The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided

Series 1-42

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries

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The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided
A 42-Lesson VerseQuest Bible Study Series

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the **King James Bible**.

This book is written from a King James Bible-believing, rightly divided perspective for Bible study, teaching, preaching, and personal edification. It is intended to help readers understand the parables of the Lord Jesus Christ in their proper biblical, doctrinal, dispensational, and prophetic context.

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Introduction to The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided

The parables of Jesus Christ are some of the most quoted, loved, misunderstood, misapplied, and doctrinally abused passages in the entire Bible. Many people treat them as if they are simple moral stories designed to make spiritual truth easy for everybody, but that is not what the Lord Himself said about them. When the disciples asked Him, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" the answer was not, "Because parables make everything plain to everybody." The answer was that it was given unto the disciples to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to others it was not given. That means parables are not merely sermon illustrations. They are instruments of revelation and concealment. They reveal truth to those who have ears to hear, and they hide truth from those who have already rejected the light God gave them. If a man starts with the modern idea that every parable is just a sweet little story about kindness, humility, and heaven, he has already missed the first key the Lord gave. Parables must be handled with fear, context, and right division, or they will become the very thing God used them to avoid: truth placed in the hands of men who do not know what to do with it.

This series, The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided, was written to take those parables out of the religious blender and put them back where God placed them. The Lord Jesus Christ did not speak in a doctrinal vacuum. He spoke to Israel under the law. He came as Israel's Messiah, the Son of David, the King of the Jews, presenting the kingdom and exposing the nation's religious leadership. He preached the kingdom of heaven as being at hand. He dealt with Pharisees, scribes, lawyers, chief priests, elders, publicans, sinners, disciples, and multitudes, and He did not say the same thing to every group for the same reason. Some parables are aimed at religious hypocrites. Some are aimed at disciples. Some expose Israel's rulers. Some reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Some warn of future judgment. Some reach into the Tribulation and Second Advent. Some teach prayer, mercy, humility, stewardship, fruitfulness, and readiness. Some apply devotionally to believers today without being direct doctrinal statements about the Body of Christ. If a man ignores the speaker, audience, setting, and doctrinal timing, he will twist the parables even while claiming to honor them.

That is why this series is different from a general study on the parables. A general study may explain what the stories mean at a surface level, but this series goes further. It asks the questions that must be asked if the Bible is going to be handled honestly. Is this parable spoken to Israel, to disciples, to Pharisees, or to the multitude? Is it dealing with the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the mystery form of the kingdom, the visible Messianic kingdom, individual repentance, national judgment, or servant accountability? Is it before the cross or after the cross? Is the doctrine in view the gospel of the kingdom,

the judgment of the nations, the coming of the Son of man, or the Church Age gospel of grace later revealed in fullness through Paul? Does the warning apply directly to the Tribulation setting, or is there a broader spiritual principle that can be applied today? These questions are not technical games. They are the difference between sound doctrine and religious confusion. A passage can be profitable for us without being doctrinally addressed to us in the same way. That distinction saves a man from turning every parable into Church Age salvation doctrine.

The central problem this series confronts is the common habit of making every parable about the Church, every parable about individual salvation, and every warning a threat against eternal security. That is how men take the Ten Virgins and terrify saved people into thinking they can run out of the Holy Spirit. That is how they take the Sheep and the Goats and preach salvation by feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. That is how they take the Talents and make justification depend on spiritual investment performance. That is how they take the Wicked Husbandmen and erase Israel's rulers from a parable that plainly exposes them. That is how they take the Marriage of the King's Son and turn the wedding garment into a shallow cliché while ignoring Israel's rejection, the murdered servants, the burned city, and the King's inspection. That is how they take the Fig Tree Lesson and either set dates like fools or deny that prophecy has visible markers at all. The problem is not the parables. The problem is men who refuse to divide the word of truth.

This series begins where the Lord begins, with the reason Jesus spoke in parables, and then moves through the major parables with the doctrinal lanes kept clear. The Sower and the Seed shows the word going forth and the condition of the hearer. The Wheat and the Tares shows that the field is the world, not the local church, and that the harvest is the end of the world. The Mustard Seed and the Leaven expose abnormal outward growth and inward corruption rather than a rosy picture of Christendom conquering the earth by gradual religious improvement. The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl distinguish Israel and the Church without making sinners purchase salvation. The Net, the Householder, the Wise and Foolish Builders, the New Cloth, the New Wine, the Candle, and the Growing Seed all show the need to handle kingdom truth with care. These early parables lay the foundation: the kingdom is not a vague word for whatever religious idea a man wants to promote. It has context, stages, mysteries, corruption, judgment, and fulfillment.

The middle of the series deals with parables that expose the heart: the Two Debtors, the Good Samaritan, the Friend at Midnight, the Rich Fool, the Barren Fig Tree, the Lowest Room, the Great Supper, the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son, the Unjust Steward, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Unprofitable Servants, the Persistent Widow, the Pharisee and the Publican, the Labourers in the Vineyard, and the Two Sons. These

parables show mercy, prayer, covetousness, fruitlessness, humility, excuses, repentance, restoration, stewardship, hell, service, persistence, self-righteousness, resentment, and obedience. Yet even here, the series refuses to flatten everything into one generic moral lesson. The Good Samaritan is not salvation by social work. The Rich Fool is not a condemnation of business or provision. The Barren Fig Tree is not a Church Age believer losing salvation. The Rich Man and Lazarus is not soft imagery that can be explained away by modern preachers embarrassed by hell. The Pharisee and the Publican does not replace the later full revelation of justification in Christ's finished work, but it does show God receiving the guilty man who seeks mercy while rejecting the religious performer who trusts himself.

The later section of the series moves heavily into prophetic and kingdom material: the Wicked Husbandmen, the Marriage of the King's Son, the Fig Tree Lesson, the Faithful and Evil Servants, the Ten Virgins, the Talents, the Sheep and the Goats, the Pounds, and the Watchful Porter. These passages are often where the greatest doctrinal damage is done. Men take Matthew 24 and 25 and aim every warning directly at the Body of Christ as if Israel, the Tribulation, the Son of man, the Second Advent, and the judgment of the nations do not exist. This series refuses that confusion. The Rapture of the Church and the Second Advent of Christ are not the same event. The judgment seat of Christ is not the judgment of the nations. The Great White Throne is not Matthew 25. The Tribulation remnant is not the Body of Christ. Israel's prophetic program is not erased because Gentiles got included in the mercy of God. Right division allows every judgment to stand in its own place, every promise to reach its proper people, and every warning to strike its intended target.

This series also emphasizes the distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God without creating artificial divisions. The two can overlap, and sometimes parallel passages show similar truths under different wording. But Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" often carries a strong Jewish, Messianic, earthly, governmental, and prophetic emphasis, while "kingdom of God" can emphasize God's broader spiritual rule, righteousness, power, and entrance by new birth. If a man cannot see both overlap and distinction, he will either divide what God connected or blend what God distinguished. The parables demand more care than that. A right division approach does not make the Bible smaller. It makes it clearer. It does not rob the parables of spiritual application. It keeps that application from becoming doctrinal theft.

The goal of this series is not to make the parables cold, academic, or distant. Right division does the opposite. It makes them sharper. When the Wheat and Tares is rightly divided, it becomes stronger, not weaker. When the Ten Virgins is placed in its kingdom setting, it becomes clearer, not less serious. When the Sheep and Goats is recognized as the

judgment of the nations, it becomes more prophetic, not less practical. When the Prodigal Son is read as part of Luke 15's rebuke of Pharisees murmuring over mercy, the elder brother suddenly becomes more dangerous than most sermons admit. When the Wicked Husbandmen is allowed to indict Israel's rulers, the parable stops being a vague leadership lesson and becomes a direct prophecy of the rejection of the Son. Right division does not blunt the sword. It removes the rust men put on it.

The parables of Jesus rightly divided magnify Christ. They show Him as the Sower, the Shepherd, the Son, the Bridegroom, the King, the Master, the Judge, the rejected Nobleman, and the returning Lord. They show Him receiving sinners, exposing hypocrites, warning servants, condemning self-righteousness, revealing the mysteries of the kingdom, and claiming what belongs to Him. They show that grace is real, judgment is real, hell is real, the kingdom is real, Israel's accountability is real, the Church's security is real, and the Lord's return is real. They protect the gospel of grace from being corrupted by works, while also protecting the believer from using grace as an excuse for laziness, pride, worldliness, or barren service. They keep a man from becoming either a legalist who weaponizes every warning or a careless fool who ignores every warning.

This introduction therefore serves as the doorway into the whole study. The reader must enter with a Bible-believing mind, not a denominational agenda. Let the Lord define His terms. Let Matthew be Matthew. Let Luke be Luke. Let Israel be Israel. Let the Church be the Church. Let the kingdom of heaven be what the Holy Ghost makes it in Matthew. Let Paul's gospel of grace stand where the risen Christ placed it. Let the prophetic warnings remain prophetic. Let the devotional applications remain clean. If a man does that, the parables stop being confusing fragments and become a structured revelation of the King's mind. If he refuses, he will keep turning royal doctrine into religious oatmeal.

The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided is therefore not merely a series about stories. It is a series about how to read the Bible without stealing from one passage to pay for another. It is about honoring the words of Christ without using them to contradict the later revelation of Christ. It is about preserving the kingdom without corrupting grace. It is about receiving application without destroying interpretation. It is about seeing why Jesus spoke in parables, what He revealed, what He concealed, whom He rebuked, whom He comforted, and what He was preparing His disciples to understand. The parables are not children's tales. They are kingdom mysteries, prophetic warnings, spiritual rebukes, and doctrinal treasures spoken by the King. The only safe way to handle them is with the Book open, the divisions clear, and the heart ready to bow before the words of God.

1 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - Why Jesus Spake in Parables

Introduction

When men talk about the parables of Jesus Christ, they usually talk as though the Lord was simply telling little stories to help simple people understand deep truth. That sounds pious, sentimental, and harmless, but it is not what the Bible says. The Bible never presents the parables as mere religious illustrations for children's church, devotional calendars, and moral lectures about kindness. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself gave the reason He spake in parables, and His answer is one of the most important keys in the New Testament. In Matthew 13:10 the disciples asked Him, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" That question ought to settle the issue before men run off to the seminary library and manufacture their own answer. Christ did not say, "Because parables make truth easier for everybody." He said in Matthew 13:11, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." There is the first great shock to the modern religious mind. Parables were not only instruments of revelation; they were also instruments of concealment. They opened truth to the believing disciple and shut truth from the hardened rejecter. They were not God's way of watering down doctrine; they were God's way of separating those who had ears to hear from those who had already rejected the light they had been given.

That means the parables cannot be handled honestly without paying close attention to where they occur, to whom they are spoken, what kingdom is in view, and what stage of revelation is unfolding. The Lord Jesus Christ was not preaching in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as though He had already died, been buried, risen again, ascended to heaven, revealed the mystery of the Body of Christ to Paul, and finished the written New Testament. He was a Jew under the law, ministering to Israel, presenting Himself as the promised King, fulfilling prophecy, exposing the religious rulers, and announcing truths connected with the kingdom. That does not mean the parables have nothing for us. They have plenty for us. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable," according to 2 Timothy 3:16. But profitable does not mean every verse is doctrinally addressed to the Church in the same way. A man who cannot tell the difference between Israel and the Church, the kingdom of heaven and the Body of Christ, the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God, is going to make a mess of the parables before he gets through the first chapter. He will use Matthew 25 to scare saved people into thinking they can lose salvation. He will use the Sermon on the Mount to put Christians back under a kingdom constitution before the King is on David's throne. He will use the parable of the sheep and goats to preach salvation by feeding and clothing people. Then he will call that "following Jesus" while ignoring the doctrinal revelation Christ gave through Paul to the Church.

This series begins where every honest study of the parables must begin: with the Lord's own explanation of why He spake in parables. Before a man can interpret the Sower, the Wheat and Tares, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl, the Net, the Ten Virgins, the Talents, or the Sheep and Goats, he must understand that Jesus Christ was dealing with a specific people in a specific prophetic setting. Israel had the covenants, the promises, the prophets, the temple, the priesthood, and the Scriptures. Their King stood in front of them. Their Messiah walked their roads, healed their sick, cast out devils, cleansed lepers, raised the dead, and preached the kingdom of heaven as being at hand. Yet the rulers accused Him, resisted Him, blasphemed the Spirit of God working through Him, and began plotting His destruction. After that rejection, the parables become more prominent, especially in Matthew 13. That chapter marks a tremendous turning point. The King begins revealing "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," truths hidden from the foundation of the world, because the nation's leadership had rejected the plain light. The parables are therefore not religious bedtime stories. They are doctrinal land mines for careless interpreters and treasures for those who believe the words of God exactly as they stand.

1. The Disciples Asked the Right Question

The disciples asked, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" That is the question modern religion does not ask carefully enough. Men assume they already know the answer because they have heard preachers repeat the same soft explanation for years. They say parables are "earthly stories with heavenly meanings," and while that may be true in a very general way, it is not enough. That definition leaves out the judicial element. It leaves out Israel's rejection. It leaves out the fact that some were allowed to understand and others were not. The disciples knew something had shifted. Christ had spoken plainly before. He had preached, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He had laid out kingdom righteousness in Matthew 5–7. He had performed miracles that authenticated Him as Messiah. But by Matthew 13, He is sitting in a ship, speaking to the multitude on the shore in parables. The disciples sense that something more is happening than a change in sermon style. They do not ask, "Lord, what is a parable?" They ask, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" That question recognizes purpose.

The Lord's answer is the key: "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." That one statement destroys the fairy tale that parables were merely designed to simplify truth for everyone. Christ says there are two groups standing in front of Him. There is a "you," and there is a "them." To the disciples it is given to know. To the unbelieving multitude, it is not given. That is not because God is cruel or arbitrary. It is because light rejected becomes light removed. When men reject plain

truth, God is under no obligation to give them more truth in a form they can exploit, mock, or trample. The Pharisees and religious rulers had already seen enough to know who He was. They had seen devils cast out, diseases healed, Scriptures fulfilled, and divine authority displayed. Instead of bowing, they attributed the work of the Spirit to Beelzebub. That is why Matthew 12 comes before Matthew 13. The order matters. The blasphemous rejection in Matthew 12 prepares the way for the parabolic concealment in Matthew 13.

This is where right division begins. You cannot isolate Matthew 13 from Matthew 12 and then build a sweet little lesson about Jesus using farm stories because people liked agriculture. That is how the Bible gets ruined by shallow handling. The parables in Matthew 13 come after the leaders of Israel have hardened themselves against the King. The King now reveals mysteries to His disciples while veiling them from the hardened crowd. He does not do this because the truth is weak. He does it because the truth is holy. Men today think God is obligated to make everything plain to every rebel with a bad attitude. He is not. A man who wants light must respond to the light he has. Proverbs says, “Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer.” Isaiah says men can hear and not understand, see and not perceive. Christ quotes that very principle in Matthew 13. There is a point where rejected revelation becomes judicial blindness. That is the first reason Jesus spake in parables.

2. Parables Reveal Truth to Believing Ears

The parables reveal truth, but they reveal it to the right kind of hearer. The Lord repeatedly says, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” That phrase is not empty decoration. It means there is such a thing as a man having physical ears and still being deaf to God. The ear that hears is not just the ear attached to the side of the head; it is the heart that receives the words of God. When the disciples heard the parables, they did not always understand them immediately. That is important. They were not geniuses standing around with halos, instantly decoding every mystery. But they did something the unbelieving multitude did not do: they came to Christ and asked. They stayed near the Interpreter. They wanted the meaning from the One who gave the parable. That is a tremendous lesson in Bible interpretation. The right way to understand a parable is not to run first to tradition, philosophy, denominational notes, or some allegorical fantasy. The right way is to let the Lord interpret His own words and let Scripture define Scripture.

The parable of the Sower proves this. Christ gives the parable, and then He gives the interpretation. The seed is the word. The fowls are connected with the wicked one. The stony ground hearer receives with joy but has no root. The thorny ground hearer is choked by cares, riches, and lusts. The good ground bears fruit. Once the Lord defines those things, a man has no right to redefine them because his denomination needs the passage

to say something else. If the Lord tells you what the field is in the Wheat and Tares, then believe Him. He says, “The field is the world.” He does not say the field is the local church. He does not say the field is the Baptist denomination. He does not say the field is the invisible Body of Christ. He says the field is the world. That means half the preaching on that parable collapses because men will not let Christ interpret His own story. They would rather use a parable as a wax nose and bend it toward whatever system they already believe.

The believing ear is not merely impressed with the beauty of the parable; it submits to the words of the parable. There is a difference between admiring Jesus and believing Jesus. Plenty of people admire Jesus as a teacher, storyteller, moral reformer, religious genius, or revolutionary. That is not faith. Faith receives His words. Faith lets His words correct your theology. Faith does not demand that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John sound exactly like Romans through Philemon. Faith understands that the same Lord who spoke to Israel in the Gospels later revealed Church Age doctrine through Paul. Faith does not panic when it sees kingdom warnings, tribulation passages, Jewish settings, or physical promises. It rightly divides them. The parables reveal truth to those who stay near the Lord, believe the words, compare Scripture with Scripture, and do not try to force every passage into a favorite doctrinal slogan.

3. Parables Conceal Truth from Hardened Hearts

The other side of the matter is just as important: parables conceal truth from hardened hearts. That offends modern religion because modern religion has invented a god who never hides anything, never blinds anyone, never judges unbelief, and never withholds light. But the God of the Bible does all of those things when men reject truth. Matthew 13:13 says, “Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.” Notice the order. They are not blind because Christ is unfair. They are blind because they have eyes and refuse to see. They are deaf because they have ears and refuse to hear. The parables become a judgment on their prior rejection. God is not playing games. He is dealing with a nation that has had centuries of prophetic witness and now has the Messiah standing before them.

Christ connects this directly to Isaiah 6. “By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.” Isaiah was sent to a hardhearted people, and his preaching would confirm their blindness because they had already rejected God. Jesus applies that to His generation. That is a terrifying thing. The religious leaders in Christ’s day were not atheists. They believed in God, Moses, the temple, sacrifices, fasting, tithing, public prayer, and outward separation. Yet when God manifest in the flesh stood before them, they could not hear Him. Their religion had not made them

tender. It had made them hard. Their knowledge had not made them humble. It had made them proud. Their tradition had not led them to Christ. It had become a wall against Christ. So the Lord speaks in parables, and the very words that feed the disciples pass over the heads of the hardened religious crowd.

This explains why two people can read the same Bible and one sees glory while the other sees confusion. The problem is not with the Book. The problem is with the hearer. One man opens the Bible to be corrected; another opens it to collect ammunition for his system. One man wants light; another wants confirmation. One man trembles at the word; another critiques it. The parables expose that difference. They are simple enough for a believer to receive and deep enough to drown a proud scholar. A child can see the father receiving the prodigal son, while a theologian can bury the whole thing under covenantal fog until no one knows who is who. A humble Bible reader can see that the Wheat and Tares ends with angels and fire at the end of the world, while a church politician can twist it into a sermon on tolerating false doctrine in the assembly. That is what happens when a man's heart is wrong. The parable becomes a veil instead of a window.

4. The Parables Are Rooted in Israel's Rejection of the King

A major reason people misinterpret the parables is that they forget Jesus is dealing with Israel. The Gospels are not floating in the air as generic spiritual literature. They are historical, prophetic, dispensational, and Jewish in setting. Matthew especially presents Jesus Christ as the King. His genealogy is royal. His birth is connected with fulfilled prophecy. Wise men come asking, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" John the Baptist preaches, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus preaches the same message. The twelve are sent to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." They are specifically told not to go into the way of the Gentiles. That does not mean Gentiles are worthless. It means the order of God's program matters. The King is presented to the covenant nation first.

By Matthew 12, the rejection has become intense and official. The miracles of Christ are undeniable, but the Pharisees attribute His power to the devil. That is not ignorance; that is blasphemous resistance to light. Then in Matthew 13, He begins revealing mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. This is not an accident. The parables are connected with the postponement and mystery form of the kingdom after the King is rejected. Israel's rulers do not want the King, so the kingdom does not come in its visible, Davidic, earthly glory at that time. Instead, mysteries are revealed concerning what will happen during the period of the King's rejection and absence. That is why the parables of Matthew 13 include sowing, counterfeiting, abnormal growth, hidden corruption, treasure, a pearl, and final separation.

They are not random inspirational stories. They explain the course of things while the King is rejected.

This also guards the reader from a thousand doctrinal errors. If a man ignores Israel's place in the Gospels, he will think the Church has replaced Israel, the kingdom is only spiritual, the promises to David are symbolic, and every warning in Matthew must be aimed directly at a born-again member of Christ's Body. That is how saved people get robbed of assurance and Israel gets robbed of her promises. God did not lie to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, or the prophets. The physical kingdom promised to Israel is real. Christ will sit on David's throne. The apostles will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Jerusalem will be the center of government. The nations will be judged. The King will reign. If you make all of that "the Church," you have not interpreted the Bible; you have stolen somebody else's mail and forged your name on it. The parables must be read with Israel's rejection of the King in view.

5. The Kingdom of Heaven Must Be Distinguished from the Church

One of the greatest sources of confusion in the parables is the failure to distinguish the kingdom of heaven from the Church, the Body of Christ. The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is especially prominent in Matthew, and Matthew is the Gospel that presents Christ as King in relation to Israel. The kingdom of heaven has to do with the rule of heaven over the earth, especially in connection with the promised Messianic kingdom. It can include a mystery form during the King's absence, but it should never be flattened into a synonym for the Church. The Church, the Body of Christ, is a mystery revealed especially through Paul after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. It is made up of saved Jews and Gentiles baptized by one Spirit into one Body. That is not the same thing as the kingdom offered to Israel in Matthew.

When Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto," the reader had better slow down. He is not automatically saying, "The Church is likened unto." Sometimes He is describing the course of the kingdom in mystery form. Sometimes He is describing conditions connected with the King's absence and return. Sometimes He is exposing the mixture that develops in the outward profession connected with His name. Sometimes He is warning about judgment at the end of the age. If you make the kingdom of heaven the Church in every case, the parables become doctrinal chaos. The Ten Virgins become Christians running out of the Holy Spirit and missing salvation. The Talents become eternal life earned by productivity. The Sheep and Goats become salvation by social service. The Wheat and Tares become church membership policy. That is not Bible interpretation. That is theological vandalism.

The Church is not a parenthesis of insignificance, but it is also not Israel. It has its own calling, doctrine, hope, position, and revelation. The believer in the Body of Christ is seated in heavenly places in Christ. He is saved by grace through faith, sealed with the Holy Spirit, complete in Christ, justified freely by His grace, and waiting for the blessed hope. That doctrine is not overturned by mishandling a kingdom parable. Right division does not weaken the words of Jesus; it protects them from abuse. It lets Matthew say what Matthew says, Romans say what Romans says, and Revelation say what Revelation says. It keeps the King's words to Israel from being used as a club against the Church's standing in Christ. It also keeps Paul's gospel from being read backward into every kingdom passage as though no doctrinal development occurs in the New Testament.

6. The Kingdom of God Must Also Be Handled Carefully

The kingdom of God is another phrase that must be handled carefully. Sometimes the kingdom of God emphasizes the spiritual rule of God, entered by the new birth, connected with righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." That spiritual aspect is real. But careless men then take that truth and use it to erase the physical, earthly, prophetic kingdom promised to Israel. That is the ditch on the other side. The Bible does not force us to choose between God's spiritual rule and His future earthly reign. Both are true when placed where God puts them.

The parables often require the reader to know which aspect of kingdom truth is being emphasized. When Jesus speaks to Israel about the kingdom being at hand, He is not merely saying, "Have a warm spiritual feeling in your heart." The King is literally present. The promised Son of David is there. The miracles are signs of the kingdom. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. Those are not random acts of kindness detached from prophecy. They testify that the King and His kingdom credentials are present. But when the King is rejected, mysteries are revealed and the kingdom does not appear immediately in visible glory. That is why the disciples in Acts 1 can still ask, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Christ does not rebuke them for believing in a restored kingdom to Israel. He tells them the times and seasons are in the Father's power.

The confusion comes when men spiritualize what should be taken literally and literalize what should be handled in its proper doctrinal setting. Some men make everything inward and mystical until there is no throne, no Israel, no land, no restored kingdom, no Davidic reign, and no prophetic fulfillment. Others make every warning and every kingdom condition land directly on the Church Age believer's eternal salvation. Both errors come

from refusing to rightly divide. The kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven are related, but they are not always used with the same emphasis in every passage. A Bible believer must watch the words, the context, the audience, and the doctrinal setting. That is not complicated unless a man has been trained not to believe what he reads.

7. The Parables Demand Right Division, Not Religious Guesswork

The parables demand right division because they sit at the crossroads of prophecy, Israel, discipleship, kingdom truth, judgment, and future revelation. They are not safe in the hands of a careless interpreter. A careless interpreter can take the Good Samaritan and preach salvation by charity. He can take the Prodigal Son and preach that everyone is already God's child in the saving sense. He can take the Unjust Steward and justify crooked business. He can take the Ten Virgins and teach that the Holy Spirit leaks out of Christians. He can take the Sheep and Goats and preach that the nations enter eternal life by humanitarian aid. He can take the Leaven and preach that sin represents the gospel improving the world. Once a man stops comparing Scripture with Scripture, there is no end to the nonsense he can pull out of a parable.

Right division asks the necessary questions. Who is speaking? To whom is He speaking? What has just happened? What covenant people are in view? What kingdom is being offered, rejected, hidden, postponed, manifested, or judged? Is the passage before or after the cross? Is the mystery of the Body of Christ revealed yet? Is the context Israel, the disciples, the Pharisees, the multitude, the Tribulation, the Second Advent, or the present Church Age? What words does the Lord define in the passage? What Old Testament background is being used? What later revelation clarifies the doctrine without erasing the original setting? These questions do not weaken devotion. They strengthen it. A man gets more practical truth from the Bible when he first gets the doctrine straight. Bad doctrine eventually produces bad application.

This is why the parables are so powerful when rightly divided. They show the wisdom of Christ in exposing hearts. They reveal the course of the kingdom in mystery form. They show Israel's leaders condemned by their own response. They warn about false profession, fruitlessness, pride, covetousness, self-righteousness, and rejection of the King. They teach mercy, prayer, stewardship, watchfulness, humility, and accountability. They reveal Christ as the true Sower, Shepherd, Seeker, Son, King, Bridegroom, Judge, and Lord. But they do all of that properly only when they are kept in their biblical order. A parable forced into the wrong dispensation becomes a weapon in the hands of confusion. A parable rightly divided becomes a clean blade that cuts exactly where God intended.

Conclusion

The first lesson in studying the parables is not to assume the parables are simple just because the stories are familiar. Familiarity is one of the great enemies of Bible study. A man hears about the Sower, the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Ten Virgins, and the Sheep and Goats so many times that he assumes he understands them before he has read the context. That is dangerous. The Lord Jesus Christ did not speak parables as religious ornaments. He spoke them at a crucial point in His ministry, especially as Israel's rejection hardened and mysteries connected with the kingdom began to be revealed. The parables were not merely windows; they were also veils. They opened truth to disciples and hid truth from rebels. They were acts of mercy to those who wanted light and acts of judgment toward those who had already despised it.

That means the parables must be handled with reverence, precision, and doctrinal honesty. Israel must be allowed to remain Israel. The Church must be allowed to remain the Church. The kingdom of heaven must not be carelessly collapsed into the Body of Christ. The kingdom of God must not be used to erase the literal promises of a coming earthly kingdom. The gospel of the kingdom must not be confused with the gospel of the grace of God. The Sermon on the Mount must not be used to overthrow justification by faith. Matthew 24 and 25 must not be used to rob the believer of the blessed hope. The parables must be read in the light God gives, not the fog men prefer. A Bible believer does not need to be afraid of the parables. He needs to stop letting religious tradition interpret them for him.

This series will therefore approach the parables as the words of the King, spoken in their setting, with their doctrine preserved and their applications drawn carefully. Some will expose Israel's rulers. Some will reveal kingdom mysteries. Some will warn about judgment at the end of the age. Some will rebuke hypocrisy, pride, covetousness, and dead religion. Some will show mercy toward sinners and the joy of recovery. Some will instruct servants during the King's absence. But through all of them, the guiding principle will remain the same: let the Bible say what it says, where it says it, to whom it says it, before applying it where it may profit. That is how the parables stop being religious oatmeal and become what God intended them to be: sharp, searching, prophetic, doctrinal, and devotional truth from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Sower and the Seed

Introduction

The parable of the Sower and the Seed is one of the most important parables in the Bible because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself gives the interpretation. That ought to make every Bible student slow down. When the Author of the Book interprets His own words, the safest thing a man can do is believe Him and leave his theological tools in the garage until he has first listened to what the Lord said. The parable appears in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8, and in all three places it sits in a context where the Lord is dealing with hearing, receiving, understanding, and responding to the word. This is not a parable about a farmer being inefficient with seed. This is not a sentimental country sermon about agriculture. This is the Lord Jesus Christ laying open the hearts of men under the searching power of the word of God. The sower goes forth to sow. The seed goes out. The issue is not the defect of the seed. The issue is the condition of the ground. That is the first great truth that needs to be nailed down with a railroad spike. The word of God is not weak, dead, outdated, uncertain, or insufficient. The problem is never the seed. The problem is the hearer.

That point alone would correct a mountain of modern religious foolishness. Men act like the word must be dressed up, softened down, modernized, retranslated, dramatized, marketed, and padded with entertainment before it can do anything. But in the parable, the seed is the word, and the word has life in itself. The problem is not that the seed needs a rock band, a fog machine, a better translation, a motivational speech, a political angle, or a psychological support group. The problem is that some hearts are hard, some are shallow, some are crowded, and some are prepared to receive what God says. The Lord is showing that the same word can be preached to different hearers with entirely different results, not because the word changes, but because the hearers differ. One hears and the wicked one catches it away. Another hears and rejoices for a while but has no root. Another hears and allows the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches to choke the word. Another hears, understands, keeps it, and brings forth fruit. The word reveals the ground. Preaching does not merely inform men; it exposes them.

The rightly divided key is also crucial. This parable is spoken in the setting of the kingdom ministry of Jesus Christ to Israel, especially in Matthew 13 where the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are being revealed after national rejection hardens. The “word of the kingdom” is specifically mentioned in Matthew’s account. That means a man has no right to grab the parable, rip it out of its setting, and use it to teach that a born-again Church Age believer loses eternal life every time he fails to produce a crop large enough to satisfy a holiness preacher. The parable is about hearing and receiving the word, especially the word connected with the kingdom, and it certainly contains principles that apply in every age. But application is not the same thing as doctrinal theft. In the Church Age, the believer is saved by grace through faith in the finished gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Fruit matters. Growth matters. Endurance matters. Obedience matters. But fruit-

bearing is not the root of justification; it is the result of life and the evidence of the word working in the heart. If a man confuses the root and the fruit, he will turn this parable into a works-based scarecrow and beat sheep with a passage Christ gave to expose hearers.

1. The Sower Goes Forth to Sow

The parable begins with movement: “Behold, a sower went forth to sow.” That opening is simple, but it is not shallow. The sower goes forth. He does not sit in the barn admiring the seed. He does not build a shrine to the seed bag and call that ministry. He does not hold a conference on theoretical agriculture while the fields remain untouched. He goes forth and sows. In the immediate setting, the Lord Himself is the great Sower, preaching the word of the kingdom to Israel. He has gone forth among the people, preaching, teaching, healing, casting out devils, and calling men to repent because the kingdom of heaven is at hand. In a broader application, anyone who gives out the word is sowing seed. A preacher sows. A teacher sows. A soul winner sows. A parent sowing Scripture into the heart of a child is sowing. A man posting truth publicly is sowing. But the central point is that the word must be cast out. Seed kept in the bag feeds nobody and produces nothing.

That is a rebuke to lazy religion. There are people who claim to love the Bible but never sow it. They admire sound doctrine, argue about sound doctrine, collect sound doctrine, and use sound doctrine as a badge, but they never cast the seed into the field. They are like a farmer who polishes his tractor, frames his seed catalog, and then complains at harvest time that nothing came up. The sower is not called to control every response. He is called to sow. That is liberating if a man believes it. The preacher is not responsible for making every hearer honest. The teacher is not responsible for manufacturing spiritual appetite in a hard heart. The witness is not responsible for forcing growth in rocky ground. The duty is to sow the word faithfully. The condition of the ground will show itself after the seed lands.

The modern church has often forgotten this. It thinks the goal is to engineer responses, manipulate emotions, soften the message, and redesign the seed so more people will appear to receive it. But Christ does not say the sower changed seed for each soil. He does not say he had one seed for the wayside, another for stony places, another for thorns, and another for good ground. The same seed goes out. That matters. The word of God is not to be altered to suit the hearer. It is to be preached. The results will differ because the hearts differ. One of the greatest mistakes in ministry is to assume that every bad response proves defective sowing. Sometimes the problem is not the preacher, the teacher, or the witness. Sometimes the problem is the ground. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself sowed perfectly, and many still rejected Him. A man who thinks perfect ministry guarantees universal acceptance has not read the Gospels carefully.

2. The Seed Is the Word

The Lord removes all guesswork when He says in Luke 8:11, “The seed is the word of God.” Mark says, “The sower soweth the word.” Matthew says the seed is connected with hearing “the word of the kingdom.” This is the Lord’s interpretation, and it must govern the whole parable. The seed is not human philosophy. The seed is not church tradition. The seed is not personal charisma. The seed is not emotional excitement. The seed is not religious culture. The seed is not clever storytelling detached from doctrine. The seed is the word. That is why the parable is so important in an age where men are constantly trying to replace the Bible with something more fashionable. God does not promise to bless man’s opinions like seed. He promises that His word will not return void. The life is in the seed, not in the personality of the sower.

This is where Bible belief becomes practical. If the seed is the word, then a man had better have the word. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. If there is no word, there is no faith. If the word is constantly questioned, corrected, doubted, replaced, and treated like a broken manuscript puzzle, then the hearer is being trained in unbelief before the seed even has a chance to take root. The devil’s first recorded attack in Scripture was not atheism. It was “Yea, hath God said?” That is still his method. Before he steals the seed from the wayside heart, he loves to train men to distrust the seed itself. He gets them wondering whether the Bible is preserved, whether the words are right, whether doctrine is certain, whether God really meant what He said, and whether some scholar with dead Greek and a living ego should be allowed to correct the Book. A man cannot grow strong while he is being taught to suspect the seed.

The seed also determines the crop. You do not sow wheat and get grapes. You do not sow corn and get figs. The word of God produces what God designed it to produce. That means the word must be given plainly, honestly, and in its proper setting. When the word of the kingdom is preached, it produces a response in relation to the kingdom. When Paul’s gospel is preached in the Church Age, it calls men to believe on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for salvation. When doctrine for the Body of Christ is preached, it builds believers in grace, assurance, sanctification, service, and hope. But when men mix seed, corrupt seed, or relabel seed, confusion follows. A preacher who cannot distinguish the gospel of the kingdom from the gospel of the grace of God is going to scatter doctrinal mixture and then act surprised when the field produces confusion. The seed is the word, but the word must be rightly divided.

3. The Wayside Hearer and the Stolen Word

The first ground is the wayside. The seed falls by the way side, and the fowls come and devour it. The Lord interprets this plainly. In Matthew, when any one hears the word of the kingdom and understands it not, then comes the wicked one and catches away that which was sown in his heart. In Mark, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. In Luke, the devil takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. That is not hard to understand unless a man is determined to complicate it. The heart is hard. The word lands on the surface. It does not penetrate. Before it can take root, the devil takes it away. The birds are not cute little church-growth symbols. In the Lord's interpretation, they connect with the wicked one, Satan, the devil. That definition should control how we handle birds later in the same chapter when they lodge in the branches of the mustard tree.

The wayside hearer is a terrifying picture because he hears real truth and leaves with nothing. The word reaches his ear but not his understanding. He may sit under preaching. He may listen politely. He may even nod at parts of the sermon. But the heart is packed down like a road from years of traffic. Pride has walked over it. Sin has walked over it. Religious tradition has walked over it. Bitterness has walked over it. Mockery has walked over it. Intellectual vanity has walked over it. The seed has no place to enter. Then the devil comes quickly. He does not wait six months. He comes immediately. He provides a distraction, an objection, a joke, a phone notification, a lunch conversation, a theological excuse, or a religious counterargument. The word that could have dealt with the heart is gone, and the man walks away untouched.

This explains why some people can hear tremendous Bible truth and act like nothing happened. It also explains why the devil fights preaching, Bible reading, Bible memory, and plain Scripture discussion so aggressively. He is not afraid of religious entertainment. He is not afraid of a sermon that never gets to the Book. He is not afraid of churches that replace doctrine with stories, politics, therapy, or emotional noise. He is afraid of the word getting into the heart. The wayside hearer's danger is not that the seed is weak; it is that his heart is hard and the devil is active. In a devotional Church Age application, this should warn every man not to treat the Bible casually. When the word is preached, read, quoted, or explained, something spiritual is taking place. Either the word is received, or the enemy is looking for a way to snatch it away. There is no neutral ground when seed is being sown.

4. The Stony Ground Hearer and the Shallow Root

The second ground receives the seed quickly with joy, but there is not much earth. The plant springs up fast, but when the sun rises, it is scorched because it has no root. The Lord interprets this as the hearer who receives the word with joy, yet has no root in himself, and endures only for a while. When tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, he is

offended. This is one of the most searching parts of the parable because it shows that immediate joy is not always proof of deep work. A man can get excited under preaching. He can respond emotionally. He can appear eager. He can start fast. But if the root does not go deep, the same sun that helps a rooted plant grow will destroy the shallow plant. The problem is not the sun. The problem is rootlessness.

That is a vital distinction. Tribulation and persecution do not create the shallowness; they reveal it. The heat exposes what was already missing under the surface. This is why a ministry built only on excitement produces unstable people. Emotional response is not the same thing as grounded faith. A man may shout over truth he has not understood. He may rejoice over promises while ignoring doctrine. He may like the benefits of association with Christ until the world starts mocking him, family starts pressuring him, friends start distancing themselves, and obedience begins to cost something. Then the shallow hearer is offended. He did not mind the word when it gave him joy. He minded the word when it brought heat. The word that first thrilled him now embarrasses him.

Right division protects this passage from abuse. This is not a proof text that a sealed member of the Body of Christ loses eternal life when persecution comes. The parable is dealing with reception of the word, especially in the kingdom setting, and showing the difference between superficial reception and fruitful endurance. In Luke's account, the language includes those who "for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away," which must be handled carefully in its context rather than jammed into a simplistic system. There are people who make temporary, shallow responses to truth. There are also saved people who are weak, immature, and unfruitful for a season without losing their standing in Christ. A man must not use this soil to deny eternal security in Paul's gospel, but neither should he use eternal security as an excuse to ignore the warning. Shallow Christianity is real. Rootless religion is real. Joy without root will not stand the heat.

5. The Thorny Ground Hearer and the Choked Word

The third ground receives seed among thorns, and the thorns spring up and choke it. The Lord identifies the thorns as the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the lusts of other things, and the pleasures of this life. Here the problem is not immediate theft by the devil or immediate collapse under persecution. The problem is competition. The word is present, but it is crowded. Something else is growing in the same soil. The heart is not empty and prepared. It is occupied by cares, riches, lusts, pleasures, ambitions, anxieties, plans, distractions, and appetites. The word is choked, and the hearer becomes unfruitful. That word "unfruitful" is critical. The issue in this part of the parable is fruit being prevented by overcrowding.

This is one of the most relevant warnings in the entire parable because many people are not openly hostile to the Bible. They are just crowded to death. They do not hate Scripture. They just have no room for it. They do not deny Christ with their mouth. They just bury His words under bills, entertainment, business, shopping, social media, family drama, success goals, political panic, hobbies, pleasures, and the endless noise of this present evil world. The cares of this world do not have to be sinful in themselves to choke the word. Care can choke as surely as lust. Anxiety can choke as surely as greed. Responsibility can become an idol when it crowds out obedience to God. Riches are deceitful because they promise security while creating new chains. Lusts of other things are deadly because they do not announce themselves as spiritual murderers. They just ask for a little more room until the word is strangled.

This should hit the modern believer hard without confusing fruit with justification. In the Church Age, a man is not justified because he produced enough fruit to offset his thorns. He is justified by faith in Christ. But a justified man can still live a choked life if he lets the thorns dominate the ground. He can have enough Bible to be accountable and enough world to be useless. He can believe right doctrine and still be unfruitful because his heart is overrun with lesser things. This is where many Bible believers need to stop blaming the seed and start clearing the field. The issue is not that the Bible does not work. The issue is that men are trying to grow the word in a heart already packed with worldliness. You cannot give the word five minutes of tired attention and give the world sixteen hours of prime appetite, then complain that you are not fruitful. The thorns are not harmless. They choke.

6. The Good Ground Hearer and Fruitful Reception

The fourth ground is good ground. The Lord describes this hearer as one who hears the word and understands it in Matthew, receives it in Mark, and keeps it in an honest and good heart in Luke, bringing forth fruit with patience. Those differences are not contradictions; they give a fuller picture. The good ground hearer hears, understands, receives, keeps, and bears fruit. The word gets in, stays in, and produces. That is the design of the seed. The fruit varies: some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Mark gives thirty, sixty, and an hundred. Luke emphasizes patience. The point is not that every fruitful hearer produces the exact same measure. The point is that good reception of the word results in fruit. Where there is real, sustained reception, the word does not remain barren.

This is where lazy religion and works religion both need correction. Lazy religion wants to say fruit does not matter at all. Works religion wants to say fruit is the basis of salvation. The Bible says neither. Fruit matters because it shows the word working. But fruit is not the payment that purchases eternal life. A tree bears fruit because it has life; it does not bear fruit in order to become alive. That distinction is not theological hair-splitting. It is the

difference between grace and confusion. In the parable, the good ground receives the seed, and the seed produces according to its nature. In the Church Age, the believer receives the gospel and is born again by the word of God, and then the word, the Spirit, and sound doctrine work in him to produce fruit. If a man reverses that order, he will end up teaching that fruit creates life instead of life producing fruit.

The varying measures of fruit should also keep men humble. Not every believer bears the same amount of visible fruit. Not every servant has the same field, calling, capacity, opportunity, knowledge, or season. Some bear thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred. That does not excuse barrenness, but it does rebuke comparison. The goal is not to boast over another man's measure. The goal is to be good ground for the word God gives. A man may not have a worldwide ministry, but he can be fruitful in his house, his local church, his witness, his prayer life, his giving, his suffering, his teaching, and his obedience. Fruit is not always public applause. Sometimes fruit is endurance when nobody sees it. Luke's phrase "with patience" matters. Real fruit takes time. The modern crowd wants microwave spirituality, instant influence, instant platforms, instant authority, and instant harvest. God grows fruit through the word received and kept.

7. The Parable Exposes Hearers, Not Defects in the Word

The great lesson of the parable is that the word exposes the hearer. Four soils, one seed. Four responses, one word. The seed does not change, but the results differ. That means the parable is a direct rebuke to every age that blames the Bible for the condition of men's hearts. When men reject the word, they say it is too hard, too old, too narrow, too offensive, too plain, too mysterious, too judgmental, or too divisive. But Christ says the issue is the ground. Hard ground needs breaking. Shallow ground needs depth. Thorny ground needs clearing. Good ground receives and bears fruit. The word does its work when it is received rightly. The Book is not on trial. The hearer is.

This has a serious application for preaching and teaching. A faithful sower must not judge the seed by the first response. Some seed is stolen quickly. Some springs up quickly and dies quickly. Some grows for a while and gets choked slowly. Some produces fruit over time. That means early excitement is not always success, and early resistance is not always the final word. A man must keep sowing. He must also avoid the temptation to change the seed because some ground rejects it. If the wayside heart does not understand, give more Scripture, not less. If the stony ground hearer is shallow, preach doctrine that builds root, not entertainment that feeds excitement. If the thorny ground hearer is crowded, preach against worldliness, covetousness, anxiety, lust, and misplaced priorities. If the good ground hearer is bearing fruit, keep feeding him the word. The answer in every case is not less Bible. It is the right handling of more Bible.

Rightly divided, the parable becomes both doctrinally safe and spiritually sharp. It does not overthrow eternal security. It does not teach salvation by crop yield. It does not make the Church equal to the kingdom of heaven. It does not erase the setting of Christ's ministry to Israel. But it absolutely does warn every hearer that the word of God demands reception, understanding, endurance, and fruit. It shows that hearing is dangerous when it does not lead to receiving. It shows that joy is suspicious when it has no root. It shows that worldly preoccupation can make a man unfruitful while he still claims to respect the word. It shows that fruitfulness requires an honest and good heart that keeps the word with patience. That is not works salvation. That is Bible truth. A man who uses grace to dodge that warning is not rightly dividing; he is hiding among the thorns.

Conclusion

The parable of the Sower and the Seed is foundational because it teaches a man how to look at preaching, hearing, and spiritual fruit. The Lord gives the interpretation, so there is no excuse for turning the parable into a playground for religious imagination. The seed is the word. The sower sows the word. The soils are hearers. The devil steals the word from the hard heart. Persecution exposes the shallow heart. Cares, riches, lusts, and pleasures choke the crowded heart. The honest and good heart receives, keeps, understands, and bears fruit with patience. That is the structure Christ gave, and a Bible believer should stay inside that fence. The safest interpretation of Scripture is always the one that bows to Scripture's own definitions.

This parable also teaches that the greatest need in any age is still the word of God rightly handled and faithfully sown. The word of the kingdom had a specific place in the Lord's earthly ministry to Israel, and that setting must be honored. The gospel of the grace of God has a specific place in this present Church Age, and that must be preached clearly without mixing it with kingdom conditions. But in every age, the word of God is the seed God uses. Men are not born again by human wisdom. Saints are not established by religious entertainment. Churches are not strengthened by motivational fluff. Families are not built by worldly philosophy. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. If the seed is absent, the field is hopeless. If the seed is corrupted, the crop will be corrupted. If the seed is faithfully sown, the ground will reveal itself.

The personal warning is plain. Every man who hears the word should ask what kind of ground he is presenting to God. Is the heart hard from pride, sin, tradition, and unbelief? Is it shallow, emotional, and rootless? Is it crowded with cares, riches, pleasures, lusts, screens, ambitions, and distractions? Or is it honest ground that receives the word, keeps it, and lets it bring forth fruit over time? The answer is not found in religious self-flattery. It is found in how a man responds when the word crosses him, corrects him, reproves him,

instructs him, and calls him to endure. The Sower is faithful. The seed is perfect. The question is the ground. And once that is understood, the parable stops being a children's story about farming and becomes a spiritual autopsy performed by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

3 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Wheat and the Tares

Introduction

The parable of the Wheat and the Tares is one of those passages where the Lord Jesus Christ did not leave men to guess at the meaning, and yet men still manage to make a mess of it because they refuse to believe the words He used. That is usually how false doctrine gets started. God says something plainly, and then religion comes along with a shovel, buries the plain statement, plants a denominational flag over the hole, and calls the result "interpretation." The Lord gives the parable in Matthew 13:24-30, and then He interprets it in Matthew 13:36-43. That should settle the matter. The disciples come to Him and say, "Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field." He does exactly that. He tells them who sowed the good seed, what the field is, who the good seed are, who the tares are, who the enemy is, what the harvest is, who the reapers are, and what happens at the end. A man would have to work hard to miss it, but religious teachers have been working hard for centuries.

The key statement is Matthew 13:38: "The field is the world." That one sentence knocks the legs out from under a great deal of bad preaching. The Lord did not say, "The field is the church." He did not say, "The field is the local assembly." He did not say, "The field is the Body of Christ." He did not say, "The field is your denomination." He said, "The field is the world." That matters. If a man changes the field, he changes the parable. If he changes the parable, he changes the doctrine. If he changes the doctrine, he starts applying the passage where God did not put it. That is how people turn this parable into an excuse for tolerating open wickedness in the church, or into a church discipline passage that supposedly forbids separating from false brethren, or into a sentimental lecture about everyone being mixed together until Jesus sorts it out. But the Lord's interpretation is not about local church discipline. It is about the Son of man, the children of the kingdom, the children of the wicked one, the devil, the end of the world, angels, judgment, fire, and the righteous shining forth in the kingdom of their Father.

This essay must therefore begin with the obvious: the parable is not there to teach the Church how to handle an unrepentant member in the assembly. Other passages deal with

that, and they deal with it plainly. First Corinthians 5 tells the church to put away from among themselves that wicked person. Romans 16 warns believers to mark and avoid those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine. Second Thessalonians 3 speaks of withdrawing from disorderly brethren. Titus 3 tells a man to reject a heretick after the first and second admonition. So if a man takes Matthew 13 and says, “We cannot remove tares because Jesus said let both grow together,” he has already ignored the Lord’s own definition of the field and contradicted clear Church Age instruction. The parable is not about cleaning out a church roll. It is about the mystery form of the kingdom, the devil’s counterfeiting work in the world, and the final separation at the end of the age. Rightly divided, it becomes a tremendous passage. Wrongly divided, it becomes a refuge for compromise.

1. The Kingdom Setting Must Govern the Parable

The parable begins, “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field.” That phrase must not be skipped. The Lord is speaking in Matthew 13, the great chapter of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. The nation’s leaders have already rejected the King in Matthew 12 by attributing His works to the devil, and now the Lord begins to reveal truths concerning the kingdom in a mystery form. The kingdom has been offered to Israel. The King is present. The signs are there. The prophetic credentials are there. But the rulers reject Him, and the kingdom does not come in its visible Davidic glory at that time. Instead, the Lord begins explaining what will happen while the King is rejected and before the final harvest comes. That is the setting of the parable.

The kingdom of heaven in Matthew must be handled carefully. It is not always identical in emphasis with the Church, the Body of Christ. The Church, as one spiritual Body made up of saved Jews and Gentiles in Christ, is later revealed with special clarity through Paul. The parables of Matthew 13 are not Paul’s epistles before Paul wrote them. They are not the full revelation of Church Age doctrine hidden under farming language. They are kingdom mysteries spoken by the King after Israel’s rejection begins to harden. If a man forgets that, he will drag Church Age issues into every detail and end up using the wrong passage for the wrong problem. The parable belongs to the kingdom of heaven context, and that context includes mixture, counterfeiting, delay, judgment, and final separation.

This is why the parable is so valuable when rightly divided. It explains why the world, during the period of the King’s rejection, contains both true children of the kingdom and false children planted by the devil. It explains why the devil imitates the work of God instead of merely opposing it openly. It explains why judgment is not always immediate. It explains why the final sorting is reserved for the end of the world and carried out by angels. None of that requires a man to pretend the local church cannot exercise discipline. None of that

requires him to confuse the Body of Christ with the kingdom of heaven. The passage has its own doctrine, and its doctrine is strong enough without borrowing something from another dispensation and stuffing it into the text.

2. The Sower Is the Son of Man

The Lord says, “He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.” There is no need to guess. The sower is not the pastor, the evangelist, the missionary, the denomination, or the local church, though men may sow the word in other passages and applications. In this parable, the Lord identifies the sower as the Son of man. That title matters. “Son of man” connects Christ not only with His humanity, but with His Messianic authority, His relationship to the earth, His coming kingdom, and His future judgment. Daniel 7 speaks of one like the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven and receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom. When Christ uses that title, He is not speaking as a harmless moral philosopher. He is the rightful King and Judge.

The good seed is sown by Christ. That means the origin of the good seed is not human religion. God’s work begins with the Son of man. He is the One who plants what is genuine. The devil is not the original creator of the field. The devil does not own the harvest. He is an enemy and an intruder. He comes after the Son of man has sown. That order is important. God’s work is first. Satan’s work is counterfeit. The devil rarely creates a brand-new field with a sign out front saying, “This belongs to Satan.” He infiltrates what God is doing. He imitates. He corrupts. He plants false sons among true ones. He does not need to convince every man to worship him openly if he can plant something that looks close enough to the real thing to confuse the careless.

This also protects the parable from shallow evangelistic clichés. In the previous parable, the seed is the word of God. In this parable, the Lord says, “The good seed are the children of the kingdom.” The symbols are not always identical from parable to parable. That is another place where careless interpreters stumble. They assume a symbol must always mean the same thing in every parable, even when Christ defines it differently in the passage. Here the good seed are not merely Bible verses scattered on soil. They are people, “the children of the kingdom.” The Son of man sows them in His field. That means the parable is dealing with persons in the world and their ultimate separation, not merely ideas in a sermon or members in a church directory.

3. The Field Is the World, Not the Church

This is the hinge of the whole parable: “The field is the world.” That is the Lord’s definition. Every interpretation that ignores that sentence is already crooked. The field is not the local church. It is not the Body of Christ. It is not a mixed congregation sitting on pews. It is the

world. Once that is settled, the command to “let both grow together until the harvest” makes sense. God is not telling pastors to let open heretics, fornicators, predators, blasphemers, and wolves remain unchallenged in the assembly because “the wheat and tares must grow together.” That is not interpretation. That is malpractice. The parable is about the world system during the present course of the kingdom mystery, where true and false grow together until the final judgment.

A man who turns the field into the church will soon contradict half the New Testament. The same Bible that says “let both grow together until the harvest” in a world-field context also tells believers not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, to mark and avoid false teachers, to reject heretics, to withdraw from disorderly brethren, and to put away wicked persons from the assembly. God is not confused. The confusion comes from men stealing a verse from its setting and using it to cancel other verses. If Matthew 13 is made into a church discipline passage, then Paul becomes disobedient in 1 Corinthians 5. That should tell a man his interpretation is wrong.

The field being the world also explains the scope of the parable. This is bigger than a local assembly. The devil’s counterfeiting work is worldwide. He plants false children all over the field. There are tares in religion, politics, education, culture, pulpits, seminaries, denominations, media, and systems of influence. Some of the most dangerous tares are not openly profane. They are religious. They resemble wheat until the fruit exposes them. The devil is not merely interested in bars, brothels, and back alleys. He likes pulpits, Bible colleges, publishing houses, and religious institutions. He knows that a counterfeit believer in a respected place can do more damage than a drunk in the gutter. The field is the world, and the enemy has planted broadly.

4. The Tares Are the Children of the Wicked One

The Lord says, “The tares are the children of the wicked one.” Again, He does not leave the meaning open. The tares are not merely weak Christians, immature believers, struggling saints, or people who do not agree with every point on your doctrinal chart. They are children of the wicked one. That is strong language. It matches the Lord’s plain speech in John 8 when He tells certain religious Jews, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.” The Bible does not teach the modern fantasy that all men are automatically children of God in the saving sense. Men become sons of God by receiving Christ. Outside of that, they may be religious, moral, educated, sincere, and respectable, but they are not children of God.

The tare is dangerous because it resembles wheat, especially in the early stages. A tare is not a thistle waving a skull-and-crossbones flag. It is a counterfeit in the grain field. It grows close to the wheat. It uses the same ground, the same rain, the same sun, and the same space. That is the devil's method. He does not always oppose truth by throwing stones at it. Sometimes he stands beside it and imitates it. He produces false professors, false teachers, false brethren, false apostles, false prophets, false Christs, and false gospels. The Bible warns about all of them. A man who thinks Satan only works through obvious wickedness has not read enough Scripture. Satan is transformed into an angel of light, and his ministers are transformed as the ministers of righteousness. That is tare work.

Rightly divided, this does not mean Christians should run around claiming omniscient ability to identify every tare in the world. The servants in the parable notice the problem and ask whether they should gather them up. The householder refuses, not because tares are harmless, but because the final judgment belongs to the harvest and the reapers. In the world-field context, there is a final separation that God will handle perfectly. Men are not angels, and they are not the final judges of all mankind. Yet that does not eliminate discernment. The Bible still tells believers to try the spirits, judge doctrine, mark false teachers, and refuse fellowship with wickedness. The difference is between local obedience now and final separation at the end of the age. Confusing those two things creates both arrogance and compromise.

5. The Enemy That Sowed Them Is the Devil

The Lord says, "The enemy that sowed them is the devil." There is no mystery about the enemy. Christ names him. This is not merely human misunderstanding, social conditioning, bad environment, or theological diversity. The devil is actively sowing counterfeit children in the world. That truth is despised by modern religion because modern religion has tried to turn the devil into a symbol, a myth, a psychological category, or a medieval embarrassment. But Jesus Christ believed in a personal devil, identified his works, resisted his temptations, cast out his devils, and exposed his children. If a man is too sophisticated to believe in the devil, he is too sophisticated to believe Jesus Christ.

The devil sows while men sleep. That detail is not accidental. "But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way." Sleep is a dangerous condition in Scripture when watchfulness is required. The enemy does some of his best work while men are careless, drowsy, indifferent, distracted, and spiritually dull. When Bible believers stop watching, false doctrine enters. When churches stop judging doctrine, tares gain influence. When nations forget God, devils move into schools, courts, pulpits, and homes. When families stop sowing Scripture, the enemy sows entertainment,

rebellion, vanity, and unbelief. The devil does not need an invitation written in red ink. He works when men are asleep.

The devil also "went his way." That is a chilling detail. He does not need to stand there and babysit the tares every second. Once the counterfeit is planted, it grows according to its nature. False doctrine has life in it, but it is the wrong kind of life. Corruption spreads. Heresy reproduces. Religious counterfeits mature. A lie planted in one generation becomes a denomination in another. A private doubt about the Bible becomes a seminary curriculum. A small compromise becomes an official statement of faith. A toleration of error becomes the new orthodoxy. That is why the devil loves sowing. He understands long-term corruption better than most Christians understand long-term faithfulness. He plants tares and walks away while sleepy men call it unity.

6. The Harvest Is the End of the World

The Lord says, "The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels." That statement is another safeguard against bad interpretation. The harvest is not Sunday morning. It is not the next church business meeting. It is not a denominational split. It is not the believer's private judgment of another man's motives. It is the end of the world. The parable points forward to a final separation connected with kingdom judgment. The angels, not church officers, are the reapers in the interpretation Christ gives. They gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity, and cast them into a furnace of fire. That is severe, prophetic, and judicial.

