



A REDEMPTION HILL CHURCH
STUDY GUIDE

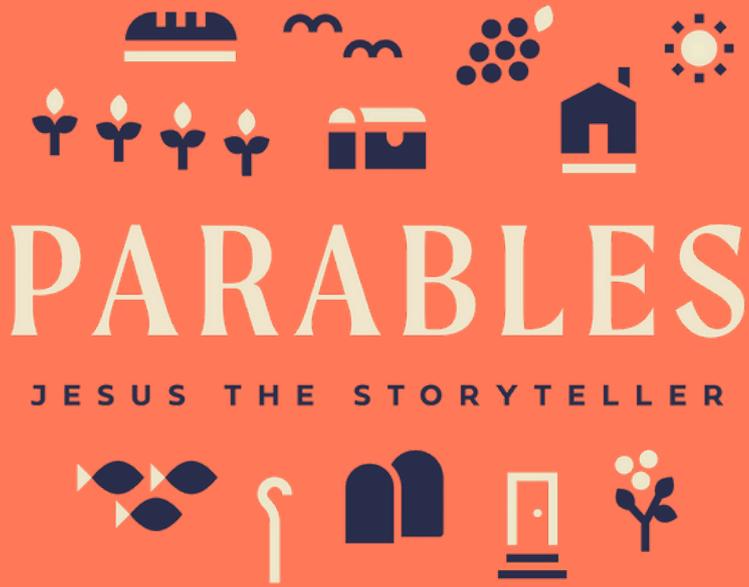


PARABLES

JESUS THE STORYTELLER



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HOW TO USE

We want to serve you! We do that by instilling God's Word deep inside your heart and pointing you to Jesus.

PERSONAL STUDY

Use this study at home. We encourage you to follow along with us in your devotional time as you read and study the Bible. You can study the passage for the upcoming Sunday, and utilize this guide to help you understand God's Word, see the gospel, and apply the truths of Scripture to your heart.

GOSPEL COMMUNITY GROUPS

In addition, to utilizing this study at home, we utilize these in our groups. In our gospel community groups, believers come together bi-weekly to discuss the sermon, and apply God's Word to their individual lives. We believe God's Word should not just be studied on an individual level, but it should also be studied in the context of community.

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01 THE SOWER & THE SOILS

MATTHEW 13:1-23

Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. -Matthew 13:8

THE CONTEXT

Matthew begins this chapter with the words, "That same day..." (v. 1). To what day is Matthew referring? Chapter 12 informs us that Jesus has already had a busy day and experienced much opposition from the Pharisees. Though Jesus has demonstrated His mercy and power, the Pharisees have completely rejected Him as a sinner and accused Him of being empowered by Satan to do his work (see Matthew 12:24). Jesus had already told His disciples that the Pharisees' accusations were a result of their wicked hearts (Matthew 12:33-37). Jesus sets out to demonstrate to His followers the reason why some reject Him while others accept Him as Lord.

As the crowds surround Jesus on the shore, He gets into a boat, His pulpit, and preaches a parable. The word "parable" literally means to come alongside, to parallel something. If you are new to the Bible, a parable is a story used to illustrate a truth. Jesus often taught in parables, and He uses this parable to emphasize a truth to His followers. What is that truth? Jesus teaches us that to receive Him, we need our hearts to be changed by Him.

THE PARABLE TOLD

Jesus begins by telling a story of four types of soil. The word is actually "gē" in Greek. It can mean land, earth, or soil. In this case, the context tells us that this word refers to soil. Jesus uses an agricultural story to connect with His audience, as ancient Israel was an agrarian society, and the audience would understand His message. Jesus tells the crowd that a sower sowed seeds on the ground (vv. 3-4). This was a typical practice of farmers. Oftentimes, they would scatter the seeds and then till the soil after the seeds had been scattered. Sometimes the soil would be tilled first. It seems the former is the case in this parable.

Some of the seed fell onto the "path" or the road (v. 4). Obviously, a seed can't grow on a road; it can't penetrate the stones or the hard ground that makes up the path. The seed merely becomes bird food. It is not just eaten by the birds; it is "devoured" by ravenous birds. Some of the seed from the sower also fell onto "rocky ground" (v. 5). This soil is different from that of the path. Think of soil with rocks buried underneath. If you've ever dug into Georgia red clay, you can relate!

It's hard to dig deep because of all the rocks buried in the soil. Jesus says, "immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away" (v. 6). The seed seemed to produce something. We aren't told if the seed produced fruit, a flower, or a plant. The word used is "grain," or *karpos* in the greek (v. 7), which is often translated as the word "fruit." Nevertheless, what type of fruit (or plant) the seed produced is not the point. It seemed to produce something rather quickly. But notice, because of the rocks, the roots could not go deep into the soil. Thus, whatever did grow was scorched by the sun's heat and it withered away.

