

Jesus' Parables

"The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom" (Matthew 13:11)

The parables that Jesus taught are deep truths. We tend to ignore them because we suppose them to be merely interesting illustrations of some propositional statement that comes before or after the parable. We'd better not ignore them! **"Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him"** (Matthew 13:12). The truths embedded in Jesus' parables are there for us to understand and to make real in our lives. Truth revealed demands a response appropriate to the truth; indifference to Truth results in judgment. So, let's go thru them, all of them, one by one, to be sure that we are thinking and living as we should be, as Jesus would have us live.

The Sower (better, the Parable of the Soils): A Kingdom citizen, one who follows Jesus, bears fruit in his life. If there's no fruit, for whatever reason, that person is not a Kingdom citizen.

The Tares: A judgment is coming. People will be evaluated to see if they're worthy of the Kingdom or not. Those who are unworthy will forfeit enjoying it.

The Mustard Seed and the Yeast: This interim era, prior to the Kingdom, will start small but will in time grow to encompass the earth. This interim era will bring civilization to the pagan world.

The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl: To be in the Kingdom is our most ultimate blessing. So whatever sacrifice we need to make, no matter what it costs us, to be sure we participate in the Kingdom is worth it.

The Net: Again, a judgment precedes the Kingdom. We must be absolutely certain we're worthy of participation.

The Owner of the House and His Storeroom: This interim age will have a mixed character, embodying aspects of the Old Testament era with features of the coming Kingdom.

The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin: A humble person who exercises faith in Jesus is of insuperable delight to God.

The Workers in the Vineyard: We must not be envious of others because God does not distribute His generosity toward us equally. God upholds justice while expressing His love in grace.

The Two Sons: Love is as love does. Those who repent and pursue life believing in Jesus, matter greatly to God. Those who make proud, self-righteous claims but whose lives don't express repentance and faith, matter not at all.

The Tenants: God has purposes for humanity, for His creation, and we're responsible to bear the fruit He expects. Being irresponsible brings condemnation. Now, those purposes center on Jesus; rejecting Jesus results in condemnation.

The Wedding Banquet: God desires His coming Kingdom to be densely populated, because it's a time for blessing and for the Son to be exalted. But many people don't want it, and some are unprepared for it, so face the indignation of God.

The Ten Virgins: Only those who are prepared for the Kingdom will participate in it. Others, though they may desire to be in it, if they're unprepared for it, will be excluded.

The Talents: The Christian life is a stewardship, and if we fail to bear fruit for God with whatever God has entrusted to us, His indignation will be severe.

The Good Samaritan: We have responsibilities for each other, and they may demand sacrifice on our part, even suffering loss. Individualism is morally deeply offensive.

The Rich Fool: We're responsible to honor God by serving Him in every way we can—especially with our assets and resources—if not by sharing the Gospel with others, motivated (at minimum) by gratitude. Selfishness deeply offends God. We need to beware being enticed by material things, like wealth for example, or the easy, self-satisfying life.

The Lost Son: God is exceedingly rich toward us, in grace. Our responsibility is to be humble, repentant, and receive His forgiveness and mercy. Self-righteousness and contempt for others are odious.

The Shrewd Manager: We're stewards for God, so we have responsibilities and must therefore be faithful. We need to pursue life with the day of accountability always in view.

The Rich Man and Lazarus: We're all human, even those who are poor, suffering, marginalized, and/or oppressed. So we have obligations to care for and support each other. A day of judgment awaits us if we neglect this duty, as Scripture makes clear.

The Persistent Widow: Justice, that is, the Messianic Kingdom, indeed will come. Our duty is to keep looking for it. It's our great hope.

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: We all are dependent on God's mercy. Therefore, humility before God is our only appropriate stance. Proud self-righteousness is abhorrent—and ineffective.

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What do we conclude from this study? A parable is not an interesting story that has a spiritual or moral lesson. Rather, it's a deep truth to live by, communicated compellingly by means of a story. Let's not miss the importance *and necessity* of Jesus' parables.

Redemption is not the whole of Christianity. We evangelicals stress belief in the Gospel for forgiveness of sins and eternal life so obsessively that we miss the clear message of Scripture, which is that we're saved *so that* we follow Jesus by fulfilling the responsibilities associated with Kingdom citizenry. Indifference to Jesus' teachings, indeed to His authority over us, brings discipline if not judgment—justification by faith notwithstanding. We dare not be smug about how we live.

The Synoptic Gospels announce the Kingdom and teach preparedness for it. The climax of all history is the Messianic Kingdom. The great privilege that the Gospel extends to all in this interim age is participation in the Kingdom.

Wisdom is meditating on these parables' truths so that they shape our minds so that we know to continually apply them to how we live. We're here to express Truth, to live it out in time and space. The purpose of salvation in this interim age, after all, is to be prepared for the coming Kingdom and to call others to salvation to do the same. Doing this continues Jesus' ministry at His First Advent and anticipates the Second, His return in glory. But it will take all the resolve and self-discipline that the eternal Son had in His incarnation—and He's more than willing to so empower us.

If Jesus were here speaking to us, I imagine He'd say something like, "You belong to Me. You have nothing to fear. I've told you what you're to do. Get to work!"