This harvest language fits the larger prophetic picture. The Bible repeatedly connects the end of the age with reaping, separation, judgment, and fire. The Son of man will send forth His angels. The wicked will not blend forever with the righteous. The counterfeit will not remain hidden forever. The devil's crop has an appointment with fire. The righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. That is not the language of a mild social improvement program. It is the language of final divine intervention. The present mixture in the world does not mean God is indifferent. It means the harvest has not yet come. Delay is not denial. Patience is not weakness. God lets the crop mature, and then He separates with perfect knowledge.

This is where the parable should terrify false professors and comfort true believers. False religion often looks successful for a season. The tares may stand tall. They may look organized, numerous, influential, and respectable. They may even mock the wheat as narrow, old-fashioned, unloving, and divisive. But the harvest is coming. On the other hand, true believers may wonder why God allows such mixture, counterfeiting, and wickedness to continue. The answer is that the end has not arrived. The reapers have not been sent. The

kingdom has not been purged in visible judgment. Until then, the believer must remain faithful, discerning, separate in obedience, and patient in hope. The harvest will reveal what the growing season concealed.

7. The Parable Protects Church Discipline While Revealing Kingdom Judgment

One of the most important practical points is that this parable, rightly divided, does not weaken church discipline. It actually protects it by keeping Matthew 13 in its proper place. If the field is the world, then the command to let both grow together until the harvest cannot be used to forbid the local church from obeying clear instructions elsewhere. A church that tolerates open wickedness under the excuse of "wheat and tares" is not being deep. It is being disobedient. Paul did not tell the Corinthians, "Let the fornicator grow with the wheat until the angels come." He said to put away from among themselves that wicked person. That is plain Church Age instruction.

At the same time, the parable rebukes the opposite error: the idea that believers can purify the world by uprooting every wicked person before the appointed harvest. The servants ask whether they should gather up the tares, and the householder says no, lest they root up the wheat also. In the world-field context, final separation belongs to God. The Church is not commissioned to build the kingdom by force, purge the planet by human power, or create a sinless society before Christ returns. That is where postmillennial dreams, political salvation schemes, and religious dominion fantasies run into trouble. The King will purify His kingdom when He comes. The angels are the reapers. The harvest is the end of the world. Until then, the Church preaches the gospel, teaches sound doctrine, separates from evil in obedience, and waits for the Lord from heaven.

The balance is important. We are not called to tolerate tares in the assembly, and we are not called to uproot every tare in the world by human force. We judge doctrine and conduct where God commands us to judge. We preach the gospel to sinners. We mark false teachers. We separate from heresy. We keep the local assembly clean according to the Scriptures. But we do not pretend we are the angels at the end of the world. We do not confuse ecclesiastical discipline with eschatological judgment. We do not confuse the Church's present responsibility with the Son of man's future purging of His kingdom. Right division keeps both truths intact, and that is exactly why the devil hates it.

Conclusion

The parable of the Wheat and the Tares is not difficult because Christ failed to explain it. It is difficult because men keep refusing His explanation. He said the sower is the Son of man. He said the field is the world. He said the good seed are the children of the kingdom. He said the tares are the children of the wicked one. He said the enemy is the devil. He said

the harvest is the end of the world. He said the reapers are the angels. That is enough interpretation for any honest Bible believer. The trouble starts when men change the field from the world to the church and then build doctrine on the alteration. Once they do that, confusion is guaranteed.

The parable reveals that during the period before the final harvest, there will be mixture in the world. Christ has His true children, and the devil has his counterfeit children. The devil's work is not merely open rebellion; it is imitation. He sows tares among the wheat. He produces religious counterfeits. He plants children of the wicked one where they can resemble, resist, and confuse the true. The present mixture should not surprise anyone who believes the Bible. It should also not lead to despair. The Son of man owns the field. The devil is an enemy, not the owner. The tares may grow for a while, but they have an appointment with the furnace. The wheat may suffer for a while, but the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Rightly divided, this parable strengthens doctrine instead of confusing it. It does not cancel church discipline. It does not teach toleration of sin in the assembly. It does not make the Church responsible to purge the whole world before Christ returns. It shows the mystery form of the kingdom, the devil's counterfeit sowing, the patience of God, the certainty of judgment, and the final triumph of the righteous under the authority of the Son of man. The field is the world. The harvest is the end of the world. The reapers are the angels. Believe those three statements, and half the bad preaching on this passage disappears before the sermon gets started.

4 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Mustard Seed

Introduction

The parable of the Mustard Seed is one of those short passages that has been preached wrong so many times that most people think the wrong interpretation is the normal one. A preacher reads, "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed," and before the congregation has time to open the passage, he is already telling them how Christianity started small and grew into a great worldwide blessing where all the nations find shelter. That sounds pleasant. It sounds optimistic. It sounds like the kind of thing religious people like to hear when they want the world to be getting better and better through church programs, cultural influence, denominational expansion, political activism, and religious institutions. But the question is not whether the interpretation sounds pleasant. The question is whether it fits the chapter. Matthew 13 is not a chapter about everything getting

cleaner, purer, and more faithful as the age goes on. It is a chapter about mystery, mixed conditions, satanic opposition, counterfeit growth, hidden corruption, and final separation. The Sower shows the word being resisted, stolen, scorched, and choked. The Wheat and Tares show the devil planting counterfeit children among the children of the kingdom. Then comes the Mustard Seed. A man has to be determined to miss the warning if he turns that context into a religious pep rally.

The Lord said in Matthew 13:31-32, "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." Those words need to be read carefully. The mustard seed is small. It grows. But it does not merely become a normal herb. It becomes a tree. That is an abnormal development. The passage does not say it becomes a healthy mustard plant bearing pure fruit in proper proportion. It says it becomes "a tree," and then the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches. The sentimental interpretation wants those birds to be lovely little nations resting in the shade of a blessed Christian civilization. But earlier in the same chapter, the fowls are connected with the wicked one who catches away the seed. When the Lord gives a symbol in the chapter and then uses birds again shortly after, a Bible believer should at least hesitate before turning those birds into blessings. The context already has Satan stealing the word and sowing tares. It is not far-fetched to see these birds lodging in the branches as unclean spiritual influences finding a home inside an abnormal religious growth.

Right division is essential here. This is not a parable about the Church conquering the world before Jesus comes back. It is not a prophecy of a pure Christian empire spreading holiness through civilization until the nations become disciples in some golden age produced by man. It is a kingdom of heaven parable in Matthew 13, dealing with the mystery form of the kingdom while the King is rejected and absent. The issue is outward growth, abnormal expansion, and the lodging of unclean influences in the branches. That does not mean there is no true work of God in this age. There absolutely is. The word of God still saves sinners. The gospel of the grace of God still brings men into the Body of Christ. The Lord still has His saints, His witnesses, His assemblies, His preachers, His Bible believers, and His faithful servants. But that is not the same thing as saying the whole outward religious structure that grew up under the name of Christ is pure. The parable warns that what begins small can grow into a great visible religious system large enough for the devil's birds to roost in it. That interpretation is not pessimism. It is believing the chapter.

1. The Parable Belongs to the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven

The parable begins with the same governing phrase that must not be ignored: “The kingdom of heaven is like.” That phrase places the parable in the Matthew 13 setting. The Lord is not giving disconnected religious illustrations. He is revealing mysteries of the kingdom of heaven after Israel’s rulers have rejected Him. This is the context that began with the disciples asking why He spake in parables, and the Lord answering that it was given unto them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to the unbelieving multitude it was not given. That means the Mustard Seed belongs to a series of parables explaining conditions during the period when the King is rejected and the kingdom does not appear immediately in visible, earthly glory. It is a mystery form, not the Davidic throne manifested in Jerusalem with the nations beaten into submission under the rod of iron.

Once that is understood, the parable changes shape. It is not describing the Millennial reign of Christ in its purity and power. When Jesus Christ reigns bodily from Jerusalem, the devil will not be freely sowing tares in the same way, religious birds will not be nesting comfortably in corrupt branches, and hidden leaven will not be working through the whole lump. The King will rule with righteousness. The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord. The nations will be judged. The law shall go forth from Zion. That is not Matthew 13’s picture. Matthew 13 gives the course of the kingdom in mystery form during the period of rejection, delay, mixture, and eventual judgment. Therefore, the Mustard Seed should be read as part of that mystery course, not as a glowing prophecy of human religious triumph before the Second Advent.

This also explains why the phrase “kingdom of heaven” must not be carelessly replaced with “the Church.” The Church, the Body of Christ, is a mystery later revealed with special clarity through Paul. Matthew 13 is not giving the full revelation of the Body of Christ. It is giving kingdom mysteries. The true Church is Christ’s Body, saved by grace, sealed by the Spirit, joined to the Head in heaven, and not destined to become a religious monstrosity full of devils. But the outward sphere of profession connected with the rejected King can grow into something large, visible, abnormal, and corrupted. If a man cannot distinguish the true work of God from the outward religious system that claims His name, he will end up praising what God is warning him about. That is exactly what has happened with this parable.

2. The Mustard Seed Begins Small

The Lord says the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, “which a man took, and sowed in his field.” The beginning is small. That much is clear. The work of God often begins in what men despise as small, weak, and unimpressive. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself did not arrive as a Roman emperor, a temple politician, or a Pharisaical celebrity. He came in humility. He was born in Bethlehem, laid in a manger, raised in Nazareth, and

ministered among common people. His disciples were not selected from the polished elite of Jerusalem's religious academy. They were fishermen, publicans, and ordinary men. The kingdom message was preached in a despised land under Roman occupation. The King Himself was rejected, crucified, and mocked. If a man judges by outward size at the beginning, he will miss God every time.

That small beginning, however, should not be confused with the abnormal ending described in the parable. Many interpreters say, "See, it starts small and grows big, so this must mean Christianity grows into worldwide blessing." But the issue is not merely growth. The issue is what kind of growth. A child is supposed to grow into a man. A weed growing into a choking jungle is another matter. A mustard seed producing a mustard plant is natural. A mustard seed becoming a great tree with birds lodging in its branches is something else. The passage emphasizes not only increase, but disproportion. It becomes "the greatest among herbs" and then "becometh a tree." That is the point that many skip. They praise the size while ignoring the abnormality.

This is one of the great mistakes of religious thinking. Men assume bigger always means better. Bigger churches, bigger denominations, bigger institutions, bigger movements, bigger influence, bigger buildings, bigger platforms, bigger councils, bigger numbers, bigger budgets, bigger visibility. But the Bible is not impressed with bigness by itself. Babel was big. Egypt was big. Babylon was big. Rome was big. The image in Daniel was big. The great whore in Revelation is big. A thing can grow large and still be corrupt. In fact, Satan often prefers bigness because bigness gives his birds more branches. The mustard seed's small beginning does not guarantee that all later outward expansion is pure. The parable is warning about what the outward kingdom profession becomes when abnormal growth creates a lodging place for unclean influences.

3. The Herb Becomes a Tree

The wording is exact: the mustard seed, when grown, is "the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree." The Lord could have simply said it became a large mustard plant. He did not. He said it becomes a tree. That detail matters because trees in Scripture often picture great kingdoms, empires, and powers that rise high and give shelter to creatures under their branches. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom in Daniel 4 is pictured as a great tree whose height reached unto heaven, whose leaves were fair, whose fruit was much, and under which the beasts of the field had shadow and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs. The point there is not a humble little herb doing what herbs do. It is imperial greatness, visible height, and worldly dominion. So when the mustard plant becomes a tree, the Bible reader should see the danger of abnormal kingdom-profession growth taking on the form of worldly greatness.

This is where much of church history becomes an illustration of the warning, not a contradiction of it. The outward profession of Christianity began with a rejected Christ, persecuted apostles, scattered disciples, and small assemblies. Over time, the name of Christ became attached to empires, state churches, religious hierarchies, ecclesiastical offices, councils, political power, military campaigns, wealth, cathedrals, persecutions, inquisitions, forced conversions, and systems of priestcraft. Men look at that great tree and call it "the triumph of Christianity." A Bible believer should look at it and ask, "What birds are in those branches?" The true work of God was never the problem. The problem was the monstrous outward growth that allowed devils, false teachers, power-hungry clerics, worldly rulers, and unclean spirits to lodge under Christian terminology.

This is not an attack on genuine believers through history. God has always had His people. There have always been saints who loved the Lord, believed the Book they had, preached Christ, suffered persecution, and walked with God in the middle of religious confusion. But the existence of wheat does not make the tares wheat. The existence of true saints inside periods of corruption does not sanctify the corrupt system around them. That is why the parable is so necessary. It helps a man distinguish between the true spiritual work of God and the swollen religious tree that grows large enough to shelter unclean things. The herb becoming a tree is not a compliment. It is a warning that outward kingdom profession can become something God never intended His true people to admire.

4. The Birds Lodge in the Branches

The most important symbol in the parable after the tree is the birds. The birds of the air come and lodge in the branches. The sentimental interpretation wants the birds to picture nations, converts, or harmless beneficiaries of Christian influence. But the context must decide the meaning before religious optimism gets a vote. Earlier in Matthew 13, the fowls came and devoured the seed that fell by the wayside. The Lord interpreted that by saying the wicked one catches away what was sown in the heart. Mark says Satan comes immediately and takes away the word. Luke says the devil takes away the word out of their hearts. So in the same chapter, birds have already been connected with satanic activity against the word of God. That does not prove mechanically that every bird in every Bible passage always means the devil, but it certainly puts a warning light on the dashboard in Matthew 13.

The birds do not merely fly past the tree. They lodge in the branches. That means they find a resting place there. They are comfortable there. They settle there. That is exactly what unclean spiritual influences have done inside outward Christendom. False doctrine has lodged there. Sacramental salvation has lodged there. Mariolatry has lodged there. Infant baptismal regeneration has lodged there. Priestcraft has lodged there. Bible-correcting

scholarship has lodged there. Modernism has lodged there. Ecumenical compromise has lodged there. Prosperity preaching has lodged there. Tongues confusion has lodged there. Social gospel unbelief has lodged there. Works salvation has lodged there. Political idolatry has lodged there. The branches are full of birds, and yet men stand underneath the tree admiring its shade.

This is why discernment is not optional. A thing can have Christian language and still be a roosting place for unclean influences. A college can have a chapel and still train men to doubt the words of God. A denomination can have a historic confession and still be full of dead men who do not know the Lord. A religious institution can talk about Jesus and still preach another gospel. A movement can claim kingdom language and still be driven by worldly ambition. The birds lodging in the branches show that the abnormal tree provides room for corruption. The true Bible believer does not burn down truth because tares exist, and he does not reject Christ because birds misuse His name. But neither does he call every bird in the branches a dove. The Bible already told him what kind of birds were working in the chapter.

5. The Parable Warns Against Outward Religious Success

One of the strongest lessons of the Mustard Seed is that outward success can be spiritually dangerous. Men love visible growth because visible growth is easy to count. Numbers impress the flesh. Influence impresses the flesh. Buildings impress the flesh. Institutional recognition impresses the flesh. When something becomes large enough, men assume God must be behind it. But in the Bible, large visible religious systems are often the very places where corruption hides best. The more branches a tree has, the more places birds can lodge. The bigger the system, the easier it becomes for men to mistake size for truth. That is how religious power deceives people. It makes them think that age, size, money, history, architecture, scholarship, and political reach prove divine approval.

The Lord Jesus Christ never taught His disciples to measure truth by outward size. He called His flock a “little flock.” He said the way to life is narrow and few find it. He warned that many would say, “Lord, Lord,” and still be rejected. He said false prophets would come in sheep’s clothing. He said the world would hate His own. Paul warned of wolves entering in, men arising from within speaking perverse things, a falling away, seducing spirits, doctrines of devils, perilous times, and men having a form of godliness while denying the power thereof. The New Testament does not describe the present age as a smooth climb into universal purity. It describes apostasy, counterfeit religion, and increasing deception. The Mustard Seed fits that testimony perfectly when read as abnormal outward growth.

This is also a warning to every local church and ministry. The danger is not only "out there" in a big historical system. Any ministry can become impressed with its own branches. A church can begin with prayer, Bible preaching, and evangelism, and later become more concerned with image, numbers, influence, and respectability. A preacher can begin as a sower and end as a branch manager for birds. A Bible school can begin by training men to preach and end by training them to correct the Book. A movement can begin as a protest against error and end as an institution protecting its own machinery. The parable warns that abnormal growth invites lodgers. If a ministry grows but stops guarding doctrine, the birds will come.

6. The True Work of God Must Be Distinguished from the Religious Monster

It is important to say this carefully: the parable does not deny the true work of God. There is a real seed. There is real kingdom truth. There are real believers. There is real fruit in other parables. There is a real gospel being preached in this age. There are real churches, real saints, real missionaries, real Bible teachers, real pastors, real evangelists, real prayers, real conversions, real acts of obedience, and real spiritual growth. The warning is not that everything connected with the name of Christ is false. The warning is that the outward structure connected with the kingdom profession can grow into something abnormal and corrupted. A Bible believer must not become so disgusted with the tree that he forgets God still has His wheat. But he must not become so sentimental about the wheat that he blesses the tree's birds.

That distinction is absolutely necessary. Some people see corruption in organized religion and then throw away all doctrine, all church, all preaching, all fellowship, and all ministry. That is not discernment; that is a wounded overreaction. Others see genuine believers in a corrupt system and then excuse the whole system because "there are good people there." That is not charity; that is blindness. The Bible believer must be able to do both things at once: recognize true saints wherever God has them and judge false doctrine wherever the devil lodges it. The presence of sincere people does not make bad doctrine good. The presence of bad doctrine does not mean God has no sincere people trapped under it. Right division keeps a man from becoming either a gullible ecumenist or a bitter isolationist.

The true work of God is always tied to the word of God, the Spirit of God, the gospel of Christ, and obedience to Scripture. The religious monster is tied to size, power, prestige, tradition, money, manipulation, and compromise. The true work of God exalts Christ. The religious monster exalts its own system. The true work of God sends men to the Scriptures. The religious monster tells men they need the institution to interpret, mediate, or authorize truth for them. The true work of God produces humility and holiness. The religious monster produces pride, fear, control, and dependency. The true work of God can survive in a prison

cell, a house church, a street corner, or a persecuted remnant. The religious monster needs branches, visibility, and worldly protection. That is the difference the Mustard Seed parable helps expose.

7. The Birds in the Branches Explain the Course of Christendom

When this parable is placed beside the Wheat and Tares and the Leaven, a sobering picture emerges. The Wheat and Tares show counterfeit children planted by the devil. The Mustard Seed shows abnormal outward growth with birds lodging in the branches. The Leaven shows hidden corruption working through the meal. Together, these parables do not describe a spotless religious age getting better and better until Christ returns to congratulate the world. They describe mixture, corruption, and counterfeiting during the mystery form of the kingdom. This is why the history of Christendom looks the way it does. It is not a surprise. The Lord already warned us.

The outward thing called "Christianity" became enormous. It spread across nations, empires, cultures, governments, educational systems, and institutions. But with that outward spread came birds. The name of Christ was used by men who did not know Christ. The Bible was chained, corrected, hidden, allegorized, and replaced by tradition. Salvation by grace was buried under sacraments, penance, works, priesthood, and ecclesiastical control. The simplicity of faith in Christ was replaced by ceremonies, relics, pilgrimages, icons, hierarchies, and superstition. Later, modernism entered the branches and denied creation, inspiration, miracles, the virgin birth, the blood atonement, hell, and the bodily resurrection. Then came the softer birds: therapeutic religion, entertainment worship, prosperity gospel, social justice gospels, political messiahs, and self-help sermons in Bible costumes. The tree is full of noise.

Yet the Lord is not fooled by the size of the tree. He knows what is His. He knows the wheat. He knows the true children. He knows the faithful servants. He knows the hidden saints who love His word in the middle of confusion. He also knows every bird. That should give both comfort and warning. Comfort, because the true believer is not required to fix the whole tree before serving God. Warning, because no man should be impressed by branches if the branches are filled with unclean influences. The course of Christendom confirms the warning of the parable. What began small became outwardly enormous, and that very enormity gave lodging room to spiritual corruption. The answer is not to worship the tree. The answer is to stay with the Book, preach the gospel, judge doctrine, and wait for the King.

Conclusion

The parable of the Mustard Seed is not a shallow encouragement about Christianity becoming popular. It is a warning about abnormal outward growth in the mystery form of the kingdom of heaven. The seed begins small, but the growth becomes disproportionate. The herb becomes a tree. The birds of the air lodge in the branches. In the context of Matthew 13, where birds have already been connected with the wicked one, tares have already been sown by the devil, and leaven will soon be hidden in the meal, the safe interpretation is not sentimental triumphalism. The safe interpretation is that outward kingdom profession grows into a visible religious structure large enough for unclean influences to settle in it.

This explains why Bible believers must never judge truth by size. The biggest thing in town may be the most corrupt thing in town. The oldest institution may be the most hardened institution. The most respected religious system may be the safest roost for the devil's birds. God has always done great things through small beginnings, despised people, rejected witnesses, and faithful remnants. He does not need a monstrous tree to preserve His word, save sinners, call preachers, strengthen saints, or bear fruit. The modern obsession with size, platform, influence, and respectability is not spiritual maturity. It is often the very condition that makes branches attractive to birds.

The lesson is not to despair, but to discern. The true work of God continues. The gospel still saves. The word still works. The Lord still has His people. But the outward religious tree must not be confused with the pure Body of Christ or the future righteous kingdom of the Messiah. The King is coming, and when He comes, He will not be impressed by the birds, the branches, or the bragging of religious systems. He will judge righteously. Until then, the charge is simple: stay with the seed, trust the Book, preach Christ, rightly divide the Scripture, refuse the birds, and do not mistake abnormal religious growth for the blessing of God.

5 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Leaven Hidden in the Meal

Introduction

The parable of the Leaven Hidden in the Meal is one of the shortest parables the Lord Jesus Christ ever gave, but it is also one of the most abused. In Matthew 13:33 the Bible says, "Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." That is all the verse says, and yet men have built all kinds of sweet religious castles on top of it. The common modern explanation is that the leaven represents the gospel spreading

throughout the world until all society is transformed. That sounds good to people who want a positive, optimistic, respectable kind of Christianity that thinks the age is getting better and better. But a Bible believer has to ask a simple question: where in the Bible does leaven represent the gospel? That is the question that makes the whole thing start falling apart. The Bible does not use leaven as a picture of purity, truth, sound doctrine, or gospel power. It uses leaven as a picture of corruption, defilement, false doctrine, hypocrisy, malice, wickedness, and evil influence that works quietly until the whole lump is affected.

That means this parable cannot be interpreted by religious optimism. It must be interpreted by Scripture. In Exodus, leaven is put away during the feast of unleavened bread. In Leviticus, leaven is excluded from certain offerings made by fire unto the Lord. In Matthew 16, Jesus warns His disciples about "the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," and the Bible explains that He spake of their doctrine. In Luke 12:1, He says plainly, "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul says, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" and connects leaven with malice and wickedness. In Galatians 5, Paul uses the same phrase in the context of doctrinal corruption connected with legalism. So when Matthew 13 says a woman hides leaven in meal until the whole is leavened, the Bible-believing interpretation is not that the pure gospel is gradually conquering the world. The Bible interpretation is that corruption is being hidden inside the outward kingdom profession and will work quietly, secretly, and thoroughly.

This matters because Matthew 13 is not a chapter about everything getting spiritually cleaner as the age goes on. The Sower shows the word being resisted, stolen, scorched, and choked. The Wheat and Tares show the devil planting counterfeit children among the children of the kingdom. The Mustard Seed shows abnormal outward growth that becomes a tree where birds lodge in the branches. Then comes the Leaven hidden in the meal. These parables stand together. They are describing the mystery form of the kingdom of heaven during the period of the King's rejection, not the pure millennial reign of Christ after the Second Advent. The leaven parable shows inward corruption working through the outward profession, just as the mustard tree shows outward abnormal growth with unclean lodgers. The devil attacks from without and corrupts from within. He steals seed, sows tares, lodges birds, and hides leaven. A man who turns that leaven into the gospel is not rightly dividing the word of truth. He is helping the leaven do its work.

1. The Bible's Use of Leaven Must Control the Interpretation

The first rule in handling this parable is simple: let the Bible define its own symbols. A man has no right to make leaven represent the gospel when the Bible consistently uses it in a negative way. That does not mean every word must have the exact same symbolic meaning

in every sentence of Scripture, but when a symbol has a strong, repeated, established use, a careful reader does not reverse it without clear reason from the context. The context in Matthew 13 gives no reason to make leaven good. The chapter is full of resistance, counterfeiting, mixture, and corruption. So both the immediate context and the wider Bible usage point in the same direction. Leaven is corrupting influence, not gospel truth.

In the Old Testament, leaven is connected with what must be removed. During the feast of unleavened bread, Israel was commanded to put away leaven from their houses. The Passover was followed by unleavened bread because leaven pictured corruption that had no place with redemption. That does not mean every physical loaf of leavened bread was sinful in ordinary use, but in the symbolic and ceremonial language of Scripture, leaven represented something that spread through the lump and altered it. That is the point. Leaven works quietly and thoroughly. It does not stay isolated. Once it is introduced, it spreads. That is exactly why it becomes such a fitting picture of false doctrine and moral corruption. It begins small, but it does not remain small.

The New Testament confirms this beyond argument. The Lord Jesus says, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees,” and Matthew explains that He spake of their doctrine. Luke identifies the leaven of the Pharisees as hypocrisy. Paul uses leaven in connection with fornication tolerated in the church at Corinth, saying a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. He then says to purge out the old leaven and contrasts it with sincerity and truth. In Galatians, the same phrase warns against doctrinal corruption, where legalism threatens the purity of grace. So there is moral leaven, doctrinal leaven, religious leaven, and hypocritical leaven. There is no passage that says leaven is the gospel. If a man wants leaven to be the gospel in Matthew 13, he is not getting that from the Bible. He is getting it from a system that wants the age to improve through religious expansion.

2. The Parable Belongs to the Mystery Form of the Kingdom

The Lord begins the parable by saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven.” That phrase puts the passage in the same Matthew 13 kingdom mystery setting as the previous parables. The chapter is not dealing with the Church in its full Pauline revelation, nor is it describing the final visible kingdom when Christ reigns from Jerusalem. It is dealing with the kingdom of heaven in mystery form during the period when the King is rejected. This matters because many wrong interpretations begin by assuming that “kingdom of heaven” must simply mean the Church or the gospel spreading throughout history. That assumption creates confusion before the parable is even read.

The mystery form of the kingdom includes conditions that would not be expected if the King had been received and the kingdom had come immediately in visible glory. In the visible kingdom, Christ rules with a rod of iron. Righteousness is enforced. The nations are judged. Satan is bound during the thousand years. But Matthew 13 shows another set of conditions: the word is resisted, the devil steals, tares grow among wheat, a mustard plant becomes an abnormal tree, birds lodge in its branches, leaven is hidden in meal, and final separation waits until the end. That is not the millennial kingdom in open glory. That is the course of the kingdom profession while the King is absent and rejected.

Therefore, the leaven should not be treated as the gospel conquering the world. It should be treated as corruption working inside the outward profession connected with the kingdom. The gospel of the grace of God is pure. It saves sinners by faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It does not corrupt the meal. It does not need to be hidden like contraband. It is preached, proclaimed, published, declared, and believed. False doctrine, on the other hand, is often hidden. It is introduced quietly. It is mixed into good things. It borrows biblical language. It disguises itself as improvement, scholarship, tradition, revival, unity, or deeper spirituality. That is exactly how leaven works. It enters quietly and spreads thoroughly.

3. The Woman Hid the Leaven

The parable says the woman “hid” the leaven in three measures of meal. That word is important. The leaven is not openly placed on a stand and announced as corruption. It is hidden. False doctrine usually works that way. It does not walk in wearing a sign that says, “I am here to ruin the truth.” It sneaks in under the appearance of piety, compassion, scholarship, tradition, experience, or improvement. It hides inside religious language. It uses Bible words with altered meanings. It keeps the shell and changes the substance. It knows that open rebellion is easier to detect than hidden corruption. The devil does not have to burn every Bible if he can hide unbelief in the notes, the classroom, the pulpit, and the translation committee.

This is why hidden leaven is more dangerous than open opposition in many cases. When someone openly denies Christ, denies the resurrection, denies the blood, or mocks the Bible, even a weak believer may recognize the problem. But when corruption is hidden inside familiar religious forms, people are much slower to detect it. A man may hear words like grace, kingdom, Spirit, baptism, faith, church, gospel, and holiness, and assume everything is sound because the vocabulary sounds biblical. But leaven does not remove the meal at first. It enters the meal. It blends with what is already there. That is why false doctrine is so effective. It does not always begin by denying every truth. It begins by altering

one thing, adding one requirement, softening one warning, questioning one verse, or redefining one word.

The woman hiding the leaven should also make a Bible reader cautious because women in prophetic and parabolic settings can sometimes represent religious systems. That does not mean women are evil, and it does not authorize foolish attacks on godly women. The Bible is full of faithful women. But symbolically, Scripture sometimes uses a woman to represent a religious or spiritual system, such as the woman in Revelation 17 or the woman Jezebel in Revelation 2. In Matthew 13, the woman hides leaven in the meal, and the result is total leavening. The emphasis is not on her personal biography; it is on the act of hiding corruption inside what should have remained pure. The warning is that religious corruption often works through subtle insertion, not open declaration.

4. The Three Measures of Meal Should Not Be Ignored

The parable says the leaven was hidden in "three measures of meal." Many readers skip that detail, but the Lord did not waste words. Meal in Scripture can be connected with food, offering, fellowship, and provision. In Genesis 18, Abraham tells Sarah to make ready three measures of fine meal when the Lord appears with two angels. In the offerings under the law, fine flour appears in connection with meal offerings. The meal offering itself is often treated as a beautiful type of the perfect humanity of Christ, fine, even, pure, and acceptable. Leaven being hidden in meal therefore suggests corruption introduced into that which should be pure and nourishing. Again, that does not point toward the gospel spreading through the world. It points toward corruption entering a religious sphere and altering the whole.

The "three measures" have been interpreted many ways, and a careful Bible believer should not become reckless with speculation. But whatever additional significance may be present, the basic picture is plain: the leaven is placed into a definite quantity of meal and works until the whole is affected. The stress is on total influence. Leaven does not merely sit beside the meal. It permeates it. It changes the character of the whole lump. This is precisely how false doctrine operates inside professing religion. It may begin in one department, one school, one pulpit, one confession, one translation, one practice, one small compromise, but over time it spreads. What was once local becomes denominational. What was once questionable becomes accepted. What was once tolerated becomes required. What was once leaven becomes the taste of the whole lump.

This is a sober warning for Bible believers because purity is easier to keep than to recover. Once leaven spreads, removing it is not simple. That is why Scripture says, "Purge out therefore the old leaven." You do not negotiate with leaven. You do not admire its texture.

You do not rename it “fresh insight.” You purge it. In doctrine, that means error must be judged by the written word of God. In local church life, it means sin and false teaching must not be allowed to spread unchecked. In personal life, it means a little compromise is never as little as it looks. The three measures of meal remind us that corruption is not content to remain in one corner. Its nature is to work through the whole.

5. The Whole Was Leavened

The ending of the parable is chilling: “till the whole was leavened.” That is not partial influence. That is thorough permeation. If the leaven represents the gospel, then this verse would teach that the gospel eventually converts the whole world through gradual influence. But that idea contradicts the rest of the New Testament’s description of the present age. The Bible does not teach that this age ends with worldwide conversion through the gradual permeation of society. It teaches apostasy, deception, false teachers, perilous times, a falling away, seducing spirits, doctrines of devils, evil men and seducers waxing worse and worse, and the Lord returning in judgment. The age does not end with the whole world turned into a loaf of gospel righteousness. It ends with the Son of man coming in power and glory to judge.

The phrase “the whole was leavened” fits perfectly with the history of outward Christendom. Corruption entered early and spread widely. The simplicity of salvation by faith was mixed with sacramental systems. The authority of Scripture was mixed with tradition. The priesthood of believers was buried under clerical hierarchies. The blessed hope was displaced by institutional ambition. Biblical separation was replaced by political alliances. The word of God was corrected, hidden, chained, allegorized, and subordinated to religious authorities. Later, rationalism, modernism, liberalism, and ecumenism leavened large portions of professing Christianity. Then came the leaven of entertainment, psychology, prosperity preaching, social gospel activism, and emotional mysticism. The whole outward lump has been affected.

That does not mean there are no true believers. It does not mean the gospel has failed. It does not mean God has lost control. It means the parable is true. The outward kingdom profession becomes leavened. God still saves sinners. The word still works. The Body of Christ is still secure in Him. The true gospel remains pure where it is believed and preached. But the visible religious lump called Christendom is full of leaven. A man has to be blind not to see it. The Bible said it would happen. The answer is not to pretend the leaven is the gospel. The answer is to identify it, reject it, and stand with the unleavened truth of the word of God.

6. Leaven Works Quietly, Secretly, and Thoroughly

Leaven is a perfect picture of corruption because it does not need to explode to be effective. It works quietly. That is why false doctrine is often more dangerous in its early stage than in its final form. By the time error is fully grown, some people can recognize it. But at the beginning it looks small, harmless, and manageable. It asks for a little room. It says, “Surely this one change will not matter.” It says, “Surely this one compromise will help us reach more people.” It says, “Surely this one doctrine is not worth dividing over.” It says, “Surely this one verse can be adjusted.” It says, “Surely this one tradition can stand beside Scripture.” Leaven always talks like a reasonable guest before it becomes the landlord.

Leaven also works secretly. It does not stay on the surface. It gets inside. False doctrine gets inside a man’s thinking before it changes his vocabulary. It gets inside a church’s priorities before it changes the sign out front. It gets inside a Bible school’s method before it changes its doctrinal statement. It gets inside a denomination’s tolerance before it changes its official position. This is why discernment must be early, not late. Men often wait until the whole lump is leavened before they admit there is a problem. By then, anyone who objects is called divisive, unloving, extreme, or outdated. That is the trick. The leaven spreads quietly, and then the people who resisted the leaven are treated as the problem.

Leaven works thoroughly. Once it is allowed to operate, it affects everything it touches. Legalism affects the gospel, assurance, fellowship, preaching, discipline, prayer, and Christian joy. Modernism affects creation, inspiration, prophecy, miracles, salvation, judgment, and morality. Charismatic excess affects worship, authority, experience, doctrine, and emotional stability. Ecumenism affects separation, evangelism, doctrine, and the identity of the gospel itself. Bible-correcting unbelief affects preaching, memory, confidence, study, and faith. That is why Paul’s phrase is so important: “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” The amount may be little at the start, but the influence is not little in the end.

7. Right Division Keeps the Gospel Pure and the Parable in Its Place

Right division is what keeps this parable from being used to corrupt doctrine. If a man refuses to rightly divide, he may turn leaven into the gospel, the kingdom of heaven into the Church, outward Christendom into the Body of Christ, and gradual corruption into spiritual success. That is not Bible study. That is religious fog. The gospel of the grace of God is not leaven hidden in meal. The gospel is declared openly: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. A sinner is saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, not by being gradually leavened into moral improvement. The gospel does not work like hidden corruption. It is light, truth, proclamation, power, and grace.

The parable belongs in its Matthew 13 setting. It is a kingdom of heaven mystery parable. It describes corruption working through the outward kingdom profession during the period of the King's rejection. That does not remove devotional application. It gives devotional application its proper foundation. In the Church Age, believers must watch for leaven in doctrine, conduct, worship, fellowship, and personal life. A little false doctrine matters. A little tolerated sin matters. A little hypocrisy matters. A little Bible doubt matters. A little worldly compromise matters. Not because those things can break the seal of the Spirit and undo salvation, but because they can corrupt fellowship, testimony, fruitfulness, discernment, and service.

Right division also protects the believer from despair. When he sees corruption in professing Christianity, he does not have to think God's word failed. God told him this would happen. When he sees false doctrine spreading through religious systems, he does not have to be shocked. The leaven was hidden long ago. When he sees institutions that once stood for truth now defending error, he does not have to collapse. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. The Lord already described the course of the outward profession. The believer's job is not to save the religious lump. His job is to stay clean, preach the Book, believe the gospel, separate from error, and serve the Lord faithfully until Christ comes.

Conclusion

The parable of the Leaven Hidden in the Meal is not a picture of the gospel gradually converting the whole world. That interpretation ignores the Bible's consistent use of leaven, ignores the context of Matthew 13, and ignores the New Testament's warnings about the course of the present age. Leaven in Scripture is connected with corruption, false doctrine, hypocrisy, malice, wickedness, and influence that spreads through the whole lump. The woman does not preach the leaven. She hides it. It does not remain isolated. It works until the whole is leavened. That is not how the gospel is presented in Scripture. That is how corruption works in professing religion.

Matthew 13 gives a connected picture. The seed is resisted. The devil steals. Tares are sown. The mustard herb becomes an abnormal tree. Birds lodge in the branches. Leaven is hidden in the meal. This is not the story of a pure religious world getting better and better until Christ returns to inherit a sanctified civilization. It is the story of kingdom mystery conditions during the King's rejection, where truth and corruption operate side by side until judgment comes. The true work of God continues, but the outward profession becomes corrupted. The Lord knew this before men wrote their church histories, built their denominations, founded their schools, and revised their Bibles. He told us exactly what would happen.

The warning is plain. Do not bless leaven because it has been hidden in meal. Do not call corruption “gospel influence” because it spreads. Do not confuse outward religious expansion with spiritual purity. Do not pretend false doctrine is harmless because it begins small. Do not wait until the whole lump is affected before judging the first pinch. The remedy is the same as it has always been: believe the words of God, rightly divide the Scripture, preach the gospel of grace clearly, purge out leaven where God commands it, and refuse to let religious optimism blind you to Bible truth. The Lord did not give this parable to make us admire the leavened lump. He gave it so men with ears to hear would recognize corruption before they ate it and called it bread.

6 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Hidden Treasure in the Field

Introduction

The parable of the Hidden Treasure in the Field is short, but if a man gets it wrong, he will twist the gospel, confuse Israel with the Church, and turn the grace of God into a religious bargain counter. Matthew 13:44 says, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.” That verse has been preached many times as though the sinner is the man, Christ is the treasure, and salvation is obtained when the sinner gives up everything to buy Him. That interpretation may sound devotional to the untrained ear, but doctrinally it is a wreck. A lost sinner does not find Christ as a treasure in a field and then purchase Him by surrender, sacrifice, church membership, repentance of every sin, discipleship, baptism, or good works. Salvation is not bought by the sinner. Salvation was purchased by Jesus Christ. “Ye are bought with a price,” Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:20. Peter says we were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but “with the precious blood of Christ.” A sinner does not sell all that he has to buy the Saviour. The sinner has nothing fit to purchase eternal life. He comes guilty, helpless, lost, dead in trespasses and sins, and is saved by grace through faith.

So the first correction must be made immediately. In this parable, the man is not the sinner buying Christ. The man is a picture of Christ. The field has already been defined in the same chapter. Matthew 13:38 says, “The field is the world.” That definition does not disappear six verses later because a preacher wants a convenient sermon illustration. If the field is the world in the parable of the Wheat and Tares, then the field remains the world unless the passage itself clearly changes the meaning. Here the man finds treasure hid in a field, hides it, and buys the field for the sake of the treasure. That is not a sinner buying Jesus.

That is the Lord Jesus Christ purchasing the world in view of a treasure hidden in it. The doctrinal question then becomes: what is the treasure? In the context of the kingdom of heaven, Israel's prophetic promises, and the Old Testament language of "peculiar treasure," the treasure points strongly to Israel, God's covenant nation, hidden among the nations and secured by the redemptive work of Christ.

This interpretation matters because it keeps the Bible in order. Israel is not the Church. The Church is not Israel. The earthly kingdom promised to Israel is not the same thing as the heavenly calling of the Body of Christ. The gospel of the grace of God is not a bargain where the sinner purchases Christ by surrendering enough. The Lord Jesus Christ is the purchaser. His blood is the price. The world is the field. Israel is the treasure hidden in the field, set aside and concealed during the mystery period, yet still known to God and secured by the work of the Son. The parable belongs to the kingdom of heaven mysteries in Matthew 13, and it follows parables that have already shown the condition of the world during the King's rejection: seed resisted, tares sown, abnormal outward growth, birds in the branches, and leaven hidden in meal. Now the Lord reveals that despite corruption and mixture in the field, there is treasure hidden there, and the field is purchased. A man who rightly divides the passage will see not only the grace of Christ, but also God's faithfulness to Israel.

1. The Parable Must Not Be Used to Teach That Salvation Is Purchased by the Sinner

The most common error in this parable is also the most dangerous: making the sinner the man who sells all that he has to buy the treasure, and making the treasure Jesus Christ or salvation. That interpretation sounds spiritual because it talks about valuing Christ above all else, but it smuggles in a rotten doctrinal idea. A sinner does not purchase Christ. A sinner does not buy salvation. A sinner does not obtain eternal life because he has sold enough, surrendered enough, sacrificed enough, wept enough, repented enough, or cleaned up enough. The Bible's gospel to the Church Age sinner is not, "Sell all that thou hast and buy Christ." It is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." It is "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." It is "to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly." If the sinner is the buyer, then the passage becomes a works-based gospel in a religious costume.

This is where men often confuse discipleship language, kingdom demands, and salvation by grace. Yes, there are passages where the Lord Jesus Christ demands everything from a disciple. Yes, a man following Christ must deny himself, take up his cross, forsake competing loyalties, and count the cost. But discipleship cost is not the purchase price of justification. A saved man should yield everything to the Lord who bought him, but his

yielding does not buy the Lord. The order matters. Redemption comes first; consecration follows. A man is not saved because he gave up everything. He is saved because Christ gave Himself. The hymn is not, "I sold enough and bought my Redeemer." The Bible says Christ "gave himself a ransom for all." The Lord Jesus did the purchasing. The sinner receives by faith what Christ purchased by blood.

If a preacher turns this parable into "you must sell all to buy Jesus," he has unintentionally joined hands with Rome, legalism, and every works-system that makes salvation depend upon human payment. The sinner has nothing worth offering. Isaiah said all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Paul counted his religious profit as dung that he might win Christ. What exactly does a lost man have that could buy the Son of God? His sins? His self-righteousness? His church attendance? His religious emotion? His moral reform? His promise to do better? That kind of preaching may produce tears and altar traffic, but it does not preserve the gospel. The man in the parable cannot be the sinner purchasing Christ because Christ is not for sale at a price a sinner can pay. Christ is the purchaser, not the merchandise.

2. The Field Has Already Been Defined as the World

The second great key is the field. Matthew 13 is not a chapter where every symbol must be reinvented in every verse according to the preacher's imagination. Earlier in the chapter, when the Lord interprets the Wheat and Tares, He says plainly, "The field is the world." That definition is crucial. In the parable of the Hidden Treasure, the treasure is hid in a field, and the man buys the field. If the field is the world, then the man purchases the world in view of the treasure hidden in it. That is a very different doctrine from a sinner buying salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ, by His redemptive work, purchased the field. He bought it. He has the right of possession, the right of judgment, the right of rule, and the right to claim what is His.

The Bible teaches this broader purchase in more than one way. Christ is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. He tasted death for every man. He gave Himself a ransom. He is the propitiation not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world. That does not mean universal salvation. It means the value and scope of His redemptive work is sufficient and judicially broad. He has purchased the field, but not everyone in the field is automatically saved. Second Peter 2 even speaks of false teachers "denying the Lord that bought them," showing that purchase and personal redemption applied by faith must not be carelessly collapsed. The world belongs to the Lord by right of creation and by right of redemption, but sinners still must believe the gospel to be saved.

This purchase also points forward to the Lord's future claim on the earth. The devil may act like the field belongs to him. The kingdoms of this world may behave as if Christ has no claim. The nations may rage, the kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers may take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed. But the field has been bought. The title deed belongs to the rightful King. Revelation shows the Lamb taking the book and opening the seals, leading to the reclaiming and judging of the earth. The parable's field is not a church building, not a denomination, not a sinner's heart, and not a mystical religious marketplace. It is the world. Christ purchased the field, and He will claim it openly in His time.

3. The Treasure Points to Israel, God's Peculiar Treasure

The treasure hidden in the field points doctrinally to Israel. That is not a guess pulled out of the air. The Old Testament repeatedly uses treasure language in connection with Israel. In Exodus 19:5, the Lord says to Israel, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." Psalm 135:4 says, "For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure." That language matters. When Jesus Christ speaks in Matthew, the Jewish Gospel presenting the King, and gives a kingdom of heaven parable about treasure hidden in a field, a Bible believer should let the Old Testament define the treasure before running to a Gentile Church application. Israel is God's peculiar treasure in the earth.

This does not mean Israel was righteous in herself. It does not mean Israel earned her election. It does not mean every individual Jew is automatically saved. It means God chose a nation through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, made covenants, gave promises, attached His name to that people, and will fulfill what He swore. The treasure is precious because God chose it, not because Israel was naturally superior to all nations. Deuteronomy makes that plain. The Lord did not set His love upon them because they were more in number than any people. He loved them because He loved them and because of the oath He had sworn. The treasure is covenantal, prophetic, and national. God's faithfulness, not Israel's greatness, is the foundation.

This is where replacement theology and sloppy evangelical interpretation do damage. They see Israel fail, reject Christ nationally, and get scattered, and then they assume God is finished with the treasure. But the Bible says otherwise. Romans 11 says blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, and then all Israel shall be saved. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. God has not forgotten His treasure because the treasure is hidden. A treasure hidden in a field is still treasure. Israel hidden among the nations, blinded in part, scattered under judgment, and set aside during the Church Age is still known to God. The parable preserves that truth.

4. The Treasure Is Hidden in the Field

The treasure is not displayed openly at the surface. It is hidden in the field. That is a perfect picture of Israel's present condition in relation to the world and the kingdom mysteries. Israel, God's peculiar treasure, has been scattered among the nations, buried under centuries of Gentile domination, spiritual blindness, persecution, unbelief, and historical confusion. The King came unto His own, and His own received Him not. The nation rejected Him. Judgment came. Jerusalem was destroyed. The people were dispersed. Yet hidden does not mean lost to God. Men lose things because they do not know where they are. God hides things because He knows exactly where they are and when He will reveal them.

This hidden condition also helps explain why the world cannot rightly understand Israel. The nations see politics, geography, ethnicity, history, conflict, religion, and controversy. God sees covenant treasure. The nations see a troublesome people. God sees Jacob, whom He chose. The nations see a historical problem. God sees promises made to the fathers. The nations see a small strip of land in the Middle East. God sees the stage upon which His King will reign from Jerusalem. The treasure is hidden in the field, but heaven has never lost track of it. God knows where every tribe is. He knows the seed of Abraham. He knows how to gather, restore, judge, purge, and save Israel when the time comes.

The hiddenness of the treasure also fits the order of Matthew 13. The kingdom does not come openly in glory at that time because the King is rejected. Instead, mysteries are revealed. The treasure is hidden. The pearl is sought. The net gathers. The final separation comes later. God's program is not over; it is unfolding. During the present Church Age, the Body of Christ is being called out, made up of Jews and Gentiles in one new man. But that does not erase Israel's hidden treasure status. Right division allows both truths to stand. God is forming the Church now, and God will restore Israel according to prophecy. A man who cannot believe both has let his system overrule the Book.

5. The Man Hideth the Treasure Again

The parable says that when the man found the treasure, "he hideth" it. That detail is strange if the sinner is supposed to be finding Christ. What sinner finds Christ and then hides Him? What lost man discovers salvation and then buries it again while he goes off to purchase the field? The common interpretation does not fit the wording. But if the man is Christ and the treasure is Israel, the detail begins to make doctrinal sense. The Lord comes, finds the treasure according to the promises, presents Himself to Israel, is rejected, and the treasure is hidden again during the mystery period. Israel does not enter immediately into kingdom glory. The nation is set aside in blindness, scattered and hidden among the nations, while God brings in another mystery: the Church, the Body of Christ.

This is not God abandoning Israel. It is God concealing Israel in the field until the time of restoration. The prophets had spoken of Israel's judgment and restoration. Hosea speaks of Israel abiding many days without a king, without a prince, without a sacrifice, and afterward returning and seeking the Lord their God and David their king. Ezekiel speaks of dry bones coming together and receiving life. Zechariah speaks of the spirit of grace and supplications being poured upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced. Paul says Israel is blinded in part until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. Hidden treasure is not forgotten treasure. It is reserved treasure.

The hiding also rebukes the arrogance of Gentile religion. Romans 11 warns Gentiles not to boast against the branches. Yet church history is full of Gentile religious systems boasting against Israel, stealing Israel's promises, claiming Israel's kingdom, and then persecuting Jewish people while pretending to be the true Israel. That is not Bible Christianity. That is blindness with a choir robe on. The treasure being hidden should make Gentiles humble, not proud. God is not finished with Israel. The Church does not replace Israel's covenants. The Body of Christ has heavenly blessings in Christ, but Israel's earthly kingdom promises remain exactly where God put them. The treasure is hidden, but it is still treasure.

6. The Man Sold All That He Had

The parable says the man "for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath." If the man is Christ, this points beautifully to the cost of redemption. The Lord Jesus Christ did not purchase the field with pocket change. He humbled Himself. He left the glory He had with the Father. He took upon Him the form of a servant. He was made in the likeness of men. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that through His poverty we might be rich. He gave Himself. He poured out His soul unto death. He shed His blood. That is the price connected with the purchase. Christ sold all, as it were, not because He lost His deity, but because He laid aside His rightful glory, took the servant's place, and paid the full redemptive price.

This preserves the gospel while magnifying the Saviour. The sinner does not buy Christ by selling all; Christ buys with all He gives. That is grace. That is redemption. That is the difference between Bible salvation and religious bargaining. Religion says, "Give up enough and maybe God will accept you." The gospel says, "Christ gave Himself, and God accepts the believer in Him." Religion says, "Pay." The gospel says, "It is finished." Religion says, "Earn." The gospel says, "Believe." Religion says, "Bring your price." The gospel says, "The price has been paid." If this parable is made about the sinner paying, it robs Christ of His purchaser's glory. If it is made about Christ purchasing, it fits the whole Bible.

The joy in the parable also matters. “For joy thereof” he sells all. Hebrews 12 says of Christ, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.” The Lord endured the cross with the joy of accomplishing the Father’s will, securing redemption, reclaiming what was His, saving sinners, and bringing God’s program to its appointed end. That joy includes more than one thing. It includes the Church, His Body and bride. It includes Israel’s future restoration. It includes the kingdom. It includes the final triumph over sin, Satan, death, and the nations’ rebellion. The hidden treasure in the field is part of that joy. Christ did not die as a tragic victim of circumstances. He laid down His life with purpose, authority, and joy set before Him.

7. He Bought the Field for the Treasure

The man buys the field, not merely the treasure. That wording is important. He does not steal the treasure. He does not remove it without right. He buys the field. The purchase is broad enough to secure the treasure within it. That is a profound picture of Christ’s redemptive claim. The field is the world, and the treasure is hidden in the field. By purchasing the field, He secures the right to the treasure. The Lord Jesus Christ has the right to redeem, restore, judge, and reign. His blood is not only the basis of individual salvation; it is also the basis upon which God will reconcile all things unto Himself and restore rightful dominion under Christ.

This is where the kingdom context shines. The parable is not merely about individual salvation. It is about the kingdom of heaven and God’s hidden treasure in the world-field. Christ’s purchase guarantees that Israel’s promises will not fail. The covenants do not depend on Gentile approval, Jewish merit, or church tradition. They rest on God’s oath and Christ’s work. Israel’s restoration will not occur because Israel finally earns it by national righteousness. It will occur because God keeps covenant, purges the nation, pours out grace, brings them through tribulation, and establishes the King. The field has been bought. The treasure will be claimed.

This also helps distinguish Israel’s earthly calling from the Church’s heavenly calling. The Church is not the treasure in this parable. The next parable, the Pearl of Great Price, fits the Church more naturally: one pearl, formed through suffering, taken from the sea, purchased by the merchantman. The Hidden Treasure points backward to Old Testament covenant language and forward to Israel’s future kingdom restoration. The Pearl points to the mystery of the Church. Keeping those two parables distinct helps keep the whole Bible from becoming a blurred mess. God has earthly purposes and heavenly purposes. He has promises to Israel and blessings for the Church. Christ is central to both. Right division does not divide Christ; it honors the order of His revelation.

Conclusion

The parable of the Hidden Treasure in the Field is not teaching that a sinner purchases Christ by giving up everything. That interpretation may preach well to people who enjoy dramatic altar-call language, but it does not match the gospel, the context, or the words of the passage. A lost sinner has nothing with which to purchase the Son of God. Salvation is not for sale at the price of human surrender. Eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. The buyer in the parable is not the sinner. The buyer is Christ. The field is not the sinner's heart. The field has already been defined as the world. The treasure is not salvation for sale. The treasure points to Israel, God's peculiar treasure, hidden in the field and secured by the purchaser.

This interpretation preserves the grace of God and the faithfulness of God. It preserves grace because Christ is the One who pays. It preserves faithfulness because Israel remains what God called her: His peculiar treasure. Israel's present blindness and scattering do not cancel God's promises. The treasure is hidden, not lost. The King was rejected, the kingdom did not come in visible glory at that time, and the mysteries of the kingdom were revealed. During this present age, God is forming the Church, the Body of Christ, through the gospel of grace. But Israel's promises are still waiting for fulfillment. The field has been purchased. The treasure will be revealed in God's time.

The parable therefore magnifies Jesus Christ as the One who gives all, buys the field, secures the treasure, and guarantees the outcome of God's prophetic program. It rebukes works salvation. It rebukes replacement theology. It rebukes Gentile boasting. It rebukes careless interpretation. It teaches that God knows where His treasure is, even when men cannot see it. It teaches that redemption is costly, purposeful, and victorious. And it reminds every Bible believer that the safest way to understand the parables is to believe the words already given in the chapter. The field is the world. The buyer is Christ. The treasure is Israel. The price is His own blood. The restoration is sure.

7 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Pearl of Great Price

Introduction

The parable of the Pearl of Great Price is one of the richest little passages in Matthew 13, and like the Hidden Treasure in the Field, it has been turned upside down by a great deal of popular preaching. Matthew 13:45-46 says, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price,

went and sold all that he had, and bought it." The usual sermon goes something like this: the sinner is the merchant man, Jesus is the pearl, and the sinner must give up everything to buy Christ. That may sound moving in a revival meeting, but doctrinally it has the same problem as the wrong interpretation of the Hidden Treasure. The sinner is not a merchant man seeking goodly pearls. The sinner is lost, blind, dead in trespasses and sins, without strength, without righteousness, and without the price needed to purchase eternal life. Christ is not an object on a religious market table waiting for sinners to gather enough surrender-money to buy Him. The Lord Jesus Christ is not purchased by man. He is the Purchaser. He is not the pearl being bought by a sinner. He is the merchant man who seeks, finds, sells all, and buys the pearl.

That one correction keeps the gospel clean. Salvation is not a transaction where the lost man brings his works, vows, tears, sacrifices, repentance, church membership, baptism, morality, and surrender as payment for Christ. The Bible says, "Ye are bought with a price." The buyer is Christ. The price is His blood. The sinner receives salvation by faith, not by purchase. When men turn these parables into the sinner buying Christ, they may think they are exalting the value of Christ, but they are actually muddying the grace of God. Of course Christ is precious. Of course the believer should count all things but loss for Him. Of course a saved man should yield his whole life to the One who bought him. But that is the fruit of redemption, not the purchase price of redemption. A man does not buy Christ by giving up all. Christ bought His people by giving Himself. That must be settled before the parable can be handled safely.

The Pearl of Great Price also belongs right beside the Hidden Treasure in the Field. The treasure hid in the field points doctrinally to Israel, God's peculiar treasure, hidden among the nations and secured by Christ's purchase of the field. The pearl points beautifully to the Church, the one Body of Christ, formed through suffering, taken out from the sea of nations, and made one precious object by the secret work of God. These two parables sit side by side for a reason. They do not teach the same thing under two random pictures. They show two distinct objects connected with the kingdom mystery program: Israel as the hidden treasure in the world-field, and the Church as the pearl of great price purchased by the merchant man. Right division lets both stand. Israel keeps her earthly promises. The Church keeps her heavenly calling. Christ is the purchaser in both. The blood of Christ is the price in both. But the treasure and the pearl are not the same object, and the Bible becomes clearer when men stop throwing them into the same doctrinal blender.

Chapter 1: The Merchant Man Is Not the Lost Sinner

The first thing to settle is the identity of the merchant man. The merchant man is "seeking goodly pearls." That alone should make a careful reader hesitate before making him a lost

sinner. The Bible does not describe lost sinners as spiritual merchants traveling through the world looking for divine pearls. Romans 3 says, “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.” The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. Lost men seek religion, pleasure, self-righteousness, power, safety, money, and a thousand forms of vanity, but they do not seek the true God in the saving sense unless God first deals with them by His word and Spirit. The modern religious story of a noble sinner searching sincerely through life until he discovers Jesus as the pearl of great price may sound poetic, but it contradicts the Bible’s diagnosis of man.

The merchant man in the parable has discernment, purpose, and purchasing power. He knows what he is seeking. He recognizes the value of the pearl when he finds it. He has enough to sell, and his sale is sufficient to buy. That does not fit the lost sinner. What does a lost sinner have that could buy Christ? His righteousness is filthy rags. His religious achievements are dung next to Christ. His works cannot justify him. His tears cannot cleanse him. His promises cannot redeem him. His church membership cannot purchase one drop of the blood. The sinner is not the merchant with capital. He is bankrupt. He is not looking over pearls with spiritual expertise. He is blind until God gives light. He is not buying salvation. He must be saved by Another who paid the price.