Other seed fell among thorns (v. 7). Like the rocky ground, the seed initially went into the soil. However, the thorns choked out the seed, and it produced nothing. So far, three soils and no luck! Is there any soil that can take the seed? Yes, the good soil! Some of the seed landed on the "good soil and produced grain (or fruit), some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (v. 8), meaning the good soil produced an abundance of fruit.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES

What makes this parable unique is what happens next. The disciples speak up, probably due to their confusion, and ask Jesus a question: "Why do you speak in parables?" (v. 10). It's a legitimate question. Why can't Jesus just tell them the truth? To the disciples, it seems that Jesus is wasting words, wasting time, and trying to disguise what He is teaching. Jesus tells them that the parables serve two

purposes: to reveal and to conceal. To His followers, the parables reveal. His disciples "know the secrets of heaven," which have been graciously given to them (v. 11). But not everyone has been given this heavenly insight. Others have not been given this privilege. Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 in vv. 13-14 to explain that He reveals Himself and His truth to those He chooses. People in Isaiah's day heard the prophet's warning but did not heed his message. They did not understand his words and thus continually became calloused. Sin has so defiled our hearts and fogged our minds that we need God Himself to clear them by the power of His Spirit. The parables reveal who has had their mind cleared and who has not. In a mysterious way, God uses the parables of Jesus to either harden a person's heart toward Him or to soften it. God uses the parables to reveal those who have hearts represented by the path, the rocky soil, or the thorns, and those whose hearts are good soil.

THE PARABLE EXPLAINED

In verses 18-23, Jesus explains the meaning of the parable. The soils represent the condition of the human heart. Though it appears there are four types of hearts, really there are only two: fruitless hearts and fruitful hearts. There are hearts like the path—callous and hard. They will not be responsive to the gospel message, which is the seed that is scattered. They will reject it immediately, producing no fruit (v. 19). There are hearts like the rocky soil, which seem to produce fruit. However, when persecution from the world sets in, when tribulation and difficulties arise, the fruit withers.

This is the type of person who embraces the teachings of Jesus for a season. They seem to be passionate about Him at first! However, when they are questioned for their faith, ridiculed for their apparent love of Jesus, and tested by life's trials, they reject Jesus. They falter and produce no fruit as well (v. 21). There are hearts like thorny ground. At first, this individual appears to love Jesus. However, the riches and pleasures of this world take their eyes off Him. They love material things more than the treasure from heaven. These deceitful "riches" choke out the seed, and they too fall away. They don't really love Jesus because He doesn't give them what they really want, which is worldly pleasure. They too prove to be unfruitful. But there is one type of heart that is fruitful—the heart of the good soil. It withstands and perseveres through the trials of the world. It is unswayed by the deceitfulness of sin and the riches this life has to offer. It produces fruit that lasts (v. 23).

This heart longs to have Jesus as its treasure. This heart beholds the good news of a Savior who became the sin of His people in love and mercy. This heart understands that Jesus traded His crown of glory for a crown of thorns to be the treasure for His people. This heart hears the good news of the gospel and believes by faith in the justifying work of Christ. This heart will produce fruit. It will produce a selfless love for others. It will produce generosity with one's time, talent, and treasure. It will produce a love for God's Word. Which heart do you have? If you have the heart of good soil, it was God's sheer grace that gave you that heart. Thank Him for His kindness to you!

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. In your group, discuss the main idea & the sub points of the sermon? What stood out?
2. How does one see God's sovereignty and man's responsibility at work in this parable? Explain.
3. Consider Jesus' words in vv10-17. In light of this, how are the parables a demonstration of God's love for His people? How are they a demonstration of his judgement for others?
4. Connect this parable back to the Pharisees actions in chapter 12. Why do you think Jesus teaches this parable "on that day" (v1)?
5. How do the soils warn us against falsely professing faith in Christ? What other passages provide such warnings?
6. What might the seed represent? What responsibility do we have in spreading the "seed"? Share some Scriptures that support your answer. What responsibility do we have in seeing that the soil is good ground? Share some Scriptures to support your answer.
7. How might you determine what soil is reflective of your heart? Explain the connection between grace and good works.
8. How does this parable highlight the mercy and grace of God in saving sinners? See *Ezekiel 36:22-28*. What response should we give if soil of our heart is good ground?

