q7. The second point in this parable is the great importance of looking forward to the resurrection of the dead.
- Q9. The Pharisee just assumed he would attend this feast. He was an heir to the covenant that God made with Abraham. The Jews were God's chosen people. Except for one thing. The covenant with Abraham, the exodus, and the messages from the prophets were just the first invitation. The second invitation came from Jesus. And it was this second invitation that many of the Jews rejected.

Date: 8 July - morning

Theme: Parables 26-27

Key Readings: Luke 14:7-14; 14:16-24

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Be honest, are you ever eager to raise your social status? To be with the "right" people? To drive a good car? Who do you try to impress?
2. In contrast to most other parables, this is a wisdom saying rather than an analogy, allegory, or fable. What's the difference? Why should we care?
3. Why is humility so important to a Christian? The Bible has 106 stories emphasizing humility. Faith is featured in 104 stories, and love is featured only 47 times. Does this tell you something?
4. Consider these spiritual gifts: teaching, administration, healing, prophecy, knowledge, charity, humility. What makes humility different?
5. How can we humble ourselves? (14:11) Does humility mean putting yourself down? Is humility the same as self-degradation? What is real humility?
6. In Verses 12-14, Jesus advises his host to invite people who cannot repay him back. What do you think of this advice? Does this include people who are poor because they are lazy or poor by choice? Does this exclude family and friends?
7. There is another important point in the parable (14:14b). What is it?

11. For what are we to be watchful? What does watchfulness involve? Why is watchfulness not a passive activity? What are the three main messages of this parable?

12. What responsibilities or duties might God demand of you? What can you do for God in your area of responsibility?

Leader's Notes

Q1. Beware is probably the best translation of the original Greek and it is a strong warning.

Q4. The rich man did not foresee his death and he was arrogant and proud about what he had. Solomon was grateful to God and thanked God that he could enjoy what God had given him.

Q5. Saving money and planning are good things. The Bible stresses using one's money and gifts wisely. Other parables advise us to increase our wealth, to be good caretakers of what God has entrusted to us, to help the poor and those less fortunate. This is how we show we are "rich toward God."

Q11. 1) We must be ready for a return of Jesus at any moment. As verse 40 says, he "will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

2) The delay that must neither reduce your expectancy nor impede your preparedness (vs 38). You must not let this delay discourage you so you fall into a trap or get overwhelmed by the drudgeries and anxieties of life.

3) You must faithfully manage the resources that have been entrusted to you by God. Don't forget, you are stewards not owners; you can't take it with you.

Date: 13 May - morning

Theme: Parables 9-10

Key Readings: Luke 12:42-28; Luke 13:6-9

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What would you do if you hired somebody to watch your home and children, left for a holiday, and then returned a day early to find they had neglected your children, had a party, and wrecked your home?
2. What distinguishes the faithful and wise manager? (12:42-44)
3. How did Jesus say that an irresponsible servant might behave when left in charge of the household? (12:45) Why might a person behave in this way?
4. In view of Christ's second coming, what does this parable teach you about readiness? About stewardship? Judgement? Serving others? Witnessing?
5. The parable identifies four kinds of servant:
 - a) One who knows what he should do, and does the right thing.
 - b) One who knows what he should do, but does the wrong thing.
 - c) One who knows what he should do, but doesn't do anything.
 - d) One who does not know what he should do, and does the wrong thingWhat is the fate of each of them? Which one do you identify with?

9. How would you summarize the message of this parable? (Three points)

10. Parable 25. Have you ever turned down a request from a friend to do something and then changed your mind because he kept asking?

11. What is the reason for persistence in prayer? To help...
- (A) change God's mind.
 - (B) change our hearts.
 - (C) understand and express the intensity of our need.
 - (D) recognize God's work.

12. What is the point of the parable? (Also see Hebrews 4:16)

Leader's Notes

Q9. 1) The lack of love is easy to justify, even though it is never right.

2) Our neighbor is anyone of any race, creed, social background, or IQ who is in need.

3) Love means acting to meet the person's need. In God's sight, there is no valid reason for refusing to help.

Q12. This parable appears only in Luke and immediately follows the verses of the Lord's Prayer. So it effectively enlarges on the petition about daily bread. As a rule in Biblical days, the woman of the house made enough bread for the day and in this case it happened that the family ate the last scraps at dinner. Thus the need for more to feed another friend who just returned from a long and arduous trip.