The merchant man is therefore a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the seeker. He is the purchaser. He is the One who came “to seek and to save that which was lost.” He is the One who knew what He was after before the foundation of the world. He is the One who saw the pearl in all its final beauty before it appeared in history. He is the One who gave all, not because He lacked deity, but because He humbled Himself, took upon Him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. The parable is not about man’s heroic search for God. It is about Christ’s purposeful pursuit and costly purchase of what He determined to possess.

Chapter 2: The Pearl Is Not Christ Being Bought by Man

The second correction follows naturally: the pearl is not Christ being purchased by the sinner. Christ is precious, no question about that. Peter says, “Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.” He is the chief corner stone, elect, precious. He is altogether lovely. He is the treasure of all treasures in any devotional sense a man could speak of. But in this parable, the pearl is bought by the merchant man, and if the merchant man is Christ, then the pearl cannot be Christ. A symbol must be governed by the action in the parable. The merchant buys the pearl. Christ does not buy Himself. The sinner does not buy Christ. Christ buys the pearl.

That protects the gospel from confusion. If the pearl is Christ and the sinner buys Him by selling all, then salvation becomes a transaction based on total surrender. That is not the gospel of the grace of God. A man may preach that with great emotion and still be doctrinally wrong. The sinner does not come to God saying, “I have sold all, now give me Christ.” He comes as a guilty sinner with no righteousness, no merit, and no price. He believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and is saved because Christ paid the price. The call of the gospel is not “purchase the pearl.” The call is “receive the gift.” Eternal life is not wages earned by surrender. It is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This does not lessen the value of Christ. It magnifies the work of Christ. The religious interpretation tries to exalt Christ by making Him the pearl, but it accidentally exalts the sinner by making him the buyer. The Bible interpretation exalts Christ as both the seeker and the buyer. He is the One who values the pearl. He is the One who knows what it will become. He is the One who pays the cost. He is the One who secures it. He is the One who owns it. That is much better than a sinner wandering through the marketplace of world religions with enough moral currency to purchase the Son of God. The parable is not about a sinner’s ability to appraise Christ. It is about Christ’s sovereign grace in purchasing a people for Himself.

Chapter 3: The Pearl Beautifully Pictures the Church as One Body

The pearl is a fitting picture of the Church, the Body of Christ. Unlike the hidden treasure, which connects naturally with Israel’s Old Testament language as God’s peculiar treasure, the pearl gives a different picture. A pearl is one object. It is not a pile of separate stones. It is formed as a single, unified thing. That matches the Church as one Body. Paul says, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” He says there is “one body, and one Spirit.” He says Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it. The Church is not many bodies scattered under different denominational flags. There are many local assemblies, but there is one Body of Christ. The pearl is one, precious, complete object purchased by the merchant man.

This distinction is badly needed because many people either confuse the Church with Israel or reduce the Church to a local institution. The Church in its doctrinal fullness is the Body of Christ, made up of saved Jews and Gentiles in one new man. That mystery was not plainly revealed in the Old Testament. It was revealed especially through Paul after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Israel is a nation with earthly covenants, land promises, kingdom promises, tribal identity, and a future restoration under the Messiah. The Church is a spiritual Body seated in heavenly places in Christ, blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and waiting for the blessed hope. These callings are not the same. The treasure and the pearl should not be mashed together.

The pearl also shows unity produced by God, not by man-made ecumenism. The Church is one because God made it one in Christ, not because religious leaders sign unity documents, merge denominations, or pretend doctrine does not matter. The true unity of the Body is spiritual and doctrinally grounded in Christ, the Spirit, the gospel, and the word of God. Ecumenical religion tries to manufacture a fake pearl by gluing together shells, beads, and gravel. God forms one pearl through the work of Christ. That means the unity of the Church is not organizational machinery. It is spiritual reality in Christ. The believer's job is not to create the Body, but to recognize what God has made and walk accordingly.

Chapter 4: The Pearl Is Formed Through Suffering

A pearl is formed through irritation, suffering, and a hidden process. That makes it a remarkable picture of the Church. The pearl begins with an intrusion, something that wounds or irritates within the oyster, and layer by layer a beautiful object is formed around that suffering. The Church is likewise connected with the suffering of Christ. It was purchased by His blood. It exists because the side of the last Adam, so to speak, was opened in death. Just as Eve was taken from Adam's side while he slept, the Church is connected with Christ's death, His wounded side, and the redemptive work that followed His rejection. No cross, no pearl. No blood, no Church. No suffering, no purchased Body.

This picture should guard against the shallow view that the Church is merely a religious organization that began because men decided to gather around Christian teachings. The Church is not a club for admirers of Jesus. It is not a moral reform society. It is not a continuation of synagogue life with Gentile decorations. It is not a political action committee with hymns. It is a blood-bought Body formed by the Spirit of God and joined to the risen Head in heaven. Its existence rests on the agony of Calvary. The pearl is beautiful, but its beauty is rooted in suffering. The same is true of the Church. The glory of the Church is not found in her buildings, institutions, wealth, platforms, councils, or earthly influence. It is found in the One who loved her and gave Himself for her.

That should also humble every believer. If the Church is a pearl formed through suffering and bought at infinite cost, then the believer has no business treating Church truth as a light thing. Many people talk about "church" as though it is merely a place they attend when convenient, a program they consume, or a social environment they judge according to preference. But the Body of Christ is precious to the Lord. He bought it. He forms it. He nourishes and cherishes it. He will present it to Himself. A man may get weary of religious machinery, and often with good reason, but he should never despise the true Church which Christ purchased with His own blood. The pearl is precious because the Merchant valued it enough to pay all.

Chapter 5: The Pearl Is Taken Out of the Sea of Nations

A pearl comes out of the sea, and in Scripture the sea often pictures the nations, Gentile masses, restlessness, and humanity in turmoil. That makes the pearl a fitting type of the Church called out from among the nations. The Body of Christ is made up of saved Jews and Gentiles, but in this present age God is especially taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name. Acts 15 uses that language. The Church is not the conversion of the nations as nations into the kingdom. It is a called-out Body from among Jews and Gentiles, joined to Christ above. It is not the same as Israel restored in her land under the Messiah. It is a heavenly people gathered out during the time of Israel's blindness in part.

This is another reason the pearl should be distinguished from the hidden treasure. The treasure is hidden in the field, and the field is the world. Israel is God's peculiar treasure, hidden among the nations and reserved for future restoration. The pearl, however, is not said to be hidden in a field. It is sought by a merchant man among goodly pearls and purchased as one pearl of great price. The imagery naturally shifts from Israel's earthly treasure language to a beautiful object drawn from the sea. That matches the Church's present calling out from the nations. Israel will be restored as a nation on the earth. The Church is caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Israel's hope is connected with the King reigning from Jerusalem. The Church's hope is heavenly, connected with the Head seated at the right hand of God.

This does not make the Church better than Israel in some arrogant Gentile sense. It means God has different purposes and callings. One of the great failures of theology is the inability to let God do more than one thing. Men act like if God blesses the Church, He must be finished with Israel. Or if God restores Israel, the Church must lose something. That is childish. God can have an earthly people and a heavenly people. He can keep His covenants with Israel and still form the Body of Christ. He can restore the kingdom to Israel and still present the Church as a glorious pearl. Right division does not rob anyone. It gives every group what God assigned to it.

Chapter 6: The Merchant Sold All That He Had and Bought It

The merchant man "went and sold all that he had, and bought it." That phrase points to the costliness of redemption. Christ did not purchase the Church with silver and gold. He purchased it with His own blood. Acts 20:28 speaks of "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Ephesians 5 says, "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." That is the doctrine of the parable. The merchant does not negotiate. He does not rent the pearl. He does not admire it and walk away. He buys it. The Church belongs to Jesus Christ because He paid for it. That settles ownership. The Church is not

the property of popes, priests, pastors, boards, governments, denominations, or religious businessmen. It is Christ's purchased possession.

The phrase "sold all that he had" should be read in light of Christ's humiliation and sacrifice. The eternal Son of God did not cease to be God, but He laid aside the outward display of His glory, took upon Him human flesh, humbled Himself, and went to the cross. He gave Himself. He poured out His soul unto death. He bore sin. He endured wrath. He shed blood. He suffered shame. That is the price behind the pearl. The Church is not a cheap religious afterthought. It was hidden in the purpose of God, purchased at Calvary, and revealed in due time through apostolic doctrine. Men may treat the Church lightly, but Christ did not purchase it lightly.

This also means the Church is secure because the purchase was complete. Christ did not make a down payment hoping later payments would come from our works. He did not pay ninety percent and leave the last ten percent to sacraments, law-keeping, endurance, or religious performance. He bought it. "It is finished" means the price is paid. A believer is not half-purchased, conditionally purchased, or temporarily purchased until he disappoints the Lord. He is bought with a price. That does not excuse sin. It establishes ownership and obligation. Because we are bought, we should glorify God in our body and spirit, which are God's. Service comes from purchase; it does not complete the purchase.

Chapter 7: The Pearl Must Be Distinguished from the Hidden Treasure

The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price stand beside each other, and that placement is deliberate. The treasure points to Israel, God's peculiar treasure, hidden in the field of the world and secured by Christ's purchase. The pearl points to the Church, one precious object formed through suffering and purchased by Christ. Both are valuable. Both are connected with Christ's redemptive work. Both appear in the kingdom mystery chapter. But they are not the same. If a man makes both parables teach the same vague lesson, he misses the doctrinal beauty of the pair. God is showing more than "valuable things are valuable." He is showing distinct purposes in His program.

Israel and the Church must be distinguished without making them enemies. Israel is not the Church under another name. The Church is not Israel upgraded for Gentiles. Israel has prophets, covenants, land, throne, temple, tribes, promises, and a future national restoration. The Church has a heavenly calling, one Body, union with Christ, spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and the blessed hope of being caught up to meet the Lord. Israel's program centers on the earth and the kingdom. The Church's position is in Christ above. Israel's blindness is partial and temporary. The Church's formation is a mystery revealed in time. Christ is the center of both, but the doctrines are not identical.

This distinction keeps the Bible from being turned into religious oatmeal. When men confuse Israel and the Church, they start stealing promises, misapplying warnings, twisting prophecy, and muddying salvation. They put the Church into the Tribulation where Israel belongs. They put Israel's kingdom promises into the Church as spiritual metaphors. They turn Matthew 24 and 25 into Church Age soteriology. They use kingdom parables to threaten the Body of Christ with loss of salvation. Then they accuse right division of being complicated. No, the complication came when they refused to leave the treasure and the pearl in their proper places. The Bible becomes clearer when the treasure remains Israel and the pearl remains the Church.

Conclusion

The parable of the Pearl of Great Price is not a story about the sinner buying Jesus. That interpretation may sound warm and devotional, but it cannot stand doctrinal examination. The sinner is not the merchant man. Christ is. The sinner does not purchase Christ. Christ purchases the pearl. Salvation is not bought by human surrender, sacrifice, or religious payment. It is secured by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and received by faith. The Merchant sought, found, sold all, and bought the pearl. That makes Christ the active Redeemer and the Church the purchased object of His love.

The pearl is a beautiful picture of the Church, the one Body of Christ. It is one object, formed through suffering, taken out from the sea of nations, and made precious by the work of God. Its beauty is not self-produced. Its value is not self-assigned. Its unity is not man-made. Its security is not maintained by religious systems. The Church is precious because Christ loved it and gave Himself for it. That truth should make believers humble, grateful, and careful. A blood-bought Church should not be treated like a religious convenience. A pearl purchased at such cost should not be dragged through the mud of false doctrine, worldliness, pride, or denominational vanity.

The Pearl of Great Price also helps preserve the distinction between Israel and the Church. The Hidden Treasure points to Israel, God's peculiar treasure hidden in the field. The Pearl points to the Church, one precious Body purchased by Christ. The two parables stand together, but they do not collapse into each other. God is faithful to Israel, and God is gracious to the Church. Christ purchased the field for the treasure, and Christ purchased the pearl for Himself. Right division lets both truths shine without theft, confusion, or contradiction. The result is a clearer Bible, a cleaner gospel, a higher view of Christ's purchase, and a deeper appreciation for the wisdom of God in His dealings with Israel, the nations, and the Church of the living God.

8 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Net Cast Into the Sea

Introduction

The parable of the Net Cast Into the Sea closes the main cluster of Matthew 13 kingdom parables with a solemn picture of final separation. It is not a cute fishing story. It is not a lesson on clever evangelistic technique. It is not a manual for soul winners to decide who is really saved and who is not. It is a kingdom of heaven parable dealing with the end of the world, the angels, the separation of the wicked from among the just, and the casting of the wicked into a furnace of fire. Matthew 13:47-50 says, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” The Lord does not leave the ending to imagination. He says what it means. The net gathers broadly. The shore is reached. The separation comes. The angels do the severing. The wicked are cast into fire. That is judgment, not a church growth seminar.

The setting is still Matthew 13, the chapter of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. That matters. The chapter has moved from the Sower and the Seed, to the Wheat and the Tares, to the Mustard Seed, to the Leaven, to the Hidden Treasure, to the Pearl of Great Price, and now to the Net. The whole chapter has shown conditions during the King’s rejection: the word resisted, the devil stealing seed, counterfeit children planted in the world, abnormal outward religious growth, birds lodging in the branches, leaven hidden in the meal, Israel hidden as treasure in the field, the Church pictured as one pearl purchased by the merchant man, and now a broad net gathering of every kind out of the sea. This is not random. The Lord is revealing the course and conclusion of the kingdom mystery period. The final parable brings the matter to the shore, where the good and bad are separated. It is the end-of-the-age reckoning.

Right division is absolutely necessary because people confuse this parable with several things it is not. It is not the judgment seat of Christ, where saved believers have their works judged for reward or loss. It is not a passage teaching that a born-again member of Christ’s Body can be thrown into hell because he failed to be a good enough fish. It is not a proof text for losing salvation in the Church Age. It is not a command for churches to drag a net through society and then determine final destiny. It is a kingdom judgment parable. It deals with the final separation at the end of the world. The angels, not preachers, do the final severing. The bad are not merely unfaithful Christians losing rewards. They are wicked, and they are cast into a furnace of fire. A man who cannot distinguish this from the judgment

seat of Christ or from the gospel of grace will turn the parable into a theological swamp. The net must be kept in its own place.

Chapter 1: The Kingdom of Heaven Setting Controls the Parable

The parable begins, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net.” That word “again” connects it to the previous parables. The Lord is not starting a disconnected subject. He is continuing the same kingdom mystery instruction. This is why a man must read Matthew 13 as a unit. The chapter began with the disciples asking why the Lord spoke in parables, and He explained that it was given unto them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to the unbelieving multitude it was not given. The Net is one of those mysteries. It shows how the kingdom situation moves toward a final sorting after a broad gathering. It is not primarily about individual soul-winning in the Church Age, though there may be devotional applications about the seriousness of the gospel and judgment.

The kingdom of heaven in Matthew has a special connection with the King, Israel, earthly rule, and the prophetic program. In Matthew, the Lord Jesus Christ is presented as King. John the Baptist announces, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Jesus preaches the same message. The King is present. The kingdom is genuinely offered to Israel. But after rejection, especially after the blasphemous resistance in Matthew 12, the mysteries of the kingdom are revealed in Matthew 13. These mysteries show conditions during the time when the King is absent and the kingdom does not appear in visible glory. The Net, therefore, does not show the Church catching souls and sorting them. It shows the final kingdom separation after the net has gathered of every kind.

This saves the reader from confusing the parable with the Church’s present ministry. In this age, the Church preaches the gospel of the grace of God. Sinners are saved individually by trusting Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. The believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit. The Church waits for the blessed hope. But this parable looks to the end of the world, not the daily work of evangelism alone. The angels come forth. The wicked are severed from among the just. The furnace of fire appears. Those are not the details of a church service. They are the details of divine judgment. The kingdom setting controls the interpretation, and the interpretation points to the end.

Chapter 2: The Sea Often Pictures the Nations

The net is cast into the sea, and that detail is not meaningless. In Scripture, the sea often pictures the nations, the restless masses of humanity, Gentile powers, instability, and the troubled world of peoples. Isaiah says, “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest.” Daniel sees beasts rising from the sea, picturing Gentile empires. Revelation speaks of waters as peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. That does not mean every

mention of water or sea must automatically be forced into a symbol, but in a kingdom parable like this, a net cast into the sea naturally suggests a broad gathering from among the nations. The sea is vast, restless, mixed, and full of every kind.

The parable says the net "gathered of every kind." That is exactly what a dragnet does. It is not a hook catching one fish at a time. It sweeps broadly. It brings in a mixed catch. Good and bad are enclosed together until the net is brought to shore. This fits the theme of Matthew 13. The Wheat and Tares showed true and false growing together in the world-field until harvest. The Net shows good and bad gathered together in the dragnet until shore. Both parables emphasize mixture before final separation. The present age is not cleanly sorted by visible appearance. The field contains wheat and tares. The net contains good and bad. The final separation belongs to God.

This should also warn against religious triumphalism. The net gathering every kind is not the same as the whole world being converted. Some men want every kingdom parable to say the gospel will gradually conquer civilization and produce a purified world before Christ returns. But the Net does not end with every fish good. It ends with separation. It ends with bad fish cast away. It ends with wicked men severed from among the just. It ends with fire, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. That is not postmillennial optimism. That is judgment at the end of the world. The sea remains a mixed realm until God's appointed sorting.

Chapter 3: The Net Gathers Broadly but Does Not Save Automatically

The net gathers of every kind, but being gathered in the net does not make every fish good. That is a critical point. Association with the outward kingdom profession is not the same thing as salvation. A man can be inside the visible sphere of religion and still be bad. He can be gathered among good things, hear good words, sit among good people, use good vocabulary, and still be unfit when the sorting comes. The net encloses both good and bad until the appointed time. That is a terrifying warning to false professors and religious pretenders. Being near the truth is not the same as being converted by the truth.

This is especially important because the visible religious world is full of people who think proximity equals life. They were raised around churches, heard Bible language, sang hymns, repeated prayers, belonged to groups, attended services, admired Jesus, respected morality, and maybe even defended "Christian values." But a fish in the net is not automatically good. A tare in the field is not wheat because it grew near wheat. A bird in the mustard tree is not sanctified because it found a branch near religious shade. Leaven in the meal is not pure because it is surrounded by flour. Matthew 13 repeatedly warns against confusing outward connection with inward reality. The Net gives that warning at the final sorting.

In Church Age application, this rebukes shallow profession without turning the passage into loss of salvation. A born-again believer is saved by grace through faith, sealed by the Spirit, and complete in Christ. But a religious professor with no new birth is not safe because he is inside the outward net of Christendom. The gospel must be believed personally. Christ must be received. A man must be born again. The parable does not teach that truly saved people become bad fish and get thrown into hell. It teaches that the final judgment will expose the difference between the just and the wicked. The net gathers broadly; only God's judgment separates perfectly.

Chapter 4: The Net Is Drawn to Shore When It Is Full

The parable says, "Which, when it was full, they drew to shore." That means the process has an appointed completion. The net is not drawn in randomly. It is drawn when it is full. That is a solemn thought. God has times, seasons, limits, and appointed endings. Men act like the present age will continue indefinitely because yesterday looked like today and today looks like tomorrow. But the Bible never teaches endless continuation of present conditions. There is a point at which the net is full. There is a point at which the shore is reached. There is a point at which the sorting begins. God's patience is not infinite delay. His longsuffering has an appointed boundary.

The fullness of the net connects with the broader biblical principle that God often allows things to reach a certain measure before judgment falls. The iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full in Abraham's day. Israel's blindness continues until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. The times of the Gentiles have their course. God counts, measures, weighs, and appoints. Men may not see the invisible line, but heaven sees it. When the net is full, it is drawn to shore. The world does not get to vote on that moment. The devil does not get to delay it. Religious institutions do not control it. The King has the schedule.

The shore is also significant because it marks the end of the mixed gathering and the beginning of visible separation. While the net is in the sea, the good and bad are enclosed together. Once it is drawn to shore, sorting begins. That is how the end of the age works. Present mixture will not last forever. Religious confusion will not last forever. Wicked men hiding among the just will not last forever. False professors will not blend in forever. The shore is coming. The fact that judgment has not yet fallen does not mean judgment has been canceled. It means the net is not yet drawn in. When it is, every fish will be known for what it is.

Chapter 5: The Good Are Gathered and the Bad Are Cast Away

The parable says they "gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away." The distinction is absolute. Good and bad are not negotiated into a middle category. There is no

third vessel for religiously confused fish, sincere but lost fish, sacramentally improved fish, or culturally Christian fish. The good are gathered. The bad are cast away. That is the kind of distinction modern religion hates because modern religion wants endless gray areas where judgment never arrives. But the Lord Jesus Christ spoke more plainly about judgment than most modern preachers would dare to speak. He did not apologize for it. He did not soften it. He did not hide it behind therapeutic language. He said the bad are cast away.

The Lord's interpretation makes the meaning even stronger. He says the angels shall sever the wicked from among the just. So the "good" correspond to the just, and the "bad" correspond to the wicked. This is not a sorting between productive Christians and less productive Christians for different levels of reward. This is a moral and judicial separation between the just and the wicked. The just are those accepted by God; the wicked are those under condemnation. That is why the destination of the wicked is not loss of a crown, but the furnace of fire. The parable is not describing a bad day at the judgment seat of Christ. It is describing damnation.

This distinction also shows why men must not confuse outward religion with righteousness. The bad fish are not bad because the net failed to gather them. They were gathered. They are bad because their nature is bad. A false professor may be in the same outward net with saints for a long time, but the end exposes him. A religious hypocrite may pass among the just for years, but the angels will not be fooled. God's judgment does not depend on human confusion. The final sorting will be accurate. No good fish will be thrown out by mistake. No bad fish will sneak into the vessels by clever language. The Lord knows them that are His.

Chapter 6: The Angels Do the Final Severing

The Lord says plainly, "The angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just." That is one of the great safeguards in the passage. The angels do the final severing. Not preachers. Not soul winners. Not church boards. Not theologians. Not governments. Not denominational committees. Angels. This immediately shows that the parable is not giving the Church its present method of ministry. The Church is commanded to preach, teach, evangelize, disciple, reprove, rebuke, exhort, separate from error, and exercise discipline in the local assembly according to Scripture. But the Church is not commissioned to perform the final end-of-the-world separation between the just and the wicked. That belongs to God's appointed messengers.

This balances two truths that must not be confused. First, believers must exercise discernment now. We are to judge doctrine. We are to mark and avoid false teachers. We are to separate from wickedness. We are to put away open sin from the assembly when

Scripture requires it. We are not called to be gullible. But second, we do not possess the omniscience or authority to conduct the final judgment of all mankind. We preach the gospel to every creature because God can save sinners. We warn men of wrath to come. We do not pretend to be angels at the end of the world. When a man confuses present discernment with final severing, he becomes either a tyrant or a fool.

The angels' role also links this parable to other kingdom judgment passages. In the Wheat and Tares, the reapers are the angels. Here, the angels sever the wicked from among the just. In Matthew 24 and 25, angels are connected with the Son of man's coming and gathering. This is end-of-age judgment language. It is not Pauline Church Age reward language. The judgment seat of Christ involves saved believers appearing before Christ to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or bad, with the possibility of reward or loss, yet the man himself saved. The Net involves angels severing wicked from just and casting the wicked into fire. Those are not the same judgment.

Chapter 7: The Furnace of Fire Is Not the Judgment Seat of Christ

The parable ends with one of the most severe statements in Matthew 13: "And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." That is not symbolic language for a Christian losing a reward. That is not a believer standing ashamed because his works were wood, hay, and stubble. That is not a temporary disciplinary experience. That is judgment upon the wicked. The same kind of language appears in the interpretation of the Wheat and Tares, where the Son of man sends forth His angels and they gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity, and cast them into a furnace of fire. The Lord repeats the warning because men need to hear it.

The judgment seat of Christ is different. At the judgment seat, the issue is service, works, reward, and loss for those already saved. First Corinthians 3 says if any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, "but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." That is not what Matthew 13 says about the bad fish. The bad are not saved yet so as by fire. They are cast into the furnace of fire. That distinction is not optional. If a preacher confuses those judgments, he will terrify saved people with passages aimed at the wicked and comfort lost professors with passages meant for saints. Right division protects both groups from the wrong application.

The furnace of fire also rebukes the soft modern god who never judges anyone. Jesus Christ taught fire, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Men may call that harsh, but they are not more compassionate than the Saviour. The Lord warns because judgment is real. A man who removes judgment from the parables has removed the teeth from the Lord's own preaching. The Net says a final separation is coming. The wicked will not be rehabilitated by

religious optimism. They will not be excused because they were part of the outward net. They will not be saved because they blended among the just for a while. The furnace is real, the wailing is real, and the gnashing of teeth is real. The Lord said it, and that settles it.

Conclusion

The parable of the Net Cast Into the Sea is a final-separation parable. The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a net cast into the sea, gathering of every kind. When the net is full, it is drawn to shore. The good are gathered into vessels, and the bad are cast away. The Lord interprets the matter plainly: “So shall it be at the end of the world.” The angels come forth. The wicked are severed from among the just. The wicked are cast into the furnace of fire. That is the meaning. A man does not need to invent another one. The parable is about end-of-age judgment in the kingdom context, not Church Age soul-winning mechanics or the judgment seat of Christ.

This passage should correct careless interpretations in both directions. It does not teach that saved members of the Body of Christ can lose eternal life and be cast into hell as bad fish. That would contradict the gospel of grace, the sealing of the Spirit, and the distinction between the judgment seat of Christ and final judgment on the wicked. But it also does not teach that outward religious association is enough. Being in the net is not the same as being good. Being gathered among Christian things is not the same as being justified before God. The final separation will expose every false professor, every religious hypocrite, every wicked man, and every counterfeit that passed for a season among the just.

The warning is sober, and the comfort is real. The warning is that the shore is coming. The net will not remain in the sea forever. The mixture will not continue forever. The wicked will not hide forever. The comfort is that God will sort perfectly. No angel will make a mistake. No just man will be cast away by accident. No wicked man will escape by religious camouflage. The Lord knows the good, the bad, the just, and the wicked. The net may look confused now, but it will not be confused at the end. Rightly divided, this parable magnifies the justice of God, preserves the gospel of grace, protects eternal security, and warns every religious pretender that the final shore is closer than he thinks.

9 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Householder Bringing Forth Things New and Old

Introduction

After the Lord Jesus Christ gives the great cluster of Matthew 13 parables, He asks His disciples a simple question: “Have ye understood all these things?” They say unto Him, “Yea, Lord.” Then He gives one more short parable that is often passed over too quickly: “Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Matthew 13:52). That verse is not a throwaway line. It is a tremendous key to Bible teaching. The Lord has just given mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. He has spoken of the Sower, the Wheat and Tares, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Net. He has given truth that connects with the Old Testament but also reveals things not plainly opened before. Then He says the properly instructed scribe is like a householder with treasure, bringing forth things new and old. That means the Bible teacher is not supposed to be a man with one little doctrinal hobbyhorse and a pocket full of clichés. He is supposed to know what God said before, what God is revealing now, how the new relates to the old, and how to bring out each truth in its proper place.

This is where right division becomes absolutely necessary. The Lord does not destroy the Old Testament, and He does not flatten the whole Bible into one generic religious soup. He does not say the instructed scribe throws away the old and keeps only the new. He does not say he ignores the new and repeats only the old. He brings forth “things new and old.” That means old truth still matters, but it must be understood in the light of further revelation. New truth matters, but it must not be twisted as though God contradicted what He already promised. A Bible teacher must know Moses, the prophets, the Psalms, the covenants, the kingdom promises, Israel’s history, the law, the types, the sacrifices, and the prophetic hope. But he must also know the mysteries revealed in due time, the rejection of the King, the mystery form of the kingdom, the Body of Christ, the gospel of grace, the catching away of the Church, the Tribulation, the Second Advent, the judgment of the nations, the Millennium, and the eternal state. He must know what belongs where. If he does not, he will make a doctrinal wreck out of the very Book he claims to teach.

The danger today is that many religious teachers are not householders bringing forth treasure. They are spiritual junk dealers dragging everything out of the attic at once and selling it as one pile. They take Israel’s land promises and hand them to the Church. They take the Church’s heavenly calling and shove it into Israel’s earthly tribulation. They take kingdom warnings and use them to threaten the eternal security of a born-again believer. They take Paul’s gospel and read it backward into every passage before the cross as if no revelation developed in time. They take the Sermon on the Mount and turn it into the plan of salvation. They take the judgment of the nations and make it a social gospel. They take the Ten Virgins and use it to scare Christians into thinking the Holy Ghost leaked out of their lamps. That is not bringing forth things new and old. That is doctrinal vandalism. The

instructed scribe must know the treasure house, know the order of the treasure, and bring out the right thing at the right time for the right purpose.

Chapter 1: The Scribe Must Be Instructed Before He Teaches

The Lord says, “Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven.” That word “instructed” is important. A man has no business pretending to be a teacher of Scripture if he is not first a student under the authority of Scripture. The scribe in Israel was supposed to be a man acquainted with the law, the writings, the prophets, and the sacred text. But the Lord is not praising the proud scribes who used knowledge as a religious weapon while rejecting the King standing in front of them. He is describing a scribe who has been instructed unto the kingdom of heaven. That means his old knowledge has been brought under the light of Christ’s revelation. He is not merely repeating tradition. He is being taught by the King.

That is the first mark of a true Bible teacher: he can be corrected by the words of God. Many men know religious systems, confessions, commentaries, denominational positions, and historical arguments, but they are not instructed by Scripture. They use the Bible like a toolbox for proving what they already believe. If a verse does not fit, they explain it away. If a passage rebukes their system, they spiritualize it. If a word makes their doctrine uncomfortable, they redefine it. That is not a scribe instructed unto the kingdom. That is a man protecting his own little kingdom from the Bible. The true teacher sits under the Book before he stands over a lesson. He lets the Scriptures tell him where Israel belongs, where the Church belongs, where the kingdom belongs, where the gospel of grace belongs, and where judgment belongs.

The tragedy is that many men want the authority of teaching without the humility of being instructed. They want a pulpit, a platform, a title, an audience, a following, or a classroom, but they do not want the slow grind of comparing Scripture with Scripture. They do not want to be forced to admit that Matthew 13 is not Romans 8, that James is not Galatians, that Hebrews is not Ephesians, that the Sermon on the Mount is not the plan of salvation for the Body of Christ, and that Revelation is not church history written in code. A teacher who cannot be instructed will eventually become a danger to those who hear him. He will not bring forth treasure. He will bring forth confusion with confidence.

Chapter 2: The Householder Has a Treasure, Not a Junk Pile

The Lord compares the instructed scribe to “a man that is an householder.” A householder has responsibility, order, stewardship, and authority within his own house. He is not a thief grabbing random items from someone else’s property. He is not a beggar digging through scraps. He has a treasure, and he knows what is in it. That is a beautiful picture of a Bible

teacher who has studied the Scriptures enough to know the storehouse of God's revelation. He does not treat the Bible as a pile of disconnected religious sayings. He sees the structure, the order, the covenants, the dispensations, the promises, the warnings, the mysteries, and the fulfillments. He knows that the Bible is not random.

A treasure must be handled carefully. Gold, silver, jewels, old records, title deeds, family inheritances, and precious things are not thrown around like rags. The word of God deserves even greater care. Every verse is pure. Every word is right. Every passage belongs exactly where God put it. But because every verse is pure, every verse must be handled lawfully. Paul told Timothy to study to shew himself approved unto God, "rightly dividing the word of truth." He also said a man must strive lawfully. That means a teacher can have the right Bible, quote the right words, and still use them unlawfully if he misapplies them. The devil quoted Scripture to Jesus Christ, but he did not handle it rightly. Religious men do the same thing every day.

The Bible is treasure, not because every verse says the same thing to the same people under the same conditions, but because every verse says exactly what God intended in its proper place. The law is treasure. The prophets are treasure. The Psalms are treasure. The Gospels are treasure. Acts is treasure. Paul's epistles are treasure. Hebrews through Jude are treasure. Revelation is treasure. But if a man throws it all into a pile and treats every verse as though it is doctrinally addressed to the same audience in the same way, he turns treasure into confusion. The instructed householder knows where the treasure belongs. He knows what to bring out for doctrine, what to bring out for reproof, what to bring out for correction, and what to bring out for instruction in righteousness.

Chapter 3: Things Old Must Not Be Despised

The householder brings forth things old. That means old truth is not discarded simply because new truth has been revealed. The Old Testament is not a dead book. It is inspired Scripture. It gives the foundation of creation, the fall, the flood, the nations, Abraham, Israel, the covenants, the law, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the kingdom, David, the prophets, and the promised Messiah. A man who neglects the Old Testament will never properly understand the New Testament. He may know a few gospel verses and a few Church Age doctrines, but he will not understand why Jesus is called the Son of David, why the kingdom matters, why Israel matters, why the land matters, why the covenants matter, why blood sacrifice matters, or why prophecy matters.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not come as a religious novelty detached from everything God had said before. He came according to the Scriptures. He was born where the prophets said He would be born. He came through the line God promised. He fulfilled types,

shadows, prophecies, and patterns. The Passover pointed to Him. The brazen serpent pointed to Him. The sacrifices pointed to Him. Jonah pointed to Him. David's throne pointed to Him. Isaiah's suffering servant pointed to Him. Micah's Bethlehem prophecy pointed to Him. Zechariah's pierced Messiah pointed to Him. If a teacher despises old things, he will preach a shallow Christ without the full weight of God's revealed preparation.

But honoring old truth is not the same as dragging the believer back under the law. That is where many go wrong. The Old Testament is profitable, but the Church is not under Moses as a covenant system. The sacrifices teach Christ, but we do not offer animal blood. The priesthood foreshadows truths fulfilled in Christ, but we do not return to Levitical mediation. The Sabbath had a covenantal sign function for Israel, but the Body of Christ is not justified by Sabbath observance. Israel's feasts are rich with meaning, but they are not the Church's legal calendar. The old is treasure, but it must be brought forth lawfully. A Bible teacher must know how to preach Christ from the Old Testament without putting saved Gentiles under Israel's yoke.

Chapter 4: Things New Must Not Be Rejected

The householder also brings forth things new. That means God reveals truth progressively in Scripture. He does not contradict Himself, but He does reveal more as history unfolds. The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13 were not plainly laid out in the Old Testament exactly as Christ reveals them here. The mystery of the Body of Christ was not made known in other ages as it was later revealed unto the apostles and prophets by the Spirit, especially through Paul. The catching away of the Church, the one new man, Jews and Gentiles in one Body with a heavenly calling, the full doctrinal explanation of justification by faith apart from works, the believer's identification with Christ's death and resurrection, and the Church's position in heavenly places are truths that must be received as new revelation in God's order.

Religious men often resist new truth because it disturbs their old system. The Pharisees had old truth in their hands, but they rejected the new light when Christ stood before them. They could quote Moses and miss the Prophet like unto Moses. They could search the Scriptures and refuse the One of whom the Scriptures testified. They could tithe mint and anise and cummin while rejecting judgment, mercy, and faith. Old truth in the hands of a hard heart can become a weapon against further revelation. That is a terrifying thing. A man can be so loyal to his tradition about old truth that he rejects the new thing God is revealing in the text.

This is also why many fail to understand Paul's ministry. They love the Gospels, or at least their version of the Gospels, but when Paul reveals the mystery, they treat him like a

footnote. They say, “I follow Jesus, not Paul,” as though the risen Christ did not give Paul his doctrine. That sounds pious, but it is rebellion wearing a devotional necktie. The same Lord who spoke on earth to Israel later spoke from heaven and revealed Church Age truth through Paul. Rejecting Paul’s distinctive revelation is not humility. It is disobedience to Christ’s order of revelation. The householder must bring forth things new. If he refuses the new, he will not understand the present dispensation.

Chapter 5: New and Old Must Be Brought Forth in the Right Order

The verse does not merely say the householder possesses new and old things. It says he “bringeth forth” out of his treasure things new and old. That implies timing, order, and wisdom. A good teacher knows not only what is true, but when and how to bring it forth. He knows milk from meat. He knows foundation from superstructure. He knows doctrine from application. He knows the difference between explaining a passage and using a passage devotionally. He knows when a verse is doctrinally addressed to Israel, when it is doctrinally addressed to the Church, when it concerns the Tribulation, when it concerns the Millennium, and when it offers a timeless moral principle that can be applied without stealing someone else’s doctrine.

This is where many teachers fail. They may know a number of true statements, but they do not know the order. They preach Matthew 24 as though it is the blessed hope of the Church. They preach the Sheep and Goats as though it is the plan of salvation for lost sinners today. They preach the Ten Virgins as though the Holy Spirit is oil that runs out of saved people. They preach the Sermon on the Mount as though a sinner is justified by exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. They preach James 2 as though Paul forgot to mention works in Romans 4. They preach Hebrews 6 as though the sealed believer in Christ is one bad week away from damnation. They have verses, but they do not have order.

A teacher without order is like a doctor who owns all the medicines but gives them to the wrong patients. The medicine may be real, but the application can be deadly. Scripture is perfect, but misapplied Scripture can terrify the wrong people and comfort the wrong people. A lost sinner needs the gospel of grace, not a lecture on millennial land inheritance. A saved believer under accusation needs Romans 8, not Matthew 25 twisted into a threat against eternal security. A lazy Christian may need warnings about the judgment seat of Christ, but he does not need to be told he is a bad fish about to be cast into the furnace. A Bible teacher must know what to bring forth and where to place it. That is what right division does.

Chapter 6: The Instructed Scribe Must Distinguish Israel, the Church, and the Kingdom

One of the chief responsibilities of the instructed scribe is to distinguish Israel, the Church, and the kingdom. If he cannot do that, he should not be trusted with the parables. Israel is a nation descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with covenants, promises, land, tribes, prophets, priesthood, and a coming earthly kingdom under Messiah. The Church is the Body of Christ, made up of saved Jews and Gentiles in one new man, seated in heavenly places in Christ, formed in this present dispensation through the gospel of grace. The kingdom includes God's rule and must be understood according to context, especially the kingdom of heaven in Matthew with its connection to the King and His earthly reign. These are related truths, but they are not identical.

When men confuse Israel and the Church, they destroy prophecy. Israel's promises are spiritualized, the Church is shoved into Israel's tribulation, and the kingdom becomes a vague religious influence instead of the literal reign of Christ. When men confuse the Church and the kingdom, they turn kingdom warnings into threats against the Body of Christ and turn the Church's heavenly hope into an earthly political project. When men confuse the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God in every passage without examining context, they miss distinctions the Bible itself makes. The result is doctrinal fog. Nobody knows who is being addressed, what gospel is being preached, what judgment is in view, or what promise applies.

The parables demand these distinctions. The Hidden Treasure points to Israel as God's peculiar treasure. The Pearl points to the Church as one purchased Body. The Net points to end-of-age kingdom judgment. The Wheat and Tares speaks of the world-field, not church discipline. The Mustard Seed warns of abnormal outward kingdom-profession growth. The Leaven warns of hidden corruption. If a man collapses everything into "the Church," he will miss the point of every one of those parables. The instructed scribe must know the old promises and the new revelation. He must know the earthly program and the heavenly calling. He must know what God promised to Israel and what God revealed about the Body of Christ. Without that, he is not bringing forth treasure. He is stirring a pot of confusion.

Chapter 7: Devotional Application Must Not Become Doctrinal Theft

A major mark of a wise Bible teacher is that he can apply Scripture devotionally without stealing it doctrinally. All Scripture is profitable, but not all Scripture is directly addressed to the same people under the same covenantal conditions. That one sentence would save people from a thousand errors. A Christian can learn from Noah without building an ark in his backyard. He can learn from Abraham without claiming every land boundary promised to Abraham's seed. He can learn from Moses without putting himself under the Mosaic covenant. He can learn from David without claiming Israel's throne. He can learn from the

Tribulation saints without placing the Church in Daniel's seventieth week. Application is real, but application must bow to doctrine.

This matters especially in the parables. The Good Samaritan can teach mercy without becoming the gospel of social works. The Prodigal Son can teach repentance, restoration, and the father's compassion without becoming a denial of Pauline salvation doctrine. The Ten Virgins can warn about readiness in a kingdom context without teaching that Church Age believers lose the Holy Spirit. The Talents can teach accountability without becoming justification by productivity. The Sheep and Goats can teach judgment of nations connected with treatment of the Lord's brethren without becoming salvation by charity. The wise teacher brings forth application after doctrine is in place. The fool skips doctrine and builds application on air.

Doctrinal theft happens when a man takes a promise, warning, command, or condition given to one group in one setting and applies it directly to another group in another setting as though nothing changed. That is how cults are built. That is how legalism is built. That is how sacramental systems are built. That is how replacement theology is built. That is how Arminian terror and Calvinist fatalism often feed off misapplied passages. Right division does not rob the Bible of application. It protects application from becoming a lie. A verse can teach me something without being written doctrinally about me. That is not unbelief. That is honest Bible handling.

Conclusion

The parable of the Householder Bringing Forth Things New and Old is a short but mighty statement about Bible teaching. The Lord Jesus Christ says the scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old. That means the proper teacher is not an ignorant enthusiast, a tradition-bound Pharisee, a doctrinal hobbyist, or a religious salesman. He is a steward of treasure. He knows the old revelation and the new revelation. He honors what God said before and receives what God reveals in due time. He does not throw away Moses and the prophets, and he does not reject the mysteries revealed by Christ and later through Paul. He brings forth both in proper order.

This is exactly why right division is not optional. Without right division, the Bible becomes one large pile of verses to be grabbed and applied at random. Israel becomes the Church. The Church becomes Israel. The kingdom becomes a feeling. The Tribulation becomes Christian suffering in general. The judgment seat of Christ becomes hell. The gospel of the kingdom becomes the gospel of grace. Kingdom warnings become threats against eternal security. Devotional lessons become doctrinal theft. But when the Scriptures are rightly

divided, the Book opens cleanly. The old things shine where God placed them. The new things shine where God revealed them. Prophecy keeps its force. Grace keeps its purity. Israel keeps her promises. The Church keeps her heavenly calling. Christ remains the center of it all.

The householder does not bring forth treasure to show off. He brings it forth to feed, instruct, warn, strengthen, and prepare those who hear. That is the calling of a Bible teacher. He must know what belongs to Israel, what belongs to the Church, what belongs to the kingdom, what belongs to the Tribulation, what belongs to the Millennium, and what applies devotionally without being stolen doctrinally. He must not be afraid of old truth, and he must not be suspicious of new revelation when God gives it. He must not flatten the Bible into religious oatmeal. He must bring forth things new and old with reverence, order, and precision. That is what it means to be instructed unto the kingdom of heaven.

10 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Wise and Foolish Builders

Introduction

The parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders is one of the most familiar sayings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and because it is familiar, it is often handled carelessly. Matthew 7:24-27 says, “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.” Then the rain descends, the floods come, the winds blow, and the house stands because it is founded upon a rock. But the man who hears Christ’s sayings and does them not is likened unto a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. The same storm comes, the same rain falls, the same winds blow, the same floods rise, and that house falls, “and great was the fall of it.” On the surface, the lesson is plain enough for a child to understand: hearing the words of Christ without obeying them is foolishness, and the only house that stands is the one built on the right foundation. But the fact that a passage is plain devotionally does not mean it can be handled sloppily doctrinally. The words are plain, but they are not floating in space. They are the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount, spoken by the King to Israel in view of the kingdom.

That setting matters. The Sermon on the Mount is not Paul’s epistle to the Romans. It is not Ephesians. It is not Galatians. It is not a post-resurrection explanation of justification by faith in the finished death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It is kingdom preaching from the King, delivered in the context of Israel, the law, righteousness, the coming kingdom, and the contrast between true kingdom righteousness and the hypocritical righteousness

of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets.” He said, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” He dealt with murder, adultery, oaths, retaliation, almsgiving, prayer, fasting, laying up treasure, judging, false prophets, and doing the will of the Father. This is not a shallow motivational speech about having a positive attitude. It is a kingdom constitution exposing the inward righteousness required under the King’s authority. If a man drags the Sermon on the Mount out of that setting and turns it into the Church Age plan of salvation, he will end up preaching salvation by works while pretending he is “just following Jesus.”

At the same time, right division must never be used as an excuse to dodge obedience. That is the ditch on the other side. Some people hear that the Sermon on the Mount has a kingdom setting and then act as if nothing in it can rebuke them, instruct them, or apply to them. That is not right division. That is laziness with a Scofield note. All Scripture is profitable. The words of Christ matter. Obedience matters. Hearing and doing matters. A man can be saved by grace through faith and still build foolishly if he refuses to obey the light God gives him. The parable does not teach that a lost sinner earns justification by building well enough. It teaches that hearing the King’s words without doing them is folly and that only what is founded on the rock survives judgment. For the Church Age believer, the doctrinal foundation of salvation is Jesus Christ crucified, buried, risen, and received by faith. But the practical foundation of a life that stands is still submission to the words of God. Grace saves a man freely; it does not authorize him to build on sand.

Chapter 1: The Parable Concludes the Sermon on the Mount

The first word of the parable is “Therefore.” That means it is connected to what came before it. A man who starts at Matthew 7:24 without reading Matthew 5 through 7 is already in danger. The Lord has just preached the Sermon on the Mount, and the parable is His closing illustration. It is not an isolated saying about general morality. It is the conclusion of a kingdom sermon. The wise man is the man who hears “these sayings of mine” and does them. The foolish man is the man who hears “these sayings of mine” and does them not. The sayings in view are the sayings of the Sermon on the Mount. That sermon must be understood in its own doctrinal setting before the parable can be applied properly.

The Sermon on the Mount is preached by the King in Matthew, the Gospel that presents Jesus Christ as the King of the Jews. John the Baptist has already preached, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Jesus has preached the same message. The King is present, and the kingdom is being offered. The sermon therefore describes the righteousness connected with that kingdom. It exposes the shallow externalism of the religious leaders and drives the issue down into the heart. Murder is not merely the outward

act; anger and contempt are exposed. Adultery is not merely the outward act; lust is exposed. Prayer is not merely public performance; secret communion with the Father is required. Almsgiving is not theater. Fasting is not religious display. The King is not fooled by outward religion.

This is why the parable has such force. After hearing Christ lay open the righteousness, sincerity, mercy, purity, faith, and obedience connected with the kingdom, a hearer must do something with those words. He can admire them, quote them, frame them, study them, and call them beautiful, but if he does not do them, he is a fool building on sand. The Lord is not impressed with respectful listeners who refuse obedience. That was Israel's problem repeatedly. They had the words. They had the prophets. They had the temple. They had the ceremonies. They had the law. But hearing without doing becomes judgment. The parable exposes that kind of empty hearing.

Chapter 2: The Rock Is the Only Foundation That Can Stand

The wise man builds on a rock. That is the central picture. A house may look impressive from the outside, but the foundation determines whether it stands in the storm. Men usually judge the house by what is visible: size, paint, windows, height, decoration, and neighborhood approval. God judges the foundation. That is one of the great lessons of the passage. Two houses may look similar before the storm. The foolish man's house may be large, attractive, expensive, and admired. The wise man's house may not look much different to the casual observer. But when the rain descends, the floods come, and the winds blow, the foundation tells the truth. The storm does not create the foundation; it reveals it.

In the broadest biblical sense, the Rock is God and His revealed truth, and ultimately Christ Himself. The Old Testament repeatedly calls the Lord a rock. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:4, "that Rock was Christ." First Corinthians 3:11 says, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." A Church Age believer must be clear: the foundation of salvation is not personal obedience, religious performance, or kingdom righteousness achieved by the sinner. The foundation of salvation is Jesus Christ and His finished work. A sinner is justified by faith in Christ, not by constructing a moral house impressive enough to survive inspection. If a man makes his obedience the foundation of his justification, he is already building on sand while calling it rock.

But in the immediate parable, building on the rock is defined by hearing Christ's sayings and doing them. That does not contradict Christ as the foundation; it shows that real submission to the King's words is the wise response to Him. In the kingdom setting, the hearer who receives the King's words and acts upon them is building properly. In devotional

application, the believer who hears the Bible and obeys it is building his life on what will stand. Christ is never separated from His words. A man cannot honestly say he is building on Christ while despising what Christ says. A man may not be saved by obedience, but a saved man who ignores obedience is not wise. He is putting his life, testimony, fruit, reward, and stability in danger.

Chapter 3: The Sand Is the False Security of Hearing Without Obedience

The foolish man is not described as a man who never heard. That is the frightening part. He hears the sayings of Christ and does them not. He is not ignorant in the sense of having no exposure. He is accountable because he heard. This is a devastating warning to religious people. A man can sit under truth, hear sermons, read Scripture, attend meetings, follow Bible teachers, debate doctrine, post verses, and still build on sand if he refuses obedience to the truth he hears. The foolish builder is not necessarily an atheist laughing at the Bible from a tavern stool. He may be a religious hearer with a Bible under his arm and disobedience in his heart.

Sand represents an unstable foundation. It shifts. It cannot hold under pressure. That is what human religion is like. Self-righteousness is sand. Tradition is sand. Emotionalism is sand. Church membership is sand if a man trusts it for salvation. Baptism is sand if a man trusts it as the new birth. Good works are sand if they are made the basis of justification. Scholarship is sand if it corrects the words of God. Denominational loyalty is sand if it replaces obedience to Scripture. Personal sincerity is sand if it is detached from truth. The foolish man may build quickly because sand is easy. He does not have to dig deep. He does not have to strike rock. He does not have to be corrected. He simply builds where it is convenient.

Hearing without doing is especially deceptive because hearing can feel like progress. A man may think that because he listened, he has obeyed. He may confuse exposure with submission. He may hear a rebuke and say, “That was strong preaching,” then change nothing. He may hear doctrine and say, “That was deep,” then never let it govern his life. He may hear warnings about pride, worldliness, bitterness, lust, false doctrine, prayerlessness, and disobedience, then walk away exactly as he came. That is sand-building. The more truth a disobedient hearer accumulates, the greater his accountability becomes. He is not safer because he heard more. He is in greater danger if he heard and refused to do.

Chapter 4: The Storm Reveals the Builder

Both houses face the storm. That detail matters. The wise man is not spared rain, floods, and wind. The foolish man is not singled out as the only one who faces pressure. The same

elements strike both houses. The difference is not the absence of storms but the condition of the foundation. This corrects another false idea: that obedience to God means a man will never face hardship. The Bible says no such thing. The wise builder still gets rain. He still faces floods. He still feels wind beating upon the house. Wisdom does not remove testing. It prepares a man to stand when testing comes.

In the immediate kingdom setting, the storm points toward judgment, testing, and the day when mere profession collapses under divine scrutiny. The Sermon on the Mount ends with a series of warnings: the strait gate and narrow way, false prophets in sheep's clothing, corrupt trees, empty "Lord, Lord" professions, and then the two builders. The whole ending is designed to strip away false security. Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" enters the kingdom of heaven. Not everyone who does religious works in Christ's name is accepted. Not every house stands. The storm is not merely a bad week. It is the searching test of whether a man's response to the King was real.

In devotional application, storms come in many forms before final judgment ever arrives. Temptation is a storm. Persecution is a storm. Sickness is a storm. Financial pressure is a storm. Family trouble is a storm. Bereavement is a storm. False doctrine is a storm. Success can even be a storm because prosperity has destroyed many men faster than suffering. When the storm comes, the foundation speaks. A man who has built his life on feelings will collapse when feelings change. A man who has built on people will collapse when people disappoint him. A man who has built on money will collapse when money leaves. A man who has built on religious performance will collapse when guilt finally catches him. A man who has built on Christ and the words of God has something beneath him that the storm did not create and cannot remove.

Chapter 5: This Is Not Salvation by Works

This point must be made plainly because many people use the Sermon on the Mount to preach works salvation. They read, "heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them," and then they conclude that a sinner is justified by doing enough of the sayings of Christ. That is not the gospel of grace. The Sermon on the Mount was preached before the cross, before the resurrection, before the ascension, before the mystery of the Body of Christ was revealed through Paul, and before the full doctrinal explanation of justification by faith apart from works was written in Romans and Galatians. The doctrinal setting is kingdom righteousness, not the Church Age gospel formula. A sinner today is not saved by successfully living the Sermon on the Mount. He is saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for his sins, was buried, and rose again.

If the Sermon on the Mount is made the plan of salvation, nobody is saved. Read it carefully. Pluck out the eye. Cut off the hand. Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. Forgive to be forgiven in the governmental kingdom context. Do righteousness exceeding the scribes and Pharisees. Enter the strait gate. Bring forth good fruit. Do the will of the Father. If a man turns all of that into the sinner's way to receive justification in the Church Age, he has not preached good news; he has preached a mountain too high for any sinner to climb. The Sermon exposes righteousness beyond Pharisaical externalism and shows the standard of the King. It does not replace the cross as the sinner's only hope.

That does not mean obedience is unimportant. It means obedience must be put in its proper place. In salvation, Christ's work is the foundation. In discipleship, obedience is required. In fellowship, obedience matters. In rewards, obedience matters. In testimony, obedience matters. In chastisement, obedience matters. In usefulness, obedience matters. In stability, obedience matters. A man is not justified by building; he is justified by Christ. But after salvation, he had better take heed how he buildeth. First Corinthians 3 says the foundation is Jesus Christ, and then every man's work will be tested. That is not the same judgment as Matthew 7, but the principle holds devotionally: what is built on the right foundation stands, and what is built wrongly will not survive God's testing.

Chapter 6: The Parable Rebukes Empty Profession

The Wise and Foolish Builders must be read alongside the verses immediately before it. Jesus says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Then He describes many who will say in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" His answer is, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Then comes the parable. That means the foolish builder is connected with empty profession, religious activity, and hearing without true submission. These are not people who lacked religious vocabulary. They said, "Lord, Lord." They had works. They had claims. They had spiritual-sounding resumes. But the Lord never knew them.

That should terrify the modern religious crowd. Many people think saying "Lord" proves everything. Others think spiritual activity proves everything. Others think impressive works prove everything. But Jesus says many will claim prophecy, exorcism, and wonderful works in His name and still be rejected. That means religious power claims are not the foundation. Miraculous claims are not the foundation. Ministry success is not the foundation. Public profession is not the foundation. A man may have all those things and still be on sand. The only safe foundation is the one God lays, and the only wise response to the King's words is obedient faith.

In Church Age terms, this should make a man examine whether he is trusting Christ or trusting religion. A lost man may say the right words and still be lost if he has never trusted the finished work of Christ. A saved man may possess eternal life and still have areas of his life built foolishly if he refuses the words of God. The passage's doctrinal warning aims at false kingdom profession, but its practical edge cuts every hearer. Do not boast that you heard. Do not boast that you said "Lord." Do not boast that you were busy. The question is whether your house is on rock or sand. Profession without possession collapses. Hearing without doing collapses. Religious activity without Christ collapses. The storm will prove it.

Chapter 7: Right Division Preserves Both Grace and Obedience

Right division is not a trick to escape the words of Christ. It is the only way to preserve both grace and obedience without corrupting either one. If a man refuses right division, he will often fall into one of two errors. He will either turn Matthew 7 into works salvation and rob the sinner of the gospel of grace, or he will overreact and act as though the passage has no instruction for the believer at all. Both are wrong. The parable must stay in its kingdom setting, but once it is rightly placed, it remains profitable. The doctrine belongs where God put it. The application can still rebuke, warn, and instruct.

Grace must be preserved. The sinner is saved by Christ's blood and resurrection, received by faith. He is not saved by successfully performing the Sermon on the Mount. He is not saved by building well enough, enduring storms well enough, or doing enough sayings to earn entrance into heaven. The Church Age believer is complete in Christ, sealed with the Spirit, and accepted in the Beloved. That doctrine cannot be overthrown by dragging a kingdom passage into the wrong doctrinal lane. Eternal security rests on Christ, not on the believer's storm performance. The foundation of salvation is not the believer's obedience but the Saviour's finished work.

Obedience must also be preserved. The same grace that saves teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. The believer who hears the Bible and refuses to obey is not spiritual because he can define dispensations. He is foolish. Right division should make a man more obedient, not less. It should show him where he stands in Christ and then teach him to build in a way that honors the One who bought him. A man may be saved and still waste his life building with wood, hay, and stubble. He may be justified and still unstable because he refuses the practical authority of Scripture. The Wise and Foolish Builders reminds every hearer that truth is not given for decoration. The words of God are to be believed and obeyed.

Conclusion

The parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders is the Lord's closing blow at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. The wise man hears Christ's sayings and does them. The foolish man hears the same sayings and does them not. Both build. Both face the storm. One stands because it is founded upon a rock. The other falls because it is founded upon sand. The lesson is plain: hearing without obedience is foolishness, and no house built on sand will survive the storm. But the doctrine must be kept in its setting. This is kingdom preaching from the King to Israel in view of the kingdom, not Paul's later doctrinal explanation of the Church Age gospel.

That distinction protects the gospel. A sinner today is not justified by performing the Sermon on the Mount. He is justified by faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for his sins, was buried, and rose again. Christ is the foundation of salvation. His blood paid the price. His righteousness is imputed to the believer. His resurrection secures the hope. To turn the Wise Builder into a sinner earning salvation by obedience is to corrupt grace and place an impossible burden on the lost. No sinner can build his way into justification. He must come to Christ as guilty, helpless, and bankrupt, and be saved by grace.

But the parable also protects the hearer from empty profession. A man who hears truth and refuses it is not wise. A believer who knows the Bible and disobeys it is building foolishly in the practical realm of life, testimony, fruit, and reward. A religious professor who says "Lord, Lord" while trusting works, signs, or outward activity is on sand no matter how impressive the house looks. The storm is coming. Judgment reveals foundations. Testing exposes what men built upon. The answer is not to admire the words of Christ from a distance. The answer is to believe them, place them rightly, and obey the light God gives. The wise man does not merely hear the King. He builds where the storm cannot take him down.