02 THE GOOD SAMARITAN

LUKE 10:25-37

But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. - Luke 10:33

THE CONTEXT

Jesus' entire ministry up to this point is full of things that have made the Pharisees and lawyers hate Him. They hate that He knows the scriptures better than they do. They hate that He can do miracles and that the people love Him for it. They hate that they cannot trap him into saying something unlawful or incorrect. Perhaps most of all, they hate him for pointing out their failure to correctly lead, guide and love His people, the Jews. This is the heart posture of the lawyer when he stands and asks his question.

There are also problems between the Jews and Samaritans. There is a long history of strife between them which goes all the way back to the Assyrian exile, which occurred around 700BC. The Assyrians conquered and removed the 10 northern tribes and dispersed them throughout the Assyrian kingdom. These Northern tribes intermarried with the Assyrians and were essentially lost. In the 700 years from that time to the time of Jesus, there have been many disagreements and even wars between the two groups. For example, the Samaritans think the temple should be on Mt.

Gerizim, the Jews think it belongs on Mt. Zion. The Samaritans only acknowledge the Pentateuch as valid scripture, whereas the Jews recognize the whole Old Testament. And we don't have to go far to see the issues between the two people. In Luke 9:51-56 the Samaritans refuse to provide shelter for Jesus because they know he is traveling to Jerusalem. In response, his disciples James and John want to rain down fire from heaven on them! Jesus' own followers were ready to kill them for a simple lack of hospitality! Pride, selfishness and failure to empathize with each other is clearly seen in the Jews, Samaritans, even the disciples!

THE PARABLE TOLD

.Ironically, one of Jesus' most famous parables was told in response to one of these angry Pharisees. Jesus had just finished publicly praising the Father for revealing truth to the children and hiding it from the wise (Luke 10:21-24). This Pharisee (and probably others) took this personally and stood up to try to trap Jesus (all-powerful, all-knowing, incarnate God) in his words. He starts with a simple question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v25).

Obviously, this man, being a lifelong student of the law, knew the answer, he just wanted to see if Jesus did. Jesus, knowing his false intentions, returns the question back to him (v26). With pride, the Pharisee rattles off Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Essentially, love the Lord with all that you are, and love your neighbor as yourself (v27). Jesus replies, “You have answered correctly, do this and you will live.” (v28). The Pharisee immediately realizes that he has just entrapped himself! Even if he believes his own lie that he is loving God perfectly, he and everyone else knows that he is not loving his neighbor very well at all. In an attempt to justify his complete lack of love for his sheep (see Ezekiel 34:1-24), this student of the law, looking for a loophole, replies, “And who is my neighbor?” (v29). From our outside perspective, this is a crazy situation. Creation is questioning the creator. A student of the law is questioning the author of the law in order to justify his sin. The bad shepherd is questioning the Good Shepherd.

Jesus responds by calmly telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. The story starts with a man making the common, but dangerous 17 mile journey from Jerusalem to Jericho. The crowd would have been very familiar with this road and its dangers. It descended 3600 ft from end to end and was full of places for criminals to hide. Not surprisingly, along the way the man is robbed, beaten nearly to death and left on the side of the road (v30). A priest coming down the road saw the man and passed by on the other side (v31). In the same way, a Levite actually went up to the man

and after seeing him also went to the other side (v32). Finally, the Samaritan arrives, sees the man and has compassion on him (v33). Oil and wine were used to soften and clean the man’s wounds. The injured man rode on the Samaritan’s donkey while the owner presumably walked alongside, all the way to the inn (v34). His room and board are paid for in advance along with anything else he might need until the Samaritan returns for him (v35). When the story ends, Jesus asks the Pharisee which of these men was a good neighbor (v36). He correctly answers the question and Jesus simply tells him to go and do the same.

THE PARABLE EXPLAINED

For the Pharisee, Jesus’ response to his question was very pointed. His question, “Who is my neighbor?” was more of an excuse for his failure to love the people around him than an honest question from a man seeking truth. For this man, the parable only confirmed what he already knew, he was not living up to the very standard he just quoted.

For the crowd, the parable was old news in regards to the fact that they were to be loving the people around them. The mandate for Jewish hospitality for the needy is clear in the Old Testament (Lev. 19:33-34, Num 15:16, Deut. 10:18-19). But the fact that that care was coming from a Samaritan to a Jew would have been shocking. In this story, it is the Jew that needed to be rescued and that rescue came from, not the priest or the Levite, but the hated foreigner. So, from a moralistic standpoint, the lesson is to do better; break through

the socio-economic barriers and love the people around you, feed the poor, shelter the homeless, care for orphans and widows. All these are very good and necessary things, but they will not save anyone.

