

Parables of Jesus

Simple, memorable stories



Part 2

8 July to 23 September

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 working our way through all 46 parables in chronological order, or at least as close to chronological order as the academics can agree it! They are in our morning sermons, and in our evening sermons.

The chronology is quite a lesson by itself. We saw that the first group of parables focused 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 had the very important Parables #12 (sower and four types of soil) and #13 (weeds among good plants). This was 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 are working through them in.

The material for this series, and some of the text above, is adapted from a really useful website <http://www.swapmeetdave.com/Bible/Bible.htm>. I have

contacted the author of the website, Dave Ahl, and have his permission to reproduce and adapt the material for the purpose of our study series, that permission includes publication of this booklet on our website. However please do not distribute it more widely.

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: 8 July - evening

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?

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: 15 July - morning

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 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: 15 July - evening

Theme: Parables 29-30

Key Readings: Luke 15:3-7; Luke 15:8-10

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. Jesus told two previous parables about sheep (Matthew 18:12-14, John 10:1-18). In the first, he contrasted the sheep to “little ones” (children, seekers). In the second, he contrasted the sheep to ones who know him (followers, Christians). In this parable, to whom does he contrast the herd of sheep? The lost sheep?
2. “Sinner” is not a word that often comes up in casual conversation. What does it bring to mind? What word(s) are more likely to be used to refer to a “sinner” today? Do any modern words really describe the concept?
3. What does the word “sin” mean? Does it mean something different to different religious groups (Jews, Roman Catholics, Buddhists, Protestants, Christians)?
4. Who was Jesus’ audience for this parable? (15:1-2)
5. How are we like sheep? In what ways do we go astray?
6. Jesus says the shepherd will hunt for a lost sheep and bring it home and there will be rejoicing. But in 15:7, he implies that a lost sinner must do one thing that a sheep does not have to do. What is it that we need to do?
7. How does the picture of “rejoicing in heaven” over repentance make you feel?
8. Parable 30. What value did the woman place on each coin? Why did she look so hard for it?

9. How is a repentant sinner like a found coin? Why does God care so much about repentant sinners?
10. How many repentant sinners does it take to cause heavenly rejoicing? How does that make you feel?
11. How does God's value of people differ from ours? Who would you rejoice more over accepting Jesus as saviour, a close family member or a beggar? (Be honest!)

Leader's Notes

Q1. Jesus compares the flock of 99 who were not lost with righteous people who do not need to repent. The lost sheep is the sinner who has not already repented. Or it might possibly even be one who had been born again and then deliberately turned their back on the Lord.

Q2. Sin is a term used mainly in a religious context to describe an act that violates a moral rule or one of God's laws. Commonly, the moral code of conduct is decreed by a divine entity. Buddhism doesn't recognise sin. The following online article might help:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin>

Q8. The lost coin was probably either a Greek drachma or Roman denarius, each worth about an average day's wages (Matthew 20:2). Smaller Near Eastern houses frequently had no windows and only earthen floors, making the search for a single coin difficult.

Date: 22 July - morning

Theme: Parable 31

Key Readings: Luke 15:11-32

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. How do you feel when others get rewards greater than they deserve (or maybe you think they deserve!)?
2. Who do the 3 major people in the parable represent in Jesus' day? Who do they represent today?
3. What share of the estate would the younger son be entitled to? (Deut 21:17) When would he receive this? By asking for it early, what did the younger son show?
4. What are the differences and similarities between this parable and the two preceding ones? (All three were told at the same time to the same mixed audience of tax collectors, "sinners," Pharisees, teachers of the [Jewish] law, and followers.)
5. What causes you to show resentment when mercy or favour is shown to someone else?
6. Who is the vilest person you know or know about? What would you do if they said they wanted to be forgiven?
7. How can you guard yourself from feeling resentful when God shows mercy to people you think don't deserve it?
8. The older son was invited by the father to return to the feast. Did he?
9. What do the three parables in Luke 15 (lost sheep, lost coin, lost son) reveal about God's love?

Leader's Notes

Q2. It's important to know that Jesus is talking to an audience (the Pharisees) who thought of themselves as righteous because they followed the law very carefully, and they looked down on the "sinners," the ordinary people of the land. The older son represents the Pharisees and the younger son represents the "sinners."