11 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - New Cloth on an Old Garment

Introduction

The parable of the New Cloth on an Old Garment is one of those short sayings of the Lord Jesus Christ that exposes an entire world of religious confusion. Matthew 9:16 says, "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse." Mark 2:21 says, "No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse." Luke 5:36 adds, "No man putteth a piece of

a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old." That is simple language, but it carries a powerful doctrinal warning. The Lord was not giving a sewing lesson for Galilean housewives. He was exposing the impossibility of patching old religion with new revelation. He was showing that what God was doing through Him could not be reduced to a repair job on Pharisaical Judaism. The King had come. The old outward religious garment was torn, worn, exposed, and unable to contain what God was bringing to pass.

The immediate setting is important. The Lord is questioned about fasting. John's disciples and the Pharisees fasted, but the disciples of Jesus did not fast in the same way. The question reveals the tension of the transition taking place in the Gospels. The old religious order had its forms, customs, fasts, washings, traditions, and visible marks of piety. The Pharisees were experts at turning religion into a garment men could admire from the outside. But Christ was not impressed with their cloth. He had already exposed their hypocrisy in other places, and He would continue to do so. He did not come to put a respectable new patch on a corrupt system. He did not come to freshen up the Pharisees' robe so they could keep wearing it with a better label. He did not come to sew grace onto law, the Church onto Israel, the gospel of the grace of God onto the old covenant order, or living truth onto dead formalism. The new cloth would not agree with the old garment. The attempt would make the rent worse.

This parable is especially important for rightly dividing the Scriptures because it sits in the transition period of the Gospels. Jesus Christ is ministering to Israel under the law, presenting Himself as the King, fulfilling prophecy, exposing religious hypocrisy, and preparing for truths that would later be opened more fully after His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and the revelation given through Paul. If a man cannot handle transition, he will make a mess of the New Testament. He will try to patch the Church onto Israel. He will try to patch grace onto law. He will try to patch kingdom conditions onto eternal security. He will try to patch old covenant forms onto New Testament life. He will try to patch priestcraft, rituals, sacraments, and religious machinery onto the finished work of Christ. The result is always the same: the rent is made worse. God is not interested in improving dead religion. He gives life. He gives a new birth. He gives a new creature. He gives a new man. He gives a better covenant. He gives a living Saviour. He does not call men to sew a clean patch on a rotten robe and then call the mixture Christianity.

Chapter 1: The Parable Was Spoken in a Time of Transition

The Lord's statement about new cloth and an old garment comes in a transition setting. That must be understood before the doctrine is applied. The Gospels are not written after the cross as though the Church has already been revealed in all its Pauline fullness. They

show the Lord Jesus Christ ministering among the Jews, under the law, in fulfillment of the prophets, offering the kingdom to Israel, and exposing the religious leaders who had corrupted the nation's spiritual life. John the Baptist has prepared the way. The King is present. The disciples are following Him. The Pharisees and their system are being exposed. The question about fasting shows that men are trying to measure Christ and His disciples by the old religious expectations already in place.

That transition creates tension. The disciples of John had a ministry connected with repentance, preparation, and the coming King. The Pharisees had a system of outward religion, traditional piety, and public fasting. The disciples of Jesus were in the presence of the Bridegroom. Christ answers by saying the children of the bridechamber cannot mourn while the bridegroom is with them, but the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. That answer already points toward His rejection and removal. Then He gives the parables of the new cloth and new wine. He is saying, in effect, that the new thing God is doing cannot simply be forced into the old forms without disaster.

This is why the Gospels must be read carefully. They contain old covenant setting, kingdom preaching, prophetic fulfillment, and anticipations of new revelation. They are inspired Scripture and full of truth for us, but they are not all doctrinally addressed to the Church in the same way Paul's epistles are. The Lord is dealing with Israel and her religious condition. He is not yet explaining the mystery of the one Body of Christ in its full doctrinal detail. He is not yet preaching 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 as completed historical fact. He is moving toward the cross, and the transition is unfolding. The parable of the new cloth warns that a man cannot understand that transition by sewing everything together as though nothing changes in God's dealings with men.

Chapter 2: The Old Garment Represents the Worn-Out Religious System

The old garment in the parable is not the Old Testament as the inspired word of God. That distinction must be made carefully. Christ did not come to destroy the law or the prophets. The Old Testament is pure, inspired, profitable, and authoritative. The old garment is not the Bible. The old garment is the worn-out religious system as men had handled it, especially the Pharisaical order with its traditions, outward righteousness, hypocrisy, and inability to receive the living work of God. The law itself was holy, just, and good. The problem was not that God's word was defective. The problem was that the religious garment men were wearing had become old, torn, self-righteous, and unable to receive what Christ was bringing.

The Pharisaical system was a robe of outward respectability. It looked religious. It had prayers, fastings, tithes, washings, Sabbath regulations, public alms, long robes, honored seats, and religious vocabulary. But underneath that garment was pride, unbelief, hypocrisy, covetousness, blindness, and rejection of Christ. Jesus repeatedly exposed it. He called them hypocrites, blind guides, whited sepulchres, serpents, and a generation of vipers. He said they made void the commandment of God by their tradition. He said they shut up the kingdom of heaven against men. So when He speaks of the old garment, the doctrinal thrust is not that the written Old Testament was bad. It is that the old religious structure men were clinging to could not be repaired by a mere patch.

This matters today because men still love old garments. They love religious systems that give them visible identity, human authority, traditional continuity, and outward respectability. Rome has an old garment of priestcraft, sacraments, traditions, relics, robes, and institutional claims. Protestant formalism has its own old garments. Legalistic fundamentalism can have old garments too, where outward rules replace inward life and grace becomes a word on the doctrinal statement rather than the atmosphere of the ministry. Any system that trusts form over life, ritual over truth, tradition over Scripture, or outward appearance over inward reality is an old garment. Christ does not come along to decorate it with a new patch. He exposes it.

Chapter 3: The New Cloth Does Not Agree with the Old

The Lord says that no man puts new cloth on an old garment because the new piece takes away from the old and the rent is made worse. Luke adds that the piece taken out of the new "agreeth not with the old." That is the heart of the parable. The new does not agree with the old. The problem is incompatibility. You cannot successfully sew fresh, strong, new cloth onto an old, shrinking, weak garment and expect harmony. The new patch pulls away, and the tear becomes worse. That is exactly what happens when men try to force the living work of Christ into dead religious systems. The new truth does not strengthen the old garment. It exposes it and tears it further.

This is seen throughout the Gospels. Christ does not fit into Pharisaical religion. His authority does not agree with their traditions. His mercy does not agree with their self-righteousness. His miracles do not agree with their unbelief. His truth does not agree with their hypocrisy. His holiness does not agree with their theatrical piety. His kingdom preaching does not agree with their ambition. His dealings with publicans and sinners do not agree with their pride. His claim to be Lord of the Sabbath does not agree with their man-made Sabbath bondage. The new cloth keeps pulling at the old garment until the tear is obvious. That is why they eventually seek to kill Him. They cannot make Him a patch, so they reject Him.

The same principle applies doctrinally. Grace does not agree with law as a system of justification. The gospel of the grace of God does not agree with sacramental salvation. The new creature does not agree with Adamic self-improvement religion. The one Body of Christ does not agree with national Israel's covenant identity being stolen and relabeled. The finished work of Christ does not agree with priestly mediation. The believer's access to God through Christ does not agree with a human priest standing between him and God. The indwelling Spirit does not agree with dead formalism. The King's living authority does not agree with religious tradition pretending to speak for God. The new cloth does not agree with the old garment.

Chapter 4: Christ Did Not Come to Patch Pharisaical Judaism

One of the strongest lessons of the parable is that Christ did not come to patch Pharisaical Judaism. He did not come to make the Pharisees look better. He did not come to add a little mercy to their pride, a little grace to their legalism, a little truth to their tradition, and a little spiritual freshness to their dead formalism. He came as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, the promised King, the Lamb of God, and the Son of God. He came to expose the nation's rulers, call sinners to repentance, fulfill righteousness, and go to the cross. He was not a reform patch for a religious robe. He was the Lord from heaven standing in front of men wearing worn-out religion.

The Pharisees wanted control, not conversion. They wanted their system protected, not their hearts changed. They could tolerate a teacher who fit their garment. They could tolerate a rabbi who respected their rank. They could tolerate a reformer who left their authority intact. But Christ was not that. He spoke as one having authority, and not as the scribes. He forgave sins. He healed on the Sabbath. He ate with publicans. He rebuked hypocrisy publicly. He cleansed the temple. He exposed their traditions. He told them their father was the devil. The new cloth did not simply fail to match the old garment; it tore against the whole thing.

That is why attempts to make Jesus a mere moral reformer always fail. He was not trying to save Judaism as the Pharisees had corrupted it. He was not trying to make all religions nicer. He was not trying to preserve institutional religion with kinder language. He came to fulfill what God had spoken and bring in what God had purposed. The religious crowd could either bow to Him or be torn by Him. That remains true. Any religious system that tries to use Jesus as a patch while keeping its own authority, traditions, works salvation, priestcraft, and unbelief will end up worse. Christ is not a decorative addition to dead religion. He is the end of every false refuge.

Chapter 5: Law and Grace Must Not Be Sewn Together as One Garment

This parable gives a strong warning against mixing law and grace. The law had its place. It was given by God to Israel. It revealed sin, governed the nation, contained types and shadows, and pointed forward to Christ. But the law was never a system by which sinners could be justified through their own righteousness. Paul says plainly that by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in God's sight. He says Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. He says we are not under the law, but under grace. That does not mean the believer is lawless. It means he is not under the Mosaic covenant as a system of righteousness and standing before God.

Religious men keep trying to sew grace onto law as though the two can function as one garment for justification. They say salvation is by grace, but you must keep commandments to stay saved. They say Christ paid it all, but you must add sacraments. They say faith saves, but works complete the transaction as the basis of final acceptance. They say the blood gets you started, but your obedience keeps you in. That is a patched garment. It looks religious, but the rent is made worse. Grace and works cannot be mixed as the ground of justification. Romans 11:6 says, "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace." That verse ought to end the argument.

A saved man should obey God. He should live holy. He should walk in the Spirit. He should serve, give, pray, witness, separate from evil, and bear fruit. But those things are not patches sewn onto Christ's finished work to make it sufficient. They are the fruit of life already received. Law and grace have to be put in their proper dispensational and doctrinal places. The law exposes, condemns, and points to Christ. Grace saves, teaches, and empowers. When men sew them together wrongly, they create a garment that neither honors Moses nor Christ. It tears the conscience, confuses the gospel, and produces either pride or despair.

Chapter 6: Kingdom and Church Must Not Be Confused

The parable also warns against sewing kingdom doctrine and Church doctrine together without right division. The Lord's earthly ministry includes strong kingdom content. He preaches the kingdom of heaven as at hand. He sends the twelve to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He speaks of the meek inheriting the earth. He talks about entering the kingdom, kingdom righteousness, judgment, and the coming reign. Those truths are real, but they belong where God placed them. The Church, the Body of Christ, is later revealed with special clarity through Paul as one new man made up of Jews and Gentiles, seated in heavenly places, blessed with spiritual blessings, and saved by the gospel of grace. If a man sews the two together carelessly, he will produce confusion.

This happens constantly. Men take Matthew 24 and put the Church in the Tribulation. They take the Ten Virgins and threaten saved believers with being shut out because their oil ran low. They take the Sheep and Goats and preach salvation by helping the needy. They take kingdom forgiveness passages and use them to undermine the believer's standing in Christ. They take Israel's kingdom promises and hand them to the Church while giving Israel the curses. That is old cloth, new cloth, patches, tears, and confusion everywhere. It is not Bible study. It is sewing with a blindfold on.

The Church has doctrine addressed to it, and Israel has doctrine addressed to it. The kingdom has conditions, promises, warnings, and judgments that must be read in context. The Tribulation has its own setting. The Millennium has its own setting. The believer today can learn from all of it, but he must not steal all of it doctrinally. Devotional application is one thing; doctrinal misplacement is another. The parable of the new cloth teaches that God is not asking us to patch everything into one religious robe. He expects us to rightly divide the word of truth.

Chapter 7: New Life Cannot Be Reduced to Old Religious Forms

The final practical force of the parable is that new life in Christ cannot be reduced to old religious forms. Men love forms because forms can be managed by the flesh. A man can fast publicly, pray publicly, dress religiously, attend ceremonies, repeat words, follow calendars, light candles, sign statements, and look spiritual while his heart remains far from God. Old garments are comfortable because they allow men to appear clothed while remaining unchanged. Christ did not come to help men look better in Adam. He came to give life. He came to make a man a new creature. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." That is not a patch. That is a new creation.

This is why mere religious renovation cannot save anybody. A drunk can sober up and still be lost. A thief can stop stealing and still be lost. A church member can become more faithful and still be lost. A moral man can polish his conduct and still be lost. A Pharisee can improve his garment and still reject Christ. The sinner does not need a patch; he needs regeneration. He does not need a religious repair; he needs a new birth. He does not need Christ sewn onto his old Adamic life as a moral improvement. He needs to be crucified with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life. The old garment cannot be saved by a new patch.

For the believer, this also means Christian living is not old religion with Jesus language added. The Christian life is not law-keeping in a Church Age costume. It is not Phariseeism with hymns. It is not self-righteousness with a King James Bible under the arm. It is walking in the Spirit, standing in grace, growing in sound doctrine, being renewed in the inner man,

and living out the life received in Christ. When believers turn Christianity into external garment management, they drift back toward the very thing the Lord exposed. The new cloth was never meant to decorate the old garment. God's work in Christ is deeper than repair. It is resurrection.

Conclusion

The parable of the New Cloth on an Old Garment is a warning against religious patchwork. The Lord Jesus Christ was not sent to repair Pharisaical Judaism, decorate dead tradition, or make old religious systems more respectable. He did not come to sew a clean piece of truth onto a corrupt garment of hypocrisy and unbelief. The old garment could not receive the new cloth. The new would pull away from the old, and the rent would be made worse. That is exactly what happened when Christ stood before Israel's religious leaders. His truth did not blend with their tradition. His authority did not blend with their hypocrisy. His life did not blend with their deadness. His righteousness did not blend with their self-righteousness.

The doctrinal warning is just as strong today. Law and grace cannot be sewn together as one ground of justification. Kingdom and Church cannot be carelessly patched together without wrecking both. Israel's promises and the Church's heavenly calling must not be mixed into one garment of confusion. Old covenant forms cannot be used as the controlling pattern for New Testament life in Christ. The gospel of grace cannot be patched onto sacramental systems, priestcraft, works salvation, or religious performance. Every time men try, the rent is made worse. Confusion increases, assurance is destroyed, Christ's finished work is dishonored, and the believer is pulled back into bondage.

The answer is not to despise the Old Testament, the law, the prophets, or the truths God revealed before. The answer is to put them where God put them and let Christ fulfill what only He could fulfill. The answer is not to patch Adam, but to preach the new birth. The answer is not to improve dead religion, but to stand in the life of the risen Saviour. The answer is not to sew together every dispensation until the Bible becomes one ragged garment, but to rightly divide the word of truth. Christ does not offer a patch. He offers Himself. And when a man has Christ, he does not need a repaired Pharisee robe. He has life, righteousness, grace, and a standing that no old garment could ever provide.

12 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - New Wine in Old Bottles

Introduction

The parable of the New Wine in Old Bottles stands right beside the parable of the New Cloth on an Old Garment, and the two belong together. The Lord Jesus Christ gives both of them in the same setting because they strike the same religious nerve from two different angles. Matthew 9:17 says, “Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.” Mark 2:22 says almost the same thing, and Luke 5:37-38 says, “And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.” The old garment parable deals with patching. The new wine parable deals with containing. In the first, men try to sew a new piece onto an old garment, and the rent is made worse. In the second, men try to pour new wine into old bottles, and the bottles burst. Both pictures warn against the same error: trying to force the living work of God into hardened religious forms that cannot receive it.

The bottles in the passage are not modern glass bottles. They are wineskins, leather containers that had to be able to stretch with the fermenting wine. New wine is active. It expands. It works. It has life and movement. An old hardened skin has already stretched as far as it can go. It is dry, brittle, and unyielding. If new wine is poured into it, the pressure bursts the skin, the wine spills, and the bottle is ruined. That is exactly what happens when men try to force new revelation, living truth, and the work of Christ into old religious containers. The Pharisees had their bottles. They had their fasting systems, their outward forms, their traditions, their ceremonial pride, their Sabbath regulations, their washings, their religious measurements, and their self-righteous structures. But Christ was not something that could be poured into that old system and safely preserved. He did not come to fill Pharisaical wineskins. He came as the Bridegroom, the King, the Son of God, the Lamb of God, and the One through whom God would bring in a new covenant, a new birth, a new creature, and eventually reveal a new man, the Body of Christ.

This parable is desperately needed because many of the worst doctrinal errors in Christianity come from pouring truth into the wrong bottle. Men take Church Age doctrine and pour it into kingdom containers. They take kingdom doctrine and pour it into Church Age containers. They take Israel’s promises and pour them into the Church. They take the Church’s heavenly calling and pour it into Israel’s earthly prophetic program. They take the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles and treat them as if every passage is saying the same thing to the same people under the same conditions. Then the system breaks, and instead of admitting they used the wrong bottle, they blame the Bible for being hard to understand. The Bible is not the problem. The bottles are the problem. New wine must be put into new bottles. Truth must be held in the proper doctrinal container, or the result is broken systems, spilled doctrine, and ruined hearers.

Chapter 1: The Parable Belongs to the Same Transition Setting as the New Cloth

The parable of the New Wine in Old Bottles appears in the context of questions about fasting. The disciples of John and the Pharisees fasted, but the disciples of Jesus did not fast in the same way. The question reveals that men were trying to measure Christ's ministry by existing religious expectations. They saw a difference and wanted an explanation. The Lord answered first by speaking of the bridegroom. While the bridegroom was with the children of the bridechamber, they could not mourn as though He were absent. The days would come when the bridegroom would be taken away, and then they would fast. Then Christ gives the parables of the new cloth and the new wine. He is showing that His presence and work cannot simply be forced into the old forms without tearing and bursting.

This is a transition moment in the Gospels. The King is present among Israel. The law and the prophets have pointed forward to Him. John the Baptist has prepared the way. The Pharisees represent a hardened religious order that has turned outward form into spiritual bondage. The disciples are beginning to follow Christ, but the full revelation of the Church, the Body of Christ, has not yet been opened as it later will be through Paul. The cross has not yet occurred. The resurrection has not yet occurred. Pentecost has not yet occurred. The gospel of the grace of God has not yet been fully proclaimed as a completed message of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. That means the Gospels must be read with their transitional character in mind. If a man ignores that, he will pour everything into the wrong bottle.

The Lord is not saying the Old Testament is evil. He is not saying Moses was wrong. He is not saying the Scriptures given to Israel should be despised. He is exposing the inability of hardened religious traditionalism to contain what God is doing in Christ. The written words of God are perfect. The religious bottles men had made around those words were the problem. They had become stiff, brittle, proud, and unyielding. When Christ came with life, authority, mercy, truth, and power, the old bottle could not stretch. It could only resist and burst. That is what dead religion always does when confronted with living truth. It either hardens further or splits apart.

Chapter 2: New Wine Is Active, Living, and Expanding

New wine is not dead liquid sitting politely in a museum jar. It works. It expands. It puts pressure on the container. That is why it must be put into a bottle capable of receiving its movement. This is a fitting picture of the living work of God as it unfolds in Christ. The truth connected with Christ is not a harmless decoration added to religion. It acts. It exposes. It presses. It expands beyond the narrow boundaries men create. The grace of God will not

remain confined inside Pharisaical legalism. The new birth will not be reduced to ceremonial washings. The indwelling Spirit will not be boxed inside dead formalism. The gospel of Christ will not be contained by priestcraft, sacramental machinery, or human tradition. Living truth puts pressure on dead structures.

That is one reason the religious leaders hated Christ. He did not merely disagree with a few of their preferences. His presence threatened the whole container. If He was right, their system was exposed. If He was the Son of God, their authority was fraudulent. If He could forgive sins, cleanse lepers, heal on the Sabbath, call publicans, and receive sinners, then their religious bottle was too small, too hard, and too corrupt to hold Him. They could not absorb Him. They could not manage Him. They could not pour Him into their categories. They could either repent and believe or resist until the bottle burst. They chose resistance.

The same thing happens whenever genuine Bible truth is introduced into a hardened system. The truth begins to work, and the system begins to crack. Teach salvation by grace through faith in a works-based system, and pressure appears immediately. Teach the priesthood of believers in a clerical system, and the bottle starts stretching. Teach the final authority of the preserved words of God in a Bible-correcting academic system, and the old skin groans. Teach the distinction between Israel and the Church in a replacement theology system, and the seams begin to split. Teach eternal security in a fear-based religious system, and the structure trembles. New wine is not polite to old bottles. It works because it is alive.

Chapter 3: Old Bottles Picture Hardened Religious Containers

The old bottles are the hardened forms that cannot receive the new wine. In the immediate setting, the old bottles especially picture the religious containers of Pharisaical Judaism: outward fasting, ceremonial pride, tradition, legal performance, and self-righteous control. Those forms had become dry and brittle. They had no room for Christ's authority, no room for mercy, no room for sinners being received, no room for the Bridegroom's presence, and no room for the life God was bringing through His Son. The old bottle may have once served a purpose in some form, but now it cannot contain the new thing. The issue is not merely age. The issue is hardness.

Religious systems become old bottles when they lose the ability to bow to Scripture. A system may have started with some truth, some usefulness, or some historical purpose. But when it becomes more loyal to its form than to the words of God, it becomes brittle. When it protects tradition over truth, it becomes brittle. When it preserves offices and titles over spiritual life, it becomes brittle. When it would rather correct the Bible than be corrected by the Bible, it becomes brittle. When it has no room for further light from

Scripture, it becomes brittle. Such a system cannot receive new wine. It can only leak, split, or explode under pressure.

This is not limited to the Pharisees. Rome is an old bottle. Dead Protestant state churches can be old bottles. Liberal seminaries are old bottles. Charismatic systems that place experience over Scripture are old bottles. Legalistic ministries that confuse control with holiness are old bottles. Even independent Bible-believing circles can become old bottles if they harden around tradition, personality, camp loyalty, or secondary issues while losing tenderness toward the Book. The moment a group says, "We cannot receive that because it threatens our system," instead of asking, "What saith the scripture?" the leather is drying out. Old bottles do not always look old. Some have modern logos, updated music, slick websites, and fresh paint. But if they cannot stretch under the authority of truth, they are old.

Chapter 4: The Bottles Burst When Truth Is Forced into the Wrong System

The Lord says if new wine is put into old bottles, "the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish." Luke says the new wine will burst the bottles and be spilled. That is a picture of loss and ruin. The wine is not preserved, and the bottle is not preserved. When truth is forced into the wrong doctrinal container, the system breaks and the truth is wasted in the handling. Men then look at the mess and blame the doctrine, the Bible, or the hearer, when the real problem was the old bottle. They tried to preserve living truth inside a container that could not hold it.

This explains many theological disasters. Pour Church Age salvation into a kingdom-performance bottle, and assurance bursts. Pour Matthew 24 into a pre-tribulational Church setting, and prophecy bursts. Pour James 2 into Romans 4 as though they are addressing the same issue in the same way, and justification doctrine bursts. Pour Hebrews warning passages directly onto sealed members of Christ's Body without regard for audience and context, and eternal security bursts. Pour the Sermon on the Mount into a gospel tract as the way to be justified, and grace bursts. Pour Paul's mystery doctrine backward into every passage before the cross, and the historical development of revelation bursts. The Bible does not break. The man's system breaks because he used the wrong bottle.

The result is always confusion. Some people lose assurance. Others become legalists. Others become antinomians. Others become covenant replacement theologians. Others become sacramentalists. Others become charismatic experientialists. Others become prophecy allegorizers. Others get so tired of contradictions created by bad systems that they quit trying to understand the Bible altogether. But the contradictions are not in the Book. They are in the bottles. God wrote the Scriptures in order. He put passages in

settings. He revealed truth progressively. He gave doctrine to specific people under specific conditions. Right division preserves the wine and the bottle because it puts truth where God put it.

Chapter 5: Gospels, Acts, and Epistles Must Not Be Poured into One Bottle

A major reason people struggle with the New Testament is that they try to pour the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles into one undivided bottle. The Gospels show Christ ministering to Israel under the law, presenting the kingdom, fulfilling prophecy, exposing the rulers, moving toward the cross, and giving truths that often have direct kingdom application. Acts is a transitional book showing Israel's continued rejection, the coming of the Spirit, the gospel moving from Jerusalem outward, Peter's ministry, Paul's conversion and ministry, and the gradual clarification of Gentile inclusion apart from the law. The Epistles then give doctrinal instruction to churches and believers, with Paul especially revealing the gospel of grace, justification by faith, the Body of Christ, the believer's position, and Church Age order.

If a man pours all three into the same bottle without distinction, he will get contradictions in his own thinking. In Matthew 10, the twelve are told not to go into the way of the Gentiles. In Mark 16 and Acts, the message goes outward. In Matthew 24, enduring unto the end appears in a tribulation kingdom context. In Romans, justification is by faith apart from works. In Acts, there are transitional signs and apostolic manifestations. In the Epistles, the Church receives settled doctrine. These things are not contradictions. They are different stages and settings in God's revelation. The bottle must match the wine.

Acts especially destroys careless systems because it is transitional. Men build entire doctrines on transitional phenomena and then try to force the whole Church Age into them. Some build a tongues system from Acts while ignoring Paul's corrective doctrine in 1 Corinthians and the later order of the completed New Testament. Some build baptismal regeneration out of passages without rightly dividing Israel's national setting, apostolic authority, and the development of Paul's gospel. Some build communal economic theories from early Jerusalem conditions while ignoring later Church instruction. Acts is inspired Scripture, but it must be handled as Acts, not as Romans, not as Matthew, and not as Revelation. New wine in the wrong bottle bursts.

Chapter 6: Church Age Doctrine Must Not Be Poured into Kingdom Bottles

Another common mistake is pouring Church Age doctrine into kingdom bottles. Men read the Gospels as though every passage is directly and doctrinally about the Body of Christ after the revelation given through Paul. They see "disciple" and immediately think "sealed member of the Body of Christ." They see "kingdom" and immediately think "Church." They

see “gospel” and assume it must always mean the full gospel of 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 as a completed historical proclamation. They see a warning in Matthew and aim it directly at eternal security in Romans. That is how confusion starts. The bottle is wrong.

The Lord’s earthly ministry must be honored in its setting. He came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He preached the kingdom of heaven as at hand. He taught under the law. He presented Himself as King. He gave commandments and warnings connected with the kingdom. He spoke of the Tribulation, the Second Advent, the judgment of the nations, and the restoration of Israel. All of that is true. All of it is inspired. All of it is profitable. But it should not be poured into the Church Age bottle as though the Body of Christ is under Israel’s kingdom program. The Church is not waiting to enter the kingdom by enduring Daniel’s seventieth week. The Church is waiting for the blessed hope.

This is where eternal security often gets attacked. Men pour the Ten Virgins into the Church Age and teach that saved believers lose the Holy Spirit. They pour the Sheep and Goats into the gospel of grace and teach salvation by works of mercy. They pour Matthew 24 into the rapture of the Church and teach that the Body of Christ must endure to the end of the Tribulation. They pour the Sermon on the Mount into justification and make the sinner’s righteousness the condition of entrance. The bottle bursts every time. Right division does not weaken the words of Christ. It keeps them in the setting Christ gave them.

Chapter 7: Kingdom Doctrine Must Not Be Poured into Church Age Bottles

The opposite error is also dangerous: pouring kingdom doctrine into Church Age bottles in a way that strips it of its prophetic force. Some men are so afraid of distinction that they spiritualize every kingdom promise into a present Church experience. Israel becomes “the Church.” Jerusalem becomes “the Church.” David’s throne becomes “Christ ruling in your heart.” The land becomes “spiritual blessing.” The Millennium becomes “the gospel age.” The Tribulation becomes “general suffering.” The Second Advent becomes a vague triumph of Christian influence. That is another bottle problem. Kingdom doctrine has its own container, and it must not be emptied into symbolic Church language until nothing literal remains.

God promised Israel a kingdom. He promised David a throne. He promised land, restoration, national repentance, regathering, and Messiah’s rule. The prophets did not merely predict a spiritual feeling in Gentile churches. They spoke of nations, Jerusalem, Zion, Israel, judgment, peace, and the Lord reigning in the earth. When Christ preached the kingdom of heaven, He was not playing word games. The King was present. The kingdom was genuinely at hand. Israel’s rejection did not cancel the promises; it postponed the

visible establishment until God's appointed time. The Church Age mystery does not erase the kingdom. It occurs before the kingdom is manifested in glory.

If kingdom doctrine is poured into a Church-only bottle, prophecy is ruined. The Bible's plain words are allegorized. God's covenants are made uncertain. Israel's future is denied. The Second Advent loses its earthly force. The nations are never judged as nations. The throne of David becomes a metaphor. That may sound scholarly in some circles, but it is unbelief dressed in theological language. New wine must be put into new bottles, and kingdom wine belongs in kingdom bottles. Church truth belongs in Church bottles. Israel's promises belong in Israel's bottle. The Tribulation belongs in its prophetic bottle. The Millennium belongs in its own bottle. When each is kept where God put it, both the wine and the bottles are preserved.

Conclusion

The parable of the New Wine in Old Bottles is a warning against forcing living truth into hardened religious containers. The Lord Jesus Christ was not trying to pour His ministry into Pharisaical forms. He was not trying to preserve their old wineskins. He was not trying to make dead religion stretch just enough to hold Him. New wine needs new bottles. Living revelation, kingdom truth, grace, the new birth, the coming Church mystery, and the work of Christ could not be contained by brittle traditionalism. If men tried, the bottles would burst, the wine would spill, and the whole effort would end in ruin.

That principle explains why so many doctrinal systems break. They use the wrong bottle. They pour the Sermon on the Mount into the Church Age plan of salvation. They pour Matthew 24 into the rapture. They pour Acts transitions into settled Church doctrine. They pour Paul's mysteries backward into the earthly ministry before the cross. They pour Israel's kingdom promises into the Church and then pour Church Age security into kingdom warnings. Then they wonder why their theology leaks all over the floor. The problem is not the Bible. The problem is the container. God's word is perfect, but it must be rightly divided.

The answer is to let every passage stand where God placed it. Let the Gospels speak in their Jewish, kingdom, transitional setting. Let Acts be Acts, a book of transition. Let Paul's epistles give the doctrine for the Body of Christ in the present dispensation. Let Hebrews through Jude speak with their proper audiences and prophetic weight. Let Revelation be prophecy, not a fog machine. Let Israel remain Israel, the Church remain the Church, the kingdom remain the kingdom, and grace remain grace. New wine must be put into new bottles. When a man does that, the truth is preserved, the doctrine stands, and the Bible stops bursting in his hands.

13 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Candle Under a Bushel

Introduction

The parabolic teaching of the candle under a bushel is one of the simplest pictures the Lord Jesus Christ ever used, and like many simple pictures in the Bible, it cuts deeper than men expect. Matthew 5:14-16 says, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.” Mark 4:21 says, “Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?” Luke 8:16 says, “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.” The point is plain: light is not given to be hidden. A candle is not lit so it can be smothered, covered, buried, concealed, or wasted. It is lit to shine. It is put on a candlestick so those in the house may see. The Lord is not teaching men how to decorate a room. He is teaching that truth received from God carries responsibility before God.

This passage is often turned into a shallow motivational slogan: “Shine your light,” meaning be nice, smile more, stay positive, and let people feel encouraged by your pleasant personality. There is nothing wrong with kindness, and a sour Christian can be a poor testimony, but that is not deep enough. In the Bible, light is connected with truth, revelation, holiness, witness, exposure, and the word of God. Light shows what darkness hides. Light guides. Light reproves. Light separates. Light makes things visible. When God gives light, He does not intend for that light to be buried under commerce, comfort, fear, laziness, cowardice, or compromise. A man who has truth and hides it is not humble. He is unfaithful. A nation that receives light and rejects it becomes accountable. A disciple who is given light and smothers it under a bushel is acting contrary to the very purpose for which light was given. The candle exists to shine, not to make the possessor proud that he owns a candle.

Right division is necessary because the candle sayings appear in more than one setting and have applications that must be kept in order. In Matthew 5, the statement is part of the Sermon on the Mount, spoken in the kingdom setting to disciples in Israel, where the Lord speaks of them as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Israel was called to be a witness to the nations, and the disciples of the King had a responsibility to manifest light before men. In Mark 4 and Luke 8, the candle saying appears near the parable of the Sower, where hearing, receiving, and manifesting truth are emphasized. Later, Church Age believers certainly have a testimony as children of light, holding forth the word of life in a crooked and perverse nation. But the application to the Church must not erase the original kingdom setting, nor should the kingdom setting be used as an excuse to hide light now.

The principle runs through Scripture: when God gives light, He expects that light to be displayed faithfully.

Chapter 1: The Candle Is Lit for a Purpose

No man lights a candle in order to hide it. That is the Lord's argument. The very act of lighting the candle reveals intention. A candle is lit because there is darkness and because light is needed. It is not lit to be admired as an object. It is not lit to remain private. It is not lit to be covered. It is lit so that its light may serve its purpose. That is exactly how divine truth works. God does not give truth to a man so he can hoard it, brag about it, or hide it from fear of consequences. God gives light so it can shine. A man with truth is responsible for what he has received.

This should make every Bible believer sober. Truth is not a toy. Doctrine is not a hobby. Understanding is not a decoration. A man who knows the gospel has light. A man who knows the words of God has light. A man who understands right division has light. A man who sees the difference between Israel and the Church, law and grace, kingdom and Body, Tribulation and Church Age, faith and works, salvation and discipleship, has light. That light is not given so he can sit in a corner congratulating himself for being less confused than other people. It is given so he can help others see. Light creates obligation.

The Lord's illustration also shows the absurdity of hidden truth. To light a candle and then cover it is foolish. Yet many Christians do exactly that spiritually. They learn enough Bible to know better, but they hide it when it costs them something. They know the gospel, but stay silent around lost family. They know the Bible's warnings, but keep quiet around compromise. They know the King James Bible is the Book, but become timid around scholars. They know salvation is by grace, but soften it around works-religion. They know the difference between the Church and Israel, but avoid saying it because religious people may call them divisive. That is a candle under a bushel. God did not light it for that.

Chapter 2: The Bushel Pictures Commerce and Worldly Preoccupation

In Matthew and Mark, the candle is not to be put under a bushel. A bushel is a measure, something connected with grain, trade, and practical earthly matters. There is nothing sinful about a bushel in itself. Men need measures. Men work, buy, sell, harvest, provide, and handle earthly responsibilities. But when the bushel covers the candle, the ordinary business of life has become an obstruction to witness. The light is not being put out by open wickedness. It is being hidden under the measure of worldly preoccupation. That may be one of the most common ways light gets buried.

Many people do not hide truth because they became atheists. They hide it because they are busy. Business, income, schedules, bills, career, customers, deadlines, projects, plans,

possessions, and daily cares become the bushel. The light is still there somewhere, but it is covered by the machinery of life. The man says he believes the Bible, but he has no time to speak it. He says he loves souls, but he is too busy to witness. He says doctrine matters, but business matters more in practice. He says Christ is first, but the bushel is sitting on top of the candle. A man can be respectable, hardworking, responsible, and still bury his light under lawful earthly concerns.

That does not mean a believer should neglect work or despise provision. The Bible commands men to work, provide, and walk honestly. The problem is not having a bushel. The problem is putting it over the candle. Commerce must not smother testimony. Work must not replace witness. Earthly responsibility must not bury eternal truth. A man should be able to handle business without letting business hide his light. If the bushel is controlling the candle, the order is wrong. God gives light first, and every earthly measure must stay beneath the authority of that light.

Chapter 3: The Bed Pictures Comfort, Ease, and Laziness

Mark and Luke mention the bed. The candle is not to be put under a bed. The bed points naturally to rest, comfort, ease, sleep, and personal convenience. Again, the bed is not evil in itself. God made the body to need rest. Sleep is necessary. But when the bed covers the candle, comfort has become the enemy of testimony. The light is hidden because the possessor would rather rest than shine, rather be comfortable than faithful, rather avoid trouble than bear witness. A candle under a bed is a picture of truth smothered by ease.

This is another major danger in the Christian life. Many people do not deny truth; they are just too comfortable to display it. They do not want conflict. They do not want to be mocked. They do not want hard conversations. They do not want the inconvenience of standing for the Book. They do not want the discomfort of being considered narrow, strange, outdated, or too serious. So they slide the candle under the bed. They keep truth close enough to claim they have it, but hidden enough to avoid the cost of shining it. That is not wisdom. That is spiritual sleepiness.

The New Testament repeatedly warns believers to wake up, watch, and be sober. Sleep is dangerous when the enemy is working and the Lord's return is nearer than when we believed. A comfortable Christian can become a useless Christian if comfort becomes his master. He may have sound doctrine in his head and no light in his house. He may know prophecy and still be asleep at his post. He may believe the gospel and still never speak to sinners because he does not want to be bothered. The bed is a soft place to lose a testimony. The Lord did not light the candle to warm the underside of a mattress. He lit it to shine.

Chapter 4: The Candlestick Pictures Proper Public Display

The candle belongs on a candlestick. That is where it gives light to all that are in the house. A candlestick lifts the light and places it where it can serve its intended purpose. This is a picture of proper display. Truth should not be hidden, but neither should it be handled foolishly. Light belongs where it can be seen clearly. It is not thrown around recklessly. It is not waved for personal attention. It is not used to burn people for entertainment. It is set where it can give light. A faithful testimony is not exhibitionism. It is ordered visibility.

This matters because some people confuse shining with showing off. The Lord is not calling His disciples to perform religion for applause. In the same Sermon on the Mount, He warns against doing alms, praying, and fasting to be seen of men. So Matthew 5:16 cannot mean, "Make yourself the star of the show." It means let the light of God's truth and the works produced by that truth be visible in such a way that men glorify your Father which is in heaven. The goal is not admiration of the candle holder. The goal is glory to God. The candlestick lifts the light, not the ego.

For the Church Age believer, the candlestick principle applies to witness, preaching, teaching, family life, local church testimony, public speech, written words, and daily conduct. Truth must be placed where it can be useful. A Bible believer should not hide doctrine in private notebooks while the world burns. He should not know the gospel but never make it plain. He should not understand right division but never help confused believers. He should not know the danger of false doctrine but remain silent because silence is safer. The candlestick is any proper place God gives a man to display truth: a pulpit, a home, a conversation, a printed page, a public post, a Bible study, a hospital room, a prison visit, a workplace opportunity, or a child's bedroom at night. Put the candle where it gives light.

Chapter 5: Light in the Gospels Connects to Israel's Witness and the Disciples' Responsibility

In Matthew 5, the Lord says, "Ye are the light of the world." That statement is spoken to disciples in the setting of the Sermon on the Mount. Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations. God had given Israel the Scriptures, the covenants, the promises, the temple service, and the knowledge of the true God. Jerusalem was meant to be a city connected with divine light, a testimony to the nations around her. But by the time Christ came, the nation's religious leaders had turned much of that light into darkness through hypocrisy, tradition, and unbelief. The disciples of the King are now addressed as light in connection with their testimony before men.

This kingdom setting matters. The Sermon on the Mount is not a generic self-help speech. It is the King speaking to disciples in Israel in view of the kingdom. The light they display is connected with the righteousness, mercy, purity, and truth of the King's words. Their good works are to be seen, not as self-righteous theater, but as testimony causing men to glorify the Father in heaven. Israel's witness had been corrupted by religious showmanship. Christ's disciples were to manifest true kingdom righteousness under the eye of God. That is why the city on a hill cannot be hid. A visible people with divine truth cannot pretend invisibility is faithfulness.

This also explains why rejection of light is so serious in the Gospels. Christ came as the true Light. John says, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Yet men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. Israel had tremendous light, and with light came accountability. The disciples who received Christ's words were not to hide what they had been given. They were to bear witness in the midst of a nation whose leaders were moving toward rejection. The candle saying, therefore, has weight far beyond "be cheerful." It is about visible testimony in a dark world under the authority of the King.

Chapter 6: Light Later Connects to the Church's Testimony in the Present Age

Although the original kingdom setting must be preserved, the principle certainly applies to believers in the Church Age. Paul tells believers, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." He tells the Philippians to shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life. That is Church Age application stated plainly in the Epistles. A saved person has been delivered from darkness and placed in Christ. He has the word of God, the Spirit of God, the gospel of God, and the truth of God. He is not light in himself by nature. He is light in the Lord. Therefore, he is to walk accordingly.

This testimony is not merely moral niceness. It includes doctrine. The believer's light is connected with the word of life. A Christian who is kind but never gives truth has not fulfilled the full responsibility of light. Good works matter, but good works without gospel truth can become nothing more than religious humanitarianism. The world is full of people who appreciate kindness while remaining lost. The Church is not called merely to be admired for service. It is called to hold forth the word of life. The candle must shine with truth, not just with personality. A nice man who never speaks the gospel may be socially pleasant, but he is not a faithful witness if God gave him light and he covered it.

The Church Age believer must also remember that the world's darkness is not neutral. The present evil world does not love Bible light. Light reproves. Light exposes. Light divides. If a

believer shines, someone will eventually object. That is why cowardice hides candles. But the same Paul who taught grace also suffered for truth. The same gospel that saves freely also brings reproach when preached plainly. The believer's standing in Christ is secure, but his testimony can be hidden, dimmed, or compromised. The candle under the bushel is not losing salvation; it is losing usefulness. It is not ceasing to belong to Christ; it is failing to display what Christ gave it to display.

Chapter 7: Truth Brings Responsibility

The central doctrine of the candle is responsibility. Light received must become light displayed. This principle appears throughout Scripture. To whom much is given, much shall be required. The servant who knows his lord's will and does it not is accountable. The watchman who sees danger and does not warn is guilty. The man who has the word and hides it under fear is unfaithful. God does not give truth so men can bury it. He gives truth so it can work through witness, obedience, warning, teaching, preaching, and holy conduct. The greater the light, the greater the responsibility.

This is especially serious for Bible believers with strong doctrine. A man who understands the gospel of grace has light many religious people lack. A man who understands eternal security has light that can comfort tormented souls. A man who understands right division has light that can rescue confused believers from doctrinal bondage. A man who believes the preserved words of God has light in an age of textual darkness. A man who sees false doctrine has light that can warn others. If he hides all that under business, comfort, fear, or the desire to be liked, he is not being balanced. He is covering the candle.

The world does not need hidden candles. It has enough darkness already. Homes need light. Churches need light. Children need light. Lost sinners need light. Confused believers need light. Religious captives need light. Men trapped under works salvation need light. People blinded by tradition need light. The purpose of light is not to make the candle feel special. The purpose is to let those who enter see. That means the believer must accept the cost of visibility. A candle on a candlestick can be noticed. It can be opposed. It can be mocked. But it can also guide, warn, comfort, and reveal. Hidden light helps nobody.

Conclusion

The parabolic teaching of the candle under a bushel is plain but powerful. No man lights a candle to hide it under a bushel, under a bed, or under a vessel. He puts it on a candlestick so those in the house may see the light. The Lord's point is that light given by God is meant to be displayed. Truth carries responsibility. Revelation demands witness. Understanding requires obedience. The candle is not lit for concealment. It is lit for usefulness. A hidden candle contradicts the purpose of its own lighting.

Rightly divided, this truth begins in the Gospel setting with Israel's witness and the disciples' responsibility under the words of the King. The Sermon on the Mount gives the kingdom context, and the disciples are told to let their light shine before men so that men may glorify the Father in heaven. In Mark and Luke, the candle saying also connects with hearing and receiving truth. Later, the Church Age believer is told to walk as a child of light and to shine as a light in the world, holding forth the word of life. The settings must be distinguished, but the principle remains: God does not give light so it can be smothered.

The bushel of commerce, the bed of comfort, the vessel of concealment, and the cowardice of religious compromise still hide candles every day. A man can bury his witness under business, ease, fear, laziness, reputation, or the desire to avoid conflict. But the Lord expects better from those to whom He has given light. The gospel should not be hidden. The Bible should not be hidden. Right division should not be hidden. The truth of Christ should not be hidden. Put the candle on the candlestick. Let it shine where God placed you. Not for self-glory, not for religious performance, not for applause, but so men may see the light and God may receive the glory.

14 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Growing Seed

Introduction

The parable of the Growing Seed is found in Mark 4:26-29, and it is one of the quietest but most powerful parables the Lord Jesus Christ ever gave. It does not have the dramatic fire of the Wheat and Tares, the frightening corruption of the Leaven, the prophetic scope of the Net, or the obvious familiarity of the Sower. It is simple. A man casts seed into the ground, sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed springs and grows up, "he knoweth not how." Then the earth brings forth fruit of herself: first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come. That is the parable. No machinery. No religious advertisement campaign. No fleshly excitement. No emotional manipulation. No man-made revival engine. Just seed, soil, time, hidden life, gradual growth, and harvest. That alone makes the passage a rebuke to an age that thinks nothing is happening unless man can package it, promote it, measure it, graph it, and brag about it.

The Lord says, "So is the kingdom of God." That phrase must be handled with care. This parable is not merely about Church Age personal growth, though it certainly applies spiritually to the believer's growth under the word of God. It is kingdom truth, spoken in the Gospel setting, showing that God's work has a hidden process beyond human control. The

seed is cast. Life works secretly. The farmer participates, but he does not manufacture the life. He does not sit underground and pull the blade upward. He does not crack open the seed and command it to become corn. He does not understand every hidden operation taking place beneath the soil. He sows, sleeps, rises, waits, watches, and harvests when the time comes. That is a direct blow against religious pride. God's word works in ways men cannot fully explain, predict, or control. The life is not in the farmer's personality. The life is not in the program. The life is not in the crowd response. The life is in the seed, and God has built into that seed a power and order that operates according to His design.

This essay must therefore make two great truths plain. First, the word of God has its own living power. It produces growth secretly, progressively, and certainly when received in the proper ground. Second, man cannot replace that divine process with gimmicks, emotionalism, pressure tactics, religious entertainment, marketing schemes, or manufactured revival. The modern church world is full of men trying to create spiritual corn without seed, harvest without growth, maturity without time, fruit without doctrine, and excitement without life. They want instant results, visible numbers, public noise, and something they can report. But the Lord's parable says the kingdom process is often hidden, gradual, and beyond human explanation. "He knoweth not how." That does not mean the farmer is ignorant of farming. It means the mystery of life belongs to God. The preacher can sow. The teacher can water. The parent can instruct. The witness can speak. But God giveth the increase. The man who forgets that will spend his ministry building machines to imitate life.

Chapter 1: The Seed Must Be Cast Into the Ground

The parable begins with a man casting seed into the ground. That is where all true spiritual work begins: the seed must be sown. In the related parables, the seed is connected with the word of God, and this parable stands in the same Mark 4 setting where the Sower has already been discussed. A man who wants spiritual growth without the word is a fool before he starts. He may have music, lights, videos, programs, emotional stories, social events, psychology, management systems, motivational speeches, and a religious brand, but if the seed is not going into the ground, he is not doing the work Christ describes. The kingdom process begins with sowing. God's word is the seed that carries life. No seed, no blade. No blade, no ear. No ear, no full corn. No full corn, no harvest.

This is one of the great needs in every age: the plain sowing of Scripture. Not religious opinion. Not denominational tradition. Not clever human philosophy. Not a preacher's personality. Not some scholar's correction of the Book. Not moral slogans dressed up with a verse at the end. The seed must be the word. The farmer in the parable does not cast gravel and expect wheat. He does not cast sand and expect corn. He does not cast dead

chaff and expect a living plant. The seed determines the crop. A ministry that sows entertainment will grow consumers. A ministry that sows politics will grow activists. A ministry that sows emotionalism will grow addicts to excitement. A ministry that sows tradition will grow Pharisees. A ministry that sows the word of God rightly divided can produce saints with root, doctrine, discernment, patience, and fruit.

The seed must also be cast into the ground. That means the word must actually be delivered to hearers. It must enter the field where men live. It must be preached, taught, read, memorized, explained, sung rightly, written, spoken, and carried into homes, churches, conversations, and public witness. A seed bag full of seed is not a harvest. A Bible on the shelf is not fruit. A preacher with notebooks full of doctrine but no willingness to sow is not faithful. A parent who owns the truth but never gives it to his children is storing seed while the field goes bare. The parable begins with action. The farmer casts seed. He does not control the hidden life, but he is responsible to sow. The sovereignty of God's hidden process never excuses human laziness in giving out the word.

Chapter 2: The Farmer Sleeps and Rises While the Seed Works

After the seed is cast, the man sleeps and rises night and day. That is a remarkable detail. The farmer is not inactive in the sense of being careless, but he is also not frantically trying to force the seed to grow. He continues the ordinary rhythm of life while the seed works beneath the surface. He sleeps. He rises. Night passes. Day comes. The seed is in the ground. Something is happening, but it is not all visible at once. This is how God often works. The deepest operations of the word in a heart are not always immediately measurable. Conviction, understanding, repentance, faith, strengthening, rooting, and growth may be taking place where the eye cannot see.

This is hard for men because men like visible control. A preacher wants to see results immediately. A parent wants every lesson to produce instant maturity. A teacher wants every student to respond at once. A witness wants the sinner converted before the conversation ends. Sometimes God does work suddenly, and thank God when He does. But often the seed works secretly. A verse heard years ago comes back in a hospital room. A sermon ignored on Sunday breaks a man on Thursday. A child who looked distracted remembers doctrine twenty years later. A rebuke that seemed wasted becomes a turning point after pride has had time to crack. The farmer slept and rose, but the seed kept working.

This should deliver faithful sowers from panic. Man is responsible to sow, but he is not responsible to possess divine power in himself. The farmer cannot stay awake twenty-four hours a day staring at the ground to make it grow faster. He cannot threaten the seed into

fruitfulness. He cannot manipulate the soil into instant harvest. He must trust the process God built into the seed. That does not excuse neglect, laziness, or carelessness. It simply means that true growth is not manufactured by anxiety. Some preachers are so nervous about results that they dig up the seed every ten minutes to see if it sprouted, and then they wonder why nothing matures. Sow the word. Water with prayer. Watch faithfully. But let God be God.

Chapter 3: The Seed Springs and Grows Up, He Knoweth Not How

The Lord says the seed springs and grows up, "he knoweth not how." That phrase humbles every honest teacher. There is a mystery to life that man cannot master. A farmer may understand many outward conditions of agriculture. He may know seasons, soil, weather, planting depth, and harvest timing. But the inward secret of life working in the seed belongs to God. The same is true spiritually. A preacher may know doctrine, study, language, context, and application. He may labor carefully and faithfully. But he cannot explain or control the secret moment when the word grips a soul, opens understanding, pierces conscience, creates faith, strengthens hope, or brings a man from darkness to light. That is God's territory.

This destroys the pride of religious technicians. The modern church is full of men who act as if spiritual growth can be engineered by formulas. Use this music, this lighting, this platform style, this sermon length, this emotional arc, this marketing method, this leadership model, this small-group strategy, this psychological hook, this brand identity, and growth will happen. Some of those things may produce movement, crowds, money, and excitement, but they cannot produce the life of God. The life is in the seed, and the secret working is of God. "He knoweth not how" is a rebuke to every man who thinks he has mastered the Holy Ghost with a spreadsheet.

The phrase also rebukes despair. Sometimes a man thinks nothing is happening because he cannot see how God is working. But the farmer does not need to understand every hidden motion in order to trust the seed. A Bible believer does not need to understand how one verse can lodge in a child's heart for decades. He does not need to understand how a gospel tract can trouble a sinner's conscience. He does not need to understand how a sermon can strike one man and seem to miss another. He does not need to understand how the word can grow roots in suffering, silence, or obscurity. He just needs to believe that God's word is alive and that God knows what He is doing beneath the surface.

Chapter 4: The Earth Bringeth Forth Fruit of Herself

The Lord says, "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself." That does not mean the earth is independent of God. It means the farmer is not the direct manufacturer of the growth. God

has placed a process in the created order by which seed in the earth brings forth fruit. Spiritually, this points to the fact that when the word of God is received properly, it works according to divine design. The preacher does not create the fruit. The teacher does not create the life. The soul winner does not regenerate. The parent does not save the child by force of will. The word enters, God works, and fruit comes through a process bigger than the sower.

This is why faithful ministry must be word-centered rather than man-centered. If the fruit comes from the hidden working of the seed, then the sower's job is not to turn himself into the attraction. He is not the life. He is not the power. He is not the miracle. He is a servant handling seed. Paul said, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." That is the same truth in apostolic language. Planting matters. Watering matters. But God gives the increase. A man can plant faithfully and not be the hero. A man can water faithfully and not be the source. The increase belongs to God.

This also exposes the vanity of man-made revival machines. Men try to produce fruit by pressure, atmosphere, repetition, music swells, emotional stories, crowd psychology, altar-call manipulation, and public momentum. They can get decisions. They can get tears. They can get raised hands. They can get social media clips. They can get crowds. But fruit is another thing. Fruit comes from life. Life comes from God's word and God's Spirit working in God's way. A machine can manufacture motion, but it cannot grow corn. A religious program can manufacture activity, but it cannot produce spiritual fruit apart from the word of God. The earth bringeth forth fruit of herself because God ordained it, not because man built a ministry machine.

Chapter 5: First the Blade, Then the Ear, After That the Full Corn

The Lord gives the order of growth: "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Growth is progressive. It has stages. God does not usually bring a plant from seed to full harvest in one instant. There is first a blade, small and tender. Then the ear appears. After that, the full corn in the ear. That order is simple, but it destroys the impatience of modern religion. Men want full corn before the blade has had time to appear. They want maturity without process, fruit without growth, teachers without training, leaders without testing, and harvest without patience. God's order is slower, deeper, and safer.

This applies to spiritual growth in believers. A new convert is not supposed to be treated as though he must instantly become a seasoned soldier. He needs milk before meat. He needs root before fruit. He needs doctrine before responsibility. He needs time under the word. The blade matters, but the blade is not the full corn. Many ministries damage people by expecting instant maturity and then despising small beginnings. Others damage people

by keeping them forever at the blade stage, never feeding them enough doctrine to mature. God's pattern includes both patience and progress. The blade is good, but it should become the ear. The ear is good, but it should become full corn.

This order also rebukes emotionalism. Emotional religion wants everything at once. It wants the feeling of harvest without the discipline of growth. It mistakes excitement for maturity. A man shouts once and is treated like a prophet. A woman cries at an altar and is treated like she is rooted in doctrine. A young man shows zeal and is thrown into leadership before he has been tested by Scripture, suffering, correction, and time. That is not God's order. First the blade. Then the ear. After that the full corn. A ministry that ignores spiritual stages will either crush tender growth or promote unripe fruit. God's word works patiently, and wise teachers must respect that process.

Chapter 6: The Harvest Comes When the Fruit Is Brought Forth

The parable ends with harvest: "But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." The hidden process is not endless. It moves toward a conclusion. Seed is not sown merely to produce green shoots forever. It is sown for fruit and harvest. In the kingdom setting, this points toward God's appointed harvest in His program. The kingdom has a divine process, and when the time is right, harvest comes. God does not forget what He planted. He does not let the age drift forever. The same Lord who allows growth in secret also knows when to put in the sickle.

This harvest principle appears throughout Scripture. There is a harvest of judgment. There is a harvest of reward. There is a harvest of fruit. There is a reaping according to sowing. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. The farmer waits because the fruit is not yet ready, but when it is ready, he does not wait unnecessarily. "Immediately he putteth in the sickle." That word "immediately" should sober a man. God may work slowly in growth, but when the appointed moment comes, He acts decisively. Men mistake patience for delay and delay for forgetfulness. But God has not forgotten the harvest.

In personal application, this reminds the believer that growth should lead to usefulness. God does not feed a man doctrine merely so he can become a storage bin. Fruit should come. Service should come. Witness should come. Maturity should come. A man should not be content to remain a blade forever. The word should produce something harvestable in his life: faith, obedience, holiness, endurance, charity, discernment, prayer, witness, teaching, and good works that glorify God. Fruit does not justify him before God; Christ does. But fruit is still the proper outcome of life. The seed that grows according to God's design moves toward harvest.

Chapter 7: The Parable Rebukes Gimmicks and Man-Made Revival Machines

This parable is a direct rebuke to the modern obsession with manufacturing spiritual results. Men do not trust the seed, so they build machines. They do not believe the word of God is enough, so they add performance, marketing, entertainment, emotional manipulation, personality branding, business strategies, and psychological pressure. They want visible growth, but they do not want the slow hidden process of the word working in hearts. They want decisions more than disciples. They want crowds more than corn. They want excitement more than endurance. They want a reportable harvest before the blade has even broken the ground.

A man-made revival machine can imitate certain outward effects. It can produce noise. It can produce tears. It can produce a crowd moving forward. It can produce testimonies that sound dramatic for a week. It can produce an atmosphere where people feel something. But it cannot produce the secret growth of the word in an honest heart. It cannot create roots. It cannot create spiritual understanding. It cannot create new birth. It cannot create lasting fruit. That belongs to God. The machine may even become dangerous because people begin trusting the machine instead of the seed. They think if the room is arranged correctly, the music timed correctly, and the appeal pressured correctly, God must work. That is not faith. That is religious mechanics.

The answer is not dead formalism. A ministry can be orderly and still dead. A church can reject emotional manipulation and still have no spiritual power. The answer is not to become cold, dry, and proud. The answer is to return to the seed and trust God's process. Preach the word. Teach doctrine. Pray. Water. Wait. Watch. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. Let the word do what no gimmick can do. The farmer does not need to paint the corn green to prove life is present. He needs to sow good seed and trust the God who gives increase. A Bible believer should have enough confidence in the Book to stop trying to improve on God's agriculture.

Conclusion

The parable of the Growing Seed teaches that God's work has a hidden, living, orderly process that man participates in but does not control. The man casts seed into the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day. The seed springs and grows up, he knoweth not how. The earth brings forth fruit of herself. First comes the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. When the fruit is brought forth, the sickle is put in because the harvest is come. That is the Lord's picture. It is quiet, powerful, humbling, and deeply contrary to the flesh. It shows that life is in the seed and that growth belongs to God's design.