As we learned in the previous chapter, the purpose of parables is to only convey saving truth to the people that Lord intends and hide it from others. So what is Jesus trying to say to us?

We need to understand that the question the Pharisee asked was the wrong question. As the Pharisee knew in his heart and we also know, the law is impossible for any man to keep, and there is nothing anyone can do to save themselves, or “inherit eternal life”. The law only shows us our inability to meet the standard that God has set. He will not tolerate sin and all of humanity has been born in sin since the time of Adam (Romans 3:23). So, the correct question is not, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”, but, “who can save me from eternal death?”. From this perspective, we can see that the robbers, the victim, the priest and the Levite are all in need of being rescued.

JESUS THE STORYTELLER

We can also see now that Jesus is the Good Samaritan. When we were dead in our sins he came to us when no one else would or could and saved us. The Samaritan gave physical care and provision. But Jesus gave his perfect, sinless life for ours. By his body and blood he rescued us, not from physical death, but eternal spiritual death. When Jesus was raised to new life he defeated death, sin and hell for us.

Now, we also have new life in him. We too can, and must go out in the world and love others the way that He loved us. This is how the world around us can experience the love of Jesus! We now have the privilege of taking the healing balm of the gospel and applying it to the hearts of the lost. The gospel is the only way that the damage caused by sin can be undone.

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How do we see Jesus' love for the lawyer, the crowd, the disciples in this text? Discuss each person/group separately. How do we see His love for *us*?
2. What roles have you played in this parable? The lawyer? The victim? The priest? The Samaritan?
3. As believers, who are our neighbors? explain
4. What are some ways that the Church is to strive to echo the actions and ideals of the Good Samaritan, and Jesus Christ?
5. Why do we love the people around us? What are the possible outcomes?

03 THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

MATTHEW 18:21-35

And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ - Matthew 18:33

THE CONTEXT

In the preceding verses to our Parable, Jesus had just finished answering questions like Who was the greatest in the Kingdom of God, the source and effects of temptation, and the order and process of reconciliation between believers. This is of great importance as we consider this parable.

THE MAGNITUDE OF OUR DEBT

Peter, in verse 21, ask Jesus how many times one should forgive another for offenses made against him. It was commonly believed in Jewish tradition that one should forgive others up to 3 times, based on Amos 1. Peter, thinking that he is going the extra mile, presents the idea that he would be capable of doubling that number and even adding one more for good measure, forgiving someone up to 7 times! Jesus responds to Peter, times, but seventy-seven times (v. 22). Some translations say “seventy times seven times! In either case, it must have struck the disciples that forgiveness should be extended to others more times than humanly possible and specifically a mark of ones lifestyle. as we consider this parable.

To Illustrate, Jesus tells the story based on several characters; a King, wishing to settle some debts; a debtor with a debt so massive, it would be calculated in modern currency somewhere in the realm of tens of billions of dollars; and a fellow servant who owed the Debtor an amount far less significant. When the debtor’s debt became due, he fell on his knees before the King, in verse 26, because he had no way to pay the sum back. The debtor said “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” And out of pity for this man, the King released him and forgave him the debt! How remarkable! The man should have leaped for joy and left the Kings presence hugging and kissing everyone he encountered in jubilation for the freedom he had just found! But that’s not how the story unfolds as Jesus continues.

SHARING THE FREEDOM OF FORGIVENESS

When the servant went out, he came upon a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller amount of money, somewhere in the amount of a few months’ wages. When the “out of debt” servant demanded that his fellow servant pay him what he was



owed in verse 28, the servant, in similar fashion, fell down at his feet and said “have patience with me and I will pay you.” Unbelievably, the servant refused and had the fellow servant thrown in prison until he paid back all that he owed! The story concludes with the King finding out how the original Debtor just treated this servant and rebuked him and asked him why he didn’t extend the same forgiveness and mercy as the King had shown him. Because of his unforgiveness towards others, he too would be thrown in prison until he paid all of his debts! Jesus, having their full attention, concludes by saying in verse 35 “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

JESUS THE STORYTELLER

While the cross was still yet ahead, Jesus is clear in this parable that our debt, our sin against the Father is too great for any of us to “pay back” with human effort. It requires the complete decision of the Father to declare us forgiven and all of our debt cancelled and paid in full. Colossians 2:13-14 tells us “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross!