Q3. If a son were to ask for his inheritance before the father's death, the son would be wishing his father dead.

Q4. In these three parables, Jesus is answering the Pharisees' question about why he eats with and accepts "sinners" at a deep level.

Q9. The son returns with dirty rags and a contrived speech. But the father's costly outpouring of visible love turns the son's heart toward him. The son's work (repentance) is SIMPLY ACCEPTING BEING FOUND.

The Lost Sheep provides vivid imagery of this as well. Once a sheep realises that it is lost, it freezes, shakes, and can only bleat. Finding and restoring the sheep often takes two or three days. The shepherd carries the sheep because, even when the sheep hears the shepherd's voice, it cannot move because it is too scared. The sheep is not able to restore itself. The only thing the sheep can do is accept being found and let the shepherd restore it.

God joyfully takes the responsibility to find and restore us. We simply need to accept being found. In these parables, Jesus explains why God came to us in Jesus, and why he chose to die. We, like the prodigal, want to run our lives ourselves—even if we starve. The prodigal didn't want to be reconciled: he wanted to get food and have a job. Even when we return to him with wrong motives, God wants to restore us as his sons and daughters.

Date: 22 July - evening

Theme: Parable 32

Key Readings: Luke 16:1-8

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. Who is the audience for this parable? (Luke 15:1-2, 16:1)
2. Who did the Rich Man's creditors think was being generous to them? Why would the shrewd manager gain from lowering the bills of his master's creditors?
3. After the manager lowered the bills, what choices did the master have?
4. What does "shrewd" mean? Is it bad to be shrewd?
5. What are some possible interpretations of this parable, especially Verses 8-9? (Hint: there are at least 6 interpretations, perhaps more.)
6. Is Jesus commending dishonesty? (16:8)
7. What is Jesus saying about (or to) "the children of the light?" (16:8, Matt 10:16)
8. Why is it so difficult to keep a proper perspective on money?
9. Is there some way that God wants you to change the way you handle your resources? What resources do you have that you can use to help people in need?

Leader's Notes

Q4. Is it bad to be shrewd? Not really. To be shrewd is to be keen witted, clever, or discerning in practical affairs. The dictionary equates "shrewd" to "common sense."

Q5. At one level the meaning is straightforward enough, and is provided by Jesus himself: "use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves." Here are some theories why the rich man commended the manager:

1) Equate dishonesty with being "streetwise." The Message makes this interpretation clearer.

2) Some believe the manager cut out the interest that was being improperly charged by the Rich Man. In those days, records of a loan were sometimes inflated in order to get round the Judaic prohibition against usury. The manager thus might be reducing the loans to their original amount.

3) Others believe the manager cut his own commission. This would not have affected the master negatively. In reducing the' bills, he is not depriving his master, but only sacrificing his own immediate interests by forgoing his commission; that is why he is praised as 'astute.'

4) It could be a combination of 2 and 3.

5) Another theory -why else do businesses have sales?

6) Jesus is not commending his methods, but rather his motives. In effect are you shrewd and clever enough, and do you have enough foresight to plan for the real future?

Depending upon where you are in your Christian life, any or all of these could be the "right" interpretation.

Q6. No, Jesus commends his principle but not his method.

Q7. "Look, even the crooks know that money is only a tool and not an end in itself. Why can't you people of faith understand that?"

Date: 29 July

Theme: Parable 33

Key Readings: Luke 16:19-31

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. What do you imagine heaven and hell will be like? What do your friends think?
2. Jesus tells the parable in 17:19-31 to the Pharisees. What did the Pharisees believe that wealth represented?
3. What does the parable tell us about Lazarus the beggar? From what happened to him in Verse 22, what else do we know about him?
4. Did the rich man go to hell because he did not give food to Lazarus? (Read verses 19-21 very carefully.)
5. What does this parable reveal about heaven and hell?
6. How does this story fit in with the "Prosperity Gospel" being widely preached today?
7. The rich man thought his brothers would believe someone risen from the dead more than the scriptures. Abraham said they wouldn't. What's the parallel today?
8. Do you really believe in the reality of hell? If so, what stops you from sharing your faith with others?
9. How would this parable encourage Christians who are sick, poor, or disadvantaged?
10. Why do you think God doesn't always provide miracles or healing to help people believe in him?
11. This parable focuses on earthly riches versus things of eternal value. What things have eternal value? How can you focus more on them than earthly riches?