Rightly divided, this parable belongs to the kingdom teaching of the Gospels, showing that God's kingdom work unfolds according to divine process beyond human manipulation. It also applies richly to the Church Age believer and ministry. The word of God still works secretly in hearts. Spiritual growth still takes time. Fruit still develops in stages. The sower still must sow, but God still gives the increase. This truth protects the preacher, teacher, parent, and witness from both pride and despair. Pride says, "I made it grow." Despair says, "Nothing is happening because I cannot see it." Faith says, "The seed is good, God is working, and the harvest belongs to Him."

The warning is plain. Stop trusting gimmicks. Stop worshiping methods. Stop measuring spiritual life by noise, speed, numbers, and emotional display. Stop digging up the seed to check whether God is doing His job. Sow the word. Trust the Book. Respect the stages of growth. Give people doctrine, time, prayer, correction, and patience. Let God work under the soil where your eyes cannot reach. When the harvest comes, it will be because the seed had life, the ground received it, and God gave the increase. Man can build machines, but only God can grow corn.

15 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Two Debtors

Introduction

The parable of the Two Debtors is found in Luke 7, and it is one of the sharpest little blades the Lord Jesus Christ ever used on religious self-righteousness. The scene is simple, but the spiritual exposure is devastating. A Pharisee named Simon invites Jesus to eat with him. While the Lord sits at meat, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, comes in with an alabaster box of ointment, stands at His feet behind Him weeping, washes His feet with tears, wipes them with the hairs of her head, kisses His feet, and anoints them with ointment. Simon watches the whole scene and immediately begins judging. He does not see grace. He does not see repentance. He does not see brokenness. He does not see love. He sees a sinful woman and assumes that if Jesus were truly a prophet, He would know what manner of woman she is and reject her. That is the Pharisee's religion in one picture: he can identify the woman's sin, but he cannot identify his own pride. He can smell corruption on someone else, but he cannot detect the corpse in his own robe.

The Lord then answers Simon's unspoken thought. That alone should have shaken the man. Simon questioned whether Jesus was a prophet because he thought Jesus did not know the woman's past, while Jesus proves He knows Simon's private thoughts. The Lord says, "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." Simon replies, "Master, say on." Then

comes the parable: “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?” Simon answers correctly: “I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most.” Jesus says, “Thou hast rightly judged.” The parable is short, but it turns the whole room upside down. Simon thought the issue was the woman’s reputation. Christ reveals the issue is Simon’s blindness. The woman knew she was a debtor. Simon did not know the size of his own debt.

This parable must be handled carefully. It is not teaching that love earns forgiveness. It is not teaching that the woman purchased pardon by tears, kisses, ointment, emotion, or public humility. The Lord says the debtors had “nothing to pay,” and the creditor “frankly forgave them both.” That means forgiveness comes from the creditor’s grace, not the debtor’s payment. The woman’s love is the evidence of forgiveness received, not the price paid to obtain it. Jesus says, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.” Then He adds, “But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” The point is not that Simon only needed a little forgiveness while the woman needed much. The point is perception. Simon thought he was a small debtor, if a debtor at all. The woman knew she had nothing to pay. The Pharisee could measure outward scandal, but he could not measure inward guilt. That is why this parable is so powerful. It preserves grace while destroying self-righteous religion.

Chapter 1: The Setting Exposes Religious Pride Before the Parable Is Even Spoken

The parable must be read in its setting. Simon the Pharisee invites Jesus to eat with him, but his hospitality is cold, formal, and proud. He calls Him “Master,” but he does not treat Him with honor. He gives no water for His feet, no kiss of greeting, and no oil for His head. These were not small things in that culture. They revealed the heart of the host. Simon wanted Jesus at his table, but not on the throne of his heart. He wanted proximity to Christ without humility before Christ. He wanted to observe Him, test Him, and measure Him, but not worship Him. That is exactly how religious pride works. It can invite Jesus into the room and still refuse Him the honor due His name.

Then the woman enters. Luke says she was “a woman in the city, which was a sinner.” Her reputation was known. The Bible does not need to name her sin for the point to stand. Everyone in that room understood she was morally stained, publicly marked, and socially despised. She comes behind Jesus at His feet weeping. She does not come demanding recognition. She does not come defending herself. She does not come correcting the Pharisee’s opinion. She does not come with a doctrinal lecture on why they should stop judging her. She comes broken, grateful, and focused entirely on Christ. Her tears wash His

feet. Her hair wipes them. Her lips kiss them. Her ointment anoints them. She gives the honor Simon withheld.

Simon sees the same event and draws the wrong conclusion. That is the danger of a bad heart around good evidence. He does not marvel at her repentance. He does not examine his own coldness. He does not ask why this woman honors Christ more than he does. Instead, he reasons within himself that Jesus must not be a prophet because He is allowing such a woman to touch Him. Simon's theology cannot understand mercy. His religion has no category for a sinful woman at the feet of a gracious Saviour. He knows how to separate from scandal, but he does not know how to bow before holiness. The setting already exposes him before the parable ever begins.

Chapter 2: The Two Debtors Show That All Men Owe

The Lord begins, "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors." That is the first blow. There are two debtors, not one debtor and one innocent man. Simon thought the woman was the debtor and he was the respectable observer. Christ's parable puts Simon in debt too. One owed five hundred pence, the other fifty, but both owed. That is what self-righteous religion hates to admit. It can tolerate the idea that bad people need forgiveness. It struggles with the idea that respectable religious people are debtors too. The Pharisee can admit the harlot needs mercy, the publican needs mercy, the drunkard needs mercy, the thief needs mercy, and the pagan needs mercy. But he cannot see that his own religious pride, cold heart, unbelief, and lack of love place him in the debtor's prison too.

The Bible's doctrine of sin is universal. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "There is none righteous, no, not one." The issue is not that some men are sinners and others are merely less impressive saints waiting to be acknowledged. All men owe. Some debts are more visible. Some sins smell worse to society. Some sins leave scars on the body, reputation, home, and public record. Other sins wear a tie, quote Scripture, sit in a respectable seat, and look down on the obvious sinner. But God sees the ledger. Pride is debt. Unbelief is debt. Hypocrisy is debt. Coldness toward Christ is debt. Religious contempt is debt. Self-righteousness is debt. Simon may not have had the woman's reputation, but he had a debt.

This is where the parable levels the room without denying degrees of guilt. The Lord does not say the two debts were identical in amount. One owed five hundred and the other fifty. There are differences in sin's expression, depth, damage, and outward scandal. A murderer's record is not the same as a moral neighbor's record in human consequences. A public harlot's reputation is not the same as a synagogue ruler's reputation. But both are debtors before God. The Pharisee's mistake was not merely that he saw the woman's sin.

Her sin was real. His mistake was that he saw her sin without seeing his own. He had enough discernment to condemn her and not enough light to condemn himself. That is the blindness Christ is exposing.

Chapter 3: The Debtors Had Nothing to Pay

The most important phrase in the parable may be this: “And when they had nothing to pay.” That sentence destroys works salvation. Both debtors were bankrupt. The five-hundred-pence debtor had nothing to pay. The fifty-pence debtor had nothing to pay. The size of the debt differed, but the inability was the same. Neither could settle the account. Neither could negotiate a payment plan. Neither could bring enough personal merit to satisfy the creditor. That is the condition of sinners before God. The scandalous sinner has nothing to pay. The religious sinner has nothing to pay. The immoral woman has nothing to pay. The clean Pharisee has nothing to pay. One may owe more visibly, but both are bankrupt.

This is why the parable must not be turned into a lesson where tears, kisses, and ointment purchase forgiveness. The Lord built the doctrine of inability into the parable. “They had nothing to pay.” If they had nothing to pay, then the forgiveness did not come because the debtor produced payment. It came because the creditor forgave. A sinner’s sorrow does not pay the debt. His love does not pay the debt. His confession does not pay the debt. His promises do not pay the debt. His religious reform does not pay the debt. His baptism does not pay the debt. His church membership does not pay the debt. His restitution, where possible, may be right after forgiveness, but it cannot purchase forgiveness from God. The debtor has nothing to pay.

In Church Age doctrinal language, the payment is the blood of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness is grounded in the work of Christ, not in the emotional performance of the sinner. The woman’s tears are beautiful, but they are not atonement. Her kisses are precious, but they are not propitiation. Her ointment is costly, but it is not redemption money. Christ is the One who pays. The creditor frankly forgives because the debt is dealt with according to grace and the work of God. Right division keeps this clear. In the Gospel setting, Christ is dealing with Israel under the law before the cross is historically accomplished, but the forgiveness still rests on who He is and what He will do. No sinner in any age is forgiven because he had enough to pay. If he had enough to pay, he would not need grace.

Chapter 4: The Creditor Frankly Forgave Them Both

The parable says the creditor “frankly forgave them both.” That word “frankly” carries the sense of freely, graciously, without payment from the debtors. The creditor does not reduce the debt. He does not refinance it. He does not ask for a partial payment. He forgives. That is the heart of the parable. Forgiveness comes from the creditor’s gracious act toward

bankrupt debtors. The debtors do not climb out by effort. They are released by mercy. That is what Simon failed to understand. He lived in a world of comparison, reputation, and religious measurement. Christ speaks of a creditor who forgives both bankrupt debtors.

This does not mean God ignores sin. Forgiveness is never God pretending the debt did not matter. The cross proves the debt mattered. The blood of Christ proves sin is not a light thing. God does not forgive because He became careless. He forgives because Christ satisfies the claims of divine righteousness. In the parable's immediate setting, the emphasis is on the grace of forgiveness. In the larger light of Scripture, we know that grace is righteous because Christ pays what sinners could never pay. That is why forgiveness magnifies God instead of making sin cheap. The woman's many sins were not excused; they were forgiven. There is a difference. Excusing sin says it was not serious. Forgiveness says it was serious, but grace has dealt with it.

The creditor forgave "them both." That phrase should have struck Simon. The woman needed forgiveness, and Simon needed forgiveness. The open sinner and the hidden sinner both needed mercy. The publicly stained and the privately proud both needed grace. Religious men often imagine that grace is for the people beneath them. Christ shows that grace is the only hope for everyone in the room. The question is not whether Simon needed forgiveness. He did. The question is whether Simon knew it. The woman's actions show she understood mercy. Simon's coldness shows he did not. Forgiveness was available, but pride has a way of standing outside the feast while judging the guest who came hungry.

Chapter 5: The One Forgiven Much Loves Much

Jesus asks, "Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" Simon answers, "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most." The Lord says, "Thou hast rightly judged." The point is not complicated. The debtor who understands the greatness of the forgiveness responds with greater love. Love flows from forgiveness received. It is not the cause that purchases forgiveness; it is the response that reveals appreciation for forgiveness. That order must be protected. The woman did not earn forgiveness because she loved much. She loved much because she knew what mercy had done for her. Her love was evidence that she understood the size of her debt and the greatness of the grace shown to her.

This is why the coldness of Simon is so damning. He gave no water, no kiss, and no oil. He did not act like a man overwhelmed by forgiveness. He acted like a man hosting a theological inspection. He was curious about Jesus but not broken before Him. He was near Christ physically but far from Him spiritually. The woman, by contrast, could not stop expressing love. Her tears, hair, kisses, and ointment were the language of a forgiven heart. She was not showing off. She was not performing for the room. She was not trying to

impress Simon. She was responding to Christ. A heart that knows its debt and tastes forgiveness does not need to be coached into gratitude.

This explains why some of the most religious people are the least loving. They do not think they have been forgiven much. They see themselves as decent, disciplined, respectable, doctrinally correct, morally superior, and better than the obvious sinners around them. Their love is small because their sense of debt is small. They may sing about grace while secretly believing God got a good deal when He got them. The broken sinner knows better. The man rescued from a ditch does not lecture the rescuer on proper etiquette. The woman who knows she was forgiven much does not stand at Christ's feet counting how much ointment is too much. She loves much because grace has become real to her.

Chapter 6: Simon Could Smell Her Sin but Not His Own

Simon's great failure was not that he noticed the woman was a sinner. She was. The Bible says so. His failure was that he could only see sin in one direction. He could smell sin on the woman but not on himself. That is the special disease of religious self-righteousness. It gives a man a sharp nose for other people's failures and no sense of his own corruption. He can identify the harlot, the drunk, the thief, the compromiser, the backslider, and the public sinner, but he cannot identify the pride, contempt, unbelief, coldness, and hypocrisy in his own heart. He has a microscope for others and a blindfold for himself.

The Lord turns Simon's judgment back on him. "Seest thou this woman?" That is a piercing question. Of course Simon saw her, but he did not truly see her. He saw her reputation. Christ saw her repentance and love. Simon saw contamination. Christ saw a forgiven sinner. Simon saw a reason to question Christ's prophetic authority. Christ saw an opportunity to expose Simon's blindness. Then the Lord compares Simon's lack of hospitality with the woman's abundant love. Simon gave no water; she washed His feet with tears. Simon gave no kiss; she ceased not to kiss His feet. Simon gave no oil; she anointed His feet with ointment. The comparison is devastating. The sinful woman treated Jesus better than the religious host did.

That is still one of the most embarrassing truths in religion. Sometimes the people with the worst past love Christ more openly than the people with the cleanest image. Sometimes the rescued sinner has more gratitude than the lifelong churchman. Sometimes the one who came from the gutter understands grace better than the one who grew up around religious vocabulary. That does not glorify sin. Sin is wicked and destructive. But it does glorify grace. Grace can produce love in a formerly ruined sinner, while pride can leave a religious man cold at the table with Jesus in the room. Simon's robe looked clean, but there

was a corpse inside it. The woman's reputation was filthy, but her heart was at the feet of Christ.

Chapter 7: Forgiveness Must Produce Love Without Becoming Works Salvation

The rightly divided application is important. The parable preserves the doctrine of free forgiveness and also insists that forgiveness produces love. If a man only preaches the love and ignores the free forgiveness, he turns the passage into works religion. If he only preaches free forgiveness and ignores the love, he turns grace into a cold legal transaction with no heart response. The Bible gives both in the proper order. The debtors had nothing to pay. The creditor frankly forgave. The one who understood the greater forgiveness loved more. Grace comes first. Love follows. Forgiveness is the root. Love is the fruit.

In the Church Age, the believer is forgiven on the basis of Christ's finished work. He is saved by grace through faith, not of works. He is justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. He does not maintain forgiveness by producing a certain emotional level of gratitude. He does not keep salvation by crying enough, loving enough, serving enough, or feeling guilty enough. Christ's blood is the ground. Faith receives. Grace saves. But once a man understands what he has been forgiven, indifference becomes monstrous. A saved man may struggle, grow slowly, and need correction, but a heart that never loves Christ, never thanks Him, never bows, never worships, never cares, and never responds should not comfort itself with religious phrases.

The danger is especially severe among doctrinally informed people. A man can know salvation by grace and become cold about grace. He can defend eternal security and show little love for the Saviour who secured him. He can argue right division and fail to weep at Christ's feet. He can expose false gospels and still become a Pharisee in attitude. Doctrine should deepen love, not replace it. The woman may not have had Simon's religious education, but she had the right posture. She was at the feet of Jesus. A Bible believer with sound doctrine and a cold heart needs this parable like a hammer to the chest. If forgiveness does not produce love, something is badly wrong in the perception of the debt.

Conclusion

The parable of the Two Debtors is a masterpiece of spiritual exposure. Two debtors owed different amounts, but both had nothing to pay. The creditor frankly forgave them both. The one forgiven most loved most. With that simple story, the Lord Jesus Christ exposed Simon the Pharisee and defended the sinful woman without denying her sin. He did not say she was innocent. He said she was forgiven. He did not say Simon had no debt. He revealed that Simon could not see it. The woman's many sins were forgiven, and her love showed

that she understood mercy. Simon's coldness showed that he did not understand his own need.

The doctrinal order must be kept clear. Love does not buy forgiveness. Tears do not buy forgiveness. Ointment does not buy forgiveness. Public humility does not buy forgiveness. The debtors had nothing to pay. Forgiveness is an act of grace grounded ultimately in the redemptive work of Christ. The woman's love was the evidence of forgiveness, not the price of it. Any interpretation that turns this parable into salvation by emotional payment has missed the sentence that governs the whole thing: "when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." Bankrupt debtors do not purchase pardon. They receive mercy.

The warning is aimed straight at religious self-righteousness. Beware of being able to smell sin on everyone else while unable to detect the death in your own robe. Beware of knowing who the sinners are but not knowing what you are before God. Beware of sitting at the table with Christ and giving Him less honor than a broken sinner gives Him at His feet. The test is not whether you can identify the woman's reputation. The test is whether you understand your own debt and the greatness of the forgiveness found in Christ. The one who knows he has been forgiven much will love much. The one who thinks he only needed a little mercy will always be cold, careful, and critical while somebody else is weeping at the feet of the Saviour.

16 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Good Samaritan

Introduction

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most famous parables in the world, and for that reason it is also one of the most abused. Men who do not believe the Bible, men who deny the gospel, men who reject the blood atonement, men who laugh at Bible doctrine, and men who would not cross the street to defend the words of God will still quote "the Good Samaritan" when they want to reduce Christianity to social kindness. In their hands, the parable becomes a humanitarian slogan: help people, be nice, do good, and that is what Christianity is all about. But the Lord Jesus Christ did not give this parable as a substitute for the gospel. He did not give it to teach that a sinner is saved by social work, compassion ministries, public benevolence, or neighborly behavior. The immediate setting is a lawyer tempting Him, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life, and then, willing to justify himself, asking, "And who is my neighbour?" That setting controls the parable. The Lord is not dealing with a humble man asking how to love better. He is dealing with a self-

righteous religious lawyer trying to limit the law's demand and protect himself from conviction.

The parable itself is a masterpiece of exposure. A certain man goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho, falls among thieves, is stripped, wounded, and left half dead. A priest comes by and passes by on the other side. A Levite comes and looks, then also passes by on the other side. Then a Samaritan, despised by the Jews, comes where he is, sees him, has compassion, binds up his wounds, pours in oil and wine, sets him on his own beast, brings him to an inn, takes care of him, pays the host, and promises to repay whatever more is spent. The Lord then asks the lawyer which of the three was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves. The lawyer cannot even bring himself to say "the Samaritan." He says, "He that shewed mercy on him." Jesus says, "Go, and do thou likewise." The answer cuts the lawyer to pieces. He asked, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus turns the question around and shows him what it means to be a neighbour. The issue is not how narrowly a man can define his obligation. The issue is whether he has mercy.

Rightly divided, the parable teaches mercy, compassion, and the exposure of dead religion, but it must not be turned into salvation by works. That is the ditch men fall into constantly. They read the lawyer's question about eternal life, hear the Lord point him to the law, and then conclude that eternal life is obtained by loving God and loving neighbour well enough. But the purpose of the law is not to flatter the self-righteous man into thinking he can perform it. The law exposes him. When the lawyer answers with the command to love God with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love his neighbour as himself, the Lord says, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." That is the law's standard. The problem is that no sinner has done it. The lawyer immediately tries to justify himself by narrowing the word "neighbour." That is what the parable destroys. It is not social gospel salvation. It is the law exposing the lovelessness of a man who thought he could justify himself.

Chapter 1: The Lawyer Came to Tempt Christ, Not to Learn

The passage begins with a lawyer standing up and tempting Jesus. That detail must not be skipped. He is not a broken sinner crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He is not a humble student asking for light. He is a religious expert testing the Lord. He asks, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" That question may sound good on the surface, but Luke tells us his motive. He is tempting Christ. He wants to test Him, trap Him, examine Him, and perhaps expose Him. Religious men often ask spiritual-sounding questions with crooked motives. They are not seeking truth; they are seeking advantage. They do not want help; they want leverage. They use questions like fishhooks.

Jesus answers him by sending him to the law. “What is written in the law? how readest thou?” That is the perfect answer for a lawyer. The man is an expert in the law, so Christ makes him deal with the words he claims to know. The lawyer answers from Deuteronomy and Leviticus: love God with all thy heart, soul, strength, and mind, and thy neighbour as thyself. The answer is correct. Jesus says, “Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.” The Lord is not lowering the standard. He is raising the mirror. If a man wants life by doing the law, then he must do it. Not admire it. Not quote it. Not debate it. Not define terms around it. Do it. Love God perfectly and love your neighbour as yourself. That is the law’s demand.

That is where the lawyer is exposed. Instead of falling on his face and admitting he has not loved God perfectly and has not loved his neighbour as himself, he tries to justify himself. Luke says plainly, “But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?” That sentence is the doorway into the parable. The lawyer is not asking because he wants a wider field of mercy. He is asking because he wants a smaller one. He wants to know where his obligation stops. He wants a definition that will allow him to feel righteous while excluding people he does not want to love. That is self-righteous religion: it uses definitions to escape obedience.

Chapter 2: The Law Exposes Self-Righteousness

The parable must be understood in light of the law’s function. The lawyer asks what he must do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus points him to the law. If a man insists on doing, then the law answers him. But the law’s answer is not designed to make the sinner proud. It is designed to shut his mouth. Love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind. Love your neighbour as yourself. That commandment is not a soft religious poem. It is a sword. It cuts through the self-righteous man’s excuses because no fallen man has kept it perfectly. The law does not say, “Love God more than average.” It says “all.” The law does not say, “Love the neighbours you already like.” It says “as thyself.”

This is why the lawyer’s follow-up question is so revealing. He knows the commandment is too broad, so he tries to narrow it. “Who is my neighbour?” In other words, “How far does this go? Whom can I exclude? Where is the line that allows me to remain righteous while withholding mercy?” That is the heart of legal religion. It is not truly interested in love. It is interested in loopholes. It wants to obey just enough to claim righteousness and avoid just enough to keep pride intact. The lawyer is trying to manage the law instead of being condemned by it. He is trying to use the commandment as a platform for self-justification rather than a mirror for his guilt.

The Lord's answer destroys that project. He does not give the lawyer a neat category list. He tells a story that puts mercy in the hands of the very person the lawyer would naturally despise. The priest fails. The Levite fails. The Samaritan acts. That is the law turning around and condemning the religious expert. The man who thought he could justify himself by asking "Who counts as my neighbour?" is forced to admit that the neighbour was the one who showed mercy. The law has done its job. It has exposed him. The parable is not showing him how easy it is to inherit eternal life by being nice. It is showing him that he is not the loving man he thinks he is.

Chapter 3: The Man Going Down Pictures the Ruin of Humanity

The parable begins with a certain man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. That detail has often been handled devotionally as a picture of man's descent. Jerusalem sits high, associated with worship, God's city, temple truth, and covenant privilege. Jericho is associated with curse, judgment, and the world below. The man goes down, and on the road he falls among thieves. While the direct interpretation is aimed at answering the lawyer's question, the imagery also gives a powerful picture of man's ruined condition. Humanity has gone down. Adam's race left fellowship with God and descended into a cursed world where thieves, wounds, nakedness, and death mark the road.

The thieves strip him, wound him, and leave him half dead. That is exactly what sin and the devil do. Sin strips. Sin wounds. Sin leaves men exposed, helpless, and dying. The devil is a thief and a murderer. The world does not heal the man it destroys. It robs him and leaves him in the ditch. Religion may come by later and discuss his condition, but the thieves have already done their work. The man in the ditch is not strong, independent, and merely in need of a little moral advice. He is helpless. He cannot bind his own wounds. He cannot lift himself onto a beast. He cannot walk to the inn. He needs mercy from outside himself.

This picture must not be pushed into every doctrinal detail beyond the Lord's intent, but the application is plain. The sinner is not in good shape. He is not merely undereducated, underprivileged, misunderstood, or temporarily inconvenienced. He is ruined by sin. He is exposed, wounded, and unable to save himself. The social gospel wants to treat him as a victim only. Legal religion wants to treat him as an inferior only. The gospel tells the truth: he is a sinner, wounded by sin, helpless without grace, and in need of a Saviour who comes where he is. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is full of men who cannot repair themselves.

Chapter 4: The Priest Passed by on the Other Side

The priest comes first. If anyone should have helped, it was the priest. He represents religious office, ceremony, temple connection, and outward spiritual authority. Yet when he

sees the wounded man, he passes by on the other side. That is one of the most damning pictures of dead religion in the Bible. The priest has position but no compassion. He has office but no mercy. He has religious identity but no willingness to get down in the ditch. He may know sacrifices, rituals, washings, and temple procedures, but he leaves the dying man exactly where he found him. Religion can walk past a dying man while keeping its robe clean.

This is not an attack on the legitimate priesthood under the law as God originally ordained it. The law had its priesthood, sacrifices, and ordinances for Israel. But the parable exposes the failure of religious office to meet human ruin. The priest cannot save the wounded man. He does not heal him. He does not lift him. He does not pay for him. He does not restore him. At the practical level, he fails to show mercy. At the spiritual level, he shows the inability of mere religious office to rescue the ruined. A title cannot save. A robe cannot save. A ceremony cannot save. A religious system cannot save. The priest passes by.

That is still happening. Men are dying in the ditch while religion walks by with a calendar, a collar, a candle, a certificate, and a collection plate. A man comes wounded by sin, and religion gives him rituals. A man needs the gospel, and religion gives him sacraments. A man needs forgiveness, and religion gives him penance. A man needs the new birth, and religion gives him membership. A man needs the blood of Christ, and religion gives him moral advice. The priest may look impressive on the road, but he is useless to the man in the ditch if he has no mercy and no remedy. Dead religion can identify a problem without having any power to heal it.

Chapter 5: The Levite Looked and Passed By

The Levite comes next. He comes and looks on the wounded man, then passes by on the other side. The Levite gets a little closer than the priest, but he still does nothing. That is another picture of religious emptiness. There is observation without action. There is inspection without compassion. There is knowledge of the need without willingness to meet it. The Levite may represent religious service, assistance, temple function, and knowledge of holy things, but his knowledge does not move him to mercy. He looks and leaves. Some men are professional lookers. They can inspect misery, analyze misery, discuss misery, and preach about misery, but they will not help the man lying in it.

This is a powerful warning because the Levite's failure may look less severe than the priest's at first. At least he looked. At least he noticed. At least he came near. But looking is not mercy. Noticing is not love. Concern without action is often just emotional window-shopping. The Levite's closer inspection only increases his guilt because he saw enough to know the need and still passed by. There are men who know the doctrine of sin, know the

condition of sinners, know the dangers of false religion, know the gospel of grace, know people are perishing, and still pass by. They can look at the ditch and write an accurate report, but they will not bind a wound.

The Levite exposes another kind of religious failure: the failure of knowledge without compassion. Bible knowledge is good. Doctrine is essential. Right division matters. But if a man's doctrine makes him proud, cold, and indifferent to wounded people, he has missed the heart of the matter. Sound doctrine should not turn a man into a priest or Levite who walks around the ditch to keep his schedule. It should equip him to help properly. The answer to emotional humanitarianism is not loveless orthodoxy. The answer is truth with mercy, doctrine with compassion, and gospel clarity with a willingness to reach the wounded man where he is.

Chapter 6: The Samaritan Came Where He Was

Then comes the Samaritan. That is the shocking twist. To a Jewish lawyer, a Samaritan was not the expected hero. Samaritans were despised as religiously mixed, ethnically despised, and socially unwelcome. Jesus deliberately makes the outsider the one who shows mercy. The priest fails. The Levite fails. The despised Samaritan acts. He comes where the wounded man is. That phrase is beautiful. Mercy does not shout advice from a distance. It comes where the wounded man is. The Samaritan sees him and has compassion. Not disgust. Not contempt. Not a lecture. Compassion. Then he acts.

He binds up the wounds, pours in oil and wine, sets him on his own beast, brings him to an inn, and takes care of him. The details are rich. Oil and wine can be seen devotionally as comfort and cleansing, soothing and searching, grace and truth, healing and antiseptic. He does not merely feel sorry for the man. He gives time, supplies, effort, transportation, care, and money. He is inconvenienced. His journey is interrupted. His resources are spent. Mercy costs him something. That is why this parable is such a rebuke to cheap compassion. Many people love mercy as an idea until it demands their beast, their oil, their wine, their time, and their money.

At the deepest devotional level, the Samaritan becomes a beautiful picture of Christlike mercy. Christ was despised and rejected. He came where we were. He found us wounded and helpless. He did not pass by. He bound up what sin had torn open. He brought us to safety. He paid what we could not pay. That does not mean the parable is a direct gospel formula or that every detail should be forced into an allegory, but the picture of grace is unmistakable. Religion walks around the dying man. Grace gets down in the ditch. Religion protects its robe. Grace touches the wounded. Religion calculates contamination. Grace brings healing.

Chapter 7: The Parable Teaches Mercy, Not Salvation by Social Work

The final question of the Lord is important. He asks, “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?” The lawyer answers, “He that shewed mercy on him.” Jesus says, “Go, and do thou likewise.” The Lord does not answer the lawyer’s original question the way the lawyer wanted. The lawyer asked, “Who is my neighbour?” Jesus asks, “Who acted as neighbour?” That turns the issue from boundary-drawing to mercy-showing. The lawyer wanted to define the object narrowly. Christ exposes the subject morally. Stop asking how little love you can get away with. Go show mercy.

But this must not be turned into salvation by social work. The parable teaches that true love shows mercy. It teaches that self-righteous religion is often merciless. It teaches that outward office cannot replace compassion. It teaches that a despised outsider may fulfill the law of mercy better than the religious expert. It teaches that a man cannot justify himself by clever definitions. But it does not teach that sinners are saved by becoming Good Samaritans. The gospel of this present age is not “go help the wounded and inherit eternal life.” The gospel is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day, and the sinner is saved by believing on Him.

Good works have their place. Mercy has its place. Compassion has its place. A saved man should be merciful. A Bible believer should not be hard, cruel, indifferent, or proud. But mercy is fruit, not the root of justification. Social work without the gospel cannot save anyone from hell. Feeding a man, clothing a man, bandaging a man, and paying for a man’s room may help him in this life, and those things can be right and good, but they do not wash away sin. Only the blood of Christ does that. The Good Samaritan rebukes loveless religion, but it does not replace the cross. A man who turns this parable into the whole gospel has passed by Calvary on the other side.

Conclusion

The parable of the Good Samaritan begins with a lawyer trying to justify himself and ends with the Lord Jesus Christ exposing the emptiness of self-righteous religion. The lawyer wanted to know who counted as his neighbour because he wanted to limit the law’s demand. Jesus showed him a wounded man, a failed priest, an empty Levite, and a despised Samaritan who showed mercy. The religious men walked around the dying man. The outsider got down in the ditch. The lawyer could not escape the conclusion. The neighbour was the one who showed mercy. The command was simple: “Go, and do thou likewise.”

Rightly divided, this parable must not be abused as a social gospel. It does not teach that eternal life is earned by humanitarian kindness. It does not replace the gospel of the death,

burial, and resurrection of Christ. It does not make social compassion the new birth. The setting shows the law exposing a self-justifying man. The parable teaches mercy, compassion, and the failure of religious pride, but it also shows that no man can use clever definitions to escape the moral demand of God. If a man wants to justify himself by law, the law will condemn him. If he wants to be saved, he must come to Christ by grace.

The practical rebuke remains sharp. Beware of being the priest with a title and no mercy. Beware of being the Levite with knowledge and no compassion. Beware of being the lawyer with doctrine in his mouth and self-justification in his heart. The world is full of wounded men, and religion has walked around them long enough. The answer is not a bloodless social gospel, and the answer is not cold doctrinal pride. The answer is truth with mercy, gospel with compassion, and grace that is willing to go where the wounded man lies. Religion keeps its robe clean and leaves the man half dead. Grace gets down in the ditch.

17 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Friend at Midnight

Introduction

The parable of the Friend at Midnight is one of the strongest lessons on prayer in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, but like every parable, it must be handled in its proper setting. Luke 11 begins with the disciples asking, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” That request matters. The Lord is not standing in the street giving lost men a magical formula for manipulating heaven. He is teaching His disciples how to approach God. He gives them the model prayer, a kingdom prayer, full of requests that fit the Jewish kingdom setting: “Thy kingdom come,” “Give us day by day our daily bread,” “Forgive us our sins,” and “Lead us not into temptation.” Then He immediately gives the parable of a man who goes to his friend at midnight, asking for three loaves because a friend has come to him in his journey and he has nothing to set before him. The man inside first answers from inconvenience: the door is shut, the children are in bed, and he cannot rise and give. But the Lord says that though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

That word “importunity” is the blade in the passage. It means shameless persistence, bold urgency, a refusal to go away because the need is real and the supply is not in the petitioner. The man outside is not asking for luxury. He is asking for bread. He is not asking to impress his guest with a feast. He is asking because he has nothing to set before him. That confession is one of the greatest beginnings of prayer: “I have nothing.” A man who thinks he has enough does not knock at midnight. A preacher who thinks he has enough in

his own personality, education, vocabulary, experience, charisma, or religious machinery will not go begging for bread. But a man who has a guest before him and an empty cupboard behind him knows what to do. He goes to the one who has bread. That is a preacher's problem if there ever was one. People come hungry, wounded, confused, lost, tempted, grieving, and desperate, and the servant of God has nothing worth setting before them unless he has received bread from above.

This parable must also be distinguished from vain repetition. The Lord is not teaching that God is reluctant, annoyed, asleep, selfish, or needing to be pestered into mercy. Parables often teach by comparison, and sometimes by contrast. The point is not that God is like a grumpy neighbor who has to be harassed until He finally gives in. The point is that if even a friend in an inconvenient hour will rise because of importunity, how much more should disciples ask, seek, and knock before their Father? The verses that follow make that plain: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Then the Lord speaks of a father not giving a stone for bread, a serpent for a fish, or a scorpion for an egg. The point is confidence in the Father's goodness, joined with persistence in prayer. Rightly divided, this does not become a heathen formula for wearing God down. It becomes instruction for disciples who know their lack, know where bread is, and are not too proud to knock until they receive what is needed.

Chapter 1: The Disciples Asked to Be Taught to Pray

The parable begins in the larger setting of the disciples asking the Lord to teach them to pray. That should immediately correct the foolish idea that prayer is merely religious instinct. Men talk as though prayer is whatever emotion spills out of the heart toward the sky, but the disciples knew better. They had watched the Lord pray. They had seen something in Him that exposed the poverty of their own prayer life. They did not say, "Lord, teach us to preach." They did not say, "Lord, teach us to perform miracles." They did not say, "Lord, teach us to defeat Rome." They said, "Lord, teach us to pray." That is a humbling request, because it admits ignorance in one of the most basic spiritual matters.

The Lord answers them with a model prayer, not a dead chant to be repeated mindlessly. He says, "When ye pray, say," and then gives words that teach order, reverence, dependence, forgiveness, and kingdom expectation. "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." Prayer begins with God, not with man's grocery list. "Thy kingdom come." Prayer looks for God's rule, not merely personal convenience. "Give us day by day our daily bread." Prayer confesses dependence. "Forgive us our sins." Prayer recognizes moral need. "Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil." Prayer admits weakness and danger. These disciples are being taught how to approach God with reverence and need.

That setting matters because the parable that follows is not a technique for lost men to force blessings out of heaven. It is instruction for disciples. In the Church Age, prayer rests on the believer's relationship to God through Jesus Christ, access by the Spirit, and the promises given to the Body of Christ. But the principle remains: prayer must be learned from God's words, not invented by religious imagination. Men need to be taught to pray because the flesh naturally prays wrongly. It prays selfishly, proudly, impatiently, mechanically, theatrically, or not at all. The disciples had the sense to ask the right Teacher, and the Friend at Midnight is part of the answer.

Chapter 2: The Need Comes at Midnight

The man's need arises at midnight. That detail is not accidental. Midnight is inconvenient. Midnight is dark. Midnight is late. Midnight is the hour when ordinary business is closed, houses are still, children are asleep, and men do not want to be disturbed. Yet need does not always arrive at a convenient hour. A friend comes in his journey, and the host has nothing to set before him. That is life. Need does not ask permission from your schedule. Souls do not always arrive hungry when your cupboard is full. People do not always come with questions when you feel rested. Trouble does not always knock in daylight. Sometimes the guest arrives at midnight.

This is where prayer becomes practical. The man does not have bread, but he knows where to go. That is the first sign of wisdom. He does not pretend. He does not set an empty plate before his guest and call it a banquet. He does not make excuses about the late hour. He does not tell the hungry traveler, "Come back tomorrow when conditions are better." He goes to his friend. The midnight hour reveals both his poverty and his dependence. If the need had come at noon, perhaps he might have gone to market. But midnight strips away ordinary options. Midnight teaches a man where his help truly lies.

Spiritually, much of the Lord's work is done at midnight. The age is dark. The world is dark. Religion is dark. Families are dark. Souls come in from long journeys, tired and hungry. They need bread. A preacher, teacher, parent, or witness who has nothing from God has nothing worth setting before them. He may offer jokes, stories, psychology, politics, entertainment, or religious slogans, but that is not bread. The darkness of the hour should drive the servant of God to prayer, not to gimmicks. Midnight is not the time to decorate an empty cupboard. It is the time to knock at the door of the One who has bread.

Chapter 3: The Man Confesses, "I Have Nothing to Set Before Him"

The confession of the man is tremendous: "I have nothing to set before him." That is not false humility. It is reality. He has a guest, he has responsibility, but he does not have supply. Many men never become useful in prayer because they never honestly say that.

They think they have plenty. They have outlines, programs, methods, stories, charisma, training, influence, and religious vocabulary. But when a hungry soul sits in front of them, they discover whether they have bread or merely packaging. A hungry man does not need a menu printed in gold. He needs bread.

This confession is especially important for anyone who teaches the Bible. No man can feed others properly unless God supplies the bread. The preacher who does not pray will eventually serve stale crumbs from old experiences. The teacher who does not seek God will give facts without nourishment. The parent who does not depend on God will give lectures without life. The witness who does not pray will speak mechanically and wonder why there is no power. The man in the parable does not need bread for himself only. He needs bread to feed another. That is a higher kind of prayer. It is not merely, "Lord, meet my need." It is, "Lord, give me what I need to help the one who came to me."

That is a preacher's problem if there ever was one. People arrive in their journey. Some are lost and need the gospel. Some are saved and starving. Some are confused by false doctrine. Some are trapped under works salvation. Some are wounded by sin. Some are tempted. Some are bitter. Some are grieving. Some are under attack. What will we set before them? Opinion is not bread. Entertainment is not bread. Religious tradition is not bread. A personality is not bread. The word of God is bread. Christ is the bread of life. Sound doctrine is nourishment. If we have nothing from God, we have nothing to set before them.

Chapter 4: The Friend Inside Has the Bread

The man outside has need, but the friend inside has supply. That is the relationship prayer recognizes. Prayer is not a speech to the air. It is going to the One who has what we lack. The man does not knock because he enjoys knocking. He knocks because bread is on the other side of the door. Real prayer is not religious performance. It is need reaching for supply. A man who has no sense of need will not pray with importunity. A man who has no confidence that God has bread will not pray with faith. Both are necessary: honest poverty and confidence in divine supply.

In the parable, the friend inside first answers with inconvenience. The door is shut. The children are with him in bed. He cannot rise and give. The point is not that God is like this reluctant friend in His character. The larger passage shows the Father is better than earthly fathers and better than reluctant neighbors. The contrast strengthens the argument. If even a friend under inconvenience will rise because of importunity, how much more should disciples come to God with confidence? The Lord is not trying to make God look stingy. He is trying to make prayer look urgent, bold, and expectant.

This is where believers must avoid two errors. One error is treating God as if He is reluctant, cold, and needing to be badgered into kindness. That dishonors His Fatherhood. The other error is treating prayer as casual, optional, and unnecessary because "God already knows." That dishonors His command to ask. The parable balances confidence and persistence. God is good, and therefore we ask. Need is real, and therefore we persist. Bread is available, and therefore we knock. The door is not approached with unbelief, but with importunity.

Chapter 5: Importunity Is Not Vain Repetition

The Lord says the man receives because of his importunity. This must be distinguished from vain repetition. In Matthew 6, the Lord warns against praying like the heathen, who think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Vain repetition is empty, mechanical, faithless, and superstitious. It repeats words as though the repetition itself has power. It turns prayer into a spell, chant, or religious lever. That is not what Luke 11 teaches. The man at midnight is not repeating empty phrases. He is pressing a real need before the one who can meet it. His persistence is not vain because his request is definite, necessary, and grounded in dependence.

Importunity is shameless persistence in the face of genuine need. It is the widow continuing before the unjust judge. It is Jacob saying, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," though that passage has its own setting. It is a man who knows he cannot go home empty-handed because someone else needs bread. It is prayer that refuses to be polite with unbelief. It is not arrogance. It is not demanding that God obey man. It is not name-it-and-claim-it presumption. It is a holy boldness born from need, relationship, and confidence in God's supply.

Modern religion often gets this wrong in both directions. Some turn persistence into a formula for manipulating God: say it enough, declare it enough, decree it enough, and heaven must yield. That is witchcraft in a church suit. Others react so strongly against abuse that they stop praying with urgency at all. They mumble a request once, add a cold "if it be thy will," and never knock again. That is not spirituality. That is often unbelief pretending to be reverence. The Lord told His disciples to ask, seek, and knock. Persistent prayer is not vain repetition when it comes from a heart that knows its need and trusts the Father.

Chapter 6: Ask, Seek, and Knock Show Increasing Urgency

After the parable, the Lord says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Those three words show prayer in motion. Asking speaks of request. Seeking speaks of pursuit. Knocking speaks of persistence at the door.

The Lord is not teaching passive resignation. He is teaching active dependence. A disciple should ask because he is not self-sufficient. He should seek because the matter is worth pursuing. He should knock because the door matters. Prayer is not laziness. Prayer is dependence in action.

The order also rebukes shallow prayer. Some people ask once without seeking. Others seek vaguely without knocking. Others knock loudly without ever asking according to God's will. The Lord gives all three. Ask plainly. Seek earnestly. Knock persistently. This is not because God is ignorant of need. It is because prayer forms the disciple in dependence, humility, desire, and faith. God could give bread without the man ever knocking, but the knocking teaches the man where bread comes from. Prayer is not merely about obtaining things. It is about learning dependence on the Father.

In the Church Age, believers have tremendous prayer privileges. We come to God through Jesus Christ. We have access by the Spirit. We may come boldly unto the throne of grace. We are told to pray without ceasing, to continue in prayer, to be careful for nothing but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to let our requests be made known unto God. That does not mean every request is granted exactly as the flesh wants. Paul prayed about his thorn and received grace sufficient rather than removal. But it does mean prayer is not a dead form. Ask. Seek. Knock. Bread is not obtained by staring at the cupboard and complaining that it is empty.

Chapter 7: Bread Is Given So Others Can Be Fed

The man asks for three loaves because a friend has come to him and he has nothing to set before him. The bread is not merely for private enjoyment. It is provision for ministry to another. That is one of the great lessons of the parable. God gives bread to feed the hungry, not to make the servant proud of his pantry. A preacher who receives truth from God should set it before others. A teacher who has been given understanding should feed others. A parent who has learned Scripture should feed the children. A believer who has received comfort should comfort others. The supply of God is not meant to stagnate in storage.

This destroys the selfish version of prayer that only asks for personal comfort. There is certainly nothing wrong with asking God for personal needs. The model prayer includes daily bread. But the Friend at Midnight pushes beyond that. The man needs bread because someone else came to him hungry. That is intercessory, ministerial, outward-looking prayer. "Lord, give me bread for them." That should be the cry of every preacher before he stands up, every teacher before he opens the Bible, every father before family devotions, every mother praying over children, every witness before speaking to a lost soul. "Lord, I have nothing to set before them unless Thou givest bread."

The bread also must be real bread. People do not need stones painted like loaves. They do not need scorpions in a bread basket. They do not need religious foam. They need truth. The word of God feeds. Christ feeds. Sound doctrine feeds. Grace feeds. Hope feeds. Reproof, when biblical, feeds. Correction, when biblical, feeds. A man who goes to God for bread should not return and give people cotton candy. If God gives bread, set bread before them. If people come hungry at midnight, do not entertain them while they starve. Feed them what God gave.

Conclusion

The parable of the Friend at Midnight teaches prayer through need, boldness, and persistence. A man has a friend come to him in his journey, and he has nothing to set before him. He goes at midnight to another friend and asks for three loaves. Though the friend inside first speaks of inconvenience, the Lord says that because of importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. The lesson is not that God is reluctant, selfish, or annoyed. The lesson is that disciples must learn to ask, seek, and knock with urgency, confidence, and persistence, knowing that the Father is good and that bread is found with Him.

Rightly divided, the passage is instruction to disciples, not a heathen formula for manipulating God. It sits in the Gospel setting, following the disciples' request, "Lord, teach us to pray." It must not be confused with vain repetition, empty chanting, prosperity decrees, or fleshly attempts to force heaven's hand. Persistent prayer is not vain when the need is real, the request is honest, and the heart depends on God. Vain repetition trusts the words themselves. Importunity trusts the One who has the bread. That is the difference between pagan noise and biblical prayer.

The personal and ministerial application is sharp. A man with nothing to set before his guest must go to the one who has bread. That is the preacher, the teacher, the parent, the witness, and the believer who wants to help others. People come hungry at midnight, and an empty cupboard will not do. We need bread from God. We need truth from the Book. We need wisdom, grace, doctrine, compassion, boldness, and spiritual provision that we cannot manufacture. So ask. Seek. Knock. Not to build a name. Not to stage a show. Not to manipulate God. Ask because someone is hungry, and you have nothing worth giving unless the Lord puts bread in your hands.

18 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Rich Fool

Introduction

The parable of the Rich Fool is one of the most direct warnings Jesus Christ ever gave about covetousness, false security, and the stupidity of planning an entire life without God. Luke 12:16-21 says, “The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully.” That opening is important because the parable does not begin with theft, fraud, robbery, oppression, or laziness. It begins with prosperity. The man’s ground brought forth plentifully. He had increase. He had abundance. He had more than his present storage could contain. In the eyes of the world, that man was a success story. He would have been admired, interviewed, studied, and probably invited to speak at business conferences about scaling operations and maximizing yield. But God called him a fool. That alone should make every Bible believer stop and tremble. The world may call a man successful while God calls him a fool. The world may praise his expansion while heaven prepares his summons. The world may admire his barns while God looks at his soul.

The Lord gives this parable in response to a man who interrupts Him with a family inheritance dispute. “Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.” The Lord refuses to become a probate judge for a covetous heart and answers, “Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” Then He gives the warning: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” That is the controlling statement. The parable is not a condemnation of work, business, savings, planning, stewardship, provision, agriculture, profit, or wise management. The Bible is not against labor. The Bible is not against a man providing for his house. The Bible praises diligence, condemns sloth, and teaches wise stewardship. The problem in this parable is not that the man had barns. The problem is that the barns had him. The problem is not that he had goods. The problem is that he talked to his soul as though goods could satisfy it. The problem is not that his ground brought forth plentifully. The problem is that his heart brought forth nothing toward God.

Rightly divided, this parable must be preserved from two errors. One error is to turn it into a lazy man’s sermon against productivity, savings, business growth, or responsible provision. That is not Bible. The other error is to soften the Lord’s warning until it becomes a harmless devotional about “keeping balance.” The Lord does not call the man “unbalanced.” He calls him a fool. Why? Because he planned years of comfort without considering one night of judgment. He spoke to his soul as though his soul could eat grain, wear profit, and rest inside storage buildings. He said, “I will” repeatedly, but never said, “If the Lord will.” He had barns full of goods and a soul empty before God. That is the warning for every age, and especially for an age of comfort, digital vanity, retirement fantasies, business obsession,

social media bragging, and endless self-expansion. A man can increase his barns while starving his soul.

Chapter 1: The Parable Begins With a Warning Against Covetousness

The Lord's warning before the parable is the key: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." He does not say merely, "Avoid covetousness if possible." He says, "Take heed," and "beware." That is watchman language. That is danger language. Covetousness is not a harmless weakness or a respectable ambition with a few rough edges. It is spiritual poison. It is idolatry, as Paul says in Colossians 3:5. It can wear a business suit, carry a planner, speak in financial terms, and look responsible while it eats a man alive. Covetousness is not simply wanting what belongs to another man. It is the disordered hunger that makes possessions, increase, security, and gain the measure of life.

The man who prompted the parable wanted Jesus to settle an inheritance dispute. Now, he may have had a legal point. The text does not say his claim was technically false. But the Lord looks past the legal surface and sees the heart. That is one of the things Christ does that men hate. Men want Jesus to validate their side of the argument. Christ exposes the motive underneath the argument. This man wanted a division of goods, and the Lord answered with a warning about covetousness. That means a man can be right about money and still wrong in his soul. He can have a legitimate claim and still be driven by a rotten appetite. He can talk about fairness while his heart worships possession.

The Lord then says, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." That statement is a direct assault on the entire philosophy of this world. The world says a man's life does consist in abundance: his net worth, home, car, portfolio, clothes, followers, business size, properties, vacations, influence, and visible success. Christ says no. A man's life is not measured by his possessions. Possessions may reveal stewardship, opportunity, or responsibility, but they do not define life. A man can have abundance and be spiritually dead. He can have little and be rich toward God. If a man does not believe that, the Rich Fool is waiting to teach him the hard way.

Chapter 2: Prosperity Is Not Sin, but It Is Dangerous

The rich man's ground brought forth plentifully. The text does not say he stole the crop. It does not say he cheated his workers. It does not say he oppressed the poor. It does not say the crop came through crime. It simply says his ground produced abundantly. That is important because the Lord is not condemning prosperity as sin in itself. Abraham was rich. Job was rich. David had wealth. Solomon had wealth. Joseph managed the storehouses of Egypt. Proverbs praises diligence and wise provision. The Bible does not

teach that poverty is automatic holiness or that wealth is automatic wickedness. The issue is the heart before God.

But prosperity is dangerous because abundance has a way of speaking to the soul. When a man lacks, he may feel his dependence more easily. When he has abundance, he can begin to imagine he is secure. His savings become his strong tower. His business becomes his identity. His house becomes his refuge. His increase becomes his proof that he is wise. He begins to confuse God's patience with God's approval and God's provision with permission to forget Him. That is why the Bible gives so many warnings to the rich. Riches are deceitful. They promise stability but cannot stop death. They promise satisfaction but cannot feed the soul. They promise control but cannot add one breath when God requires the life.

This should especially speak to believers in an age of opportunity, comfort, technology, and visibility. It is easy to look at increase and assume God is blessing everything attached to it. Sometimes increase is blessing. Sometimes it is a test. Sometimes it is simply the result of natural law, hard work, timing, market conditions, or God allowing a man's idol to grow large enough to expose him. The rich man's plentiful crop did not make him wise. It revealed his foolishness. Prosperity did not create his covetousness; it gave it a microphone. When his ground increased, his soul started talking, and what came out proved he had planned for barns but not for God.

Chapter 3: The Rich Man's Conversation Was With Himself

The rich man "thought within himself." That phrase is revealing. He does not pray. He does not give thanks. He does not ask God for wisdom. He does not consult Scripture. He does not consider the poor. He does not speak of stewardship. He holds a board meeting with himself, and every member of the board is named "I." "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" Then he says, "This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." His speech is filled with "I" and "my." That is the language of a man whose world begins and ends with himself.

The issue is not planning. Planning is wise when done under God. The issue is godless planning. James rebukes men who say, "To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain," while failing to say, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." That is the spirit of the Rich Fool. He has a plan for construction, storage, retirement, ease, eating, drinking, and merriment, but no thought of whether he will live through the night. He talks as though time belongs to him. He talks as though his soul answers to him. He talks as though his goods are permanent. He talks as though God is not in the room.

That is one of the marks of practical atheism. A man may believe in God doctrinally and still plan like an atheist. He may say he believes the Bible and still run his life as if the only questions are profit, storage, comfort, and future ease. He may talk about providence but never submit his plans to God. He may thank God publicly while privately worshiping his own strategy. The Rich Fool's inner conversation exposes the real altar of his heart. He is not kneeling before an idol of stone. He is bowing before barns.

Chapter 4: Bigger Barns Cannot Feed a Starving Soul

The rich man's solution to abundance is bigger barns. Again, building barns is not evil in itself. If a farmer has increase, storage may be responsible. Joseph stored grain in Egypt and saved lives. Proverbs commends foresight. The sin is not storage. The sin is the man's assumption that storage equals soul security. He says to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." That is where his foolishness becomes visible. Goods can be laid up for the body, but goods cannot satisfy the soul. Grain can feed the stomach, but not the spirit. Barns can store crops, but not eternal life.

The man talks to his soul like his soul is an animal that can be fed with stored produce. "Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." That is the theology of the barn. Ease, appetite, pleasure, and time. That is still the theology of the modern world. Work hard, build bigger, store more, retire comfortably, travel, eat, drink, enjoy yourself, and assume your soul will be fine because your accounts are full. But the soul was made for God. It cannot live on corn, cash, property, screens, applause, or luxury. A man can feed his body and starve his soul to death. He can have stocked barns and an empty heart. He can have a full calendar and no eternal purpose. He can have a retirement plan and no preparation for judgment.

This is the warning modern Christians need. It is possible to spend years increasing barns while decreasing spiritually. A man can expand his business and shrink in prayer. He can improve his house and neglect his family altar. He can grow his bank account and lose his burden for souls. He can build his online presence and lose his secret walk with God. He can multiply possessions and become poor in discernment, poor in Scripture, poor in holiness, poor in charity, poor in worship, and poor in eternal fruit. Bigger barns are not wrong when God orders them and they serve stewardship. But bigger barns are deadly when they become the voice that tells the soul to rest without God.

Chapter 5: God Called Him a Fool

The world would not have called this man a fool. The world would have called him successful, strategic, disciplined, fortunate, visionary, and financially secure. God called him a fool. That is the only evaluation that matters. "But God said unto him, Thou fool." Those words break into the parable like a thunderclap. The man has been speaking to

himself, but now God speaks to him. The man had plans for many years, but God speaks of "this night." The man had goods laid up, but God speaks of his soul being required. The man had barns, but God asks who will own what he prepared. One sentence from God demolished his entire life philosophy.

A fool in Scripture is not merely an unintelligent person. A fool is a man who lives without proper fear of God. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." The Rich Fool may not have said that with his mouth, but he said it in his planning. He left God out. He left death out. He left judgment out. He left eternity out. He left stewardship out. He left his soul out, except as something to be comforted by goods. That is foolishness. A man does not have to be stupid to be a fool. He can be intelligent, educated, productive, and rich, and still be a fool if he builds life on the assumption that he controls tomorrow.

God's timing is also devastating: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." Not next decade. Not after retirement. Not after the barns are completed. Not after he has enjoyed his goods. This night. Death does not wait for a convenient season. Eternity does not ask whether your projects are finished. God does not need permission from your calendar to require your soul. That is the great terror in the parable. The rich man had many years in his imagination and only one night in reality. Every man planning without God is doing the same thing. He is writing checks on time he does not own.

Chapter 6: Earthly Stewardship Must Be Distinguished From Trusting Riches

Right division and sound doctrine require balance. This parable is not condemning work, saving, building, planning, business, or provision. The Bible condemns laziness. It says if any provide not for his own, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. Proverbs praises the ant for preparing in summer. Joseph's storage in Egypt was wise and God-used. Paul labored with his own hands. A man who uses the Rich Fool to excuse sloth, irresponsibility, poverty-by-foolishness, or failure to provide is twisting the passage. The rich man's problem was not that he had a barn. It was that he trusted the barn.

Stewardship says, "God has given me resources, and I must use them under His authority." Covetousness says, "My resources are mine, and they exist for my security and pleasure." Stewardship gives thanks. Covetousness congratulates itself. Stewardship asks how to honor God. Covetousness asks how to enlarge ease. Stewardship remembers death. Covetousness plans as though death is an interruption for other people. Stewardship can save without worshiping savings. Covetousness stores while starving the soul. The difference is not always visible in the bank statement. It is visible in the heart's conversation.

A Christian may own a business, plan wisely, save carefully, build responsibly, and provide generously while remaining rich toward God. Another man may have far less and still be covetous, anxious, selfish, and godless. Covetousness is not measured only by net worth. A poor man can worship money he does not have. A rich man can serve God with money he does have. The parable is not about the number in the barn. It is about the man's soul before God. Earthly stewardship is good when God is first. Trusting riches is damnable when goods become the soul's refuge.

Chapter 7: The Rich Fool Was Not Rich Toward God

The Lord ends the parable with the application: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." That is the final diagnosis. The man laid up treasure for himself but was not rich toward God. He had wealth in one direction and poverty in the other. He was rich toward earth and poor toward heaven. Rich toward barns and poor toward God. Rich toward the body and poor toward the soul. Rich toward time and poor toward eternity. That is the tragedy. The issue is not that he possessed goods; it is that his goods possessed his imagination, his confidence, and his future.

To be rich toward God is to value what God values, trust what God says, and invest life in what survives death. For a lost man, the first need is salvation through Jesus Christ. No man is rich toward God while rejecting Christ. A man may give to charity, build hospitals, fund causes, help neighbors, and still die lost if he has not believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. In this present Church Age, the gospel is clear: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. Eternal life is not obtained by generous giving or barn management. It is received by faith in the finished work of Christ. A man without Christ is poor no matter how full his barns are.

For the believer, being rich toward God means living as a steward, not an owner. It means laying up treasure in heaven. It means using resources for God's glory. It means caring more about eternal fruit than temporary ease. It means feeding the soul with Scripture instead of talking to it with financial statements. It means remembering that every possession is temporary and every opportunity is accountable. A Christian can increase his barns if God orders it, but he had better not starve his soul while doing it. The final audit is not done by the bank. It is done by God.

Conclusion

The parable of the Rich Fool is not an attack on work, business, saving, planning, or provision. It is an attack on covetousness, self-security, and a life planned without God. The rich man's ground brought forth plentifully, and he decided to build greater barns, store his fruits and goods, and tell his soul to take ease for many years. But God said, "Thou fool,

this night thy soul shall be required of thee." In one night, his plans collapsed, his goods passed to someone else, and his soul stood before the God he had ignored. That is not failure by worldly standards, but it is failure by the only standard that matters.