We are encouraged to boldly ask, seek, and knock on the door of our heavenly friend and father, knowing that we can trust him. We must practice the same perseverance, and even though the answer to our prayer may be delayed, we must continue to ask, seek, and knock.

Date: 1 July

Theme: Parables 24-25

Key Readings: Luke 10:30-37; 11:5-8

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What are the greatest inconveniences in your life? (Ones involving expenditures of your time? Of money? Emotional issues? Travel plans? Working with others?)
2. Did the expert in the law who questioned and then answered Jesus understand what was necessary to inherit eternal life? Did he summarise the Law correctly? (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18)
3. After Jesus affirmed his correct reply, what did the legal expert then want to do? (10:29)
4. Jesus replied to the legal expert's question, "who is my neighbour?" with perhaps the best-known parable in the Bible. Let's consider this parable from the point of view of the priest and the Levite. Could they have had good reasons for behaving the way that they did?
5. What natural inclinations make it easier for you to act like the priest and the Levite rather than the Samaritan?
6. What was the Samaritan's response to the situation? Why did he help the beaten man? (10:33) How practical was his approach?
7. How does it feel when someone has mercy on you? How do you feel when you get in trouble because of your own stupid actions? How does mercy feel then?
8. In what ways can you personally or can we as Christians be more like the Samaritan? Is this something to aspire to? Is this something God expects of you?

6. Do you know your "master's will?" (12:47) Should you try to know it better or are you better off not knowing it so you will not be punished as severely? (12:48)
7. Over what has God given **you** stewardship? What do you think God wants you to do with it (be specific)? How would God evaluate the job you're doing? How can you improve the job you're doing?
8. Parable 10. What is the context in which Jesus tells the parable of the barren fig tree?
9. In this parable, who are the characters represented by the fig tree, the owner, and the gardener? What do the figs (or fruit) represent?
10. Which is most surprising to you: that the owner wants to cut down the tree? Or that the gardener wants to give it another year?
11. What eventually happens? Is the tree cut down? Does the owner give it another year? If so, does it bear fruit?
12. What is the message of this parable?

Date: 13 May - evening

Theme: Parable 11

Key Readings: Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23; Mark 4:3-8, 14-20;
Luke 8:5-8, 11-15

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. When was the last time you “tuned out” a speaker?
2. Why would a farmer allow precious seed to land on bad ground? Is he irresponsible scattering seed at random?
3. What happened to each group of seeds?
4. How did Jesus conclude his parable? What did he mean by that? (13:9)
5. How much of the parable did the people understand? How much did the disciples understand? (13:9-10) Why didn't they understand this parable?
6. Why do you suppose that this was among the first parables that Jesus told?
7. What kind of people today might be represented by the seed that fell on the path? (13:19)
8. Why couldn't those who received the word with joy stay faithful? (13:20-21)
9. What choked those who were represented by the seed that fell among the thorns? What other things (or people) might the thorns represent? (13:22)
10. Why is perseverance necessary for all who receive the Word? (Luke 8:15) How long did it take for you to understand the gospel of Christ?

9. In what ways has God shown mercy in forgiving your sins?

10. If God is so willing to forgive us, why are we often unwilling to forgive others? Why is there such an attraction to revenge movies like Death Wish, Straw Dogs, Payback, and Point Blank?

11. Is it really possible to “forgive and forget?” How is it possible to forget the wrongs that others have done to us?

12. What happened to the servant who was unforgiving? What is the parallel meaning for us today?

Leader's Notes

Q1. Slave - slaves did not just have servile duties. Some might be tutors, physicians, companions, household managers, sales agents, and administrators.

Q2. The point here is that, fair or not, the slave was expected to work in the fields and fix the food.

Q8. A talent was about 20 years wages for a laborer whilst a denarius was a days wages.