Leader's Notes

Q1. The following pairs are what people commonly say about heaven followed by what the Bible says: non-earth/new earth, unfamiliar/familiar, disembodied/resurrected physically, leaving favourite things/retaining the good, nothing to do but float on clouds/a God to worship and serve with a universe to rule and friends to enjoy, no learning or discovery/an eternity of learning and discovery, boring/fascinating.

Q2. Position, power and prestige - nothing changes!

Q4. His ordinary clothing seems to have been purple and fine linen. In those days, purple was a precious and rare dye, a purple garment was often a royal gift, and was worn only by princes and nobles of very high degree. It seems that everything that could make life splendid and joyous was in profusion. We are not told that the rich man got his wealth by fraud, or oppression.

Jesus doesn't say that the rich man did Lazarus any harm, but we do not find that he had any compassion in him either. The wrong of this rich man was his providing for himself only. Interestingly, it is not that he disobeyed one of the ten commandments, deliberately or inadvertently

Q5. First of all, Jesus teaches here that heaven and hell are both real, literal places. The Bible is clear that every person who has ever lived will spend eternity in either heaven or hell.

Second, once we cross the eternal horizon, that's it. There are no more chances.

Q6. Like many people these days who buy into the "Prosperity Gospel," the rich man wrongly saw his material riches as evidence of God's love and blessing. Likewise, he believed that poor and destitute people, like Lazarus, were cursed by God.

Date: 5 August

Theme: Parables 34

Key Readings: Matthew 20:1-16

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. What do you think of deathbed conversions?
2. Who is the best employer you have ever had? Why?
3. What wage was agreed upon by the landowner and workers early in the morning? (Vs 20:2) What wage was agreed upon by those hired later? (Vs 20:4)
4. What explanation did the last group of workers give when asked why they were standing around doing nothing? What else might they have been doing? How do you see this as applying to you or others today?
5. What did the landowner tell the foreman to do at the end of the day? (Vs 20:8)
6. Was anyone underpaid or cheated? Why then did the workers complain? Was anyone overpaid?
7. Does this parable make economic sense? Does it in any way fit with employers, unions, and government regulations in the world we live in? How do our cultural values resist the idea of grace?
8. With which group of workers do you personally identify—those hired at 9:00a.m., noon, 3:00 p.m., or 5:00 p.m.?
9. What's the danger of thinking of yourself as a responsible worker, hired at 9.00am? Why is it dangerous to compare your own situation with someone else's?
10. How does it make you feel to know that heaven will include murderers, child molesters, swindlers, and crooked

politicians that put their trust in Christ only minutes before their death?

11. What would happen if God gave each of us what we deserve?

12. How can focusing on God's grace in our lives keep us from becoming jealous of others? In what way can you thank God every day for his grace in your life?

Leader's Notes

Q3. A days labor at harvest was about 12 hours long. His own workers would have started at 6:00 a.m. Three hours later, he saw he needed more and hired some at 9:00 a.m., they would know they had to work 9 hours to earn a denarius (a fair wage). He then hired more at noon, 3:00, and finally 5:00 to help. He didn't state a wage, to the later ones but said he would pay "what is right."

Q4. They could have been looking for work, so they were negligent in not doing so. Think about signing on today!

Q6. While it may be argued some were overpaid, nobody was cheated. The complaint offered no evidence of wrongdoing. It was a complaint born of jealousy, not objective reality. The early hires received less than they expected but the later hires received more. We should rejoice in the good others receive. But do we?

Q7. No, it doesn't fit, but Jesus says this parable is about the kingdom of heaven. It points to the truth: many who were called last will be first in the kingdom of heaven, while the first called will be last. Our reward will not depend on the greatness, fatigue, and length of our work, but above all and primarily on the free will and favour of God. The measure of grace that each of us receive depends solely and alone on God's benevolence.

Q9. God dispenses gifts not wages, if we think of ourselves as long serving we risk thinking we'll get a higher reward.