The warning is desperately needed in an age drunk on increase. Men measure life by possessions, platforms, accounts, comfort, retirement, digital influence, business growth, and visible success. But Jesus said a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. A man can have much and be empty. He can have goods for many years and not have one more night. He can talk to his soul like a fool and discover that his soul belongs to God. Bigger barns cannot stop death. Full barns cannot forgive sin. Stored goods cannot purchase eternal life. Ease cannot answer judgment.

The answer is not laziness or poverty worship. The answer is to be rich toward God. Work, but do not worship work. Save, but do not trust savings. Build, but do not let barns become your god. Provide, but do not starve your soul. Plan, but say, "If the Lord will." Use what God gives, but remember that God can require the soul tonight. The wise man lays hold on Christ, feeds on the word, uses earthly goods as a steward, and lives with eternity in view. The fool increases his barns and forgets his soul.

19 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Barren Fig Tree

Introduction

The parable of the Barren Fig Tree is one of those passages that must be handled with a Bible in one hand and a doctrinal backbone in the other, because if a man rips it out of its setting, he will turn it into another religious club to beat saved people over the head with. Luke 13:6-9 says, "He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none." The owner then says to the dresser of the vineyard, "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" The dresser answers, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." That is the whole parable. It is short, plain, and solemn. A fig tree is planted in a vineyard. The owner comes seeking fruit. There is none. Judgment is deserved. Intercession delays the cutting down. More cultivation is given. If fruit still does not come, the axe falls. That is not a fluffy devotional about personal growth goals. It is a warning about privilege, patience, fruitlessness, and judgment.

The key is the fig tree. In Scripture, the fig tree has deep connections with Israel. Alongside the vine and the olive tree, the fig tree is one of the great botanical pictures connected with God's dealings with His earthly people. Israel is pictured as a vine brought out of Egypt and planted by God. The olive tree is used in Romans 11 to explain Israel's covenant root and Gentile grafting in. The fig tree often connects with Israel's national condition, fruitfulness, judgment, and prophetic signs. When Jesus later curses a fig tree that has leaves but no fruit, it is not a random outburst against agriculture. It is a living sermon against a nation with religious appearance and no fruit for God. So when Luke 13 gives a fig tree planted in a vineyard, with the owner coming for fruit and finding none, a careful Bible believer should not immediately make the fig tree an individual Church Age believer about to lose salvation. The national and prophetic setting must be respected.

That does not mean there is no application to individuals or to believers today. There is plenty. God expects fruit where He gives light. Privilege creates responsibility. Patience should lead to repentance, not presumption. A man can have leaves, location, and cultivation, and still be barren. A church can have doctrine, opportunity, and history, and still be fruitless. A believer can be saved and yet waste time, neglect the word, resist chastening, and produce little that glorifies God. But application is not the same as doctrinal theft. This parable is not teaching that a sealed member of the Body of Christ is cut out of Christ and sent to hell because he failed to bear enough fruit. That would contradict the gospel of grace and the believer's standing in Christ. The passage deals first with Israel's national accountability under the ministry of Christ, God's patience with a privileged but barren people, and the warning that continued fruitlessness would end in judgment. If we get that straight, the devotional application becomes sharper, not weaker.

Chapter 1: The Fig Tree Points First Toward Israel

The first mistake men make with this parable is pretending the fig tree is just a generic symbol for any person in any age. The Bible's own pattern should control the interpretation. The fig tree has repeated connections with Israel's national life, blessing, failure, and prophetic condition. In the Old Testament, sitting under one's vine and fig tree is a picture of peace, safety, and kingdom blessing. The absence or destruction of figs is associated with judgment. The prophets use agricultural imagery to describe Israel's spiritual condition before God. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes ministering to Israel and speaks of a fig tree in a vineyard with no fruit, the Jewish and prophetic background is impossible to ignore unless a man is trying not to see it.

The setting in Luke 13 strengthens that point. The Lord has just warned His hearers about perishing unless they repent. He refers to the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices and the eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell. He tells the people

that those tragedies do not mean the victims were greater sinners than everyone else. “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Then He speaks the parable of the fig tree. That context is not a private Church Age discipleship class on losing eternal security. It is a national warning to Israel in the face of coming judgment. The nation had seen Christ’s ministry. The King was present. The vineyard had been cultivated. The fig tree should have borne fruit. Yet the owner found none.

This matters because Israel had more privilege than any nation on earth. They had the covenants, the promises, the law, the prophets, the temple service, the sacrifices, the Scriptures, the priesthood, and the Messiah standing in their midst. If any tree should have borne fruit, Israel should have. The fig tree was not planted in a desert with no care. It was planted in a vineyard. It had location, cultivation, attention, and expectation. That is why the fruitlessness was so serious. The more light a people has, the more accountable they become. Israel’s barrenness was not ignorance in total darkness. It was fruitlessness under divine privilege.

Chapter 2: The Vineyard Shows Privilege and Cultivation

The fig tree was planted in a vineyard. That detail is significant. A vineyard is a cultivated place. It is not wilderness. It is not neglected ground. It is a place of intentional planting, care, fencing, dressing, and expectation. Israel is repeatedly connected with vineyard imagery in Scripture. Isaiah 5 famously presents Israel as the Lord’s vineyard, planted in a very fruitful hill, fenced, cleared of stones, and furnished with a tower and winepress. God looked for grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. That Old Testament background echoes loudly when Luke 13 speaks of a fig tree planted in a vineyard. The issue is not lack of privilege. The issue is lack of fruit despite privilege.

This is the difference between barrenness in ignorance and barrenness under cultivation. The fig tree had every reason to produce. It was not growing in a place where no owner cared. It had soil, attention, and protection. That makes its fruitlessness more serious. God had cultivated Israel for centuries. He separated the nation from the Gentiles. He gave them His law. He sent prophets rising up early and sending them. He delivered them from Egypt. He brought them through the wilderness. He gave them the land. He restored them after captivity. He preserved a remnant. Then He sent His Son. The vineyard had been worked, and the owner rightly came looking for fruit.

This principle applies devotionally as well. A person who has been raised around the Bible, heard sound preaching, received repeated warnings, been spared by mercy, and given opportunity after opportunity is not in the same position as someone with little light. A church that has had the Book, doctrine, preaching, liberty, and years of opportunity is not

the same as a pagan village with no witness. Privilege is not decoration. It is accountability. A man should tremble if he has had much cultivation and still bears no fruit. God does not cultivate ground forever just so the tree can look leafy and occupy space. He seeks fruit.

Chapter 3: The Owner Came Seeking Fruit

The owner came seeking fruit and found none. That is the central issue. The question is not whether the tree had leaves, height, bark, location, history, or roots in the soil. The question is whether it had fruit. God does not merely look for religious appearance. He looks for what His own work should produce. Israel had plenty of leaves in Christ's day. There was temple activity, sacrifices, feasts, scribes, Pharisees, prayers, fasts, tithes, traditions, debates, and religious vocabulary. But when the King came seeking repentance, righteousness, faith, mercy, and recognition of the Messiah, the nation as a whole was barren. There was a remnant, but the national leadership was fruitless.

This is where the parable connects with the later cursing of the fig tree. In that event, Jesus finds leaves but no fruit, and the fig tree withers. The leaves picture outward show. The fruit is what God wanted. Israel had leaves. The temple was standing. The priests were operating. The Pharisees were performing. The scribes were teaching. The nation looked religious. But leaves are not fruit. Religious motion is not repentance. Ceremony is not faith. National privilege is not obedience. A tree can look alive from a distance and still be barren when the Lord inspects it.

There is a strong warning here for anyone with outward religion. God is not impressed by leaves when there is no fruit. A man may have Bible knowledge and no humility. He may have doctrinal vocabulary and no charity. He may have public ministry and no secret prayer. He may have separation standards and no spiritual life. He may have church attendance and no burden for souls. He may have religious confidence and no repentance. Leaves can fool men for a while, but they do not fool the owner of the vineyard. When God comes seeking fruit, He is not satisfied with foliage.

Chapter 4: Three Years of Seeking Fruit Shows Divine Patience

The owner says, "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none." The three years naturally remind the Bible reader of the Lord's earthly ministry to Israel. For roughly three years, Christ ministered among His people, preaching, teaching, healing, casting out devils, cleansing lepers, raising the dead, and presenting undeniable proof of His identity. He came again and again seeking fruit. Yet the official response of the nation, especially its rulers, was unbelief, resistance, accusation, and eventually murder. The barren fig tree stands as a fitting picture of Israel under the searching ministry of her Messiah.

The phrase also shows patience. The owner did not come once and immediately cut the tree down. He came seeking fruit over time. God's patience is one of the most misunderstood truths in Scripture. Men mistake patience for indifference. They think because judgment is delayed, judgment is canceled. Israel had a long history of God's longsuffering. He bore with the nation through wilderness rebellion, idolatry, judges, kings, prophets rejected, captivity, restoration, and finally the ministry of Christ. But patience has a limit. The owner eventually says, "Cut it down." Divine longsuffering is not divine permission to remain barren forever.

This should rebuke presumption. A man can mistake repeated mercy for safety. He can say, "God has not judged me yet," as though that proves He never will. A nation can mistake survival for approval. A church can mistake continued existence for spiritual health. Israel's three years of inspection did not mean the tree was acceptable. It meant God was patient. Every extra sermon, every extra warning, every extra act of mercy, every extra season of opportunity should lead to repentance and fruit. If it does not, it increases accountability. The longer the owner seeks fruit and finds none, the more serious the barrenness becomes.

Chapter 5: "Cut It Down" Is Judgment, Not Loss of Church Age Salvation

The owner's command is severe: "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" That is judgment language. The barren tree is not merely disappointing; it is occupying space without producing what it was planted to produce. In the national setting, this points toward judgment upon Israel. The nation would reject Christ. Jerusalem would later be destroyed. The temple would fall. The people would be scattered. The fig tree that bore no fruit under the King's ministry would face the axe. That is a historical and prophetic reality, not a generic threat that every born-again believer is about to be cut out of Christ and damned.

This distinction must be maintained. Church Age salvation rests on the finished work of Christ, received by faith. The believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption. He is placed into the Body of Christ. He is accepted in the Beloved. He is justified freely by grace. His eternal life is not hanging by the thread of fruit-production quotas. If a man takes "cut it down" and aims it at the eternal security of a saved believer in the Body of Christ, he is not rightly dividing. He is stealing Israel's national judgment language and turning it into a weapon against grace.

That does not mean believers can ignore fruitlessness. The New Testament gives serious warnings about chastisement, loss of reward, uselessness, shame at the judgment seat of Christ, and being set aside from service. A saved man who refuses fruit may not lose

salvation, but he can lose joy, testimony, usefulness, reward, and even physical life under divine chastening. First Corinthians 11 shows believers judged in the body. First Corinthians 3 shows works burned though the man himself is saved. John 15 has its own setting and must be handled carefully, but it certainly warns about fruit-bearing and purging. So the warning remains real, but it must be applied lawfully. Israel's national cutting down is not the same thing as a Christian losing eternal life.

Chapter 6: The Dresser Intercedes for More Time

The dresser of the vineyard says, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it." That is intercession and added mercy. The tree deserves judgment, but the dresser asks for more time and more cultivation. This is a beautiful picture of mercy delaying judgment. God's patience is not passive. He does not merely wait; He continues to deal, dig, disturb, and fertilize. The digging loosens the hardened ground. The dung enriches what is lacking. The tree receives one more season of concentrated attention before the final decision. Mercy gives space to repent.

In Israel's case, this fits the continued dealings of God even after the nation's rejection of Christ. Even after the cross, God gave witness through the apostles. In Acts, Peter preaches to Israel. The nation receives further testimony. Miracles continue. Stephen preaches a Spirit-filled indictment of Israel's history and rejection, and they stone him. The mercy of God continued beyond the immediate rejection, but the national direction remained one of unbelief. The dresser's intercession shows that God's judgment is not rash. When judgment falls, no one will honestly say God was impatient.

Devotionally, the digging and dunging are not always pleasant. If God is going to make a barren life fruitful, He may have to dig around the roots. He may disturb what has become hard. He may expose what is compacted. He may apply humbling things that do not smell pleasant to the flesh but nourish the life. Chastening, correction, conviction, hardship, rebuke, loss, and pressure can all be part of God's cultivation. A foolish man complains about the digging. A wise man asks why the owner is still giving him time. If God is dealing with barrenness, the answer is not to resent the spade. The answer is to bear fruit.

Chapter 7: Fruitlessness Is Dangerous Even When Salvation Is Secure

The rightly divided application to believers must be strong but clean. A saved member of the Body of Christ is not Israel's barren fig tree in the primary doctrinal sense, and he is not in danger of losing justification because he has had a weak season. But fruitlessness is still dangerous. The believer was created in Christ Jesus unto good works. He is called to bear the fruit of the Spirit. He is expected to grow in grace, walk worthy of the Lord unto all

pleasing, and be fruitful in every good work. Grace does not save a man so he can become a well-watered tree with nothing for God.

Fruitlessness can come in many forms. There can be no fruit of holiness, no fruit of witness, no fruit of charity, no fruit of prayer, no fruit of thanksgiving, no fruit of doctrine lived out, no fruit in the home, no fruit in service, no fruit in endurance, no fruit in spiritual maturity. A man can know he is eternally secure and still be practically barren. That is not a small thing. Eternal security is not permission to cumber the ground. It is the assurance from which grateful service should grow. A man who uses grace as an excuse for fruitlessness has not understood grace. He has turned a Bible doctrine into a hiding place for laziness.

The warning to modern Christians is especially needed because much of our age is leafy but barren. We have platforms, posts, podcasts, buildings, conferences, slogans, debates, branding, and religious content everywhere. Leaves everywhere. But where is the fruit? Where is holiness? Where is prayer? Where is brokenness? Where is charity? Where is endurance? Where is sound doctrine producing sound living? Where are sinners being warned, saints being strengthened, families being ordered, and Christ being glorified? A leafy tree can fool men at a distance. The owner comes close enough to inspect the fruit.

Conclusion

The parable of the Barren Fig Tree is first a warning about Israel's national accountability under the patient dealings of God. The fig tree planted in a vineyard had privilege, cultivation, and opportunity. The owner came seeking fruit and found none. For three years he came, and still there was barrenness. The command to cut it down reveals the seriousness of fruitlessness under divine privilege. The dresser's intercession reveals mercy, patience, and further cultivation. But the final warning remains: if it bears fruit, well; if not, it will be cut down. Israel had the covenants, the prophets, the temple, the law, and the Messiah Himself, yet the nation as a whole failed to bring forth fruit.

Rightly divided, this parable must not be turned into a threat that every saved Church Age believer is about to lose eternal life. Israel's national judgment, the cutting down of the barren fig tree, and the believer's standing in Christ are not the same doctrine. The gospel of grace remains clear: the believer is saved by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, sealed by the Spirit, and secure in Him. But that security does not erase the seriousness of fruitlessness. God still chastens His children. Christ still judges the believer's works. A saved man can lose reward, usefulness, joy, testimony, and even physical life under severe chastening. Grace protects salvation; it does not excuse barrenness.

The practical warning is simple and severe. God seeks fruit where He gives light. Privilege is not a substitute for fruit. Leaves are not fruit. Religious activity is not fruit. Location in the

vineyard is not fruit. History is not fruit. A tree can be planted in the right place, receive years of care, and still be barren. If God is digging around the roots, do not despise the mercy. If He is disturbing the soil, do not complain about the spade. If He is giving more time, do not presume on it. The owner of the vineyard has the right to seek fruit. And when He comes looking, may He find more than leaves.

20 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Lowest Room at the Feast

Introduction

The parable of the Lowest Room at the Feast is found in Luke 14, and on the surface it looks like a simple lesson in manners. A man is invited to a wedding, and the Lord tells him not to sit down in the highest room lest a more honorable man be invited and the host come and say, “Give this man place,” and he begin with shame to take the lowest room. Instead, when invited, he should go and sit down in the lowest room, so that when the host comes, he may say, “Friend, go up higher,” and then he will have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with him. Then the Lord gives the governing principle: “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” That is not merely etiquette. That is a spiritual law. The Lord is not trying to help ambitious men manipulate banquets so they can be promoted more smoothly. He is exposing the pride that grabs for visibility, honor, rank, reputation, and recognition before the proper time and without the proper authority.

The setting makes the rebuke even sharper. Jesus is in the house of one of the chief Pharisees on the sabbath day, and the Bible says “they watched him.” That means this is not a warm family meal with humble disciples gathered around the table. This is a religious environment charged with suspicion, pride, status, and observation. The Pharisees are watching Christ, but Christ is watching them. He sees how they choose out the chief rooms. He sees the religious ladder in the room. He sees men quietly calculating importance, position, honor, and visibility. They are not merely sitting down to eat. They are arranging themselves according to pride. So the Lord speaks a parable to them. He reaches into the ordinary scene of a feast and turns it into a judgment on self-exaltation. Men think they are selecting seats. God says they are revealing hearts.

Rightly divided, this parable belongs in the Gospel and kingdom setting, where the Lord is rebuking the pride of Israel’s religious leaders and teaching principles that fit the kingdom order of God. The kingdom reverses man’s social ladder. The proud man who climbs into the high seat gets sent down. The humble man who takes the low place is called up by

another. That principle runs all through Scripture. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Before honour is humility. Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. But the parable must not be twisted into a works-based salvation lesson, as though a sinner gets eternal life by acting humble enough at the table. Salvation in this present Church Age is by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ. Yet the rebuke of pride applies with full force to believers, preachers, ministries, social media voices, religious influencers, and anyone tempted to grab the chief room before God gives it. Pride still looks for the best seat. Humility still waits for the host.

Chapter 1: Christ Was Watching the Watchers

Luke 14 says that Jesus went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, "and they watched him." That phrase reveals the atmosphere. The Pharisees are not sitting there hungry for truth. They are observing, measuring, testing, and looking for something to accuse. Religious pride loves to watch Christ without bowing to Christ. It will study Him, critique Him, evaluate Him, invite Him to dinner, and inspect Him, but it will not submit to Him. These men thought Jesus was the one under observation. They did not realize the Lord was reading the room better than they were reading Him. They watched Him with suspicion. He watched them with perfect discernment.

The Lord saw how they chose the chief rooms. That is the immediate trigger for the parable. He did not need a man to stand up and announce his pride. He could see it in the way they sat down. Pride often reveals itself in small arrangements. Where does a man sit? Whom does he want to be seen with? What title does he crave? What recognition does he expect? What offense does he take when he is not honored? The Pharisees had built an entire religious culture around visibility: long robes, chief seats, greetings in the markets, public prayers, widened phylacteries, and religious reputation. At the table, the same spirit showed up in their choice of seats. They wanted the highest rooms because they believed they belonged there.

That is the first warning. A man can be watched by others and still be watched by God. Social positioning may impress men, but God sees the motive. The person who is always maneuvering for attention, platform, rank, recognition, and advantage may think he is simply being wise, strategic, or confident. God calls it pride when the heart is self-exalting. The Pharisees were watching Jesus to judge Him, but Jesus was watching them to expose them. That is how the Bible works. Men open the Book to critique it, but the Book opens them. Men sit in judgment on Christ, but Christ is the Judge in the room.

Chapter 2: The Highest Room Appeals to the Flesh

The highest room represents honor, visibility, recognition, and perceived importance. In the feast setting, it was the place of distinction. The flesh loves that seat. It wants to be seen as important. It wants people to assume it belongs near the host, near influence, near authority, near applause. Pride does not always say this out loud. It simply moves toward the seat. It calculates who is watching. It notices who gets invited closer. It measures itself against others. It quietly assumes it deserves more than it has been given. That is the old Adam showing up at a religious dinner table wearing clean clothes and looking for a nameplate.

This desire for the highest room appears in ministry as much as anywhere else. Men want the chief seat in preaching, teaching, denominational reputation, online influence, Bible knowledge, prophecy discussions, apologetics, and doctrinal debates. They want to be seen as the sharp one, the deep one, the bold one, the prophet, the watchman, the expert, the defender, the man with the final word. Social media has turned the chief room into a digital chair with likes, shares, followers, comments, and visibility. The old Pharisee did it with seats at feasts and greetings in marketplaces. The modern Pharisee can do it with engagement metrics and public branding. Same flesh, new furniture.

This does not mean all visibility is sinful. God can put a man in a visible place. God can give a preacher a platform, a teacher an audience, a writer readers, or a ministry influence. The issue is not the existence of the room; the issue is whether a man grabbed it for himself or was placed there by the host. There is a massive difference between being called up higher and climbing up higher. One is exaltation from another; the other is self-promotion. The flesh cannot stand waiting because waiting requires trust. Pride wants the chair now. Humility is willing to let the host decide.

Chapter 3: The Proud Man Risks Public Humbling

The Lord warns that if a man takes the highest room, a more honorable man may have been invited, and the host will come and say, “Give this man place.” Then the self-exalted guest begins with shame to take the lowest room. That is a humiliating scene. The man who wanted honor receives embarrassment. The man who wanted to be seen going up is seen going down. He chose the room privately according to his pride, but his demotion becomes public. That is the danger of self-exaltation. Pride often selects the seat quietly, but God can arrange the correction openly.

This is a spiritual principle throughout Scripture. Haman built gallows for Mordecai and ended up hanging on them. Nebuchadnezzar boasted in great Babylon and ended up eating grass like an ox. Herod received worship as a god and was eaten of worms. Peter boasted that though all men should be offended, he would not, and before the night was over he

denied the Lord three times. Pride writes checks the soul cannot cash. It puts a man in positions he cannot sustain under the eye of God. Self-exaltation always carries the risk of divine abasement. The higher a man climbs in pride, the more visible the fall.

This ought to sober anyone in ministry. A preacher who grabs authority God did not give him may be made to sit down. A teacher who pretends to know what he does not know may be exposed. A man who builds his public reputation on being untouchable may be humbled by the very weakness he ignored. A social media voice that loves the chief room may find the same crowd that praised him watching him descend. God is not mocked. He knows how to tell a man, "Give this man place." It is better to take the low room voluntarily than to be escorted there by shame.

Chapter 4: The Lowest Room Is Not False Humility

The Lord tells the invited man to go and sit down in the lowest room. This is not a call to fake humility. False humility is just pride in old clothes. Some people take the low seat loudly so everyone will notice how humble they are. They make humility another strategy for advancement. They talk about how unworthy they are while secretly waiting for someone to contradict them. That is not biblical humility. The Lord is not teaching a clever social technique where a man pretends to be low so he can be promoted. He is teaching the true posture of a man who does not presume upon honor.

The lowest room means a man does not assume he deserves the chief seat. He is content to be where the host places him. He does not need to be recognized to be faithful. He does not need the highest visibility to serve. He does not collapse if someone else is honored. He does not measure his worth by public placement. That kind of humility is not weakness. It is strength under God. It takes more grace to sit quietly in the low room than to claw for the high one. The flesh can fight for attention. Only grace can wait.

This principle is especially needed among Bible believers because knowledge can puff up. A man can learn doctrine, right division, prophecy, textual truth, and strong argumentation, and then begin to think he belongs in the highest room. He may despise weaker brethren, mock confused people, treat questions like interruptions, and assume his sharpness gives him rank. But God is not impressed with Bible knowledge married to pride. The lowest room is good for the best of men because it reminds him that whatever he knows, he received. If God gave the light, why boast as though it originated in you?

Chapter 5: Exaltation Must Come From the Host

The beauty of the parable is that the humble man does not promote himself. The host comes and says, "Friend, go up higher." That is the right way to be exalted: by another, not by oneself. Proverbs says, "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a

stranger, and not thine own lips." In the parable, the host has the authority to assign seats. The guest does not. That is the issue. Pride acts like the guest owns the seating chart. Humility remembers the host does. Spiritually, God is the One who exalts, places, promotes, and rewards. A man's job is to be faithful where he is.

When the host says, "Friend, go up higher," there is no shame in the promotion. The man did not grasp for it. He was called to it. That kind of elevation is safe because it comes with authority from the one who governs the feast. God may lift a man. God may enlarge a ministry. God may give a teacher more hearers. God may put a preacher before more people. God may increase influence. But when God does it, the man should tremble rather than strut. Being called up higher is not permission to become proud. It is a reminder that the seat was a gift, not a conquest.

This helps correct both ambition and false withdrawal. Some men are proud and grab seats. Others are fearful and refuse service even when God calls them up. Humility does not mean refusing the host when He says, "Go up higher." If God opens a door, take it with trembling. If God gives a platform, use it faithfully. If God gives influence, spend it for truth. But do not seize what God has not given, and do not pretend that self-promotion is faith. Let the host move you. Until then, serve in the room where you are placed.

Chapter 6: Kingdom Principles Reverse Man's Social Ladder

The Lord's principle is clear: "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." That is kingdom reversal. Man's world rewards self-promotion, networking, image management, ladder climbing, name dropping, brand building, and aggressive ambition. God's kingdom runs on another principle. The first shall be last, and the last first. The greatest is servant of all. The meek inherit the earth. The publican who smites his breast goes down justified rather than the Pharisee who advertises his righteousness. The childlike are great in the kingdom. The crucified Christ is exalted above every name.

This principle is seen all through the earthly ministry of Jesus. The disciples argued about who would be greatest. James and John wanted chief seats. Peter boasted in his loyalty. The Pharisees loved public honor. Again and again, the Lord rebuked the instinct to climb. The kingdom does not operate by the pride of Adam. It operates by the humility seen perfectly in Christ. Philippians 2 later gives the full pattern: Christ humbled Himself, and God highly exalted Him. First the lowest room, then the highest name. The path of God's exaltation runs through humility, not self-advertisement.

This rebukes modern religious celebrity culture. Much of what is called ministry today is baptized ambition. Men build platforms, cultivate personas, chase visibility, and then call it

“impact.” They want the chief room at the feast, but they call it outreach. They want applause, but they call it influence. They want followers, but they call it kingdom work. God can use visibility, but visibility is dangerous when pride is driving. The kingdom principle still stands: exalt yourself, and God knows how to bring you down. Humble yourself, and God knows how to lift you at the right time.

Chapter 7: This Is a Rebuke of Pride, Not a Works-Based Salvation Plan

Right division keeps the parable in its proper doctrinal place. The Lord is not teaching that a sinner earns eternal life by choosing the lowest seat at a feast. Humility does not purchase salvation. Taking the lowest room does not wash away sin. Refusing self-promotion does not justify the ungodly. In this present Church Age, salvation is by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ: His death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection. A proud man needs to be humbled, yes, but humility itself is not the blood. The cross is the ground of salvation. Faith receives what Christ has done.

The parable is a rebuke of pride under the eye of God. In its Gospel setting, Jesus is exposing the ambition and self-importance of religious men who loved chief rooms. It fits the kingdom ethic where God reverses human pride and honors humility. The direct issue is not how to be justified before God in the Pauline sense, but how pride behaves and how God responds to it. A man who turns every command to humility into a condition for maintaining salvation will corrupt grace. A man who uses grace to ignore the rebuke of pride will corrupt practical holiness. Right division preserves both.

For believers, the application is unavoidable. Pride in ministry is dangerous. Pride in doctrine is dangerous. Pride in influence is dangerous. Pride in being right is dangerous. Pride in being separated from false religion is dangerous. Pride in numbers, followers, knowledge, sacrifice, suffering, or service is dangerous. A saved man may be eternally secure and still be abased by God in this life for pride. He may lose usefulness, credibility, reward, and joy. The lowest room is not the way to get saved; it is the posture of a man who knows he is nothing without the grace of God.

Conclusion

The parable of the Lowest Room at the Feast is not merely about table manners. It is a spiritual rebuke aimed at pride, ambition, self-promotion, and religious status-seeking. Jesus watched men choose the chief rooms, and He exposed the heart behind the seating arrangement. The proud man takes the high place and risks being publicly sent down. The humble man takes the low place and waits for the host to say, “Friend, go up higher.” The lesson is simple and severe: “Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Rightly divided, the parable belongs in the Gospel and kingdom setting, where the Lord is rebuking the pride of Israel's religious leaders and teaching the principle of divine reversal. It is not a works-based salvation plan. A sinner is not justified by strategic humility at a feast. He is justified by faith in the blood and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But the parable remains profitable and sharp for every believer. God still resists the proud. God still gives grace to the humble. God still knows how to demote a self-exalting man and raise a humble servant at the proper time.

The warning is needed in the age of platforms, pulpits, ministries, debates, followers, influence, and religious reputation. Do not grab the chief room. Do not confuse visibility with authority. Do not mistake applause for approval. Do not call ambition "calling" when the host has not moved you. Take the low room. Serve where God put you. Be faithful without demanding recognition. If the host wants you higher, He knows your name and your seat. And if He never moves you in front of men, the low room with God's approval is better than the high room followed by shame.

21 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Great Supper

Introduction

The parable of the Great Supper in Luke 14 is one of the clearest rebukes in the Bible against religious privilege without a willing heart. The setting begins with a man at the table saying unto Jesus, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." That sounds spiritual. It sounds orthodox. It sounds like the kind of statement a religious man could make at a feast and expect everyone to nod. But the Lord Jesus Christ does not let the statement float around as a harmless religious compliment. He answers with a parable about a certain man who made a great supper and bade many. When the supper was ready, he sent his servant to say to them that were bidden, "Come; for all things are now ready." But they all with one consent began to make excuse. One had bought a piece of ground and needed to see it. Another had bought five yoke of oxen and needed to prove them. Another had married a wife and therefore said he could not come. The invitation was refused, not by people who had never heard of the supper, but by people who had already been bidden. That is the sting of the parable.

This parable is not merely about rude people missing dinner. It is about the rejection of God's invitation by those who assumed they were closest to it. In its immediate setting, it exposes Israel's privileged but resistant religious class. They had the covenants, promises, prophets, Scriptures, temple, priesthood, and the hope of the kingdom. They could speak

warmly about eating bread in the kingdom of God, but when the King stood in front of them and the invitation became immediate, they made excuses. Their mouths loved the idea of the kingdom; their hearts did not want the King's call. That is one of the most dangerous religious conditions on earth: to admire the feast while refusing the summons. A man can speak beautifully about God's promises and still excuse himself when God says, "Come." Religious privilege does not guarantee participation in what God is doing. Proximity to truth can become more damning when the heart refuses the truth.

Rightly divided, this parable must be handled in its Gospel and kingdom setting. It has connections with Israel's rejection, the call going out beyond the self-satisfied religious crowd, and God bringing in those who knew they had nothing to offer. The poor, maimed, halt, blind, and outsiders are compelled to come in, not because God lowered the value of the supper, but because those first invited despised it. This parable is not the same in every detail as the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19, nor should it be flattened into every prophetic feast in Scripture as though all suppers are identical. It is a kingdom parable exposing rejection and widening mercy. It also applies powerfully today because excuses still reveal the heart. Men still miss God's invitation for land, oxen, marriage, business, possessions, family, comfort, and self-importance. Those who thought they were first refuse the call, and those who knew they were nothing come when called. That pattern runs straight through the Bible.

Chapter 1: The Parable Answers a Religious Statement About the Kingdom

The parable begins after a man says, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." The statement itself is not false. It is blessed to eat bread in the kingdom of God. The prophets spoke of kingdom blessing, restoration, feasting, joy, and fellowship under the reign of God. The problem is not the doctrine in the statement. The problem is the danger of saying true things without responding rightly to the truth. Religious men can speak accurately about future blessing while refusing present obedience. They can admire the concept of the kingdom while rejecting the King who brings it. Jesus answers the statement with a parable because He knows the heart behind religious language. He knows that some men love talking about the feast more than they love coming when summoned.

This is a constant danger among people with Bible knowledge. A man can talk about the kingdom, prophecy, doctrine, covenants, dispensations, grace, Israel, the Church, the rapture, the Second Advent, and the marriage supper, and still have a heart full of excuses when God's word presses him personally. The man at the table likely thought he was adding a noble spiritual remark to the conversation. Christ turns it into a warning. That is how the Lord often works. Men make religious comments to appear spiritual, and He exposes whether they actually mean what they say. It is one thing to say, "Blessed is he that shall

eat bread in the kingdom of God." It is another thing to come when the servant says, "All things are now ready."

The parable therefore begins by separating religious talk from real response. The invited guests had already been bidden. They knew about the supper. They were not ignorant pagans with no prior knowledge. They represent the privileged class who had every reason to be ready when the call came. Yet their excuses reveal they did not value the supper. That is the Lord's answer to the man's statement. Yes, blessed is the man who eats bread in the kingdom of God, but do not assume you will be there because you know how to talk about it. The invitation must be received. The call must be obeyed. Religious vocabulary will not bring a man to the table if his heart is married to the field, the oxen, and the house.

Chapter 2: The Supper Was Great Because the Host Was Great

The parable says, "A certain man made a great supper." The greatness of the supper is tied to the greatness of the host. In Scripture, divine feasting often represents blessing, fellowship, provision, and participation in God's promised joy. God is not pictured as a beggar offering scraps. He makes a great supper. That means the refusal of the invited guests is not caused by poverty in the invitation. Nothing is lacking in the provision. The servant says, "Come; for all things are now ready." That is a complete invitation. The supper is prepared. The time has come. The provision is sufficient. The only thing missing is the willingness of the invited guests.

This is a tremendous picture of how men treat the grace and promises of God. The issue is not that God has failed to provide. The issue is that men despise the provision because their hearts are elsewhere. In Israel's case, God had prepared everything necessary for the nation to receive her King. The prophets had spoken. John the Baptist had prepared the way. The Messiah had come. The miracles testified. The words were plain. The kingdom was at hand. Yet those who were bidden made excuses. They did not refuse because the supper was small. They refused because they did not want it on the host's terms. God's provision exposes man's will.

In Church Age application, the same principle stands with the gospel of grace. God has provided salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The work is finished. The blood has been shed. The tomb is empty. The message goes out. "All things are now ready" is not a bad way to describe the sufficiency of Christ's finished work, though the parable's direct setting is kingdom. The sinner does not need to bring payment, religious merit, works, sacraments, or self-reform to complete the supper. The provision is ready in Christ. But men still make excuses. They do not refuse because Christ is

insufficient. They refuse because they love darkness, pride, sin, self-righteousness, or earthly attachments more than the call of God.

Chapter 3: The First Invited Guests Picture Privilege Without Appetite

The first invited guests are the most accountable people in the parable because they had already been bidden. They knew the invitation existed. They were not surprised that a supper had been planned. In the historical and doctrinal setting, this points directly toward Israel's privileged position. To them pertained the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises. They had received the advance invitation through the prophets. They had been told Messiah was coming. They had been told of kingdom blessing. Yet when the call came that all things were ready, the self-satisfied religious crowd would not come.

Privilege without appetite is one of the saddest conditions in Scripture. A starving outsider may run when invited, but a privileged man can become dull through familiarity. He has heard of the supper so often that he no longer values it. He has been around truth so long that it no longer pierces him. He assumes he can respond later because he has always been near the invitation. That is deadly. Religious privilege can harden a man if he does not respond in faith. The same sun that softens wax hardens clay. The same Bible that saves a humble sinner can become judgment against a proud hearer who rejects it. The invited guests were not excluded because the host forgot them. They excluded themselves by refusing the call.

This applies to people raised around the Bible, churches, preaching, and Christian language. A man can grow up hearing truth and still have no appetite for God. He can know the right phrases, recognize the songs, understand the arguments, and still prefer his field, oxen, and household interests. Familiarity is not faith. Heritage is not hunger. Religious background is not repentance. Being bidden is not the same as coming. The first invited guests had opportunity, but opportunity despised becomes condemnation. The supper was ready, but they were not.

Chapter 4: Excuses Reveal the Heart

The first man says, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused." The second says, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused." The third says, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." These excuses are not openly immoral. Land, oxen, and marriage are not evil. That is what makes the parable so searching. Men do not always miss God because they are chasing obviously wicked things. Sometimes they miss God because lawful things become ruling things. Property, business, and family become excuses for refusing the

invitation of God. The problem is not the field, the oxen, or the wife. The problem is the heart that values them above the call.

Excuses are windows into desire. A man's excuse tells you what he loves more than obedience. The field represents possessions and earthly investment. The oxen represent business, labor, productivity, and economic interest. The wife represents domestic attachment and personal life. Again, none of those are sinful in themselves. A man should care for property responsibly, work diligently, and honor marriage. But when these things become reasons to reject God's summons, they become idols. The man with the field could have inspected it later. The man with the oxen could have proved them later. The married man was not forbidden by marriage to attend a supper. The excuses are thin because the heart is unwilling. Men often dress refusal in respectable language.

This is still how rejection works. People say they cannot come to Christ because of work, family, business, timing, responsibilities, relationships, money, plans, or personal goals. Many of the things they name are not evil. The evil is that those things outrank God. A man does not have to curse God to reject Him. He can simply say, "I pray thee have me excused." That polite phrase is one of the most terrifying lines in the parable. It is respectful rebellion. It is refusal with manners. Hell will have plenty of people who did not shake their fist at the invitation; they simply had something else to do.

Chapter 5: The Poor, Maimed, Halt, and Blind Are Brought In

When the servant reports the refusal, the master of the house is angry and says, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." That is a remarkable reversal. Those who would have been considered least likely, least honorable, least qualified, and least impressive are brought in. The self-satisfied invited guests refuse, and the broken come. This exposes a recurring pattern in the ministry of Christ. Publicans and harlots enter before proud religious leaders. Sinners receive mercy while Pharisees murmur. The sick know they need a physician; the self-righteous do not.

The poor, maimed, halt, and blind represent those with no claim of status. They are not coming because they deserve the supper. They are not coming because they can repay the host. They are not coming because society considers them honorable guests. They come because they are invited and brought. That is grace in motion. The first guests had privilege and no hunger. These have need and no pretension. A man who knows he is poor, crippled, halted, and blind is not likely to brag about his seat at the table. He knows he was brought in by mercy. That kind of guest is much nearer to grace than the man who thinks the host should be honored by his attendance.

In Israel's setting, this fits the Lord's ministry to the despised, broken, and needy within the nation. He received publicans, sinners, harlots, lepers, blind men, beggars, and outcasts. The religious leaders despised such people, but many of them responded to Christ in a way the leaders did not. In broader application, it also foreshadows the invitation reaching beyond the original privileged group. When those who were first bidden refuse, mercy reaches the streets, lanes, highways, and hedges. God is not left without guests because proud men decline. His house will be filled.

Chapter 6: The Highways and Hedges Show the Widening Invitation

After the poor and broken from the city are brought in, the servant says, "Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room." That is a glorious phrase. "Yet there is room." The refusal of the first guests did not exhaust the supper. The neediness of the poor did not fill it completely. There is still room. The master then says, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." The invitation widens beyond the expected places. The highways and hedges suggest outsiders, travelers, strangers, and those beyond the city's ordinary circle. The master intends his house to be filled.

This has tremendous dispensational significance. Israel's rejection does not leave God's table empty. The gospel eventually goes beyond Jerusalem, beyond Judea, beyond the narrow circle of Jewish privilege, and out toward Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth. The Church Age mystery, revealed especially through Paul, shows Jew and Gentile in one Body through the gospel of grace. The parable itself is not Paul's full mystery doctrine, but the pattern is there: those who thought themselves first refuse, and the invitation goes wider. God's mercy is not defeated by religious rejection. If the invited guests will not come, God will fill His house with those they despised.

The word "compel" must also be handled carefully. It does not justify forced conversions, religious tyranny, state-church violence, or coercive sacramental systems. History is full of wicked men who used words like this to excuse persecution and religious control. The compulsion here is the urgency of persuasion and pressing invitation, not salvation at swordpoint. God does not regenerate men by physical force. The servant is to go urgently, earnestly, and insistently because the supper is ready and the house is to be filled. A faithful witness does not mumble the invitation like it hardly matters. He presses the truth because eternity is real, the provision is ready, and there is room.

Chapter 7: This Supper Must Be Distinguished From Other Prophetic Feasts

Right division requires distinguishing this great supper from other biblical feasts and suppers. The Bible speaks of kingdom feasting, the marriage supper of the Lamb, the

supper of the great God in judgment, Passover, covenant meals, and other prophetic images of eating and fellowship. Not every supper is the same supper. The Great Supper in Luke 14 is a parable about invitation, refusal, excuses, and the bringing in of the poor and outsiders. The marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19 has its own setting connected with the Lamb's wife making herself ready. The supper of the great God in Revelation 19 is a judgment scene involving the destruction of the wicked. A man who collapses every feast into one event will confuse doctrine.

The Luke 14 supper has direct force in the Lord's rebuke of Israel's self-satisfied religious crowd. The first invited guests refuse. The poor and broken are brought. Then the outsiders are compelled to come in. The emphasis is not on identifying every end-time banquet detail. The emphasis is on rejection of God's invitation by the privileged and the gracious filling of the house with those who respond. That is why the parable ends with the severe statement, "For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." Refused light becomes lost privilege. The invitation despised becomes exclusion.

For the Church Age believer, this distinction protects the gospel and sharpens the application. We do not preach that sinners are saved by getting themselves worthy of a feast. We preach Christ crucified and risen. We preach that all things are ready because the work is finished. We warn that excuses reveal unbelief. We also remember that religious background does not save, and earthly attachments can keep men from receiving the call. The parable is not a map of every prophetic supper, but it is a devastating picture of invitation refused and mercy extended beyond the expected guests.

Conclusion

The parable of the Great Supper exposes the danger of being invited, privileged, religiously informed, and still unwilling to come. A certain man made a great supper and bade many. When all things were ready, the servant was sent to call them. But those first invited made excuses. Land, oxen, and marriage stood in the way. They were not openly wicked excuses, but they revealed hearts that valued earthly matters above the invitation of the host. That is the terror of the parable. Men do not have to despise the supper with blasphemy. They can miss it with polite priorities.

The parable also shows the mercy and sovereignty of the host. The refusal of the first guests does not cancel the supper. The poor, maimed, halt, and blind are brought in. The highways and hedges are searched. The house will be filled. This is a powerful picture of Israel's rejection and the widening reach of God's invitation beyond the self-satisfied religious crowd. Those who thought they were first refuse the call, and those who knew they

were nothing come when summoned. God's table will not sit empty because proud men prefer fields, oxen, and domestic comfort. Grace knows how to fill the house.

Rightly divided, this is not the same as every prophetic feast in Scripture, nor is it a works-based salvation lesson. It is a kingdom parable with a sharp rebuke against religious privilege without response. It applies today because excuses still reveal the heart. A man can be near truth and still refuse Christ. He can know religious language and still prefer his possessions. He can admire the idea of the kingdom and still reject the King's call. The supper is great. The provision is ready. The invitation is serious. The question is not whether a man can produce a respectable excuse. The question is whether he will come.

22 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Lost Sheep

Introduction

The parable of the Lost Sheep is one of the most tender pictures in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, but tenderness must never be used as an excuse for doctrinal carelessness. The Lord gives this parable in two important settings: Luke 15 and Matthew 18. In Luke 15, the publicans and sinners draw near to hear Him, and the Pharisees and scribes murmur, saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." That is the immediate spark. The religious crowd is offended because mercy is being shown to people they despise. So the Lord gives three connected parables: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son. Each one rebukes the coldness of religious men who cannot rejoice when the lost are recovered. In Matthew 18, the parable appears in a different setting, where the Lord speaks about little children, humility, offenses, despising little ones, and the will of the Father that one of these little ones should not perish. The same picture of a lost sheep is used, but the emphasis shifts according to the context. A Bible believer must notice both settings and not mash them together carelessly.

In Luke 15, the parable is aimed like a spear at the murmuring Pharisees and scribes. They saw sinners coming to Jesus and were disgusted. They did not say, "Praise God, sinners are hearing truth." They said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." That statement reveals the heart of dead religion. Dead religion knows how to separate from scandal, but not how to rejoice over repentance. It knows how to identify the lost, but not how to seek them. It knows how to keep its robe clean, but not how to carry a sheep home on its shoulders. Jesus does not deny that the publicans and sinners are sinners. He does not pretend they are misunderstood saints. He calls them lost. But He also reveals that heaven has more joy over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons

which need no repentance. The issue is not whether sin is real. The issue is whether religious men have the heart of God toward sinners who come to hear Christ.

Rightly divided, this parable must not be used to teach universalism, unstable salvation, or sentimental nonsense about every person automatically being safe because the Shepherd loves sheep. The Shepherd truly seeks. The Shepherd truly values the lost. The Shepherd truly rejoices over recovery. But the parable in Luke 15 includes repentance, and the broader Bible never teaches that all men are saved regardless of faith, repentance, or response to the word of God. Nor should the parable be twisted to teach that a born-again Church Age believer loses salvation every time he wanders and must be re-saved by being carried back. That is not the gospel of grace. The parable shows the heart of the Shepherd, the value of the lost, the joy of recovery, and the rebuke of religious men who hate mercy when it is shown to people they do not like. It also warns believers not to despise the weak, the wandering, or the little ones whom the Father values.

Chapter 1: The Luke 15 Setting Begins With Sinners Drawing Near

Luke 15 begins with one of the most beautiful scenes in the Gospels: “Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.” They did not draw near to the Pharisees. They did not draw near to the scribes. They drew near to Jesus. That tells you something about the difference between holy mercy and dead religion. Jesus Christ was absolutely holy, yet sinners came to hear Him. He did not flatter their sin. He did not excuse their guilt. He did not lower the righteousness of God. But there was grace in Him, truth in Him, and hope in Him. The guilty could come near enough to hear. That is a marvel. The only sinless Man in the room was the only One sinners wanted to approach.

The publicans and sinners were not respectable people in the eyes of the religious class. Publicans were tax collectors, often associated with greed, extortion, and collaboration with Rome. “Sinners” was a broad label used for those outside the respectable religious boundary. These were the people who made religious leaders uncomfortable. Yet they drew near to hear Jesus. That does not mean they were saved because they walked close enough to listen. It means the word of Christ was reaching the very people the Pharisees had written off. The Shepherd’s voice was being heard by those in the wilderness. That should have caused joy. Instead, it caused murmuring.

There is a lesson here for every preacher, teacher, and Bible believer. If sinners are drawing near to hear the word of God, do not act like a Pharisee because they do not yet look like finished saints. Let them hear. Tell them the truth. Preach Christ. Do not excuse sin, but do not despise the sinner who is close enough to hear the Saviour. The Pharisees were so concerned about contamination that they could not recognize visitation. Jesus received

sinners, not to confirm them in sin, but to recover them from it. That is the Shepherd's heart. The sheep is lost, but the Shepherd does not stand at a distance complaining that the wool is dirty.

Chapter 2: The Pharisees and Scribes Murmured Against Mercy

The Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." That accusation was meant as an insult, but in the light of grace it sounds like glory. Thank God Jesus receives sinners. If He did not, there would be no hope for any of us. The problem with the Pharisees was not that they believed in separation from sin. The Bible teaches separation from evil. The problem was that they had no category for mercy that seeks and recovers. They could separate from sinners, but they could not rejoice over sinners coming to truth. They hated sin in others but loved pride in themselves. They could smell the dirt on the lost sheep but not the corruption in their own hearts.

Murmuring is often the language of people who are too religious to rejoice. They do not openly deny that God can save sinners, but they resent it when He saves the kind of sinners they despise. They like mercy in doctrine but not always in practice. They like grace when it is written in a confession but not when it walks into the room smelling like the far country. The Pharisees did not rejoice that publicans and sinners were hearing Jesus. They complained that Jesus received them. Their religion had become a wall against the very heart of God. They knew how to guard the table but not how to welcome the repentant.

This is why the Lord gives the parable. He is not merely comforting the sinners; He is rebuking the murmurers. The Lost Sheep is not only about the Shepherd's love. It is also about the ugliness of religious men who cannot share heaven's joy. Jesus forces them to consider a simple question: if one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one, would he not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost until he find it? The answer is obvious. Even their own earthly common sense would value a lost animal enough to seek it. Yet they had less concern for lost souls than a shepherd would have for a sheep. That is the disgrace of self-righteous religion.

Chapter 3: The Shepherd Seeks the One That Is Lost

The shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one is lost. That one matters. The ninety and nine matter too, but the lost one is the focus of the search. The shepherd does not say, "Well, ninety-nine percent retention is good enough." He does not shrug and move on because the majority are still together. He goes after the one. That tells us something about the value God places on the lost. Numbers do not erase individuals with Him. The crowd does not make Him forget the one. Religious systems often think in terms of categories, statistics, crowds, reputations, and groups. The Shepherd knows the sheep.

The Lord says the shepherd goes after that which is lost “until he find it.” That phrase shows persistence. He does not make a half-hearted attempt. He does not wander around for five minutes and then say the sheep was too much trouble. He seeks until he finds. That is a strong picture of the seeking grace of Christ in the Gospel setting. The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. He did not come merely to start a moral improvement club. He did not come to flatter the righteous in their own eyes. He came after the lost. That offended the Pharisees because they did not think they were lost. They thought other people were lost. The parable exposes the difference between the Shepherd and the religious supervisors.

This seeking does not teach universalism. The parable says the shepherd finds the sheep in the story, but parables must be interpreted within the full counsel of Scripture. The Bible does not teach that every lost person is automatically saved regardless of response, faith, or repentance. Luke 15 itself says there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. The point is not that no one can finally reject God. The point is that God’s heart toward the lost is not like the Pharisees’ heart. The Shepherd seeks. He values the one. He rejoices in recovery. If a man uses the parable to erase repentance, faith, judgment, and hell, he is not honoring the Shepherd. He is corrupting His words.

Chapter 4: The Shepherd Carries the Sheep on His Shoulders

When the shepherd finds the lost sheep, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. That is a tender and powerful picture. The sheep is not shown marching home in proud self-reform. It is carried. The strength is in the shepherd, not in the sheep. The shoulders bear the weight. That is a beautiful picture of grace. A lost sheep does not rescue itself by becoming a lion. It is found and carried by the shepherd. The recovery produces joy, not resentment. The shepherd does not beat the sheep all the way home because it wandered. He rejoices over its recovery. That is very different from the spirit of the Pharisees.

The shoulders also speak of security in the shepherd’s care. The sheep is not dragged behind on a chain. It is placed on the shepherd. In devotional application, there is comfort here for the weak and wandering. The Lord is not indifferent to those who stray. He knows how to recover. He knows how to carry. He knows how to restore. That does not make wandering safe or acceptable. A lost sheep is in danger until found. But it does show that the Shepherd’s heart is not cold. He is not like religious men who are secretly glad when someone they dislike falls into a ditch. He rejoices to bring the sheep home.

Church Age doctrine must still remain clear. A saved believer is not eternally secure because he holds the Shepherd tightly enough; he is secure because the Shepherd holds him. John 10 gives that truth plainly: Christ’s sheep hear His voice, He gives unto them

eternal life, and they shall never perish. That is not exactly the same setting as Luke 15, but the truth of Christ as Shepherd is consistent. The Lost Sheep parable should not be used to teach that saved people are constantly lost and re-saved. It shows recovery, joy, and the Shepherd's heart. The gospel of grace and eternal security must be taught from the passages that directly define them, while this parable enriches our understanding of the Shepherd's mercy.

Chapter 5: Heaven Rejoices Over One Sinner That Repenteth

The Lord interprets the joy of the parable by saying, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." This statement must be read carefully. The point is not that there are actually ninety-nine sinless men somewhere who have no need of repentance in an absolute sense. The Lord is speaking in a way that rebukes those who considered themselves righteous. In the context, the Pharisees and scribes saw themselves as the safe, respectable, righteous crowd and saw the publicans and sinners as the lost. Jesus says heaven rejoices over the repentant sinner, the very person they despised.

Repentance is part of the passage. That matters. The parable is not merely about being lost and then automatically celebrated. The joy is over "one sinner that repenteth." Repentance in the Gospel and kingdom setting includes a real turning of heart toward God under the light given. It is not a work that purchases salvation, but it is not absent either. In the Church Age, salvation is by faith in the finished work of Christ, and true faith is not a proud defense of sin. A man who wants the Shepherd's joy while refusing the Shepherd's call is playing games. The publicans and sinners drew near to hear Him. That is not the posture of a man telling God to leave him alone.

Heaven's joy exposes earth's religion. Heaven rejoices while Pharisees murmur. Heaven celebrates recovery while scribes complain about association. Heaven values the one sheep while religious men value their clean image. That is a terrible contrast. A man should ask himself whether his heart sounds more like heaven or more like the Pharisees. Does he rejoice when sinners repent, even if they were the sort of sinners he once despised? Does he rejoice when backsliders are restored, even if their failure embarrassed the group? Does he rejoice when the weak are recovered? Or does he secretly prefer condemnation because mercy makes him uncomfortable? The Lost Sheep tests the heart.

Chapter 6: Matthew 18 Emphasizes the Little Ones and the Father's Will

In Matthew 18, the Lost Sheep appears in a different context. The chapter begins with the disciples asking, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus sets a little child in the midst and teaches humility. He warns against offending little ones who believe in Him.

He speaks of the seriousness of stumbling, despising little ones, and the care of heaven toward them. Then He says, “How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray…” In this setting, the emphasis is not primarily on Pharisees murmuring over sinners, but on the Father’s concern for the little, weak, and wandering. “Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”

That difference matters. Luke 15 rebukes religious men who despise mercy shown to sinners. Matthew 18 rebukes pride among disciples and warns against despising little ones. The same lost-sheep picture serves both settings, but the emphasis shifts. In Matthew 18, the sheep goes astray, and the shepherd seeks it. There is joy over the recovered sheep. The Lord uses that to show the Father’s will toward vulnerable ones. The chapter later deals with restoration, confrontation, and forgiveness among brethren. The atmosphere is full of humility, care, and the danger of causing harm to those God values.

This is a needed correction for hard men. Some people are fierce against sin but careless with sheep. They think strength means despising weakness. They think doctrinal confidence gives them permission to trample little ones. Matthew 18 says otherwise. The Father values the little one. The shepherd seeks the wandering one. The recovered sheep brings joy. This does not mean sin is excused. It means restoration matters. It means the weak are not disposable. It means the wandering are not to be despised as though their recovery would be an inconvenience. A Bible believer must know how to stand against error without developing a heart that enjoys losing sheep.

Chapter 7: The Parable Rebukes Religious Men Who Hate Mercy

The Lost Sheep is one of the greatest rebukes in Scripture against religious men who hate mercy when it is shown to people they dislike. That is the issue in Luke 15. The Pharisees and scribes did not rejoice that sinners were hearing Christ because their religion was built around superiority. They needed sinners beneath them to feel righteous. If grace lifted those sinners, the Pharisees lost their favorite measuring stick. That is why grace is so offensive to self-righteous people. Grace brings the publican near. Grace receives the sinner. Grace recovers the lost. Grace gives heaven joy over someone religion had written off.

This does not mean mercy is sentimental compromise. The Shepherd does not say the sheep was never lost. The Lord does not say the sinners were never sinners. Mercy begins by telling the truth. A sheep is lost. A sinner must repent. A wanderer needs recovery. But mercy refuses to turn truth into contempt. It refuses to use doctrine as an excuse for coldness. It refuses to stand with folded arms while the Shepherd goes into the wilderness.

A man who has no joy over recovery is not being more holy than God. He is being Pharisaical.

The parable also rebukes the pride that can creep into doctrinal circles. It is possible to know right division, eternal security, prophecy, the King James Bible, and the gospel of grace, and still develop a Pharisee's heart toward people who are lost, confused, weak, or wandering. That is a disgusting contradiction. Sound doctrine should make a man more like the Shepherd, not more like the murmurers. If the Shepherd values the one sheep, then the Bible believer should not treat that sheep like trash. If heaven rejoices over repentance, then no preacher has a right to sulk because grace interrupted his religious pride.

Conclusion

The parable of the Lost Sheep reveals the heart of the Shepherd and exposes the heart of religious pride. In Luke 15, the publicans and sinners draw near to hear Jesus, and the Pharisees and scribes murmur because He receives sinners and eats with them. The Lord answers with a shepherd leaving the ninety and nine to seek the one lost sheep until he finds it, lays it on his shoulders rejoicing, and calls others to rejoice with him. Heaven rejoices over one sinner that repenteth. The very thing that makes heaven glad made the Pharisees angry. That contrast is the point of the parable.

In Matthew 18, the same lost-sheep picture is used in the context of humility, little ones, offenses, and the Father's will that one of these little ones should not perish. That setting adds another layer. The Lord values the weak, the little, and the wandering. He warns against despising those whom the Father cares for. Together, Luke 15 and Matthew 18 show that the Shepherd seeks sinners, values sheep, rejoices in recovery, and rebukes those who are too proud to share His joy. The settings are not identical, but they agree in revealing God's concern for the one who is lost or gone astray.

Rightly divided, the parable does not teach universalism, does not erase repentance, and does not make Church Age salvation unstable. It teaches the Shepherd's mercy, the joy of recovery, and the wickedness of religious contempt. It reminds us that grace does not deny the sheep was lost; it goes after it. Grace does not excuse wandering; it restores. Grace does not flatter sinners; it receives repentant sinners to Christ. And if heaven can rejoice over one recovered sheep, then any religious man who murmurs over mercy has revealed that his heart is closer to the Pharisee than to the Shepherd.

23 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Lost Coin

Introduction

The parable of the Lost Coin sits in the middle of Luke 15 like a silver piece on the floor of a dark house, and if a man rushes past it to get from the Lost Sheep to the Prodigal Son, he will miss one of the Lord's most searching pictures of divine concern over what is lost. Luke 15 begins with publicans and sinners drawing near to hear Jesus, while the Pharisees and scribes murmur, saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." That is the setting for all three parables in the chapter. The Lord is answering religious critics who cannot understand why He receives the very people they despise. He first speaks of a shepherd seeking one lost sheep. Then He speaks of a woman who has ten pieces of silver, loses one piece, lights a candle, sweeps the house, and seeks diligently until she finds it. When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together, saying, "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost." Then the Lord says, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." That is the Lord's interpretation. The point is joy over recovery, and that joy rebukes the cold murmuring of religious men.