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. In Matthew 18:27, the King forgives the enormous debt of ten thousand talents the servant owed him by showing pity for him, because he knew it wouldn’t, or even could ever be paid back. Explain in your own words how this gives you greater insight into the love the Father has for you.
2. How should the servant have responded to being declared “paid in full” by the King? Why?
3. Share with the group how you can relate to the Debtor in this parable.
4. Perhaps the heart of this parable is how the Servant, once released from his debt, treated another servant who owed a debt to him. Does this parable bring to your mind a situation that requires you to extend grace and forgiveness to someone? Explain?
5. What impact do you think forgiveness has on others as we extend mercy and grace in situations opposed to judgment and condemnation?

04 THE RICH FOOL

LUKE 12:13-21

And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” - Luke 12:15

THE CONTEXT

In a book where Luke portrays Christ as the savior for all people, we find in Luke 12:13-21 that Jesus is confronted by a man seeking an inheritance equal to his brother's. Jesus responds that this financial issue is between the man and his brother. He then teaches the crowd the parable of the rich fool, which applies to everyone. In this passage, Jesus addresses covetousness and greed, emphasizing that where our treasure is, our heart will be also (Matthew 6:21). This financial problem is merely a sign of a deeper, inward issue.

THE SAME STRUGGLE

While culture and history change over the years, some aspects of life remain the same regardless of the century. Just as children today inherit their parents' possessions when they pass away, the same was true in biblical times. In this passage, we see a younger brother complaining and asking Jesus to tell his older brother, who likely received a double portion of the inheritance as was customary, to split the inheritance. Jesus quickly points out the sin behind the man's complaint: covetousness. In fact, Jesus was watch out for it! (v. 15). This is a sin that most, if not all, of us still struggle with today, just as they did back then.

THE GREAT REVERSAL

The parables in Luke often depict reversals. In this instance, Jesus warns the crowd to guard their hearts. He tells a story of a man who became wealthy from his crops and planned to retire and live an easy life, a lifestyle often promoted by the world today. In fact, this is a man most of us strive to be. He has worked hard and managed his money wisely. If you are a parent, you would love for your child to follow the pattern of this man.

However, what the world deems wise, God considers foolish. Although it seemed smart for the man to accumulate such abundance, all his hard work was in vain because he died the very night he thought he was set for life. Why seek and covet things that can be taken from us in an instant? Life is not about ourselves and gaining wealth; life is about God.

This man had put his trust in his stuff instead of the God who created his stuff. This man found security in his possessions instead of the author of life. This man sought for satisfaction in his riches instead of the richness of God. How pathetic! But if we are honest, we are much like this man.

JESUS THE STORYTELLER

As we examine this parable, we can see the gospel addressing the destructive sins of covetousness, greed, and anxiety in two ways. First, instead of seeking to be rich in possessions, we should seek to be rich in Christ by prioritizing the kingdom of God. Why? Because Jesus was the one who was truly rich, and for our sake, He became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9). He took on flesh & went to a brutal cross to rescue us from the futility of covetousness. As a result, our heart should see that Jesus is the only one who can bring true, lasting satisfaction to our hearts, unlike money and possessions.

Second, we find true security not through the world, but through Christ, who will keep us safe not just in this life, but in the life to come. Jesus is the only one who can provide security that withstands the grave. Do you believe that?

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How might you see the gospel in this parable?
2. Where might you be coveting something that someone else has, and how is this affecting your relationship with them and with God? Discuss
3. Read Luke 12:15. Why does Jesus say, “..be on guard against all covetousness?” How might we remain on guard against coveting?
4. What treasures has Jesus given you that money cannot obtain? How does this kill our desire for wealth and possessions?
5. In what ways do you compromise Godly character for material gain or wealth? What warnings do you need to heed from this parable?
6. In what ways does your heart focus on the kingdom of this earth instead of God’s kingdom?
7. What is a fool? Why is the man in the story a fool? Use other Scriptures that describe a fool.

05 THE PRODIGAL SON

LUKE 15:11-32

It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”
-Luke 15:32

THE CONTEXT

Luke 15 opens with one of many encounters with the Pharisees in which they were not okay with what Jesus was doing. Tax collectors and sinners are coming to Jesus. Presumably they wanted to hear him teach, or be healed, or see a miracle. The Pharisees of course were grumbling with each other that Jesus was so comfortable and interactive with them. Did he not know they were sinners? You see, tax collectors were viewed as traitors to the Jewish people, aligning themselves to Rome to make money or get a higher position in society by exacting taxes on their own people. They were seen as a disgrace. And sinners is a broad term intended to capture a very wide group of people who were not following the law of Moses (nor the additional laws that had been heaped upon them by the Pharisees).

In response to this grumbling by the Pharisees, Jesus tells 3 parables. The parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the prodigal son (lost son). While the focus of this study is on the prodigal son, it is important to see that all 3 are related and address the same issue.

The parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin follow the same pattern. A man's sheep is lost, he searches for it, it is found, he rejoices with his friends. A woman's coin is lost, she searches for it, it is found, she rejoices with her friends.

The parable of the prodigal son follows a similar pattern, but like so many of Jesus' parables, it hits on a more personal level. This time the thing that is lost is not an animal or a coin, but a son. In this parable we get a real, intimate, and deeply personal view of God's love for his people, especially those that are lost. We learn that all heaven rejoices when a lost sinner is found. And we learn that if God himself rejoices with the finding of lost souls, we should too.

THE PARABLE TOLD

.The opening scene in verse 11 zooms into a man with two sons (similar opening to a man with 100 sheep, or a woman with 10 coins). The younger son, in total disrespect to his father asks for his inheritance early. He wants only what the father can offer him and wants nothing to do with the father himself. Astonishingly, the father grants his request and gives him

his share of the property he owns. The son quickly goes and sells the property for the cash and runs far away from home and blows his whole inheritance. Can you imagine? Through his newfound inheritance, everything that the world had to offer was immediately available to the younger son. And he went hard after it. It would be like winning the lottery and being able to do whatever you wanted. Unfortunately, history proves that most lottery winners go broke quickly after they win. And it was the same for this young man.

Famine strikes the land, the money is gone and the son has to get a job. Not a good one either, he hires himself out to a local and must take care of the pigs. It is worth noting that pigs were very unclean animals to a Jew, they would have read this as the lowest of positions, feeding the pigs of the gentiles. The text even says that he longed to eat the pigs food. Whether or not he did we don't know, but this is rock bottom for the son. All that he had, all that he thought he wanted, all that the world had to offer had come to nothing. He had nothing and no one.

Verse 17 says that he came to himself. He woke up. He remembered his father. When he had come to the end of his striving he remembered that there was a father who loved him and took care of him. He knows he is not worthy to be considered his father's son anymore but he is hoping that he can at least be a servant in his fathers house. He plans a genuine, heartfelt confession of his sin to his father and makes his way home.

The father sees the son from far off and runs to greet him (a very undignified thing for an old man to do). More than that, he hugs him and kisses him! Remember where the son just was, with the pigs, unclean, filthy. The son starts to recite his confession and request of servanthood but the father doesn't let him finish. The best robe, the family ring, the best steak thrown on the grill. Celebration ensues. For the son was lost and now is found! You can start to see the pattern now. The son is lost, the son is found, rejoicing ensues. Sounds like the lost sheep and the lost coin.

But the older brother is not happy. This son (notice he doesn't call him brother) squanders away his fathers wealth and walked away from the family. And yet he is greeted with all of this rejoicing and gifting. I can relate with the older brother. That's not fair. The older brother always obeyed his father and never got treatment like this. This injustice from the father demands an answer. And the father gives a simple one: "You are always with me, all that I have is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; was lost, and his found" (v31-32)

THE PARABLE EXPLAINED

The younger son represents the tax collectors and sinners that the Pharisees were grumbling about. The older son represents the Pharisees that were grumbling about Jesus' receiving them. And the father in the story is God. The lesson that Jesus teaches is the same as the other 2 parables. God rejoices at the lost being found, at the dead being made alive.

The Pharisees are being called out for their lack of rejoicing the sinners were coming to the Messiah.

The big question left on the table to answer is HOW? How can God accept sinners such as these? The older brother was right. The younger brother wanted nothing to do with his father, squandered his inheritance, defiled himself and disgraced his family. He did not deserve the welcome he got from his father. And the sinners and tax collectors were equally as guilty. They did not deserve to be counted among the family of God. And the truth is, we don't either. How can God reconcile sinners to himself?

The answer was and always will be Jesus. He is a better brother.

JESUS THE STORYTELLER

Jesus is not like the younger brother who takes his inheritance and squanders it. Instead, he shares it with us. Romans 8:29 says that Jesus (having raised from the dead) is the "firstborn among many brothers". Hebrews 2:11 says that Jesus is "not ashamed to call us brothers". And Romans 8:17 says that we are now "fellow heirs with Christ".

He is not like the older brother who sees his younger brother and wishes he would stay lost and dead. He doesn't look at his father and say, they don't deserve it. Instead, he does his father's will, even to the point of death on a cross (Phil. 2:8) and comes to get us, His wayward brothers. Ephesians 2:5-6 says that God "while we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...raised us up with him and seated us with him in the

heavenly places in Christ Jesus". And just like the parable of the lost sheep says, "I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance."