Date: 12 August

Theme: Parables 35-36

Key Readings: Luke 12:2-8; Luke 12:10-14

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. When was a time when your persistence paid off?
2. Does persistence in prayer mean: a) endless repetition, b) long sessions of prayer, c) attending daily [or weekly] prayer meetings, d) keeping our requests constantly before God, e) something else (what)?
3. What do we know about the judge and the widow? Why did the judge eventually give in? (18:4-5)
4. How are God's actions the same—and how are they different—from the unjust judge?
5. Why do people (you) stop praying? How should we respond when we do not see our prayers answered? How can you guard against the temptation to give up praying when you do not get the results you expect?
6. How can we be sure we are praying for things that are within the will of God?
7. Parable 36. How does it feel to be in the presence of someone who is better than you at what you do best?
8. What motivated the Pharisee to pray? How did he pray? (18:11-12)
9. What would be examples of "Pharisees" and "tax collectors" today? How important are outward appearances in our culture today? How do we judge people according to their outward appearance? Does outward appearance matter?

10. We all pray differently. Do you ever feel intimidated by someone who prays really well or has memorised great portions of scripture?

11. How do you approach God in your prayers? What enables us to be confident in our prayers to God? (Romans 8:26-27, John 15:7, Philippians 4:6-7)

12. Why does God honour the prayers of the humble?

Leader's Notes

Q2. In this parable, persistence does not mean a, b, or c; rather it means d, keeping our requests before God. That does not mean that b or c is bad. In fact, attending a regular prayer meeting is probably a very good thing. The reason for persistence in prayer is not to remind God but to remind yourself of your faith in God and your belief that he will answer your prayers.

Q4. God is not an unjust judge and he has compassion for his people. He does not respond to bribes; you cannot buy or earn his favour; he gives it to you absolutely free (grace), in his time, and according to his plan. If persistence resulted in justice from this unjust judge, how much more will God, who loves both people and justice, answer our prayers.

Q6. Actually, we can't be sure if what we ask of God is in his will. He has a plan and we occasionally get glimpses of it, but we can never see it all or come close to understanding it. The best we can do is keep our prayers in line with what we know of God's will through scripture.

Q9. The two people in the parable were chosen as the most distinguished and the most despised - who are they today?

Date: 19 August

Theme: Parable 37

Key Readings: Luke 19:12-27

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. Why did Jesus tell this parable of the ten servants and minas? (19:11).
2. Where did the man of noble birth say he was going? What did he want his servants to do with the money he gave them? How much money was it? (19:12-13)
3. 19:14 seems a bit odd until we know the players in this parable. To Jesus' audience, who was the "man of noble birth" (later called "the master")? Who were the servants? Who were the subjects (citizens, people, countrymen)? Who might they represent today?
4. In verse 19:21, was the third servant's description of his master accurate? Would you say the servants's response to his master was hypocritical?
5. Perhaps more than some others, this parable directly applies to us today. Why?
6. Is there another reason the third servant may have been a bad steward? What does this parable teach us about stewardship? What does it teach about the imminent return of the Lord?
7. What responsibilities and gifts has Jesus given to you (to you personally)?
8. Why is the master so hard on the man who did not use his mina to earn more? (A) he didn't share his master's interest in the kingdom, (B) he didn't trust his master's intentions, (C) his only concern was for himself, (D) he did

nothing productive with the money, (E) he had a short-term mindset?

9. Jesus talks about two groups of people in this parable, the servants who each received a mina and the subjects of the kingdom. With which group do you more closely identify? Who would fall in the other group?

10. What can we learn from this story about neglecting to obey the truth that we already know? (James 2:14-17)

11. What can you expect from the Lord if you use the resources he has given to you for his glory? (Galatians 6:7-9)

Leader's Notes

Q1. Apparently the disciples think that the Kingdom of God (or heaven) is just around the corner. Jesus, on the other hand, sees problems in this mindset. He tells this parable in order to correct, or at least to put into perspective this short-term thinking. Many people today believe that the return of Jesus Christ is imminent and have predicted specific dates for this. In truth it could be tomorrow or 1,000 years from now. We just don't know.

Q3. The noble is a benevolent ruler. The ten servants are disciples. The subjects are unbelieving onlookers

Q5. Some think the return is imminent others that we don't know when he will return; there are plenty of people who don't want Jesus to be who he says he is; there are sadly plenty of disciples who don't use their gifting.

Q6. We must hold two truths in tension; we must live in the light of an imminent return. But we must also live wisely, making good investments for His kingdom, knowing that His return may not be as soon as we think or hope.