Date: 24 June
Theme: Parables 22-23
Key Readings: Luke 17:7-10
Matthew 18:23-34

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. The original Greek word for the man working for his master is *doulos*. Do you know what that means? (17:7)
2. Was it fair for the master to expect his servant would prepare his meal after laboring in the fields all day?
3. Has society shifted on obeying authority and doing ones duty? Has God?
4. Should the master be expected to thank his servant for doing what he was told (or ordered or commanded) to do, for doing his duty? Should we expect thanks from God for obeying him and doing what he tells us to do? Doesn't our piety (being devout or reverent) earn us some special treatment?
5. Parable 23. 1. Jesus told the parable of the unmerciful (unforgiving) servant right after telling Peter he must forgive someone seventy-seven (or seventy times seven) times. How likely are we to forgive someone many times for a similar offence?
6. Why is an unforgiving spirit so deadly?
7. What is the only supplication (request) in the Lord's prayer that has a "catch" to it (that requires something of us)? (Matthew 6:12-15, Mark 11:25-26)
8. In today's terms, roughly how much did the first servant owe the king? How much did the second servant owe the first?

11. What kind of soil do you most resemble right now? What worries or temptations have hindered your growth as a Christian recently?
12. How could you listen more faithfully and intently to the voice of God? What will most help you be responsive to God in your study of the Bible?

Leader's Notes

The parable is simple: the sower scatters seed generously and it ends up on four different types of terrain. Some lands on the side of the road, some on rocks, others in thorny soil, and some in good soil. The first three don't survive and the seed planted in the good soil flourishes.

And we immediately say, "I want to be good soil." Or we say, "I know people who are like the rocky soil," or maybe "Let's pray for the folks who are stuck in the thorny soil." So this parable about a sower quickly becomes the parable of the types of soil.

If we reread the parable from the perspective of the sower, we get a better understanding of it and why Jesus himself emphasised the idea of sowing the seed. He makes it clear that he came to rescue sinners. His purpose was to bring salvation to everyone. If we keep this in mind, we can see that the parable actually has three meanings:

- 1) To show that Christ came to share the Word of God with everyone. God isn't a stingy God who picks and chooses who is good enough to hear the word. He graciously sows into everyone who is willing to accept his word.
- 2) To show us how the different soils in our life can encourage or stop us from receiving the "Good News."
- 3) To encourage us to share the Word of God with others. And like Jesus, we should spread the Good News with everyone, not just those who are receptive.

Date: 27 May

Theme: Parable 12

Key Readings: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. In this parable, who is the sower? What does the field represent? The wheat? The weeds? The enemy? The harvest? The harvesters?
2. What did the servants volunteer to do for the owner of the field? (Vs 13:28)
3. On what grounds did the owner turn down the servants' suggestion? (Vs 13:29) How difficult is it to pull up only the weeds from a densely growing bed of flowers? Can you always clearly identify the weeds from the good plants?
4. What dangers lie in trying to label people as either "weeds" or wheat?" Whose responsibility is it to identify the weeds and deal with them?
5. What does this parable teach about church purity? Divine patience? Human accountability?
6. If you had to guess, what would you say would be the ratio of "wheat" to "weeds" in UK fields?
7. How do these kinds of passages (threats of judgement and harsh punishment for unbelievers) make you feel?
8. In what ways can you "shine like the sun" in your contacts with unbelievers? What does this mean? (Daniel 12:3) What does this say about Christians who try to isolate themselves from non-Christians?
9. It is possible to interpret this parable to mean that whatever you were at birth (weed or wheat) is what you

6. In this parable, Jesus describes himself as both the gate (10:7) and the shepherd (10:11, 10:14). Which image do you like better?
7. Gates can be used to keep some things in and some out. Which side of the gate that Jesus described are you on? (Be careful answering this.) (10:9) How has Jesus been a gate in your life?
8. What does a hired hand do for the sheep? (10:12) What was Jesus willing to do for his sheep? (10:11, 10:15, 10:17) What does it mean when Jesus repeats something three times?
9. How are we like sheep? What tempts people to follow a stranger (or thief)? Why?
10. In what ways has Jesus been your shepherd? How can we better hear his voice?