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What lesson is Jesus trying to teach the Pharisees in this passage? How do the 3 parables relate to one another to form a unified teaching from Jesus?
2. What other ways do you see the Gospel fleshed out in this parable?
3. Think through the Father's reaction to seeing his son return. What can this reaction teach us about God?
4. Who do you relate with in this story? Remember, we are all the younger brother at some point.
5. If you relate with the younger brother, what is keeping you from running back to the Father? What does this story show us about how God responds to true repentance?
6. Do you relate with the older brother? Who are you unwilling to welcome into the family (or back into the family) because they don't deserve it? How should this parable shift your perspective on how we view those who don't deserve God's grace?

06 THE TEN VIRGINS

MATTHEW 25:1-13

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

-Matthew 25:1

THE SETTING

The story of the ten virgins opens introducing the reader to the characters of the ten virgins. These ten virgins are awaiting the arrival of the bride groom. They've got their lamps ready for when he arrives, for when he does, it will be time to accompany him to the wedding feast.

In ancient Israel a wedding feast would be the talk of the village, a social gathering that wasn't to be missed. To be a part of the wedding signaled status to the community at large. There was importance ascribed to the attendee by the way of receiving the invitation. The event would be an all day affair, there would be a time of dancing early on in the day. After the dancing concluded the groom would leave his house and head to the bride's where upon his arrival they would depart her home and head for the groom's house for the climax of the day— the ceremony and the feast. The last part of the day would often occur during the evening hours where lamp light would be needed to make the final traverse.

In this context, it makes sense that the virgins in the parable would need to

have lamps and those lamps would need oil. There is an implicit directive here, to be ready, to be ready to escort the bride groom. But, of the group we see they are divided, one group is wise and the other is foolish. One group makes proper preparations, bringing enough oil for the journey, and one group neglects to make proper preparations failing to bring enough oil for the journey.

THE POINT OF THE PARABLE

The main message in scope for the parable of the ten virgins is to prepare for the bride grooms arrival. The five virgins in the story who represent wisdom have been vigilant to ensure that when the bride groom arrives, they will have enough oil for the journey.

The Christian walk is a similar journey. Followers of Christ wait on this side of eternity for His return. In the meantime we are to live wisely and part of living wisely means making preparations which means planning in advance. This isn't a grab what you need at the last minute before you head out the door, this is organized preparation which requires time.

Backcountry backpacking is a lot of fun when you have the right provisions. An experienced backpacker knows that the “right provisions” mean things like food, water, enough socks, first aid supplies, a flashlight, tent, etc. Beyond provisions the backpacker must also account for pack weight, after all, carrying a heavy backpack over 20-100 miles is not fun, it also means accounting for how much water you should keep on your pack and where you can filter water along the route. For the journey you also must route plan, which means having a map and compass or GPS to know the direction you are going. Without thoughtful planning it is easy to end up lost, placing one in the unfortunate position of having to radio in an unplanned emergency airlift (a helicopter rescue) —provided of course you planned well and brought a satellite communicator or are in reach of a cell tower.

JESUS THE STORY TELLER

For the virgins who have the oil, the wise virgins, the story concludes with the bride groom escorting them into the banquet hall. Outside the door the foolish virgins plead with the bride groom to let them into the court of his care. But, the bride groom through the closed door tells them, “I do not know you.”

The question then becomes, who is the one who is known by the bride groom? In this parable it is the five wise virgins. The five wise versions represent Christians, and as such, the five foolish virgins represent those who look like Christians but are not, they are wedding attendants but not true brides.

Preparation for the Christian means eagerly waiting in faith for the return of the bride groom, Jesus. It means walking by faith every day believing that we will ultimately see the last prophecy of Christ return fulfilled (Hebrews 9:28).

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do the ten virgins and their lamps symbolize in this parable? How do the actions of the wise virgins differ from those of the foolish virgins? What does the oil represent?
2. What does it mean to “watch” in the context of this parable? How can we apply this command in our daily lives? How does this call to watchfulness compare to other biblical teachings of Jesus?
3. What is the significance of the door being shut when the bridegroom arrives? How does the bridegroom's response to the foolish virgins (“I do not know you”) align with other teachings of Jesus on true discipleship and knowing Him?
4. How does the anticipation of Christ's return influence your daily decisions and actions? What practical habits or disciplines can help you live in a state of constant readiness for Christ's return?
5. How does the urgency of this parable motivate you to share the gospel with others?