Date: 26 August

Theme: Parables 38-39

Key Readings: Matthew 21:28-32; Matthew 21:33-34
Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-18

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. What is the best illustration you've ever seen of the old saying, "actions speak louder than words"?
2. Who are the people in the parable? Who did they represent then? Who do they represent today?
3. Was the behaviour of either son wholly commendable?
4. Why doesn't religious knowledge or information guarantee that we will do what God wants us to? Why do we so often drag our feet in doing what God wants?
5. When, if ever, is it too late to do the right thing? What does it mean to repent? Is it ever too late to repent?
6. Parable 39. What does the vineyard represent? Who does the owner represent? The servants the owner sent? The tenants? The son of the vineyard owner?
7. Isn't it unlikely that the tenants would hurt the servants and send them away with nothing, and then kill his son? Why would they do such a thing? Can you imagine anyone doing something like that today?
8. Compare this parable to Isaiah 5:1-7.
9. What does the parable tell us about the fate that awaits those who reject Jesus?
10. What is the meaning of the scripture that Jesus quoted in 21:42? (Psalm 118:22)

11. How can we avoid letting the crowd (or our friends and peers) from making decisions for us? Is there an area of your life where you resist God's authority?

Leader's Notes

Q2. Jesus is outside the temple speaking mainly to the leading priests and elders. In the two sons he shows his listeners an image of two classes of people in Israel. On the one side were the religious leaders of the people, pleased with their own self-righteousness and boastful regarding their own sanctity. On the other are the sinners and scum of the people that the leaders thought scarcely worthy to be looked at—the tax collectors and prostitutes.

Q6. This is one of the few parables that appears in all three synoptic gospels. This means Pay Attention! The vineyard represents Israel, the landowner represents God, the tenants stand for the Jews, the fruit stands for what is owed to God, and the servants sent by the landowner are the rejected prophets of the Old Testament right up to John the Baptist.

Q10. Jesus was referring to his own role in the kingdom of God (21:43) and to his rejection by the leaders and their followers. When he says, "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." he is saying that God has rejected the theocracy (a nation ruled by God) of the Old Testament, and a New Covenant has been made with a new people who have been chosen as upholders of the kingdom of God in the place of a nation (Israel).

Date: 2 September

Theme: Parable 40

Key Readings: Matthew 22:2-14

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. What do you like and dislike about weddings?
2. How do you react when long-awaited plans fail to materialise?
3. In Jesus' days, it was customary to send two invitations to a party—the first to announce it and the second to say that everything was ready. Is it surprising that those who had previously been invited later refused to come?
4. Upon receiving refusals, what did the king do? (22:4)
5. What keeps people from accepting Jesus' offer of salvation and eternal life?
6. How did the guests respond to the second appeal? (22:5)
What shocking acts did some of them do? (22:6)
7. When you first learned of Jesus' offer of salvation (to you), did you immediately accept it?
8. How did the king deal with those who continued to refuse his invitation? (22:7)
9. After the first guests again refused to come, the king went to "Plan B" that included what changes? (22:8-9) How did that work out? (22:10)
10. If you at first refused Jesus' offer of salvation and accepted it later, what changed your mind?
11. How does God demonstrate his patience to unbelievers?

12. What did the king say when he spotted an improperly dressed guest? (22:11-12)
13. In the parable, the wedding clothes that were needed for admittance to the banquet represent what? (Isaiah 64:5-6)
14. On judgment day, many point to the good deeds they have done. Will that get them into the banquet of eternal life? Are good deeds useless? (James 2:14-26)
15. What did the king have his servants do with the improperly dressed man? (22:13) Why did he do this?
16. What will happen to those who either reject Christ or try to enter his kingdom on their own terms?
17. Does Verse 14 ("For many are invited, but few are chosen.") mean that God has only chosen a few people to enter heaven (predestination)?

Leader's Notes

Q13. The proper wedding clothes are all that Jesus said was required for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven

Q14. Many will claim to have done good deeds, but Jesus will turn them away because they have not dealt with salvation; they will not be prepared properly and spiritually to be received by the King at the celebration for the Son. God is looking for repentance and faith, not deeds.

On the other hand, having faith will most definitely lead to one doing good deeds. James 2:14, 17, 18 .