Date: 17 June - evening

Theme: Parables 20-21

Key Readings: Matthew 18:12-14
John 10:1-5, 7-18

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. To what lengths would you go to recover a missing wallet? An important irreplaceable document? A winning lottery ticket? Your missing child?
2. Bible commentators are divided about the meaning of the parable of the lost sheep. Some think the flock represents Christian believers and the lost sheep refers to a weak believer who has slid backward and strayed from his belief in Jesus. Others think that those who belong to Christ are eternally secure and cannot wander so far as to get lost. They think the lost sheep refer to the unredeemed of Israel (in Jesus' day) who characteristically hadn't listened and were prone to wandering far away. Today, the lost sheep would be a nominal Christian who behaves in a way inconsistent with that of a child of God. What do you think?
3. Does it change your image of God to see him as a caring shepherd searching frantically for one lost individual? How does this fit with the image of God as a judge to whom we must give account? (Hebrews 4:13)
4. Parable 21. What kind of relationship do sheep have with their shepherd? (10:2-4)
5. To whom did Jesus say the sheep would not listen? (10:5, 10:8) Who did Jesus say was the thief? (10:1) Who does the stranger or thief represent today?

remain to the "end of the age." What do you think about that?

10. What does this parable teach us about the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God)?

Leader's Notes

Note: this is the first in a series of eight "Kingdom of Heaven" parables and the only one explained by Jesus. After telling this, he expects you to "get it."

As you read the parable, you find it filled with spiritual significance and truth. But, in spite of the clear explanation that Jesus gave, this parable is often misinterpreted. Many have attempted to use this story as an illustration of the church, noting that there are both true believers (the wheat) and false professors (the weeds). While this may be true, Jesus distinctly explains that the field is not the church; it is the world (v. 38). This misinterpretation is not new; it's been around for centuries. When Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is near", he meant the spiritual realm which exists on earth side by side with the realm of the evil one (1 John 5:19). When the kingdom of heaven comes fully, heaven will be a reality and there will be no "weeds" among the "wheat." But for now, both good and bad seeds mature in the world.

The enemy in the parable is Satan. In opposition to Jesus Christ, the devil tries to destroy Christ's work by placing false believers and teachers in the world who lead many people astray. Instead of requiring these false believers to be rooted out of the world, and possibly hurting immature believers in the process, Christ allows them to remain until His return. At that time, angels will separate the true from false believers. In addition, we are not to take it upon ourselves to uproot unbelievers because the difference between true and false believers isn't always obvious.

Date: 3 June

Theme: Parables 13-15

Key Readings: Mark 4:6-29
Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke
13:18-19
Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. Who does the man who plants the seed, the seed itself, the plant it grows into, and the soil represent?
2. Have you ever tried to grow a plant from seed? Do all sprout? Do all grow to maturity? What does it take for a plant to grow, where do you get the things you need?
3. What was the growth process like for the seed in the parable? (4:27-28) Quick or gradual? Well understood or mysterious? What's the meaning of the parable?
4. How does this parable help you better understand what the kingdom of God is like? How do you feel knowing the message of Christ has a mysterious power in itself?
5. Does this parable imply an obligation for believers to sow the seed, water it, and fertilize it in others, i.e., speak of your faith to others? (1 Corinthians 3:6-9)
6. What small or seemingly insignificant possession is worth a great deal to you? Why?
7. Jesus often referred to mustard seeds in what context? (Matt 17:20, Luke 17:6)
8. The parable of the mustard seed must have confused Jesus' listeners. Everything was wrong. The mustard seed is not that tiny, the yellow mustard plant is only 8" tall, the

Leader's Notes

Q3. You might wonder why Jesus taught the parable of the dragnet, which talks about the separation of good and evil, when He already talked about that separation in the parable of the wheat and the weeds. One reason He taught it was because the parable of the wheat and the weeds emphasises the coexistence of good and evil, not the separation of good and evil. Another reason Jesus had for teaching the parable of the dragnet was because of His compassion for humans. He wanted to warn them about hell. He said, "So you, too, must keep watch! For you do not know the day or hour of my return." (Matt 25:13). Jesus cautioned people not to take their sins lightly because inevitably they would be accountable before God. (Hebrews 4:13)

Q4. The Kingdom of heaven is like a net. That net moves through the world unseen. When the net touches the back of a fish, the creature simply swims a little further ahead of it, enjoying what appears to be permanent freedom. People move about in this world imagining themselves to be free, fulfilling their own desires, with little knowledge that the net of judgment is coming closer and closer. Each time people are touched by the net, they move a little further along. Eventually they will find themselves hitting the part of the net in front of them and there is no escape.

Q5. There is much debate about the nature of hell, the only thing we can be sure of is we don't want to be there.