The parable is simple, but it is not shallow. A coin is not like a sheep. A sheep can wander. A coin cannot. A sheep has legs; a coin has none. A sheep may bleat; a coin is silent. A sheep is lost outside in the wilderness; the coin is lost inside the house. The Lord is giving another angle on lostness. Some are lost in visible wandering. Some are lost in silent helplessness. Some are lost far away in the wilderness. Some are lost inside the house, under dust, in darkness, close to religious surroundings, but still lost. The woman does not say, "The coin is in the house, so it is not lost." She does not say, "I still have nine, so the one does not matter." She does not say, "It is only one piece of silver, so let it stay hidden." She lights a candle, sweeps the house, and seeks diligently until she finds it. That reveals value, effort, light, diligence, and joy. It also exposes how unlike heaven the Pharisees were. Heaven rejoices over one sinner that repenteth; they murmured when sinners drew near to Christ.

Rightly divided, this parable must not be pushed into fanciful excess. Some men allegorize every speck of dust, every broom stroke, every corner of the house, every neighbour, and every shadow until the parable becomes more imagination than Bible. That is not needed. The Lord gives the point plainly: the lost are valuable, the search is diligent, the recovery brings joy, and that joy corresponds to heaven's joy over one sinner that repenteth. At the same time, we should not flatten it into a vague moral lesson about being nice to people. It is part of Jesus' rebuke of religious murmuring in Luke 15. The publicans and sinners are drawing near. The Pharisees and scribes are complaining. Christ shows them that God's heart is not like theirs. God values what is lost. God brings light into darkness. God

searches where the self-righteous would not bother looking. God rejoices over recovery. Religious critics inspect sinners with suspicion. Heaven rejoices when they are found.

Chapter 1: The Lost Coin Belongs in Luke 15's Answer to Murmuring

The parable cannot be understood properly if it is separated from Luke 15:1-2. Publicans and sinners drew near to hear Jesus, and the Pharisees and scribes murmured. The parables that follow are Christ's answer to that murmuring. He is not merely teaching abstract theology about lost things. He is rebuking men whose religion has made them hostile to mercy. They see sinners coming to Christ and treat it like a scandal. They should have rejoiced that sinners were hearing the words of life, but instead they complained that Jesus received them and ate with them. That is the ugly spirit that Luke 15 exposes.

The Lost Coin stands between the Lost Sheep and the Lost Son to reinforce the same heavenly principle from another direction. In the Lost Sheep, the shepherd goes after one lost sheep until he finds it. In the Lost Coin, the woman searches diligently until she finds one lost piece of silver. In the Lost Son, the father receives the returning son with compassion and joy while the elder brother becomes angry. The three parables together form a devastating answer to the Pharisee spirit. God seeks. God values. God receives. God rejoices. The religious critic murmurs, calculates, resents, and refuses joy. If a man reads Luke 15 and identifies more with the murmuring Pharisees than with heaven's rejoicing, the chapter has exposed him.

This setting also protects the parable from becoming a shallow lesson on mere humanitarian concern. Jesus is dealing with sinners, repentance, recovery, and joy in heaven. The publicans and sinners are not being told they were never lost. They are lost. But the Pharisees are being told their contempt is out of step with God's heart. That balance matters. Grace does not pretend the coin was not lost. Grace searches until it is found. Mercy does not deny sin. Mercy brings sinners to the Saviour. The religious critic thinks the presence of sinners near Christ is a disgrace. Heaven thinks repentance is a cause for celebration.

Chapter 2: The Coin Was Lost but Still Valuable

The woman has ten pieces of silver and loses one. The lost coin does not cease to have value because it is lost. That is one of the first great truths in the parable. A coin on the floor, hidden in darkness, covered with dust, and separated from its proper place is still silver. Its condition is wrong, but its value has not vanished. The woman's search proves she values it. If the coin were worthless, she would not light a candle, sweep the house, and seek diligently. The lost condition creates urgency, not contempt. That is a sharp rebuke to religious men who treat lost sinners as though lostness means worthlessness.

This does not mean man has saving merit in himself. The Bible is plain: sinners are guilty, ruined, dead in trespasses and sins, without righteousness, without strength, and unable to redeem themselves. The value of the lost sinner is not that he possesses some spark of righteousness that God must admire. The value is connected with God's creation, God's image in man, God's concern, and God's redemptive purpose. A lost soul is not trash. He is lost. There is a difference. The Pharisee looks at the publican and sees something to avoid. Christ sees someone to recover. The coin is not functioning where it belongs, but it matters enough to be sought.

This is where Bible believers need balance. We must not flatter sinners as though sin is harmless, nor should we speak of them as though their souls are meaningless. A man can be spiritually lost and still be worth seeking with the gospel. He can be filthy with sin and still be someone Christ came to save. He can be buried under dust and still be the object of divine concern. The Lord Jesus Christ did not receive sinners because sin was light. He received them because grace is great. The coin was lost, but it was valuable. That is why the search began.

Chapter 3: The Coin Was Lost Inside the House

The coin in this parable is not lost in the wilderness like the sheep. It is lost in the house. That is a sobering distinction. Something can be lost while still being inside a religious environment. A person can be near the table, near the lamp, near the broom, near the household, near other coins, and still be lost. That is one of the most frightening truths in Scripture. Lostness is not always far away in the obvious wilderness. Sometimes it is inside the house, under the dust, in the dark, surrounded by religious furniture. A man can grow up in church, hear Bible words, know hymns, sit under preaching, and still be lost if he has never been found by grace.

This point would have cut the Pharisees deeply if they had ears to hear. They assumed lostness was outside their circle: publicans, harlots, sinners, Samaritans, Gentiles, and the obviously unclean. Jesus shows a lost piece inside the house. That is dangerous truth for religious people. The house can contain what is lost. Proximity is not possession. Being near the things of God is not the same as being right with God. A coin can be in the house and still not be in the woman's hand. A sinner can be near religion and still not be reconciled to God. A church member can be baptized, enrolled, active, and lost. A Bible reader can know verses and still be lost. A Pharisee can sit at the table and still be in darkness.

This should sober every person raised around truth. Do not assume that being in the house means being found. Do not assume that religious background equals salvation. Do not

assume that because you are near other coins, you are where you belong. The parable says the coin was lost, and the woman knew it. That is the mercy of the passage. The search is not limited to the far country. God can search the house too. Sometimes the candle must be lit and the floor swept in religious places before what is lost is exposed and recovered. The publican in the street may know he is lost, while the religious coin in the house lies silent under the dust.

Chapter 4: The Woman Lit a Candle

The woman lights a candle. That is necessary because the coin is hidden in darkness. You do not find lost silver in a dark house by complimenting the darkness. You need light. This is one of the great spiritual truths of the parable. Recovery requires light. In Scripture, light is connected with the word of God, truth, revelation, conviction, holiness, and exposure. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” The candle does not create the coin’s value, but it reveals where the coin is. The light does not save by itself as a detached object; it exposes and guides the search. Without light, men stumble around in religious darkness and call it ministry.

This is why sinners need the word of God, not merely sympathy. Sympathy in darkness may sit beside the lost coin and never find it. Emotional concern without truth cannot recover what is lost. The candle must be lit. The word must shine. Sin must be exposed. Christ must be preached. The gospel must be made plain. The Pharisees had religious lamps of their own tradition, but they did not give the light of grace. They could see enough to criticize sinners, but not enough to rejoice over repentance. God’s light is different. It reveals lostness for the purpose of recovery, not for the pleasure of condemnation.

The candle also rebukes the modern idea that darkness should be respected. The world wants a religion that never turns the light on. It wants affirmation without exposure, comfort without conviction, and mercy without truth. But a lost coin remains lost if the house stays dark. A preacher who refuses to shine the word because someone may be offended is not compassionate. He is leaving the coin under the dust. A parent who will not bring Scripture to bear on a child’s heart is not loving. A church that hides doctrine to attract people is not seeking the lost; it is decorating the dark. The woman lit a candle. That is where recovery begins.

Chapter 5: The Woman Swept the House

The woman not only lights a candle; she sweeps the house. Light reveals, but sweeping disturbs. That is another powerful picture. The dust must be moved. The hidden places must be searched. The floor must be disturbed. A coin lost under dirt will not be found by leaving everything as it is. This is where many people resist God’s work. They do not mind a

candle as long as it stays decorative, but they resent the broom. They do not mind truth in theory, but they do not want it disturbing what has settled. Yet recovery often requires sweeping.

Spiritually, sweeping can picture the searching work of truth in the heart and in the house. It moves excuses, traditions, sins, pride, false comforts, and religious dust. It exposes what has been covered. In Luke 15's setting, the Pharisees did not need a polite theological discussion only; they needed their house swept. Their murmuring, pride, contempt, and coldness had accumulated like dust. The lost were closer to mercy than the murmurers were, because the lost were drawing near to hear Jesus while the religious crowd stood back criticizing. The broom of the parable sweeps through the room and reveals how ugly their spirit was.

This applies to churches, homes, and individual lives. Sometimes God has to sweep the house to recover what is lost. He may sweep through a family with conviction. He may sweep through a church with preaching. He may sweep through a man's life with chastening, exposure, or hard providence. The goal is not destruction for destruction's sake. The goal is recovery. But the dust cannot be allowed to remain undisturbed if it is hiding what needs to be found. A ministry that never sweeps may look peaceful, but it may also be full of lost coins under religious dust. The broom is mercy when the searcher is seeking recovery.

Chapter 6: She Sought Diligently Until She Found It

The woman seeks diligently until she finds the coin. That phrase shows determination. She does not light the candle, sweep once casually, and then quit. She seeks until she finds. That is the same persistence seen in the Lost Sheep, where the shepherd goes after the one until he finds it. The Lord is showing the earnestness of divine concern over the lost. The search is not lazy, half-hearted, or ceremonial. It is diligent. The Pharisees would avoid sinners to preserve their own image. Christ reveals a searching heart that values the lost enough to seek carefully.

Diligent seeking also reveals the difference between true spiritual concern and religious talk. Many people say they care about the lost, but they do not light candles, sweep houses, or seek diligently. They care in theory, not in practice. They like the idea of evangelism more than the work of it. They like the doctrine of grace more than the inconvenience of showing it. They like saying "souls matter" but will not cross a room, open a Bible, answer a question, endure a mess, or pray earnestly. The woman's search costs effort. Real concern moves. Real concern looks. Real concern continues.

Yet this diligence should not be confused with man saving by human power. The searcher seeks, but salvation belongs to God. In the direct context, Christ is defending His reception of sinners and revealing heaven's joy over repentance. In Church Age application, believers preach, pray, witness, teach, and seek opportunities, but God gives the increase. We cannot regenerate a soul by diligence. But our inability to save does not excuse laziness in seeking. The woman could not make the coin valuable; it already was. She could not cause it to be lost; it already was. But she could light, sweep, and seek until it was found. That is the servant's place under God.

Chapter 7: Recovery Produces Joy, Not Suspicion

When the woman finds the coin, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost." Recovery produces joy. That is the conclusion of the parable. The woman does not say, "Gather around so we can discuss how foolish the coin was." She does not say, "Let us examine all the dust that was on it." She does not say, "Let us decide whether this coin deserves to be back with the others." She says, "Rejoice with me." The point is joy over finding what was lost. Jesus then says there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Heaven's response to repentance is joy.

This is exactly the opposite of the Pharisee spirit. Religious critics often treat recovery with suspicion. A sinner repents, and they want to keep smelling the dust. A backslider returns, and they want to rehearse the wandering. A publican draws near, and they complain about the company Jesus keeps. That is not heaven's spirit. Heaven is not naïve. Heaven knows the sin better than any Pharisee ever could. But when repentance is real and recovery happens, heaven rejoices. Religious men who refuse to rejoice are not being more discerning than God. They are revealing their own coldness.

This does not mean discernment is abandoned. Churches must still be wise. Restoration must be handled biblically. False professions should not be celebrated as though emotion equals conversion. But suspicion is not the same as discernment. Some people do not know how to rejoice over anyone being found because they secretly enjoy being superior. Luke 15 rebukes that spirit from start to finish. The woman's joy, the shepherd's joy, and the father's joy all stand against the murmuring of the Pharisees and the anger of the elder brother. Heaven's joy is nothing like the cold suspicion of religious critics.

Conclusion

The parable of the Lost Coin is a beautiful and searching picture of the value of what is lost, the diligence of the search, the use of light, the sweeping of the house, and the joy of recovery. A woman has ten pieces of silver and loses one. She lights a candle, sweeps the

house, and seeks diligently until she finds it. Then she calls her friends and neighbours to rejoice with her. The Lord's point is plain: there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. That is the answer to the Pharisees and scribes who murmured because Jesus received sinners and ate with them.

Rightly divided, the parable should not be stretched into fanciful allegory or turned into universalism. It does not teach that lostness is harmless. It does not teach that repentance is unnecessary. It does not teach that everyone is automatically saved because God values the lost. It teaches that what is lost matters, that God's concern is diligent, that light is necessary, that recovery brings joy, and that religious contempt is out of step with heaven. The coin is lost, but it is valuable. It is in the house, but still lost. It is silent and helpless, but not forgotten. The search continues until it is found.

The practical warning is sharp. Do not be like the Pharisees, standing outside the joy of God because mercy is being shown to people you despise. Do not love doctrine in a way that makes you cold toward recovery. Do not leave the house dark because you fear what the candle may expose. Do not refuse the broom because you prefer settled dust. Light the candle. Sweep the house. Seek diligently. And when God recovers a sinner, rejoice. Heaven does.

24 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Prodigal Son

Introduction

The parable of the Prodigal Son is one of the most famous passages in all the Bible, and because it is famous, it has been dragged through more doctrinal mud than almost any parable the Lord Jesus Christ ever gave. Some turn it into a Calvinist proof text and try to make every detail fit an irresistible-return system. Some turn it into a social gospel lecture about accepting everybody without repentance, without confession, without sin being called sin, and without any real dealing with the far country. Some turn it into a sentimental Father's Day story where the whole point is simply that fathers should be kind to wayward children. Others use it to teach that everybody is already God's child in the saving sense and simply needs to "come home" to a universal Fatherhood. That is not Bible handling. The parable belongs in Luke 15, and Luke 15 begins with publicans and sinners drawing near to hear Jesus, while the Pharisees and scribes murmur, saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." That is the setting. The Lord gives the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and then the Lost Son as one connected answer to religious men who resented mercy shown to sinners.

The Prodigal Son must therefore be read as the climax of Luke 15's rebuke. In the Lost Sheep, the Shepherd seeks the wandering one and rejoices when it is found. In the Lost Coin, the woman lights a candle, sweeps the house, seeks diligently, and rejoices when the silver is recovered. In the Prodigal Son, the lost one goes farther. He deliberately leaves the father's house, wastes his substance with riotous living, falls into famine, joins himself to a citizen of that country, feeds swine, hungers for husks, comes to himself, confesses his sin, and returns. The father sees him a great way off, has compassion, runs, falls on his neck, kisses him, clothes him, restores him, and makes a feast. That is the part most people remember. But the parable does not end there. The elder brother appears, angry and unwilling to go in. That elder brother is the key to the Pharisee rebuke. The younger son pictures waste, ruin, repentance, and restoration. The elder brother pictures religious bitterness, self-righteous service, and resentment at grace. The boy in the hog pen may have been far from the house, but the man in the field was farther from the father's heart.

Rightly divided, this parable should not be forced to carry doctrines it was not given to carry. It is not the primary passage for defining Church Age justification, the sealing of the Spirit, the Body of Christ, eternal security, or the gospel of the grace of God. Those truths are established plainly in Pauline doctrine and other direct passages. Nor should the parable be used to erase repentance, excuse sin, or make restoration automatic without confession. The younger son says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight." That matters. The father's compassion is real, but the son does not come home defending the far country. The parable teaches the compassion of the father, the misery of sin, the sanity of repentance, the joy of restoration, and the ugliness of the elder-brother spirit. It is not a doctrinal wrecking ball to smash Israel, the Church, grace, repentance, and salvation into one sentimental puddle. It is the Lord's answer to murmuring religion. Heaven rejoices when the lost are recovered. Religious pride gets angry outside the feast.

Chapter 1: The Younger Son Wanted the Father's Goods Without the Father's Fellowship

The parable begins with the younger son saying, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." That request reveals the first disease in his heart. He wants the father's goods, but he does not want the father's presence, authority, house, order, or fellowship. That is sin in its basic form. Sin wants God's gifts without God. It wants life, breath, pleasure, ability, money, health, opportunity, and creation, but it does not want the Father ruling over the house. The prodigal does not begin in the hog pen. He begins with a wrong desire in the father's house. The far country begins in the heart before it appears on the map. A man leaves inwardly before he leaves outwardly.

The father divides unto them his living. That statement is sobering because sometimes God lets a man have what he demands so the demand can expose him. The prodigal thought substance would mean freedom. He thought inheritance without oversight would mean life. He thought leaving the father's house would enlarge him. That is the lie of the far country. Sin always advertises itself as liberty. It says, "Get out from under authority. Take what you can. Live your own life. Find yourself. Follow your heart. Enjoy your portion. You only live once." But sin never puts the famine in the brochure. It never shows the empty purse, the empty stomach, the empty friends, or the swine trough. It shows the music before the misery.

This is not merely a story about an immoral young man. It is a picture of the human heart's tendency to despise fellowship while demanding benefits. Men want God's air in their lungs but not God's words in their ears. They want God's food on their table but not God's authority over their bodies. They want God's patience but not God's holiness. They want mercy available later but sin available now. The younger son's request is ugly because it treats the father as a source of goods rather than the joy of the house. And that is exactly where many souls begin their descent. They do not first deny the father's existence. They simply value his portion more than his presence.

Chapter 2: The Far Country Promises Freedom but Produces Waste

The younger son gathers all together and takes his journey into a far country. That phrase matters. Sin always moves away from the father's house. It wants distance from authority, distance from correction, distance from remembrance, distance from restraint, and distance from the familiar sound of truth. The far country is not just geography. It is moral distance. A man can be in the far country while still sitting in a church pew if his heart is already gone. Another can be geographically far away and still be near to God in faith. The prodigal's far country is the place where he thinks he can spend the father's goods without being troubled by the father's face.

There he wastes his substance with riotous living. The word "wasted" is the proper description of sin's economy. Sin does not invest; it consumes. It does not build; it burns. It does not multiply life; it spends life. The prodigal spends his substance, his time, his dignity, his reputation, and his strength. He is not merely breaking rules. He is wasting what the father gave him. That is what sin does to a man. It wastes years, affections, gifts, opportunities, health, purity, family, conscience, and spiritual sensitivity. A sinner may call it experience. God calls it waste. A backslider may call it a season. Heaven calls it waste. The far country is a furnace that eats inheritance and gives husks in return.

The prodigal's ruin also exposes the false friendship of sin. As long as he had substance, the far country likely had company. When the substance was gone, so were the pleasures attached to it. Sin's companions are often rented, not loyal. The world loves a man while he has something to spend. When famine comes, the world has no covenant love to offer. The father's house had bread enough and to spare, but the far country had no mercy for a bankrupt fool. This is why the Bible says the way of transgressors is hard. Not adventurous. Not liberating. Hard. The prodigal is about to learn that lesson with an empty belly.

Chapter 3: The Famine Reveals What the Far Country Really Is

After he spends all, a mighty famine arises in that land, and he begins to be in want. That is a divine sentence on sin's illusion. As long as the money lasted, the far country may have looked full. But once famine comes, the land shows its true character. It cannot sustain him. It cannot restore him. It cannot feed him. It cannot comfort him. The famine did not create the prodigal's foolishness; it revealed it. The famine stripped away the music, the noise, the crowd, and the illusion of independence. Suddenly the man who demanded his portion has nothing. The man who wanted freedom is hungry. The man who left bread is longing for husks.

The famine is a mercy if it wakes a man up. That is hard for the flesh to hear, but it is true. God sometimes lets the far country become bitter so a man will stop romanticizing it. If the prodigal had prospered forever in riotous living, he might never have come to himself. Famine can preach what comfort would not. Hunger can expose what pleasure concealed. Emptiness can become the first honest sermon a man has heard in years. The Lord does not say the famine saved him, but it helped reveal his condition. God knows how to let sinners and backsliders taste the poverty of their chosen country.

This has practical force. Many people do not think clearly until the famine comes. They ignore preaching, warnings, parental tears, Scripture, conscience, and the memory of better days. Then the famine hits: the relationship collapses, the money runs out, the addiction bites, the friends leave, the reputation burns, the consequences arrive, the health fails, the soul grows empty. Suddenly the far country does not look so glamorous. A man can curse the famine, or he can let it bring him to himself. The famine is not pleasant, but neither is the hog pen. If the famine wakes a man up and turns his thoughts toward the father's house, mercy has been at work in the hunger.

Chapter 4: The Hog Pen Shows the Bottom of Rebellion

The prodigal joins himself to a citizen of that country, and he is sent into the fields to feed swine. For a Jewish audience, this detail is filthy. Swine were unclean under the law. The young man who left the father's house looking for freedom ends up attached to a stranger

and feeding pigs. That is the downward road of sin. It promises independence and produces bondage. He left the father's authority only to become a servant in the far country. That is always how sin works. Men reject God's yoke and end up chained to worse masters. They refuse the Father and become slaves to appetite, money, lust, pride, substances, bitterness, fear, or the approval of men.

Then he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him. That is one of the most pitiful statements in the parable. The man is not merely feeding pigs. He envies them. He is hungry enough to desire their food. The far country has brought him below the level he imagined possible. And no man gave unto him. That is the compassion of the world when the party is over. The father gave him a portion. The far country gave him nothing. The father's house had bread. The far country offered husks he could not even get. Sin is a cruel employer.

The hog pen is not the end of the story, but it is the end of the illusion. Nobody in the hog pen is still honestly bragging about the far country. If he is, he has lost his mind. The prodigal's misery is a mirror for every soul that has tried to live on what sin provides. The world's husks may take many forms: pleasure, pornography, vanity, applause, drunkenness, drugs, success, entertainment, rebellion, religious hypocrisy, or digital addiction. They may differ in appearance, but they cannot feed the soul. A man can be surrounded by husks and still starve. The hog pen is where sin's promises go to die.

Chapter 5: Repentance Begins When He Comes to Himself

The parable says, "And when he came to himself." That is one of the greatest phrases in Luke 15. Sin is insanity. Rebellion is insanity. A man living in the far country, starving among swine while his father's house has bread enough and to spare, is not thinking clearly. Repentance begins when he comes to himself. He remembers the father's house. He remembers the hired servants have bread enough and to spare. He sees the absurdity of perishing with hunger where he is. That is not merely regret. Regret says, "I hate the consequences." Repentance begins to say, "I have sinned." The prodigal is no longer defending the far country. He is seeing himself honestly.

He says, "I will arise and go to my father." That is movement in the right direction. He does not merely sit in the hog pen and feel bad. He does not write poems about missing home while staying with the pigs. He does not blame his father, his brother, the famine, the citizens of that country, the economy, or his upbringing. He says, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." That confession is essential. He recognizes sin vertically and personally. He sinned against heaven. He sinned before his father. True repentance stops

making excuses. It stops managing blame. It stops calling rebellion a journey of self-discovery. It calls sin what God calls it.

The prodigal also gives up his claim to worthiness. “I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” Now, there is a doctrinal distinction to make. He never stopped being the father’s son in the story, but he knew he had forfeited any claim to honor. His confession is not polished theology; it is broken humility. He does not march home demanding restoration. He comes with confession and unworthiness. That is the proper posture of repentance. The far country had taught him what pride would not. The son who once demanded “give me” now says “make me.” That is a major change.

Chapter 6: The Father’s Compassion Comes Before the Son’s Speech Is Finished

When the son is yet a great way off, his father sees him, has compassion, runs, falls on his neck, and kisses him. That is one of the most beautiful scenes in the Bible. The father is not portrayed as indifferent, cold, or reluctant. He sees him before he reaches the house. He runs before the son can finish his prepared speech. He embraces before the servants bring the robe. He kisses before the feast begins. That is compassion. The father does not send a servant to inspect whether the son smells like pigs. He does not demand a probationary period before showing affection. He does not stand on the porch with crossed arms saying, “Let us see if you mean it.” He runs.

But the father’s compassion does not erase the son’s confession. The son says, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” He does not come home praising the far country. He does not come home proud. He does not come home demanding rights. The father interrupts restoration into the servant category, but he does not interrupt the confession of sin. That balance matters. Grace receives repentant sinners. It does not pretend the far country was harmless. The son is restored by the father’s compassion, not by paying back the wasted inheritance, but he comes in the posture of repentance, not rebellion.

The robe, ring, shoes, and feast all speak of restoration. The best robe covers the shame. The ring signifies restored position and favor. The shoes mark him not as a barefoot slave but as a son in the house. The fatted calf announces joy. The father says, “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” This is recovery language, joy language, restoration language. Rightly divided, a man should not build every Church Age doctrine from these details, but the picture of grace is unmistakable. The father’s heart is not like the Pharisees’ heart. Heaven rejoices when the lost are found.

Chapter 7: The Elder Brother Was Near the House but Far From the Father’s Heart

The elder brother is the great rebuke at the end of the parable. He is in the field when the music and dancing begin. He asks what these things mean, and when he hears that his brother has come and the father has killed the fatted calf, he is angry and will not go in. That is the Pharisee spirit standing outside the joy of grace. The younger son had been far off in the far country, but the elder brother is far off while standing near the house. That is the terrifying point. A man can be outwardly near and inwardly distant. He can be in the field of service and still not know the father's heart.

The elder brother's speech exposes him. "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." That is self-righteousness talking. He views his relationship to the father as servitude, not fellowship. He boasts in his record. He resents that he never received a kid to make merry with his friends. Then he refers to the prodigal not as "my brother" but as "this thy son." He drags up the wasted living and harlots. He is not glad the lost is found. He is angry that grace is generous. That is exactly the spirit of the Pharisees and scribes in Luke 15:2. They murmured because Jesus received sinners. The elder brother murmurs because the father received his son.

The father's reply is tender but corrective: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Then he says, "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad." It was fitting to rejoice. The elder brother thought rejoicing was inappropriate. The father says it was necessary. Why? "For this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." Notice the father says "thy brother." He restores the relationship the elder brother refused to acknowledge. This is where the parable hits religious pride hardest. The elder brother can be more offended by grace than the prodigal was by the hog pen. The man in the field can be farther off than the boy among the swine.

Conclusion

The parable of the Prodigal Son is not a sentimental speech about everybody being fine, nor is it a doctrinal playground for forcing systems into every phrase. It is the climax of Luke 15, where Jesus answers Pharisees and scribes who murmured because He received sinners and ate with them. The younger son shows waste, rebellion, famine, humiliation, repentance, confession, and restoration. The father shows compassion, readiness to receive, joy in recovery, and restoration beyond what the son dared to request. The elder brother shows religious bitterness, self-righteous service, resentment at mercy, and refusal to rejoice when the lost is found.

Rightly divided, the parable does not overthrow the gospel of grace, redefine the Church, erase Israel, prove universalism, or make social acceptance the same as salvation. It teaches the Father's compassion toward the repentant, the misery of sin, the sanity of

coming to oneself, and the joy of restoration. The son does not come home defending the far country. He comes confessing sin. The father does not receive him because the far country was harmless. He receives him because mercy is greater than the son's ruin. Grace is not permissiveness. Grace is the father running toward the broken son who finally stopped lying to himself.

The warning at the end is the one religious people need most. Beware the elder brother spirit. Beware serving in the field while refusing the father's joy. Beware measuring your obedience as a reason God should be less merciful to someone else. Beware saying "this thy son" when the father says "thy brother." Beware being closer to the house than the prodigal but farther from the father's heart. The hog pen is a terrible place, but religious bitterness outside the feast is worse in some ways because it can call itself faithful while hating grace. Heaven rejoices when the lost is found. If that makes a man angry, he has not merely misunderstood the prodigal. He has misunderstood the Father.

25 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Unjust Steward

Introduction

The parable of the Unjust Steward is one of the most difficult parables in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, not because the words are impossible to read, but because the lesson cuts across the grain of religious laziness and carnal interpretation at the same time. Luke 16:1-13 gives the account of a certain rich man who had a steward, and that steward was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. The master calls him and says, "How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward." The steward then reasons within himself. He cannot dig. He is ashamed to beg. He knows his stewardship is ending, so he acts quickly to secure reception into other men's houses after he is put out. He calls his lord's debtors, reduces their bills, and uses what time remains to prepare for the future. Then comes the difficult statement: "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely." That is the line where careless readers lose their minds and start acting like the Lord is praising fraud, dishonesty, theft, manipulation, or crooked bookkeeping. He is not.

The key is to notice exactly what is commended. The steward is called unjust. That label is not removed. The Lord is not turning a crook into a hero. He is not saying the steward's dishonesty is righteous. He is not teaching that cheating your employer is a smart way to get ahead. The commendation is not of his injustice, but of his prudence. He acted with urgency because he knew his stewardship was ending. He looked ahead. He used present

opportunity in view of future accountability. That is the point the Lord draws out when He says, “For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” The Lord is exposing a shameful contrast. Worldly men often show more practical foresight about a temporary future than religious people show about eternal matters. A lost man will plan for retirement, business, influence, legal protection, investments, and future survival, while believers who claim to know eternity is coming often live as though stewardship will never be audited. That is the rebuke.

Rightly divided, this parable must be protected from two major abuses. First, it must not be twisted into salvation by financial cunning, as though a man can buy his way into heaven through clever use of money. The gospel of this present Church Age is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, received by faith, not a financial strategy. Second, it must not be softened into a vague lesson about “being nice with money.” The passage is sharper than that. It deals with stewardship, accountability, mammon, faithfulness in little, and the impossibility of serving two masters. The steward is losing his position. An account is required. His present handling of another man’s goods affects his future reception. That is the lesson. Earthly resources are temporary, but how a man handles them reveals his character and affects future accountability. Money is not eternal, but it can be used in view of eternity. Mammon is not God, but it can expose whether God is truly God to a man.

Chapter 1: The Steward Was Accused of Wasting His Lord’s Goods

The parable begins with accusation: the steward had wasted his lord’s goods. That word “wasted” immediately connects this man with irresponsibility. He was not the owner. He was a steward. That is the first truth that needs to be nailed down. A steward manages what belongs to another. He does not possess absolute ownership. He is entrusted with goods, authority, opportunity, time, responsibility, and access, but he must answer to the owner. His failure is not merely that he had fewer goods than someone else. His failure is that he wasted what was not his. That is stewardship sin. It is one thing to waste your own imaginary kingdom; it is another thing to waste what belongs to your lord.

That truth applies broadly. Israel was a steward of divine privilege. They had the Scriptures, the covenants, the temple, the priesthood, and the promises. The disciples were stewards of light. Later, in the Church Age, believers are stewards of the mysteries of God, stewards of grace, stewards of time, bodies, gifts, money, opportunities, doctrine, and the gospel. A man owns nothing absolutely. His breath is borrowed. His body is bought, if he is saved. His money is entrusted. His influence is accountable. His children are entrusted. His Bible knowledge is entrusted. His ministry is entrusted. The modern man says, “My life, my money, my time, my platform, my business, my talent.” The Bible says, “Give an account of thy stewardship.”

The accusation of waste should make every believer sober. Waste is not always open wickedness. A man can waste by neglect. He can waste time without committing a scandalous crime. He can waste doctrine by never using it to help anyone. He can waste money by spending it only on vanity. He can waste influence by chasing applause instead of truth. He can waste a platform by entertaining people instead of feeding them. He can waste years arguing online while his family starves spiritually. He can waste a church by keeping it busy with programs and empty of Bible. The steward in the parable is unjust, but the charge against him is also a mirror. What has God entrusted to us, and what are we doing with it?

Chapter 2: The Lord Demanded an Account

The rich man says, “Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.” That is the sentence that changes everything for the steward. His position is not permanent. His management is being audited. The day of casual waste is over. He must answer. This is the point men avoid because they prefer to talk about blessings, opportunities, and possessions without talking about account. But the Bible is full of accounting. Servants answer to masters. Stewards answer to owners. Nations answer to God. Churches answer to Christ. Believers appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Lost men stand before the Great White Throne. Nobody gets to live forever without an audit.

This is not the same judgment in every context, and right division matters. The lost man’s final judgment is not the believer’s judgment seat. The judgment of the nations is not the Great White Throne. Israel’s national accountability is not identical to the Church’s reward judgment. But the principle of accountability runs through all of Scripture. The steward had to give account because stewardship is temporary and entrusted. For the Church Age believer, salvation is secure in Christ, but service is accountable. A saved man will not answer for his sins as a criminal before the Great White Throne, because Christ bore his sins. But he will answer for his service, his works, his motives, his stewardship, and what he built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Grace removes condemnation; it does not remove accountability.

The phrase “thou mayest be no longer steward” is also sobering. Stewardship opportunities can end. A man may assume he will always have the same time, health, influence, pulpit, open door, family access, business strength, mental clarity, and ministry liberty. He will not. The stewardship can be taken. Death can take it. Sickness can take it. Age can take it. Sin can ruin it. God can remove it. The opportunity that seems permanent today may be gone tomorrow. The steward’s crisis was that he finally realized the clock was running out. A wise man should realize that before the crisis comes.

Chapter 3: The Steward Thought About the Future

Once the steward hears that his stewardship is ending, he starts thinking about what comes next. He says within himself, “What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.” Now, his character is still not admirable. He is not suddenly a holy man. He is practical, shrewd, self-interested, and calculating. But he does one thing many religious people fail to do: he faces the future. He does not pretend the account will go away. He does not ignore the deadline. He does not sit around singing about his feelings while the stewardship collapses. He thinks ahead. That is the part the Lord uses to rebuke the children of light.

The children of this world are often masters at planning for temporal survival. They plan careers, investments, retirements, legal documents, business moves, branding, education, property, taxes, and legacy. They think five, ten, twenty, and thirty years ahead for a vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away. Meanwhile, people who claim to believe in eternity often live as though the judgment seat of Christ is a doctrine on paper and not a coming reality. They know their stewardship will end, but they do not act like it. They know they will give account, but they spend their time like fools. They know riches are uncertain, but they serve them. They know souls matter, but they do not witness. They know the Bible is true, but they do not order life by it.

This is the sting of the parable. The Lord is not saying, “Be dishonest like the steward.” He is saying, in effect, “Look at how urgently a worldly man acts when his temporary future is threatened. Why do the children of light act less wisely when eternity is at stake?” That question should embarrass us. The steward’s prudence condemns our spiritual carelessness. If a crook can think ahead about housing after unemployment, a Christian ought to think ahead about standing before Christ. If a worldly man can use present opportunity to prepare for a temporary future, a believer ought to use present resources to prepare for an eternal one.

Chapter 4: The Steward Used Present Opportunity Before It Was Gone

The unjust steward still had a small window of opportunity before the stewardship was fully removed. He used it. He called his lord’s debtors and reduced their bills. Again, the morality of the act is not being praised. The man is still unjust. But he understood that present access could affect future reception. He acted before the door closed. That is the practical wisdom being highlighted. He did not wait until he was already put out to begin preparing. He used the little time remaining. That is where the parable hits hard. Opportunity is temporary. Use it before it is gone.

Every believer is living inside a temporary window of stewardship. We have time now. We have bodies now. We have money now. We have open doors now. We have the Bible now. We have people near us now. We have chances to witness now. We have chances to pray now. We have chances to give now. We have chances to teach children now. We have chances to help saints now. We have chances to lay up treasure in heaven now. But the window is closing. Death closes it. The rapture closes it. Lost opportunities close it. Hardened hearts close it. Children grow up. Churches drift. Health fails. Influence changes. A man who assumes he can become faithful later is gambling with stewardship he does not own.

This also applies to money. Money is a present opportunity, not an eternal possession. A man cannot take it with him, but he can use it before he goes. He can support truth, help saints, aid the needy, provide for his family, print and send Scripture, strengthen ministry, and use temporal resources in ways that echo into eternity. Or he can waste it all on vanity, appetite, status, luxury, and digital bragging. The unjust steward used temporary access for future advantage. A child of light should use temporary access for eternal purpose. If the world can be shrewd for tomorrow's roof, why are Christians so careless about eternity's account?

Chapter 5: The Lord Commended Prudence, Not Dishonesty

The most misunderstood line in the parable is, "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely." The steward is still called unjust. That label is essential. The Lord does not sanitize the man. He does not say the steward became righteous by cleverness. He does not praise the dishonesty. He commends the prudence, the foresight, the practical wisdom of acting in light of a coming change. The steward finally understood that his present stewardship had to be used with the future in mind. That is the lesson. Any interpretation that makes Jesus praise sin is already wrong.

The Bible never approves dishonesty. "Thou shalt not steal" is still true. False balances are abomination to the Lord. Fraud, oppression, theft, deceit, and manipulation are sins. This parable cannot be used to excuse crooked business, financial schemes, lying, or religious fundraising gimmicks. A man who uses the Unjust Steward to justify dishonest handling of money is proving he is more unjust than wise. The Lord's point is not, "Cheat well." The point is, "Even the unjust can see the need to act in view of the future. Why cannot the children of light see it?" The commendation is limited and specific.

This is where Bible interpretation needs common sense and reverence. Parables often use characters who are not morally ideal to make a point. The unjust judge in Luke 18 is not a picture of God's character. The sleeping friend at midnight is not a picture of God's

reluctance. The unjust steward is not a model of honesty. In each case, the Lord draws a lesson from a particular feature in the story, not from every moral quality of the character. If even an unjust steward shows foresight, how much more should God's people? That is the argument. Do not turn the villain into a saint. Learn the lesson Christ actually drew.

Chapter 6: Mammon Must Be Used, Not Served

After the parable, the Lord says, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." That statement has also been abused. Mammon refers to wealth, riches, material resources, and the economic power of this world. It is called "unrighteous" not because every coin is stolen, but because it belongs to an unrighteous world system and is so easily tied to covetousness, pride, corruption, and false security. The Lord's point is that temporal resources should be used in light of eternal realities. Money cannot save, but it can be used in ways that matter beyond this life.

This is not salvation by giving. A lost man cannot purchase everlasting habitations with donations. Simon Magus tried to connect money with spiritual power and was rebuked. Salvation is not bought with silver and gold. The blood of Christ is the price. The gospel of grace remains clear. But for those who belong to God, the use of mammon reveals stewardship. If money is temporary, then use it for eternal ends. If it will fail, then do not worship it. If it is unrighteous mammon, then do not make it your master. Put it under God's authority. Make it serve what will last.

The Lord then says a man cannot serve two masters. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." He does not say it is difficult. He says it is impossible. Money is a useful servant but a damning master. When mammon becomes master, God becomes a religious accessory. When God is Master, mammon becomes a tool. That distinction reveals the heart. A man may say God is first, but his spending, giving, worrying, chasing, hoarding, and compromising may reveal that mammon is on the throne. The unjust steward used money with the future in view. The child of light must use money with eternity in view and refuse to bow to it.

Chapter 7: Faithfulness in Little Reveals Character

The Lord applies the parable by saying, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." Money is called "least" in comparison with true riches. That is a shocking statement to a world that treats money as the greatest thing. God calls it little. Temporal goods are a test. If a man cannot be faithful with money, why should he be trusted with true riches? If a man lies, cheats,

hoards, wastes, worships, and compromises over earthly resources, his character is being revealed. Money is not the ultimate treasure, but it is an accurate thermometer.

The Lord also says, “If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?” That question ought to shake every believer. True riches are spiritual, eternal, and heavenly. They include doctrine, ministry, reward, spiritual responsibility, and the treasures that belong to God’s kingdom. A man’s handling of temporary things reveals whether he can be trusted with weightier things. That does not mean poor believers are unfaithful or rich believers are faithful. It means whatever mammon passes through a man’s hands becomes a stewardship test. Little money can test as surely as much money. The widow’s mites spoke louder than the rich men’s surplus.

This principle applies beyond money, though money is the immediate context. Faithfulness in little matters. Small obedience matters. Daily stewardship matters. Hidden choices matter. A man who is dishonest in little will not become holy simply because the stage gets bigger. A preacher who mishandles small influence will mishandle large influence. A church that wastes small opportunities will waste large ones. A believer who cannot be trusted with time, money, words, and doctrine in private should not imagine he is ready for greater public responsibility. God watches the little because the little reveals the man.

Conclusion

The parable of the Unjust Steward is difficult only when men try to make it praise what it clearly condemns or ignore what it clearly teaches. The steward is unjust. His dishonesty is not approved. The Lord commends his prudence, not his sin. He acted with urgency because he knew his stewardship was ending. He used present opportunity in view of future consequences. That practical foresight is the point of the rebuke. The children of this world often show more wisdom about temporal survival than the children of light show about eternal accountability. That is a disgrace, and the parable is meant to make us feel it.

Rightly divided, this passage does not teach salvation by money, cleverness, giving, or financial strategy. Eternal life is not purchased with mammon. The sinner is saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. But once a man is dealing with stewardship, money becomes a serious test. Earthly resources are temporary, but how they are handled reveals the heart. Mammon must be used, not served. The believer must not waste what belongs to the Lord. Time, money, influence, doctrine, opportunity, and ministry are entrusted goods, and the day is coming when the Lord will say, “Give an account of thy stewardship.”

The warning is plain. Stop living as though stewardship lasts forever. Stop acting like money is eternal. Stop wasting the Lord’s goods while worldly men plan more carefully for

retirement than Christians plan for the judgment seat of Christ. Use present opportunity before it is gone. Give, serve, preach, teach, help, witness, and lay up treasure in heaven. If an unjust steward had enough sense to prepare for a temporary future, then the children of light ought to have enough sense to live for eternity.

26 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Rich Man and Lazarus

Introduction

The account of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 is one of the most terrifying passages ever spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is hated by every soft-handed religious compromiser who wants a Bible without fire, a Christ without judgment, a hell without torment, and a gospel without urgency. The passage begins, “There was a certain rich man,” and then, “There was a certain beggar named Lazarus.” That alone makes it different from many parables. The Lord names Lazarus. He gives details about the rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day. He gives details about the beggar laid at his gate, full of sores, desiring to be fed with crumbs from the rich man’s table, while dogs came and licked his sores. Then both men die. Lazarus is carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom. The rich man is buried, and in hell he lifts up his eyes, being in torments. He sees Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. He cries for mercy. He asks for one drop of water. He is told there is a great gulf fixed. He asks for Lazarus to be sent to his father’s house to warn his five brethren. Abraham tells him, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” The rich man argues that if one went unto them from the dead, they would repent. Abraham answers, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

Some classify this passage as a parable. Others insist it is a historical account because the Lord names Lazarus and gives concrete afterlife details not normally found in parables. A man can discuss that question, but he had better not use the label “parable” to water down the doctrine. Whether someone places it in a parable list or treats it as a literal historical account, it belongs in this series because it is one of the Lord’s major teachings about death, torment, the intermediate state, Abraham’s bosom, the sufficiency of Scripture, and the hopelessness of rejecting the written word. If it is a parable, it is the most doctrinally detailed parable about the afterlife in the Gospels. If it is not a parable, then it is an eyewitness account from the Lord of glory, who knows exactly what is beyond the grave. Either way, the passage teaches truth. Jesus Christ did not build doctrine on fantasy. He did not invent false scenery to scare peasants. The Lord of truth does not describe conscious

torment, a great gulf fixed, and the authority of Moses and the prophets so modern preachers can explain it all away with a soft voice and a nervous smile.

Rightly divided, this passage must be handled in its pre-cross Gospel setting. Abraham's bosom appears in connection with the Old Testament righteous dead before the finished work of Christ is historically accomplished and before Christ's ascension. The passage is not a direct description of the final lake of fire after the Great White Throne. It is not the judgment seat of Christ. It is not soul sleep. It is not annihilation. It is not purgatory. It is conscious torment after death for the lost rich man and conscious comfort for Lazarus. The passage also does not teach that Lazarus was saved because he was poor or that the rich man was damned merely because he was rich. Poverty does not save, and wealth does not automatically damn. The issue is far deeper. The rich man lived in luxury without repentance, without mercy, without fear of God, and without heeding Scripture. Lazarus, though despised in life, is comforted after death. The reversal is severe, eternal, and irreversible. This account is a dagger in the heart of modern soft preaching. Hell is real. Torment is conscious. Death does not end accountability. And signs will not convince a man who rejects the written word of God.

Chapter 1: This Account Must Not Be Dismissed as Mere Religious Imagery

The first thing to settle is that Luke 16 must not be dismissed as "just a parable" in the modern unbelieving sense of "just a story that does not teach actual doctrine." That is the trick. Men do not usually call it a parable because they love parables. They call it a parable because they want to blunt the edge of the fire. They say, "Well, this is only symbolic," and then proceed to erase everything uncomfortable: hell, torment, memory, thirst, irreversible separation, and the sufficiency of Scripture. But even if a man calls it a parable, he has gained nothing by way of escape. The Lord's parables teach truth. The Sower teaches truth. The Wheat and Tares teaches truth. The Net teaches truth. The Ten Virgins teaches truth. The Talents teaches truth. A parable from the mouth of Christ is not a falsehood wrapped in a moral. It is a divine instrument of revelation and concealment. It reveals truth to those with ears to hear and hides it from those who prefer their own darkness.

This account is unusual because Lazarus is named. In the Lord's parables, characters are usually identified by roles: a sower, a certain man, a king, a householder, a shepherd, a woman, a steward, a father, a son. Here the beggar is named Lazarus, and Abraham is named as well. The rich man is not named, though tradition later called him Dives, which simply means rich man. The naming of Lazarus gives the account a historical weight that should make any honest reader cautious about reducing it to mere illustration. The Lord also gives details about the afterlife that are too doctrinally serious to be treated as decorative scenery. Abraham's bosom, torment, flame, the great gulf fixed, memory,

conscious speech, and the request for Scripture-based warning all carry doctrinal force. If Christ gives those details, a Bible believer should receive them with fear and trembling.

The safest position is to treat the passage as true revelation regardless of whether one places it under the category of parable or historical account. The Lord is not teaching fiction as if it were doctrine. He is revealing what men desperately need to know: death does not settle all men into the same condition, riches do not protect a man from hell, poverty does not mean God has forgotten a man, conscious torment is real, and the written Scriptures are sufficient warning. Modern preachers may be embarrassed by this passage, but Christ was not embarrassed when He preached it. The problem is not that the passage is unclear. The problem is that men are soft, afraid, and more loyal to modern respectability than to the words of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2: The Rich Man Had Luxury Without God

The rich man is clothed in purple and fine linen and fares sumptuously every day. That is the picture of luxury, status, comfort, and abundance. Purple was associated with wealth and dignity. Fine linen speaks of high-quality clothing. Faring sumptuously every day means he did not merely have an occasional feast. His life was a continual feast. He had the best clothes, the best food, the best comfort, the best social position, and the best earthly arrangement. If social media had existed then, he would have posted his table, his wardrobe, his gates, and his lifestyle while Lazarus lay outside the frame. The world would have called him blessed. God shows him in hell.

This passage is not condemning wealth in itself. Abraham was rich, and Abraham is the one speaking from the place of comfort. Job was rich. David had wealth. Joseph managed great stores. The Bible does not teach that poverty saves or that money damns by itself. The rich man is not in torment because he owned purple clothes. He is in torment because he lived without repentance, without mercy, without God, and without heeding the Scriptures. His riches insulated him from seeing his spiritual need. He had enough to feed his body while starving his soul. He had enough to clothe his flesh while standing naked before God. His table was full, but his heart was empty. His life was comfortable, but his eternity was dreadful.

This is why riches are dangerous. Riches create the illusion of control. They can make a man feel secure when he is one heartbeat from hell. They can surround him with comfort while judgment stands at the door. They can numb his conscience with pleasure. They can make him think tomorrow is guaranteed because today is well furnished. The rich man had no apparent need from day to day. His clothing was fine. His food was abundant. His gate was established. His life was smooth. Then he died. The man who had everything in time

had nothing in eternity. That is the danger of riches without God. They can make a man look blessed right up to the moment he opens his eyes in torment.

Chapter 3: Lazarus Had Misery in Life but Comfort After Death

Lazarus is the opposite picture. He is a beggar, laid at the rich man's gate, full of sores, desiring to be fed with crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. The dogs came and licked his sores. He is poor, diseased, helpless, hungry, and humiliated. He is not merely having a difficult season. His life is a portrait of misery. While the rich man feasts inside, Lazarus lies at the gate. The rich man has fine linen. Lazarus has sores. The rich man has a table. Lazarus wants crumbs. The rich man has social comfort. Lazarus has dogs licking his wounds. If a man judged only by outward circumstances, he would assume the rich man was favored and Lazarus was forgotten.

But death reverses the visible picture. Lazarus dies and is carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also dies and is buried. Notice the difference. The rich man likely had the impressive funeral. Lazarus may have had no honor on earth at all. But heaven's escort belongs to Lazarus. Angels carry him. The rich man's body is buried, but his soul is in torment. This is one of the great reversals in Scripture. Earth's evaluation is not heaven's evaluation. Men may pass by Lazarus at the gate, but angels do not lose him. Men may honor the rich man with burial, but hell receives him. The afterlife reveals what earthly appearances concealed.

Again, this does not mean Lazarus was saved because he was poor. The Bible does not teach salvation by suffering. Poverty is not atonement. Sores are not righteousness. Hunger does not wash away sin. Lazarus is comforted because he belongs among the faithful, connected in that setting with Abraham's bosom and the promises given to the fathers. His poverty is not the purchase price of his comfort. His condition shows that earthly misery does not mean divine rejection. That is the point. A man can suffer terribly in this life and be received by God. Another can prosper magnificently in this life and be lost. Earthly condition is not the final verdict. Death opens the books in a way men cannot ignore.

Chapter 4: Hell Is Conscious Torment, Not Soul Sleep or Annihilation

The rich man dies and "in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." That sentence ought to end a great many arguments. He is conscious. He sees. He speaks. He remembers. He reasons. He feels. He thirsts. He pleads. He suffers. He is not asleep. He is not annihilated. He is not purified. He is not given a second chance. He is in torment. Jesus Christ said it. The modern soft preacher can cough, shuffle his notes, appeal to Greek terms, and try to explain it away, but the words are still standing there like iron bars: "in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments."

The rich man asks for Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue, “for I am tormented in this flame.” That is not metaphorical discomfort in a vague spiritual state. It is conscious anguish described in terms of flame, thirst, and torment. If a man insists that some language is figurative, he still has gained nothing. The figure would have to point to something real and terrible enough to warrant such language. A symbol of torment does not mean comfort. A figure of flame does not mean sleep. A picture of thirst does not mean peace. The Lord chose the words, and the words are meant to terrify men out of indifference.

This passage is one reason modern preaching is so weak. Men no longer speak of hell like Jesus did. They prefer “separation from God” in the mildest possible tone, or “self-chosen alienation,” or “the absence of flourishing,” or some other soft academic pillow. The Lord said torment. The Lord said flame. The Lord said a great gulf fixed. Hell is not a doctrine invented by angry fundamentalists to scare children. It is a doctrine preached by Jesus Christ. If a man claims to follow Jesus but is embarrassed by the hell Jesus preached, he is not following Jesus. He is following a sentimental idol with a borrowed name.

Chapter 5: The Great Gulf Fixed Shows Final Separation

Abraham tells the rich man, “Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed.” That phrase is one of the most dreadful statements in the passage. The gulf is not temporary. It is fixed. It cannot be crossed from either side. Those who would pass from comfort to torment cannot, and those who would come from torment to comfort cannot. This destroys the idea of postmortem second chances in this passage. The rich man is not told to endure for a while and then cross over. He is not told to improve himself in the flames. He is not told that prayers, payments, masses, or rituals on earth can shorten his condition. The separation is fixed.

This is a direct blow against purgatory. The rich man is not being purged. He is being tormented. Abraham does not tell him he will eventually be released. He tells him he cannot cross the gulf. The passage also destroys soul-sleep theories because the rich man is not unconscious. It destroys annihilationism because the rich man is not extinguished. It destroys universalism because the rich man is not eventually reconciled in the scene. The passage gives conscious, irreversible separation after death. A man may hate that doctrine, but hatred does not move the gulf. The gulf is fixed because God says it is.

The fixed gulf also reveals the urgency of this life. Men act like death is a soft curtain through which all souls pass into the same light. Jesus says otherwise. Death seals a man’s condition. The rich man’s concern for his brothers comes too late to help himself. His prayer for water is denied. His request for a messenger is denied. His memory remains, but

his opportunity is gone. That is why the gospel must be preached now. That is why men must be warned now. That is why Scripture must be believed now. The grave is not a doorway to negotiation. It is the end of a man's earthly opportunity. After that, the gulf is fixed.

Chapter 6: Moses and the Prophets Are Sufficient Witness

The rich man asks that Lazarus be sent to his father's house to testify to his five brethren, lest they also come into that place of torment. Abraham answers, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." That statement is one of the strongest testimonies in the Bible to the sufficiency of Scripture. The rich man thinks his brothers need a sign from the dead. Abraham says they have the written word. They have Moses. They have the prophets. Let them hear them. God's word is not treated as inferior to a supernatural experience. It is treated as sufficient warning.

This is a rebuke to every generation that demands signs while neglecting Scripture. Men say, "If God would just show me something, I would believe." No, not necessarily. The problem is not lack of evidence. The problem is a wicked heart that refuses the light already given. The rich man's brothers had Moses and the prophets. That means they had creation truth, law, prophecy, warning, covenant revelation, moral commandments, sacrificial types, and testimony to God's holiness. They did not need a ghost story. They needed to hear the Book. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Signs can arrest attention, but they do not replace Scripture.

This should also strengthen Bible believers. The written word of God is enough to warn men of hell and point them to truth. We do not need to manufacture visions, near-death experiences, emotional theater, or sensational testimonies to make the Bible powerful. God's word is powerful. Moses and the prophets were enough witness for the rich man's brothers. Today we have Moses, the prophets, the Gospels, the Epistles, and the full revelation of Christ crucified and risen. A man who will not hear the Scriptures does not need a bigger show. He needs repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. The problem is not that the Book is weak. The problem is that men refuse to hear it.

Chapter 7: Signs Will Not Persuade a Man Who Rejects the Written Word

The rich man argues, "Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." That sounds reasonable to the flesh. Surely a resurrection sign would convince them. Surely a messenger from the dead would shake them. Surely a supernatural visitation would succeed where Scripture failed. Abraham answers, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." That statement is prophetic dynamite. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself would rise from the dead,

and the unbelieving nation's leaders still would not be persuaded. They rejected the written word, and therefore they rejected the risen Christ.

This is one of the greatest lessons in the passage. Signs do not cure unbelief when the heart rejects Scripture. Pharaoh saw signs and hardened his heart. Israel saw miracles in the wilderness and rebelled. The Pharisees saw Christ's works and accused Him of having a devil. Men saw Lazarus of Bethany raised from the dead, and the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ did not convert the men determined to reject the word. Evidence is not the issue for a rebellious heart. Authority is. A man who will not bow to what God has written will not be persuaded by what God displays.

That truth destroys the modern obsession with spectacle. Many churches act like if they can produce enough emotional impact, enough signs, enough wonders, enough testimonies, enough cinematic experiences, enough dramatic music, enough stagecraft, then men will believe. But Abraham's answer stands: if they hear not the Scriptures, they will not be persuaded though one rose from the dead. The greatest sign in history is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and God has recorded it in the written word. The issue is whether men will hear the Book. If a man rejects the Book, no amount of spiritual fireworks will fix him. He does not need entertainment. He needs to hear Moses, the prophets, and the gospel of the risen Christ.

Conclusion

The Rich Man and Lazarus is not a passage to be softened, explained away, or buried under religious discomfort. Whether one calls it a parable or a historical account, it is truth from the mouth of Jesus Christ. It teaches that earthly wealth cannot protect a man from hell, earthly suffering does not mean God has forgotten a man, death brings a real separation, the lost experience conscious torment, Abraham's bosom was a place of comfort for the righteous dead in that setting, and the great gulf is fixed. It also teaches that Scripture is sufficient warning and that signs will not persuade a man who rejects the written word.

Rightly divided, the passage must be placed in its pre-cross Gospel setting. It is not the final lake of fire after the Great White Throne, nor is it the judgment seat of Christ, nor is it a description of Church Age believers losing salvation. It is a revelation of the afterlife as Christ describes it before Calvary's historical accomplishment and the later revelation of the Church's doctrine through Paul. But those distinctions do not weaken the passage. They sharpen it. The rich man is in torment. Lazarus is comforted. The gulf is fixed. Moses and the prophets are sufficient witness. One rising from the dead will not persuade those who refuse Scripture.

This passage should put steel in every preacher's spine. Hell is real. Conscious torment is real. Death is not a joke. Riches without repentance are dangerous. Comfort without God is a trap. Religious signs are no substitute for the written word. A man can fare sumptuously every day and wake up in torment. A beggar full of sores can die and be carried by angels. The world's verdict is not God's verdict. The soft preacher may be ashamed of hell, but Jesus Christ preached it plainly. And if the Lord Jesus Christ was not too gentle to warn men about torment, no Bible believer has any business being too refined to preach it.

27 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Unprofitable Servants

Introduction

The parable of the Unprofitable Servants in Luke 17:7-10 is one of those passages that knocks the pride out of religious service if a man will let it speak. The Lord says, "But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?" The answer is obvious. The master does not meet the servant at the door after a day's work and say, "You poor thing, sit down first, and I will serve you." Instead, he says, "Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink." Then the Lord asks, "Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not." Then comes the sentence that exposes the whole matter: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." That is not modern ministry language. Modern ministry is full of applause, entitlement, branding, platform building, public affirmation, and men acting like God ought to be impressed that they showed up. Christ cuts through all of it and says that after obedience, the servant still says, "I have done my duty."