Q17. The invitation is there for all who care to listen, but some refuse, and some refuse to submit to the requirements of entrance into the kingdom. So none of these will be present in the kingdom. Those Jesus refers to as "chosen" are the people who respond to the invitation to come, and respond in the proper manner so that they are prepared to enter the kingdom.

Date: 9 September

Theme: Parables 41-42

Key Readings: Matthew 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-29; Luke 21:29-31
Matthew 24:45-51

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. Parable 41 is one of only six parables repeated in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. What does this tell us?
2. In 24:33 and 34, what does “all these things” refer to? (Matthew 24:4-31)
3. What are some current examples of false prophets deceiving people?
4. In 24:33, what does “it” in the phrase “it is near” refer to? (Luke 21:31)
5. In 24:34, what does “this generation” refer to? Do you feel as though you are part of it?
6. Who knows when the end times will come? (24:36) Would you like to know when Christ will return? What are the pros and cons of not knowing?
7. What does it really mean in a practical sense for you to “keep watch” (24:42) or “be ready” (24:44)?
8. What would you do if you knew that a thief would try to rob your home tonight?
9. Looking at your life could anybody accuse you of not believing in the imminent return of Christ? How can you have a sense of expectation about it?
10. What would you do if you hired a house sitter/caretaker to watch your home and children, left for a week-long

vacation, and then returned a day early to find that your caretaker had neglected your kids, trashed your house, and ignored your other instructions?

11. But do we really have to worry about being ready for the end today? Yes, a few signs of the end times have appeared, but far from all of them. The second coming is probably a good way off. You've put the past behind you and you're making progress with your life. You're not doing anything really bad today. You're entitled to a little fun today, aren't you? Tomorrow is another day.

12. In what ways are you not ready to face the Lord today?

Leader's Notes

Q2. All these things refers to what Jesus has talked about earlier in the chapter.

Q4. God's kingdom - the kingdom of heaven.

Q5. The new leaves on the fig tree are analogous to the signs preceding the second coming. So the phrase "this generation" clearly refers to the generation that is alive at the time those signs are fulfilled.

Q7. The only safe way to "be ready" is to obey God and Christ today and every day. But think about what that means in a practical sense. Discuss this beyond surface platitudes!

Date: 16 September - morning

Theme: Parables 43-44

Key Readings: Matthew 25:1-13; Mark 13:35-37

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. When was a time you were late to an important event? Why, and could you have avoided being late? How?
2. Why were some of the virgins described as foolish? What made the others wise?
3. What did the foolish virgins ask of the others? How did the wise ones respond when asked to help the ones who had not prepared? Was this fair?
4. In what ways do you tend to count on more mature Christians or ride on their coat tails?
5. How did the bridegroom respond when some of the virgins wanted to come to the wedding late? (Matthew 25:12) What does the parable teach?
6. What responsibility does each Christian have while waiting? (Matthew 25:13, Hebrews 10:23-25, 13:1-5, James 1:22-25, 4:7-10)
7. Why do we tend to think and act like we have all the time in the world before Christ's return?
8. What are the possible consequences of putting off thinking about Christ and spiritual growth until later? Why is continual preparation better than "last minute cramming?"
9. Parable 44. How do you think the disciples would have reacted if Jesus had said he would not return for at least another 2,000 years? What if you were told that today?

10. How might a detailed outline of future events be a hindrance, rather than a help, to our faith in God?
11. What did Jesus say the servants should do to occupy their time until the owner's return? (Mark 13:34)
12. How should we occupy our time as we wait for Christ's return? What specific task(s) do you think God has given you to do as you wait for Christ's return?
13. In what ways do we need to be on guard (13:33) until Christ returns? (Matthew 7:15, 24:11, 24:24, Jeremiah 14:13-15, 23:16, 2 Peter 2:1-3, Ephesians 6:11-12, Titus 2:11-14)

Leader's Notes

The questions that have specific answers have Bible references to help, the rest are meant to get discussion going. That discussion could be well informed by remembering that the Oxford Bible Commentary says the parable teaches three lessons:

- 1) No one know the date or time of Christ's second coming.
- 2) Those who are faithful and prepared will be rewarded at the end times.
- 3) Those who are unfaithful and unprepared will suffer eternal punishment.