Date: 17 June - morning

Theme: Parables 18-19

Key Readings: Matthew 13:47-50; 13:52

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. There are two types of fishing nets: a casting net that catches only the fish it is thrown over and a drag net that catches everything. Which net did Jesus refer to in Matthew 13:47? What about when he spoke of "fishers of men" (Matt 4:18-19)?
2. What did the fishermen do with all the fish (Matt 13:48)? How will this be like what the angels do at the end of the age? (Matthew, 13:49, 25:31-32, 34, 41)
3. Jesus already told a similar parable about good and bad people coexisting (parable 12, wheat and weeds, Matt 13:24-30). What's the difference in the message?
4. How is the kingdom of heaven like the fishing net in parable 18?
5. How would you describe hell?
6. Jesus asked his disciples if they understood the eight kingdom of heaven parables. Do you? If you understand them, what did Jesus say you are to do?

black mustard bush is typically about 5 feet tall, hardly a tree that could shelter birds. Explanation please?

9. How does yeast work?

10. Can you summarise these two parables in a simple way as to what they meant to his listeners then and what they mean to us today?

11. Jesus often spoke in parables. Are there examples, stories, or illustrations that you can use to help share your faith in Christ with your family or friends?

Leader's Notes

Q1. The man represents the planter of the seed who might be Jesus or might be us planting the seed in a non-believer. The seed represents the word of God (it does not represent a person, which may be confusing, because the mature plant does represent a believer). In this parable and prior ones, people also seem to be represented by the soil ("All by itself the soil produces grain..." 4:28).

Q3. What's the meaning of the parable? It seems to be that "once planted in a fertile mind, the gospel message contains its own power to grow and mature."

Q8. First, why a mustard seed? Probably because it is the most tightly packed seed of all. There is no place for air inside it. As a result it can withstand high pressures and high temperatures. Also, of the seeds sown in the East to produce edible products, the mustard seed was probably the smallest known by most people.

The pod of seeds on a mustard plant holds thousands of seeds so one plant can give rise to hundreds more. A mustard plant sprouts quickly but can also lay dormant for many years. Also it is not easily killed; a fire in a field will destroy everything but the mustard plants.

Date: 10 June
Theme: Parables 16-17

Key Readings: Matthew 13:44; 13:45-46

Questions from the sermon

a. What did God say to you through the sermon, and what caught your attention?

Questions

1. What could the topic of Parables 16 and 17 be entitled?
2. Was the man who found the treasure behaving unethically by doing what he did? Why or why not?
3. What is the main point of the Hidden Treasure parable?
4. Pearls are mentioned only five times in the Bible. What were they considered? (Matthew 7:6, 1 Timothy 2:9, Revelation 17:4, 18:12, 18:16, 21:21)
5. In parables 16 and 17, we can learn six principles about the kingdom of heaven.
 - A. What is its value?
 - B. Is it casually or easily seen?
 - C. How is the kingdom seized and made your own? (Crux of these parables)
 - D. How does the kingdom relate to joy?
 - E. Does everyone enter the kingdom under the same circumstances?
 - F. How is the kingdom made personal? (Luke 9:57-62, Matt 10:37-39, 16:24)

Leader's Notes

Q2. People frequently buried their valuables in Jesus' day. The man found a buried treasure. The Jewish law said that if somebody found something they could keep it. So the man could have simply taken the treasure, but he didn't. Instead, he went to all the trouble of buying the field.

Q4. The scripture references can be summarised as the Bible saying three things about pearls: they are holy, valuable, and used in the building of heaven.

Q5. A. Priceless, incomparable value.

B. The value of salvation is not apparent to most people. The world looks at Christians and doesn't understand why they worship God and why they help others.

C. Each of the men finds something that he appropriates and makes his own. That shows us that you can be under the dominion of God (everyone is) but not be a member of His Kingdom. Before a person can appropriate the Kingdom, they must come to the point where they see the value of the Kingdom. God has offered something of true value, yet it is incredible the extremes people go to acquire things that are worthless in the long run.

D. The response to finding the treasure was joy. People want joy. You can find true joy by discovering the Kingdom of heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ.

E. There is one big difference between the parables: In the first the man made his find by accident. In the second he was searching for pearls when he found the one of great value. One was stumbling, one was seeking, but both found the kingdom. God provides a way for everyone.

F. The kingdom is made personal by a transaction. There is a transaction made to acquire salvation, but it is not with money or good works. The transaction is this: You give up all you have for all He has.