07 THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

MATTHEW 25:14-30

For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. -Matthew 25:29

THE CONTEXT

When interpreting this parable, it is critical to remember the context in which it is set. Jesus has just given the Olivet Discourse in Chapter 24, predicting the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, which occurred in 70 AD. Jesus uses that event as a paradigm for His second coming (Matthew 24:44) and tells His disciples, "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes" (Matthew 24:46). Jesus has set the stage for His second coming, identifying Himself as the master and His disciples as the servants. As the parable of the virgins, which precedes this parable, informs us, His servants are to be prepared for their master's return.

ENTRUSTED TO STEWARD

What is a talent? When we think of a talent, we may think of a skill or ability. While that is certainly true, the original audience of Jesus' parable would not have immediately thought that way. In ancient times, a talent was a unit of money, specifically a weight of a precious metal such as silver or gold. The weight of a talent varied over time, but it was typically equivalent to seventy-five pounds of silver. The basic unit of money during that period was

the denarius, considered a fair day's wage for a laborer. One silver talent was equal to six thousand denarii. In other words, a talent was equivalent to six thousand days' wages, or twenty years' worth of wages. A talent was an extreme amount of wealth.

Jesus is communicating that He has entrusted each of His followers with an extreme amount of responsibility. If Jesus were teaching this parable today, perhaps He would have used millions of dollars as an example. Just as the master entrusted large sums of money to his servants (vv 14-15), so Jesus has entrusted His followers with vast resources to be invested for Him. This includes not merely monetary resources or our treasure but also the abundance of resources in the gospel. In addition to our treasure, we have time and gifts given to us by God Himself.

Notice, when the master leaves, he provides no instructions for his servants. They are free to use their own judgment to decide what to do with this large sum of money. The first two men were diligent and responsible. "He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents



more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more” (vv 16-17). The third man was different. He played it safe and hid his money, unlike the other two men (v 18). Keep in mind, there were banks during this time. But this man chose not to utilize a bank. By burying his money, he guaranteed that there would be no loss, but he also guaranteed there would be no gain!

EXPECTED TO INVEST

The master then unexpectedly returns to settle accounts “after a long time” (v 19). We aren’t told how much time had passed, but we are to assume a significant amount of time went by. All of the servants had ample time to invest what they were given. Now, the master shows up with some questions! The two men who invested their talents are praised, rewarded, and given more responsibility by the master (vv. 20-23). As great as that response was to these servants, even greater were the words, “Enter into the joy of your master” (vv 21, 23). It’s important to note, stewarding our time, talent, and treasure for Jesus is not begrudging. It is a means by which we actually experience unwavering joy because of our obedience to Him! Consider that for a moment.

The third servant was called into the master’s office. His reply revealed his heart. Mixing insults with excuses, the third servant’s response merely revealed his laziness and selfishness. But the root of his sin was his bitterness toward the master. The servant said, “I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed” (v 24). A hard man! The master

entrusted the servant with a vast amount of money. He didn’t truly know the master. His fear of the master paralyzed him into passivity.

The master then corrects the servant, condemns him, and casts him out. In condemning him, he takes what he had given him and gives it to his faithful servant (vv 26-30). It seems harsh, but it’s not! If we won’t use what God has given us for His kingdom, He will call on someone else! He won’t allow our sinful passivity to halt His mission to advance His kingdom.

JESUS THE STORYTELLER

There is much application from this parable! But in light of its context, we must consider the main idea that Jesus is communicating. In light of what Jesus has given us, we are to give what we have for Him. Think about it. He’s given us so much! He’s given us Himself. Jesus was the one cast into the darkness of hell; He experienced the weeping and the gnashing of teeth on the cross in our stead (v 30). For those who have fled to Him for refuge, He’s equipped us with His Spirit and has dispensed so many blessings upon us. How can we not take our lives and offer them to Him in worship, investing our resources for His purposes? The master is coming again, and he will ask for a return on what he has entrusted his with. May we be found faithful, because of how faithful the master has been to us!



GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How does this parable reveal to us the kind heart of the master? How does the context of this passage assist in your understanding of the parable?
2. How does this parable encourage you to steward your time, talent, and resources for the sake of the gospel? What may that look like?
3. Read vv24-25. What does this response reveal about the third servant's heart? What does it reveal about his knowledge of the master?
4. Discuss the connection between joy and obedience. What other passages of Scripture connect those two themes?
5. What causes us to revert to passivity and slothfulness with our resources? How does the gospel provide a cure to this problem that stems from our heart? Use other Scripture to support your answer.



PARABLES

JESUS THE STORYTELLER



*THE REFORMED EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY,
MATTHEW.* BY DANIEL M. DORIANI

THE ESV EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY, MATTHEW. BY
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