Date: 16 September - evening

Theme: Parable 45

Key Readings: Matthew 25:1-13

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. What are your five best traits or greatest attributes?
2. In 25:14, the word "it" refers to the kingdom of heaven. To what did Jesus liken it in this parable?
3. On what basis did the master decide to give different amounts of money to each of the servants? How did the word "talent" come to mean an ability, skill, or aptitude?
4. There are four important elements in this parable: time, money, work, and profit. That seems pretty worldly. What can we say about each element?
5. The master says three things to reward each of the first two servants. They are:
6. What is the main characteristic of the third servant that differentiates him from the first two?
7. What was the third servant's excuse for not investing his talent? How did the master respond to his explanation? (25:24-28)
8. What was the ultimate outcome of the third servant?
9. God rejoices in his servants making a profit. What does a profit mean to God?
10. Is it important to God how much talent you have? (2 Corinthians 8:10-12)
11. Where are you able to invest your talents (money and abilities)? What people can benefit most from the talents you have?

12. Can you summarise this parable as to what it means to you today in a sentence or two?

Leader's Notes

Q3. The word "talent" is derived from the Greek word talanton, which means "balance, sum, weight." So, in fact, the basic root of the word talent as used today to denote the capacity of achievement, success, or ability was originally a unit of weight or money for the payment for goods and services in the ancient world.

Q6. In a word, the third slave is lazy, and thus useless, as opposed to being hard-working, and therefore useful.

Q9. God expects a profit and rejoices in it. He has granted the time and the resources for humans to make a profit for the kingdom of heaven, until He returns. Spiritual profit might be measured as lost souls saved, spiritual growth and edification (Eph 4:11-13), walking in God's ways and obeying his commands, bringing glory to God.

Q10. It is not how much talent one has, but how one uses it that is important to God. It is not how many gifts that God gives to a person, it is what one does with them.

Date: 23 September

Theme: Parable 46

Key Readings: Matthew 25:31-46

Questions from the sermon

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

Questions

1. Where will all the nations be when Christ returns? (25:31-32) He says he will divide all peoples as a Shepherd does what? Is it difficult to separate sheep from goats? (Hebrews 13:20, Matthew 10:38)
2. What will Jesus say to those on his right (the sheep)?
3. How will the sheep respond to Jesus' words on that day? (25:37-39) How does Jesus respond to their questions? (25:40)
4. What did Jesus say to those on his left (the goats)? How did they reply? How did Jesus reply to them? (25:41-45)
5. How do people today usually determine whether they will be nice to someone?
6. Would your behaviour change if you treated every person in your life as if he or she was Jesus? How?
7. In several recent parables, Jesus emphasises being faithful and using your gifts but didn't say what that means. Here he lists five specific things that we are to do. They are: ...
8. Who are the people gathered before Jesus in this final judgement: gentiles, Jews, Samaritans, believers, non-believers, all humanity?
9. Who are the needy or "the least of my brothers" that we are to serve? (Proverbs 19:17, Matthew 10:40-42, 12:46-50)

10. This story sounds as if Jesus is saying that he is going to judge us based on our works, on our deeds. But surely we're saved by our faith, not by works? Surely it doesn't depend on what we do, does it? (James 2:14-18)

11. What specific act of kindness toward a needy person can you do today?

Leader's Notes

Note: Some Biblical scholars regard these verses as a parable; others call it a word picture of the last judgement. It doesn't matter; what matters is the message Jesus wants us to take from it to impact our lives today.

Q1. In Asia and Africa sheep and goats are often similar in appearance, non-shepherds find it difficult to distinguish such sheep and goats, but the shepherd knows the difference and easily separates them.

Q8. The identity of those who are gathered is disputed, but it is probably all of humanity. The passage belongs to a long section full of stories and examples for believers and one might expect here a solemn appeal to those within the church. Several commentators call this the "Gentile Judgement," but the passage itself has no support for such a limitation.

Q9. I identify the "least of these brothers of mine" with the needy in general. This seems more consistent with Jesus' commands to ignore distinctions between insiders and outsiders and with Jesus' injunction to love one's enemies.

Q10. James makes clear that if you are relying on your faith in Jesus to save you, but you are living the same kind of selfish life as the people around you who don't believe in him, watch out. Beware! The Bible doesn't give you any reassurance at all that you will really be saved.

Good works aren't the reason we're saved; but they are the evidence that we're saved.

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		

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