This passage does not teach that obedience is worthless, meaningless, or unimportant. The servant did plow. He did feed cattle. He did serve the master. He did what was commanded. The Lord is not rebuking obedience. He is rebuking entitlement after obedience. There is a world of difference. A man should serve God. A saved man should obey. A preacher should preach. A teacher should teach. A father should lead. A mother should instruct. A believer should witness, pray, give, study, separate from evil, walk in charity, bear fruit, and labor faithfully. But after doing it, he has not turned God into his debtor. He has not purchased grace. He has not made the Lord obligated to salute him. He has not added one ounce of merit to the finished work of Christ. He has done what duty

required. That is the lesson. Service is right, but service never becomes a claim against God's grace.

Right division is vital here because this passage can easily be twisted in two directions. The legalist will use it to crush people under servile fear, as if God never rewards, never delights in faithfulness, and never calls His servants beloved. That is wrong. The Bible teaches rewards, crowns, commendation, inheritance, and the judgment seat of Christ for believers. The Lord can say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." But the grace of reward does not mean God is in debt to human merit. On the other side, the careless grace-abuser will say, "If we are unprofitable servants anyway, why serve?" That is also wrong. The passage does not cancel duty; it defines the spirit in which duty should be done. A saved man serves because he belongs to the Lord, not because he is bargaining for salvation. He labors because Christ bought him, not because he is buying Christ. He obeys because God is worthy, not because obedience makes God owe him. After a man has preached, taught, sacrificed, labored, suffered, and spent himself, he is still a servant, not God's creditor.

Chapter 1: The Servant Belongs to the Master

The parable begins with the assumption of servanthood. "Which of you, having a servant…" The servant is not an independent contractor negotiating terms with the master. He belongs in the household of service. His work is not a favor he performs when convenient. It is his duty. This is the first truth modern Christians often forget. A believer is not his own. Paul says, "Ye are bought with a price." That one statement ends the fantasy of independent Christianity. The saved man belongs to Jesus Christ by right of purchase. His body and spirit are God's. His time, gifts, strength, doctrine, opportunities, and breath are not his personal kingdom. They are entrusted to him under the authority of the One who bought him.

This destroys the consumer spirit that has infected modern Christianity. People talk about serving God as though they are volunteering occasional help for a religious organization that should be grateful for their presence. They speak as though church, prayer, giving, witness, study, and obedience are optional add-ons to a self-owned life. But the Bible does not present the believer as a self-owned customer. He is a servant. That word cuts across the pride of the age. A servant does not begin the day by asking whether he feels fulfilled by the master's commands. He asks what the master requires. The servant's life is ordered around another's will.

This also frames all Christian service properly. Ministry is not a stage for self-expression. It is not a platform for ego. It is not a career ladder for religious ambition. It is service under a Master. A preacher who forgets he is a servant will begin to act like a celebrity. A teacher

who forgets he is a servant will begin to act like an authority above correction. A worker who forgets he is a servant will demand applause for ordinary duty. The Lord begins with the reality of servanthood because humility starts there. We belong to Another. That is not oppression. For the saved man, it is freedom from the tyranny of self. But it is still servanthood.

Chapter 2: The Servant Works in the Field Before Serving at the Table

The servant in the parable has been plowing or feeding cattle. He has labored in the field. That means the servant's day has already involved real work before he is called to further service. He is not idle. He is not lazy. He is not pretending. He has done field labor, and after coming in, he is still expected to gird himself and serve the master. The Lord is not describing a servant who did nothing. He is describing a servant who did real work and still has no right to demand that the master become his servant. That is the point. Service, even hard service, does not reverse the relationship.

This is a strong word for anyone who labors in ministry. There are seasons when service is exhausting. Plowing is hard work. Feeding cattle is not glamorous work. Much of the Lord's work is more like plowing than performing. It is repetitive, tiring, hidden, dirty, and often unnoticed. A man studies, prays, teaches, counsels, writes, witnesses, answers questions, bears burdens, takes criticism, helps the weak, and keeps going. A woman serves in hidden faithfulness, teaches children, prays, encourages, sacrifices, and nobody applauds. A faithful believer may work in the field all day, spiritually speaking, and still have more duty when he comes in. The parable does not deny the work is real. It denies that the work makes the servant lord of the house.

The flesh hates this. The flesh says, "After all I have done, I deserve to be served." The flesh counts sacrifices and keeps receipts. The flesh remembers every late night, every insult, every dollar, every tear, every sermon, every lesson, every unnoticed labor, and then presents the stack to God as if heaven should be impressed. But Christ says the servant comes in from the field and still girds himself. Why? Because the Master is still the Master. The work is real, but the relationship has not changed. The servant did not become the owner because the field was hard.

Chapter 3: Obedience Is Duty, Not Leverage

The Lord says, "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you," then say, "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Notice the phrase "commanded you." The servant is not inventing extra credit. He is doing what was commanded. That matters. Obedience is not leverage over God. It is the proper response to God's authority. A man does not obey the Lord and then hold out his hand as

though God now owes him. He obeys because God commanded. The command itself is sufficient reason. God does not need to negotiate with His servants as though His right to command depends on their approval.

This rebukes the entitlement spirit in ministry. Some men serve for a while and then become bitter because they expected more recognition, more comfort, more results, more money, more loyalty, more praise, or more visible success. They say, “After all I have done for God…” That sentence is dangerous. It can sound like testimony, but often it is the beginning of accusation. The servant starts acting as though obedience placed God in debt. He forgets that every breath used in service was given by God, every gift used in ministry came from God, every open door was opened by God, every bit of strength was supplied by God, and every fruit that remains came by God’s increase. How can a man make God his debtor with resources God gave him?

This also helps distinguish duty from merit. Duty is real. God commands holiness, prayer, witness, charity, service, obedience, and faithfulness. But duty fulfilled does not create saving merit. If a man keeps a command, he has not done God a favor. He has done what he ought to have done. That truth is poison to self-righteousness. The Pharisee spirit wants to turn obedience into a trophy. Christ turns it back into duty. A servant does not plow the field and then act surprised that the master expected plowing. That is what servants do. A believer does not obey and then act as if obedience is extraordinary payment. That is what believers owe the Lord who bought them.

Chapter 4: “Unprofitable” Does Not Mean Useless or Worthless

The phrase “unprofitable servants” must be handled carefully. The Lord is not saying faithful service has no value, that obedience is useless, or that God despises the labor of His people. Scripture teaches the opposite in many places. God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love. The labor of believers is not in vain in the Lord. The judgment seat of Christ will reveal works, rewards, crowns, and loss. The Lord can commend faithful servants. So “unprofitable” cannot mean that obedience is meaningless or that service has no place. It means the servant has not profited the master in such a way as to make the master indebted to him. He has not added to God’s essential glory. He has not supplied a lack in God. He has not created a claim.

God does not need us. That offends the flesh, but it is true. God is self-existent, self-sufficient, eternal, holy, and complete. He does not depend on preachers, churches, missionaries, writers, singers, givers, or workers to be God. If every servant dropped dead, God would still be God. If every pulpit went silent, the stones could cry out. If every witness failed, God’s purpose would not collapse. That does not make service unimportant. It

makes grace astonishing. God does not use servants because He is needy. He uses servants because He is gracious. He allows dust to participate in His work. That should produce humility, not entitlement.

This understanding protects a servant from despair as well as pride. If God does not need me, then I am not the savior of the world, the pillar of heaven, or the last hope of the Church. That relieves a crushing burden. But if God commands me, then I am still responsible. That removes laziness. The servant's proper attitude is neither self-importance nor indifference. He serves faithfully, knowing the work matters because God commanded it, while also knowing God owes him nothing as though the work originated in him. "Unprofitable" is not self-hatred. It is honest humility before the sufficiency of God.

Chapter 5: Service Must Be Distinguished From Salvation

This parable is especially important because service and salvation are constantly confused. A saved man should serve. He should obey. He should labor. He should bear fruit. But he is not saved by serving. He is saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The gospel of this present Church Age is not, "Serve enough and God will accept you." It is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. The sinner is justified by faith apart from works. Service follows salvation; it does not purchase salvation. The servant does not become accepted because his plowing was impressive. He serves because he belongs to the master.

This distinction saves the conscience. If service is the basis of salvation, no man can ever have assurance. How much service is enough? How many fields must be plowed? How many cattle fed? How many tables served? How many prayers prayed? How many sermons preached? How many sacrifices made? If a man's acceptance before God depends on his service record, he is doomed. Even after doing all commanded, the servant says, "We are unprofitable servants." That means service cannot be the ground of justification. If perfect obedience to duty would still not put God in debt, then imperfect obedience certainly cannot save the soul.

But this distinction also rebukes the lazy man who hides behind grace. Some hear that service does not save and conclude that service does not matter. That is rebellion dressed in doctrine. Grace does not cancel duty. The blood of Christ does not purchase a man so he can sit in spiritual laziness. Paul, the great preacher of grace, labored more abundantly than they all, yet not he, but the grace of God which was with him. The right order is crucial. Grace saves freely. Grace teaches. Grace empowers. Grace produces service. Service never becomes the root of salvation, but it should appear as fruit in the saved life.

Chapter 6: The Passage Rebukes Entitlement in Ministry

The parable lands with special force on ministry entitlement. A man can preach for years and begin to think God owes him success. He can teach doctrine and think God owes him recognition. He can sacrifice and think God owes him comfort. He can suffer and think God owes him an easier road. He can build a platform and think God owes him protection from criticism. He can work long hours and think God owes him visible results. That spirit is poison. The servant may have plowed all day, but he is still a servant. Ministry does not make a man God's creditor. It makes him more accountable.

Entitlement often hides under the language of exhaustion and disappointment. A man says, "I have served, and nobody appreciates me." Sometimes that pain is real. People can be ungrateful. Churches can be cruel. Ministry can wound a man. But the servant must be careful not to turn pain into a claim against God. Christ was not treated as He deserved. Paul was not treated as he deserved. Faithful servants in Scripture often suffered misunderstanding, rejection, poverty, imprisonment, and death. The call to serve was never a contract promising applause. The Master owes no man celebrity, comfort, or ease because the man did his duty.

This also rebukes religious bargaining. Some serve God so long as God appears to bless their plans. If the blessing does not come the way they expected, they sulk. They were not servants; they were negotiators. A servant serves because the Master is worthy. He may receive reward by grace, but he does not demand it as a wage that God was forced to pay. The judgment seat of Christ will be righteous, and God will not forget faithful labor, but every reward will still be grace. The servant who understands that can labor without bitterness. He does not count receipts and hand God an invoice. He says, "I have done that which was my duty to do."

Chapter 7: True Humility Serves After Serving

The most searching part of the parable is that the servant continues serving after coming in from the field. He does not say, "I already worked today; now it is my turn to be honored." He girds himself and serves the master. That is the spirit Christ is teaching. True humility does not retire into self-pity after one act of obedience. It does not say, "I have done enough; now God and others should attend to me." It keeps its place before the Master. That is not abuse; that is servanthood. The flesh wants to serve once and be celebrated. Grace teaches a man to serve and remain low.

This is hard because service can become a secret idol. A man may begin serving God out of gratitude and slowly start using service to build identity. He becomes "the preacher," "the teacher," "the defender," "the helper," "the faithful one," "the sufferer," "the one who sacrifices." Then, when he is not honored accordingly, anger rises. That reveals the

problem. He was not merely serving; he was building a case for recognition. The unprofitable servant attitude keeps service from becoming self-worship. It says, “The Master is worthy whether anyone notices me or not.”

True humility does not deny that labor happened. The servant did plow. He did feed cattle. He did serve. Humility is not lying about work. It is refusing to turn work into superiority. It is refusing to use obedience as proof that God owes special treatment. A humble servant can work hard, acknowledge God’s grace in the work, and then return to the Master’s feet without demanding applause. That is rare. It is also safe. A man who stays a servant is much harder for pride to destroy.

Conclusion

The parable of the Unprofitable Servants teaches that obedience is duty, not leverage. The servant plows or feeds cattle, comes in from the field, girds himself, serves the master, and afterward eats and drinks. When he has done all that was commanded, he still says, “We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” The Lord is not saying obedience is worthless. He is saying obedience does not put God in debt. Service is right, but it is never a payment that makes the Master owe the servant.

Rightly divided, this passage protects both grace and duty. It prevents service from being turned into salvation, because even full obedience to duty would not create saving merit before God. The sinner is saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ, not by plowing enough fields for God. But the passage also prevents grace from being twisted into laziness. The saved man belongs to the Lord and should serve faithfully. Grace saves, and grace teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly. Service is not the root of salvation, but it should be the fruit of a life bought by Christ.

The final rebuke is aimed at entitlement. After a man has preached, taught, witnessed, given, sacrificed, suffered, prayed, labored, and served, he is still a servant. He is not God’s creditor. He is not the owner of the field. He is not the master of the house. He has done his duty, and even that duty was performed with strength God gave him. The safest servant is the one who works hard and stays low. He does not hand God an invoice. He bows his head and says, “We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

28 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge

Introduction

The parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge is one of the strongest teachings in the Bible on continuing in prayer when justice seems delayed, but it is not merely a generic devotional about "never giving up." Luke 18:1-8 begins by saying, "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." That opening gives the immediate practical lesson. Prayer must continue when the answer does not come at once. Faith must not collapse because the night is long. The burdened soul must not faint simply because heaven does not move according to man's preferred timetable. Then the Lord tells of a judge in a city who feared not God, neither regarded man, and a widow who came unto him, saying, "Avenge me of mine adversary." For a while he would not. But afterward he says within himself that though he fears not God nor regards man, yet because the widow troubles him, he will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary him. Then the Lord says, "Hear what the unjust judge saith." If even that kind of judge will finally act because of persistence, how much more shall God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?

That last part is where the parable becomes much heavier than ordinary prayer advice. The issue is not merely a believer praying for a better job, a family problem, a financial need, or personal guidance. Those matters can certainly be prayed over, and the devotional principle applies. But the parable itself speaks of vengeance, an adversary, God's elect crying day and night, divine longsuffering, and the coming of the Son of man. The Lord ends with the question, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" That gives the passage prophetic weight. It points beyond ordinary daily prayer into the pressure of a coming time when God's people will be oppressed, crying for deliverance and vengeance under an adversary, waiting for the Son of man to come and set things right. The parable fits tribulation pressure, end-time injustice, and the certainty that God will avenge His own. If a man flattens that into a simple motivational poster about persistence, he has not listened to the ending.

Rightly divided, this parable must be kept in its prophetic and kingdom setting while still being applied devotionally. The Church Age believer can learn much from it about prayer, endurance, waiting, and refusing to faint. All Scripture is profitable. But the Church is not appointed to go through Daniel's seventieth week as Israel's tribulation remnant, crying for vengeance under the Antichrist until the Son of man comes to earth in judgment. The phrase "Son of man cometh" is not the same emphasis as the blessed hope of the Body of Christ being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The cry for vengeance is not the normal Church Age prayer of gospel witness toward enemies. In this age, believers are taught to pray for all men, preach the gospel, and suffer with patience, while vengeance belongs to the Lord. In the Tribulation and Second Advent setting, oppressed saints cry for God to

avenge, and He will. Right division preserves both truths. We can learn persistence without stealing the prophetic setting.

Chapter 1: The Parable Begins With the Command Not to Faint

Luke tells us the Lord spoke this parable "to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." That is the immediate practical lesson, and no interpretation should ignore it. The Lord knows that delay tests prayer. It is easy to pray once when the burden is fresh and the heart is emotional. It is harder to pray when nothing seems to change, when the adversary remains, when injustice continues, when the judge appears silent, and when the soul grows tired. "Not to faint" means not to collapse inwardly, not to lose heart, not to quit because the answer has not appeared. Prayer is not merely an emergency flare shot into the sky. It is a continuing dependence upon God when the situation remains unresolved.

This is a necessary lesson because many people treat prayer as a short-term transaction. They ask, wait a little while, and if God does not answer the way they expected, they stop. Then they call their fainting "accepting reality" or "being practical." The Lord says men ought always to pray. That does not mean repeating empty words like a heathen or pretending prayer is a mechanical lever. It means the soul must keep turning to God. It means faith must keep speaking to the Father even when circumstances are stubborn. It means the believer must not let delay turn into unbelief. A prayerless heart is often a fainting heart.

At the same time, this command does not mean God is a vending machine that must eventually yield to human pressure. Prayer is not sorcery. It is not a way to force God to obey man. The parable deals with a widow seeking righteous avenging against an adversary, and the Lord uses the contrast between an unjust judge and the righteous God. Persistent prayer is not stubborn flesh demanding its own will. It is faith refusing to let go of God's justice, God's promise, God's character, and God's timing. The widow keeps coming because her cause is real and her need is urgent. The lesson is not "annoy God until He gives you what your flesh wants." The lesson is "do not faint when justice seems delayed."

Chapter 2: The Judge Feared Not God and Regarded Not Man

The judge in the parable is deliberately described as wicked in his disposition: he feared not God, neither regarded man. That is about as low as a judge can go. A judge who fears God will remember that he himself is under judgment. A judge who regards man will at least care about justice, public accountability, or human need. This man has neither restraint. He is not moved by divine fear or human compassion. He is a picture of cold authority without righteousness. The widow's case comes before a man who has position but no conscience. That is the kind of world where the weak suffer.

The Lord is not saying God is like this judge in character. That is one of the most important interpretive safeguards. The parable is an argument from contrast, not similarity. If even an unjust, cold, self-centered judge can be moved to act because of persistent coming, then God, who is righteous, holy, compassionate, and faithful, will surely avenge His own in His time. The unjust judge is the dark background against which God's justice shines. A man who reads the parable and thinks God is reluctant, annoyed, selfish, or unjust has missed the point entirely. The Lord is not degrading the Father. He is strengthening faith by contrast.

This contrast matters because oppressed people often feel as though heaven is like an unjust court. They cry and wait. The adversary continues. The injustice seems uncorrected. The world's judges may be corrupt, indifferent, cowardly, or bought. Systems may fail. Religious leaders may ignore the weak. Governments may persecute the righteous. In those seasons, the heart can begin to wonder whether God sees. The parable answers by saying God is not the unjust judge. The fact that He bears long does not mean He is indifferent. His delay is not corruption. His patience is not negligence. He will avenge His own elect.

Chapter 3: The Widow Pictures Helplessness Under Oppression

The widow in Scripture often represents vulnerability. A widow has no husband to defend her, no natural protector in the social order, and can easily become the prey of corrupt men. The law repeatedly warned Israel about mistreating widows, fatherless children, and strangers. God takes notice when the weak are oppressed. In this parable, the widow has an adversary, and she needs justice. She is not asking for luxury or personal advancement. She is crying, "Avenge me of mine adversary." That is the cry of someone under pressure who cannot deliver herself.

This is why the parable fits so naturally with tribulation pressure and persecuted saints. The widow's cry is not a casual request. It is the cry of the oppressed against an adversary. In Revelation, souls under the altar cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?" That is not the ordinary tone of comfortable religious life. It is the cry of martyrdom, oppression, and righteous vengeance delayed. Luke 18 has that same flavor. The Lord speaks of God's elect crying day and night and then asks about faith when the Son of man cometh. The widow's position gives the passage its prophetic edge.

Devotionally, every believer can learn from the widow's helplessness. Prayer begins where self-sufficiency ends. A proud man does not pray like this because he still believes he has options. A self-reliant man tries to negotiate, manipulate, or fight in his own strength. The widow keeps coming because she has no other hope of justice. That is not weakness in the

bad sense. That is the honesty of need. Many saints would pray better if they stopped pretending they were not widows in a hostile world. We are not sufficient of ourselves. We need God. The adversary is real, the world is unjust, and the flesh is weak. So pray and do not faint.

Chapter 4: Her Persistence Exposes the Power of Importunity

The widow keeps coming. That is the action of the parable. She does not come once and disappear. She does not accept the judge's first refusal as the final word. She continues until the judge himself admits that her continual coming troubles him. This is importunity in action. It is not vain repetition. It is not empty chanting. It is not superstition. It is persistent appeal under a real burden. The widow is not trying to impress the court with her eloquence. She is pressing a righteous cause before the only authority in the city who can act.

Persistence in prayer is one of the great tests of faith. Anybody can pray when emotions are high. The question is whether a man continues when the burden remains. Does he keep praying when the adversary still stands? Does he keep praying when the answer is delayed? Does he keep praying when others grow tired of hearing about it? The widow's strength is not social power, wealth, position, or influence. Her strength is that she will not stop coming. The unjust judge may ignore her for a while, but he cannot pretend she has disappeared. Persistent prayer keeps the matter before God, not because God forgets, but because faith refuses to abandon the matter to unbelief.

This is a rebuke to fainting Christians. Many people quit too soon. They pray for a season, see no change, and retreat into bitterness or resignation. The Lord says not to faint. Keep coming. Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. Keep crying to God. Do not confuse God's delay with God's denial. Do not let the adversary define the outcome. Do not let weariness become theology. The widow's persistence does not make the unjust judge righteous, but it does bring action. How much more should God's people continue before a righteous God who actually cares for His own?

Chapter 5: God's Elect Will Be Avenged

The Lord draws the conclusion: "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" The phrase "his own elect" must be handled carefully. In Scripture, election can refer to different groups according to context: Israel as God's elect nation, Christ as the elect Servant, tribulation saints, and believers in the present dispensation. A lazy interpreter sees the word "elect" and immediately drags the verse into his favorite theological system. That is not Bible study. Here the context is prophetic, tied to crying day and night for vengeance and the coming of the Son of man.

That fits especially with God's oppressed people in the end-time setting, not a Calvinist classroom debate about individual election.

God will avenge His own. That is the promise. The world may persecute. The adversary may rage. Judges may be unjust. Systems may fail. Martyrs may die. Saints may cry, "How long?" But God's vengeance is certain. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." In this present Church Age, believers are not called to execute vengeance. We preach the gospel, suffer wrong, bless them that persecute, and leave vengeance with God. But leaving vengeance with God does not mean vengeance will never come. It means God will handle it righteously, perfectly, and at the appointed time.

This is where modern soft religion often fails. It wants a God who forgives but never avenges, loves but never judges, comforts but never destroys, receives but never recompenses. That god is not the God of the Bible. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself says God will avenge His own elect. Divine vengeance is not petty human revenge. It is holy justice. It is God setting right what wicked men have done. It is God answering blood, oppression, lies, persecution, and rebellion. The widow's cry will not be ignored forever. The elect who cry day and night will not be forgotten. The Judge of all the earth will do right.

Chapter 6: The Son of Man Coming Gives the Parable Prophetic Weight

The parable ends with the question, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" That ending must govern the interpretation. The title "Son of man" is tied to Christ's Messianic authority, earthly kingdom, judgment, and coming in glory. Daniel 7 shows one like the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven and receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom. In the Gospels, the coming of the Son of man often points to the Second Advent in power and glory, not the Church's blessed hope in Pauline terms. Therefore, Luke 18 is not just general advice about having a better prayer life. It looks toward the time when the Son of man comes and the question is whether faith remains on the earth under terrible pressure.

This gives the parable a tribulational edge. During the Tribulation, God's people will face oppression, persecution, deception, and the rage of the adversary. They will need endurance. They will cry for vengeance. They will wait for the coming King. The issue will be faith under pressure. Will they still believe God will avenge? Will they still cry day and night? Will they endure the delay? When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on the earth? That question is not decorative. It is the prophetic point of the passage. The widow's persistence becomes a picture of end-time saints refusing to faint under the pressure of injustice.

Right division protects the Church Age believer here. The Body of Christ is looking for the blessed hope, not for the Son of man to come to earth at the end of Daniel's seventieth week after the signs of Matthew 24. The Church is caught up before the day of the Lord's wrath. That distinction does not rob Luke 18 of application. It keeps it from being misapplied. We can learn to pray persistently, trust God's justice, and refuse fainting without claiming the Church must endure the Tribulation as the widow under the unjust judge. The prophetic edge belongs where God put it, and the devotional profit remains.

Chapter 7: Persistent Prayer Must Not Be Flattened Into Generic Positivity

The parable is often reduced to "keep praying and God will eventually give you what you want." That is too shallow. The widow is not asking for personal luxury. She is asking for justice against an adversary. The Lord's application is not "God will fulfill every personal ambition if you repeat it long enough." It is that God will avenge His own elect who cry day and night unto Him. The passage is about prayer under oppression, faith under delay, and justice under divine timing. It is not a prosperity formula. It is not a blank check for the flesh. It is not a motivational slogan.

This matters because modern religion loves to turn prayer into self-fulfillment. It preaches persistence as a technique for getting promotions, houses, platforms, money, success, and personal dreams. That is not Luke 18. The widow is not building a brand. She is oppressed. She has an adversary. She needs avenging. God's people in the prophetic setting are not asking for luxury; they are crying under persecution. The context is severe. A man who turns that into generic positivity has taken a sword and turned it into a toothpick.

Devotionally, the believer should still be encouraged to pray about everything. The Church Age epistles tell us to pray without ceasing, continue in prayer, and bring requests to God with thanksgiving. But prayer must always be under God's will, God's word, and God's glory. Luke 18 specifically strengthens the soul against fainting when justice is delayed. It teaches that God hears, God cares, God may bear long, and God will act suddenly and righteously in His time. Persistent prayer is not positive thinking. It is faith refusing to faint while waiting for the Judge who cannot be bribed, fooled, or delayed one moment beyond His purpose.

Conclusion

The parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge teaches that men ought always to pray and not to faint. The widow has an adversary, no power of her own, and a judge who neither fears God nor regards man. Yet she keeps coming until even that unjust judge acts because of her continual coming. The Lord then turns the contrast upward: if an unjust judge can be moved to act, shall not God avenge His own elect who cry day and night unto

Him, though He bear long with them? The answer is certain. God will avenge them speedily when His appointed time arrives.

Rightly divided, this passage carries prophetic weight. The language of avenging, the elect crying day and night, and the coming of the Son of man points beyond ordinary prayer advice to end-time pressure, tribulation suffering, and divine vengeance at the Second Advent. It fits the cry of oppressed saints waiting for God to judge and avenge. It should not be flattened into a generic formula for getting whatever the flesh desires. Nor should it be used to confuse the Church's blessed hope with Israel's tribulation setting. The prophetic edge must remain sharp.

Yet the devotional application is powerful. Pray and do not faint. Keep coming to God when justice seems delayed. Do not mistake longsuffering for indifference. Do not let the adversary convince you that heaven is silent because God is unjust. He is not the unjust judge. He is the righteous Judge. He hears His own, He knows the oppression, He measures the delay, and He will act. The question is whether faith will still be found when the waiting has tested the soul. When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth? That question should search every heart that has ever thought about quitting prayer because the night was long.

29 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Pharisee and the Publican

Introduction

The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican is one of the clearest exposures of self-righteous religion in the entire Bible. Luke 18:9 tells us exactly why the Lord Jesus Christ spoke it: "And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." That is the key before the parable ever begins. The Lord is not dealing with atheists, drunkards, harlots, thieves, or open rebels in the street. He is dealing with religious people who trust themselves and despise others. That is one of the most damnable combinations in the world. A man can be guilty and know it, and mercy can reach him. But when a man is guilty and covers his guilt with religion, fasting, tithing, separation, public prayer, and comparisons with worse sinners, he has built a wall around his own soul. He is not just lost; he is lost behind a pulpit-shaped barricade. He is not just blind; he has painted eyes on the blindfold and called it discernment. Self-righteousness is so deadly because it uses true religious things in a false way. It takes prayer and turns it into boasting. It takes fasting and turns it into a résumé. It takes tithing and turns it into a receipt waved in God's face. It takes separation from sin and turns it into contempt for sinners.

The parable itself is simple. Two men go up into the temple to pray. One is a Pharisee, the other a publican. The Pharisee stands and prays thus with himself: “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are.” Then he lists the kind of people he is not like: extortioners, unjust, adulterers, and even this publican. He then lists what he does: he fasts twice in the week and gives tithes of all that he possesses. The publican, standing afar off, will not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smites upon his breast, saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Then the Lord gives the verdict that overturns the whole religious room: “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.” Not the fasting man. Not the tithing man. Not the respectable man. Not the separated man. Not the man who thanked God in the language of religion while admiring himself in the mirror of comparison. The guilty publican went home justified rather than the Pharisee. That is grace cutting the throat of religious pride.

Rightly divided, this parable must be handled in its Gospel setting before the cross, before the full revelation of the Church Age gospel through Paul, and before the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ are preached as completed good news in the form given in 1 Corinthians 15. The publican does not stand in the temple quoting Romans 3, Romans 4, Ephesians 2, or Titus 3. He cries for mercy as a guilty man under the light he has, and God justifies the humble sinner rather than the proud religious performer. Later revelation gives the full doctrinal explanation of how God can justify the ungodly righteously through the blood and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But the central moral and spiritual truth stands with all the force of heaven: God can save a guilty man who seeks mercy, but He resists the religious performer who thinks God should be impressed. The publican’s cry does not replace the gospel of grace; it shows the posture of a man who knows he needs mercy. The Pharisee’s prayer does not fail because fasting and tithing are evil; it fails because he trusted himself, despised others, and used religion as a hiding place from his own guilt.

Chapter 1: The Parable Is Aimed at Those Who Trust Themselves

Luke tells us the target of the parable: those who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous.” That is the root of the whole problem. The Pharisee’s error is not merely that he did some wrong things in prayer. His prayer reveals a deeper disease. He trusts himself. His confidence is inward, not Godward. He looks at his religious record, his moral contrast with others, his fasting, his tithing, his outward discipline, and concludes that he has something God should recognize. That is the religion of Adam dressed in Sabbath clothes. It is man standing before God with a fig-leaf apron he stitched himself and expecting heaven to applaud the needlework.

Self-trust is deadly because it often borrows God’s vocabulary. The Pharisee begins with “God, I thank thee.” That sounds pious at first. He does not openly say, “I thank myself.” He

frames his pride in thanksgiving language. That is what makes religious pride so subtle. It can say “praise God” while praising itself. It can say “by God’s grace” while secretly believing it is superior. It can testify in a way that smells like worship but is really self-advertisement. The Lord exposes the truth by saying the Pharisee “prayed thus with himself.” His words were addressed upward, but his heart was circling himself. He was not communing with God. He was rehearsing his own excellencies in a religious mirror.

This is why self-righteousness is more dangerous than open scandal in some ways. The drunkard may know he is ruined. The harlot may know she is unclean. The thief may know he is guilty. But the self-righteous man thinks his very religion proves he is safe. He uses morality as a blindfold, discipline as a hiding place, and comparison as a sedative. He does not tremble because he has learned to measure himself by men worse than himself. But God does not judge a man by the publican standing nearby. God judges according to truth. A man trusting himself is already trusting the wrong savior. And the worst savior a sinner can have is himself.

Chapter 2: The Pharisee Despised Others Because He Exalted Himself

Luke says these self-righteous men not only trusted themselves, but “despised others.” Those two sins belong together. When a man trusts himself as righteous, he will almost always need someone beneath him to prove the point. Self-righteousness feeds on comparison. It does not rest in God’s mercy. It rests in finding someone worse. The Pharisee says, “I thank thee, that I am not as other men are.” That sentence is the heartbeat of religious pride. He is not asking God to search him. He is asking God to admire the distance between him and the people he despises. He defines righteousness by contrast, not by holiness. He feels clean because he can point at dirt on another man.

Notice the list: extortioners, unjust, adulterers, and “even as this publican.” The publican becomes part of the Pharisee’s prayer as an exhibit in his courtroom. He drags another man’s guilt into his own religious speech to make himself look better. That is a vile thing. A man’s prayer should bring him low before God, but the Pharisee uses prayer to stand taller than his neighbor. He has no mercy, no grief, no burden, no compassion, no desire for the publican’s restoration. The publican is useful to him only as a comparison point. That is how religious pride treats sinners: not as souls needing mercy, but as props in its own self-portrait.

This spirit is alive today. A man can say, “I am not like the Catholics, not like the Charismatics, not like the liberals, not like the Calvinists, not like the modern Bible correctors, not like the compromisers, not like the backsliders, not like the worldly crowd.” Some of those separations may be doctrinally necessary. Error should be marked. False

doctrine should be exposed. Sin should be rebuked. But the moment a man uses separation as a reason to admire himself before God, he has become a Pharisee with better doctrine. Sound doctrine in a proud heart can become another tool of self-exaltation. Right division should make a man humbler, not more contemptuous. A man who knows the truth should thank God for mercy, not use truth as a club to prove he is better flesh than someone else.

Chapter 3: The Pharisee's Works Were Real but Misused

The Pharisee says, "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." There is no indication that he is lying about the outward facts. He probably did fast. He probably did tithe carefully. He was likely disciplined, moral, externally separated, and religiously serious. That is what makes the parable so cutting. The Lord does not present a Pharisee who is openly drunk, dishonest, adulterous, and careless. He presents a man with real religious works, and then shows that those works did not justify him. The problem was not that fasting was wicked. The problem was that he trusted in his fasting. The problem was not that giving was wicked. The problem was that he used giving as evidence that God should accept him.

Good things become dangerous when they are used as a basis for righteousness before God. Prayer is good, but the Pharisee's prayer was rotten. Fasting can be good, but his fasting became pride. Tithing under the law had its place, but his tithing became a spiritual receipt. Separation from extortion, injustice, and adultery is good, but he turned it into contempt. That is one of the devil's cleverest tricks in religion. He does not always need to make a man openly wicked. Sometimes he only needs to make a man proud of being outwardly moral. A man can go to hell with a clean reputation, a disciplined schedule, and a religious résumé if he trusts those things instead of God's mercy.

This is crucial for rightly dividing service and salvation. In the Church Age, a saved man should pray, fast as led, give, live cleanly, separate from evil, and serve the Lord. But none of those things form the ground of justification. A believer does not earn acceptance by religious performance, and a lost man cannot purchase mercy with spiritual activity. Paul later says plainly that to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. That later doctrinal clarity explains what this parable illustrates morally. The Pharisee worked and boasted. The publican pleaded for mercy. The Pharisee presented a résumé. The publican presented guilt. God justified the man who came empty, not the man who came decorated.

Chapter 4: The Publican Stood Afar Off

The publican stands afar off. That detail matters. He does not rush to the front as though he belongs there. He does not take the chief room. He does not lift his face with confidence in himself. He knows he is guilty. The distance is not unbelief in God's mercy; it is the posture of a man who knows he has no claim. He is not putting on a religious performance. He is not trying to impress the Pharisee. He is not trying to look humble. He is ashamed before God. That is a healthy place for a guilty sinner to begin. He does not come bargaining. He comes broken.

Publicans were despised, often associated with greed, collaboration with Rome, and dishonest gain. The Pharisee's contempt for him had social fuel. But the publican sees what the Pharisee does not: he sees his own need. That is why he is closer to justification while standing afar off than the Pharisee is while standing in religious confidence. Distance in posture is not always distance from mercy. A man bowed low in guilt may be nearer to grace than a religious man standing tall in self-admiration. The publican stands afar off, but his prayer reaches heaven. The Pharisee stands prominently, but his prayer circles back to himself.

This should warn every man who mistakes bold religious posture for spiritual health. There is a holy boldness that belongs to believers through Christ, but there is also a fleshly boldness that comes from not knowing one's condition. The publican's shame is not the end of the story, but it is honest. He does not minimize sin. He does not compare himself with worse publicans. He does not say, "At least I am not like other tax collectors." He does not blame Rome, society, his upbringing, or economic pressure. He stands afar off as a sinner before God. That is where mercy meets him.

Chapter 5: The Publican Would Not Lift Up His Eyes

The publican "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven." That is not theatrical humility. It is the natural posture of conviction. He knows heaven is holy, and he knows he is not. He cannot look up as though he has a claim. His body language agrees with his prayer. The Pharisee's prayer was full of spiritual posture but empty of contrition. The publican's posture is low because his heart is low. He is not performing humility for an audience. He is unable to pretend before God. That is a powerful mark of real conviction: it stops acting.

He smites upon his breast. He does not point at the Pharisee. He does not smite the air. He does not beat another man's sins. He smites where the problem is. His own breast. His own guilt. His own heart. That is the opposite of the Pharisee. The Pharisee's prayer moves outward toward "other men" and "this publican." The publican's prayer moves inward to his own sin and upward to God's mercy. A man is getting somewhere spiritually when he stops

using everyone else's sins to avoid dealing with his own. The publican's hand on his breast is worth more than the Pharisee's whole list of accomplishments because it is honest.

This is needed in an age where men know how to expose everything but themselves. People can diagnose denominations, movements, politicians, preachers, family members, online opponents, and historical enemies, but never smite their own breast. That is dangerous. A man can be right about many errors and still wrong before God if he refuses personal conviction. The publican does not need a platform, a debate, or a comparison chart. He needs mercy. That is what makes his prayer clean. He is not trying to win an argument. He is trying not to perish under his guilt.

Chapter 6: "God Be Merciful to Me a Sinner" Is the Cry of a Bankrupt Soul

The publican's prayer is short: "God be merciful to me a sinner." No ornament. No résumé. No excuses. No comparison. No bargaining. No promise to do better as the basis of acceptance. Just mercy. That is the cry of a bankrupt soul. He does not say, "God reward me." He does not say, "God recognize me." He does not say, "God compare me." He says, "God be merciful." He knows that if God deals with him only on the basis of justice without mercy, he is finished. That is the difference between the two men. The Pharisee asks God to notice his righteousness. The publican asks God to provide mercy for his sin.

The word "merciful" here carries the thought of propitiation, mercy grounded in sacrifice. The publican is in the temple context, where sacrifice, blood, atonement, and mercy are not abstract ideas. He may not understand the full later revelation of Christ's finished atonement the way Paul would later explain it, but he knows he needs mercy from God, not applause from men. In the fuller light of the New Testament, we know that mercy is righteous because of Jesus Christ. God does not forgive by pretending sin does not matter. Christ died for sins. His blood is the ground. His resurrection is the proof. God can be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. The publican's cry reaches toward the mercy that God Himself must provide.

This cry should not be confused with a mechanical formula. A man can repeat "God be merciful to me a sinner" and not mean it. The words are not magic. The issue is the heart posture of guilt and dependence. In the Church Age, the gospel must be preached clearly: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. The sinner must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. But no man believes rightly while still trusting himself. The publican's cry shows the collapse of self-trust. He comes as a sinner needing mercy. That is the kind of man God saves. Not because his humility purchases salvation, but because he has stopped presenting himself as his own savior.

Chapter 7: The Publican Went Down Justified Rather Than the Other

The Lord's verdict is the thunderclap: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." The publican. The guilty man. The despised man. The man who stood afar off. The man who would not lift up his eyes. The man who smote his breast. The man with one plea for mercy. He went down justified rather than the religious performer. That reverses everything human religion assumes. Men would have expected the Pharisee to go home justified. He had the works, the reputation, the discipline, the visible religion, and the moral contrast. But God saw the heart. The publican came empty and received mercy. The Pharisee came full and went away empty.

The word "justified" must be handled carefully in the progress of revelation. This is spoken before the cross is accomplished historically and before the full Pauline explanation of justification by faith in Christ's finished work is written. The parable is not giving a complete post-resurrection doctrinal treatise on imputed righteousness. But it is giving a real verdict from the Lord: God accepts the humble sinner seeking mercy rather than the self-righteous man trusting himself. Later revelation explains the ground and mechanism of justification with greater doctrinal fullness. The parable shows the moral contrast between self-righteousness and mercy-seeking faith. There is no contradiction. There is development of revelation.

The Lord closes with the principle: "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." That principle connects with the larger kingdom teaching of Christ and runs throughout Scripture. God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. The Pharisee exalted himself and was rejected. The publican humbled himself and was justified. This does not mean humility is a meritorious work that earns salvation. It means proud self-trust cannot receive grace because it will not admit need. The empty hand receives. The clenched fist of self-righteousness does not. God saves sinners, not performers who think heaven owes them a standing ovation.

Conclusion

The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican exposes self-righteousness as one of the most dangerous forms of spiritual blindness. The Pharisee had religion, prayer, fasting, tithing, morality, and separation, but he trusted himself and despised others. He used prayer to boast, comparison to comfort himself, and religious works as evidence that God should be impressed. He stood in the temple and talked to God, but the Lord says he prayed with himself. That is a terrifying thing. A man can be religious enough to pray and proud enough that his prayer never rises above his own head.

The publican had nothing to present but guilt and need. He stood afar off, would not lift up his eyes, smote upon his breast, and cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He did not

compare. He did not bargain. He did not boast. He did not defend himself. He asked for mercy. The Lord said that man went down to his house justified rather than the other. That is the judgment of Jesus Christ, and it destroys every religion built on human righteousness. God can save a guilty man who seeks mercy, but He resists the religious performer who thinks God should be impressed.

Rightly divided, this parable does not replace the full Church Age gospel later revealed in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The publican's cry must be understood in its Gospel and temple setting, while Paul later gives the doctrinal explanation of justification by faith apart from works. But the central truth remains sharp enough to cut through every age: no man is justified by trusting himself. No man is accepted because he can find someone worse to stand beside him. No man impresses God with a résumé of religious activity. The sinner's hope is mercy, and that mercy is found in the God who justifies the ungodly through Jesus Christ. The publican knew he needed mercy. The Pharisee thought he was mercy's exception. Only one went home justified.

30 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Labourers in the Vineyard

Introduction

The parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard is one of the sharpest rebukes in the Bible against religious entitlement, envy, and the crooked idea that God's goodness to another man is somehow an injury against me. Matthew 20:1-16 gives the account of a householder who goes out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. He agrees with the first labourers for a penny a day and sends them into the vineyard. Then he goes out again at the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth hour, and even the eleventh hour, finding others standing idle and sending them also into the vineyard. When evening comes, the lord of the vineyard commands his steward to call the labourers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. Those hired at the eleventh hour receive every man a penny. When the first labourers see it, they suppose they will receive more, but they also receive every man a penny. Then they murmur against the goodman of the house, saying, "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day." The householder answers one of them, "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?" Then comes the knife: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?"

The setting is crucial. Matthew 19 ends with Peter asking, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" The Lord answers with promises

concerning the regeneration, the twelve thrones, and rewards for those who forsake houses, brethren, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, or lands for His name's sake. Then He says, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." Immediately after that comes the parable, and it ends with the same principle: "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen." That tells us how to read it. This is kingdom teaching. It deals with reward, service, God's sovereignty, grace, and the reversal of human expectations. It is not a simple Church Age justification passage where every detail should be read as though the penny equals eternal life and the labourers are all getting saved at different points in their lives. If a man makes the penny salvation, he is already in trouble, because the men are labouring for it. Salvation in the present gospel of grace is not wages earned by vineyard labor. It is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Rightly divided, this parable must be kept from two errors. First, it must not be twisted into works salvation, as though the sinner enters heaven because he laboured long enough in God's field. The gospel of the grace of God is not "work in the vineyard and receive the penny." It is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, and the sinner is justified by faith apart from works. Second, it must not be stripped of its force by pretending it has no application to the Church Age believer's attitude toward service, reward, and grace. The parable hits religious workers right between the eyes. The first labourers received exactly what they agreed to receive, but they became angry because the lord was generous to others. They did not complain because they were cheated. They complained because someone else was blessed. That is a crooked eye. The parable exposes the servant who works with a ledger instead of a grateful heart, the preacher who resents latecomers, the religious worker who believes hardship has made God his debtor, and the soul that cannot rejoice when grace gives another man more than he expected.

Chapter 1: The Vineyard Belongs to the Householder

The parable begins, "For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard." That first sentence settles ownership. The vineyard is his. The hiring is his. The timing is his. The agreement is his. The payment is his. The labourers enter a field they did not plant, own, or rule. They are not partners controlling the vineyard. They are hired workers. That matters because much of the murmuring later comes from men forgetting whose vineyard it is. They begin as labourers, but by evening they are talking as though they own the pay scale.

The kingdom of heaven setting is also important. Matthew's Gospel is loaded with kingdom truth connected to Israel, the King, the coming reign, and God's dealings in relation to the kingdom. This parable follows the Lord's promise to the apostles regarding thrones in the

regeneration and His warning that many first shall be last and last first. It is not a floating story about a generic employer. It is a kingdom parable about God's right to call, reward, reverse human expectations, and expose envy among servants. The vineyard imagery also carries Old Testament weight, especially in relation to Israel as God's vineyard. A careless man who reads the whole thing as a modern business payroll dispute has already missed the atmosphere of the passage.

The ownership of the vineyard rebukes every servant who begins to think God's work exists for his reputation. The field is not ours. The ministry is not ours. The fruit is not ours. The opportunity is not ours. The reward is not ours to assign. A preacher does not own the vineyard because he has laboured in it. A teacher does not own the vineyard because he has studied. A missionary does not own the vineyard because he has sacrificed. A Bible believer does not own the vineyard because he has borne heat. The vineyard belongs to the Householder. Until that is settled, every discussion of reward will be poisoned by pride.

Chapter 2: The First Labourers Agreed for a Penny

The first labourers are hired early in the morning, and they agree with the householder for a penny a day. That is a fair agreement. No injustice is done. No deception occurs. The terms are clear. They know what they are promised. They enter the vineyard under an arrangement they accepted. Later, when they receive the penny, they are not shortchanged. The problem is not that the householder failed to keep his word. The problem is that they changed their expectations after seeing his generosity to others. Their dissatisfaction is born, not from injustice, but from comparison.

That is a major spiritual issue. A man can be content with what God has given him until he sees what God gives another man. Suddenly the same blessing no longer satisfies him. The first labourers were not angry at the penny when they agreed to it in the morning. They were angry at the penny when the eleventh-hour men received it in the evening. Nothing changed in their agreement. Their eye changed. Envy is not caused by lack. Envy is caused by looking sideways at another man's blessing and interpreting God's goodness to him as unfairness to me. That is why the householder later asks, "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?"

This rebukes religious service done with a contract spirit. Some people serve God with an invisible agreement in their own mind. "Lord, I will labour, but I expect recognition. I expect a larger reward than that man. I expect my years to count in a way that keeps latecomers beneath me. I expect my suffering to purchase status. I expect my early start to guarantee higher rank." That is dangerous. God does reward service, and He is not unrighteous to forget labor, but He never gives servants the right to turn reward into entitlement. The first

labourers had a true agreement, but they still developed a crooked attitude when grace showed up near evening.

Chapter 3: The Later Labourers Were Called at Different Hours

The householder goes out at the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth hour, and the eleventh hour. Each time he finds labourers and sends them into the vineyard. The later men do not all begin at the same time, and they do not all endure the same length of labour. Some work most of the day. Some work half the day. Some work only one hour. The parable therefore introduces a difference in time, opportunity, and burden. Not every servant begins under the same circumstances. Not every man has the same length of service. Not every worker enters the vineyard at dawn.

That principle is true in many ways. In Israel's history, different generations received different calls and responsibilities. In the kingdom context, there are those who appear early and those who appear later. In individual application, some men come to truth early in life and labour for decades. Others are converted late. Some are raised around the Bible from childhood. Others spend years in confusion and only later enter useful service. Some men have long ministries. Others have brief but sincere work near the end of life. God knows the hour. God knows who stood idle because no man hired them. God knows the opportunities each servant had. The Householder is not confused by the clock.

This should produce humility in those called early and gratitude in those called late. If God gave a man light early, that is mercy, not a reason to despise those called later. If God brought another man into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, that is mercy, not a reason for the late man to boast either. Nobody hires himself. Nobody owns the vineyard. Nobody creates his own opportunity. The labourer who has worked since morning should thank God for a full day of service. The labourer called at the eleventh hour should thank God that he was called at all. Both attitudes are ruined when men forget grace.

Chapter 4: The Last Were Paid First

When evening comes, the lord of the vineyard tells his steward to call the labourers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. That order is deliberate. The last are paid first so the first can see it. The reversal is not hidden. God intends to expose what is in the hearts of the early labourers. If the first had been paid first and sent away, they would have received their penny contentedly. But by paying the last first, the householder brings their inward attitude to the surface. They see the eleventh-hour men receive a penny, and immediately they suppose they will receive more. Their expectation changes because they compare.

This is the point where the parable becomes a mirror. God often exposes hearts by blessing someone else in front of us. A man thinks he is humble until a latecomer is honored. He thinks he is gracious until a restored sinner is celebrated. He thinks he serves for God's glory until another servant receives praise. He thinks he believes in grace until grace is shown to someone who did not bear his heat. The first labourers' hearts were not exposed by hardship alone. They endured the heat of the day. Their hearts were exposed by generosity shown to others. Sometimes prosperity in another man's life tests us more than adversity in our own.

The order also ties directly to the Lord's statement that the last shall be first and the first last. God's kingdom does not run according to man's assumptions of rank. The men who appear first in human estimation may not stand first in God's distribution. The men who seem late, small, unnoticed, or less impressive may receive honor that surprises everyone. This does not make God unjust. It makes God sovereign. If the Householder wants to pay the last first, the labourers have no right to accuse Him. The pay line belongs to Him.

Chapter 5: The Murmuring Revealed a Crooked Eye

When the first labourers receive their penny, they murmur against the goodman of the house. Their complaint is not that he broke the agreement. Their complaint is that he made the last equal unto them. "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us." That sentence reveals the wound. They cannot stand equality by generosity. They believe their burden and heat should guarantee superiority. The problem is not their math. The problem is their eye. They see grace as injustice because it gives another man more than they think he deserves.

The householder answers, "Friend, I do thee no wrong." That is the heart of the matter. God is not unjust when He is generous. If He gives one man what He promised and gives another more than expected, He has wronged no one. Envy argues that goodness to another is theft from me. Grace says God may do what He will with His own. The first labourers were paid fully. They suffered no loss. Their misery came from comparison. That is why envy is so wicked. It can turn a fulfilled promise into a grievance simply because another man was treated kindly.

The phrase "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" is one of the most searching questions in Scripture. An evil eye is a covetous, envious, resentful eye. It cannot rejoice over generosity unless it is the recipient. It sees another man's blessing and feels cheated. It sees mercy and calls it unfair. It sees grace and demands a scale. This spirit shows up in churches, ministries, families, and online religious circles. A man labours for years and then resents a late convert whom God uses. A preacher suffers long and then envies

someone with quick fruit. A lifelong churchgoer resents a former sinner being warmly restored. That is the elder brother in another form. It is the crooked eye of a worker who forgot the Householder is good.

Chapter 6: The Penny Should Not Be Made Church Age Justification

This parable must not be carelessly turned into a Church Age salvation formula. If the penny is made eternal life in the Pauline sense, then the passage becomes dangerous if pressed mechanically, because the men receive the penny after labouring in the vineyard. That would make salvation wages for work, which directly contradicts Romans 4:4-5 and Ephesians 2:8-9. The sinner today is not hired into a vineyard, works a certain number of hours, and then receives justification as a wage. The gospel of grace is clear: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. The ungodly man is justified by faith, not by labour.

The parable is kingdom teaching tied to reward, calling, and the reversal of first and last. It follows Peter's question, "What shall we have therefore?" and the Lord's answer about thrones, reward, and inheritance connected with following Him. The penny is part of the parable's reward structure, not a complete doctrinal symbol for Church Age salvation. A man must resist the urge to flatten every parable into the same gospel tract. The Gospel setting, kingdom language, vineyard imagery, and first-last reversal must be allowed to speak. Right division keeps grace from being corrupted by labour-wage confusion.

That said, the parable still teaches principles that apply to believers. God keeps His word. God rewards according to His own righteousness and sovereignty. God is free to be generous. Servants should not compare themselves among themselves. Long service does not give a man the right to resent mercy shown to another. The Church Age believer is saved apart from works, but after salvation he serves and will be judged for reward. Even then, reward will never be a matter of God being trapped in debt by human merit. It will be righteous, gracious, and according to the perfect judgment of Christ.

Chapter 7: God's Generosity Exposes the Spirit of the Worker

The deepest issue in the parable is not the penny but the spirit of the labourers. The same payment that should have satisfied them becomes offensive when they see generosity toward others. That means their work had a hidden corruption in it. They bore the burden and heat of the day, but they did not share the heart of the householder. They served, but they were not glad that others were blessed. They laboured, but they wanted their labour to keep them above the latecomers. That is a dangerous kind of service. A man can work hard in the vineyard and still have an evil eye.

This is where the parable hits ministry pride. A man may say, “I have laboured longer. I have suffered more. I have studied harder. I have sacrificed more. I have been faithful when others were idle. Why should that man receive blessing? Why should that latecomer be used? Why should that restored sinner be welcomed? Why should that younger preacher have influence? Why should that person who wasted years now receive joy?” Those questions reveal a crooked heart. The issue is not justice. The issue is resentment that God is good. The religious worker who cannot rejoice over grace has revealed that he was working with a crooked eye.

The cure is to remember whose vineyard it is, whose money it is, whose call it is, and whose grace it is. If God gives me a full day in the vineyard, I should thank Him. If God brings another man in at the eleventh hour, I should thank Him for that too. If God rewards another servant with unexpected generosity, I should not murmur as though heaven’s treasury belongs to me. The Householder is good. That should be enough. A servant who cannot rejoice in the goodness of his Master has a problem deeper than payroll.

Conclusion

The parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard teaches God’s sovereignty, reward, grace, and the exposure of envy among servants. The householder hires labourers at different hours, from early morning to the eleventh hour. When evening comes, he pays the last first, and every man receives a penny. The first labourers murmur because those who worked only one hour receive the same as those who bore the burden and heat of the day. The householder answers that he has done them no wrong and asks the piercing question, “Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” That question is the heart of the parable.

Rightly divided, the passage belongs in Matthew’s kingdom setting and follows the Lord’s teaching about reward and the reversal of first and last. It should not be twisted into a Church Age justification passage where salvation is earned by vineyard labor. The gospel of grace remains untouched: sinners are saved by faith in the finished death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not by wages for work. But the parable still applies powerfully to service, reward, and attitude. God is not unjust when He is generous. He is not wrong to bless latecomers. He is not obligated to arrange His rewards according to our pride.

The warning is plain. Do not serve with a crooked eye. Do not measure your labor against another man’s blessing. Do not think bearing the heat of the day makes God your debtor. Do not murmur because grace gave someone else more than you expected. The vineyard is His. The penny is His. The call is His. The reward is His. The goodness is His. A faithful servant should rejoice that the Householder is good, even when that goodness humbles every human idea of who should be first and who should be last.

31 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Two Sons

Introduction

The parable of the Two Sons in Matthew 21:28-32 is short, sharp, and aimed directly at the religious leaders who had mastered the art of saying the right thing while refusing the will of God. The Lord Jesus Christ says, “But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.” The first son answers, “I will not,” but afterward he repents and goes. The father then comes to the second son and gives the same command. The second son answers, “I go, sir,” but he goes not. Then Jesus asks, “Whether of them twain did the will of his father?” They answer, “The first.” That answer condemns them out of their own mouths. The publicans and harlots, who first looked like the rebellious son, repented at the preaching of John. The chief priests and elders, who wore the public appearance of obedience, refused to believe even after seeing it. The Lord then says, “Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.” That is not gentle religious small talk. That is a public rebuke against empty profession, religious appearance, and hard unbelief.

The setting makes the parable even stronger. Jesus has entered Jerusalem. His authority is being challenged by the chief priests and elders of the people. They ask, “By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?” The Lord answers them by asking about the baptism of John: was it from heaven or of men? They will not answer honestly because they are not truth-seekers; they are reputation-managers. If they say John’s baptism was from heaven, Jesus will ask why they did not believe him. If they say it was of men, they fear the people, because the people held John as a prophet. So they say, “We cannot tell.” That cowardly answer exposes them before the parable even begins. These men are not ignorant. They are evasive. They are not waiting for more light. They are dodging the light they already have. Then Jesus gives the parable of the Two Sons and applies it directly to them. The issue is not lack of religious words. The issue is refusal to obey God when His messenger and His Son confront them.

Rightly divided, this passage must not be turned into salvation by works, as though a sinner earns eternal life by working in the vineyard. The gospel of the grace of God, later preached in full after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, is not “go work and be justified.” A sinner today is saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for his sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. But right division must never be used to dull the parable’s rebuke. In this kingdom setting, Jesus is exposing religious leaders who said the right thing outwardly but refused the will of God, while publicans and harlots, publicly stained and outwardly rebellious, repented at John’s preaching. Verbal profession without obedience is worthless in that setting. Repentance is not mere talk. It is seen in a changed

direction. The first son's initial words were ugly, but afterward he repented and went. The second son's words were polished, respectful, and useless. That makes this parable painfully relevant in any age full of people who say "sir," wear the right label, claim the right heritage, quote the right phrases, and still refuse the will of God when it confronts them.

Chapter 1: The Parable Was Spoken to Religious Leaders Under Confrontation

The parable of the Two Sons is not spoken in a vacuum. It is spoken to chief priests and elders who had challenged the authority of Jesus Christ. That matters because the Lord is not addressing humble sinners asking how to be saved. He is confronting religious rulers who already had light and rejected it. They had seen John the Baptist's ministry. They had seen sinners repent. They had seen Christ's works. They had heard His words. Yet instead of bowing to truth, they played political games with questions of authority. They wanted to trap Christ without being trapped themselves. The Lord exposes their dishonesty before He ever tells the story.

Their refusal to answer about John's baptism is the immediate background. John came preaching righteousness, repentance, and the nearness of the kingdom. The publicans and harlots believed him, but the leaders did not. When Jesus asks whether John's baptism was from heaven or men, they calculate instead of confessing. Their answer, "We cannot tell," is not honest ignorance. It is strategic cowardice. They know they are caught. If John was from heaven, they are guilty for rejecting him. If John was merely of men, they risk the crowd's anger. So they hide behind fake uncertainty. Religious men often use "we cannot tell" when the truth is too costly.

This setting shows why the parable hits so hard. The two sons picture two kinds of response to the father's command. One looks bad at first but repents and obeys. The other sounds good at first but disobeys. Jesus is not speaking theoretically. He is describing the very people in front of Him. The publicans and harlots had said "no" by their lives, but afterward they repented at John's preaching. The religious leaders had said "yes" by their office, words, and outward profession, but when God's will came through John, they refused. The parable is a mirror, and the chief priests and elders are standing in front of it.

Chapter 2: The Father's Command Was Plain

The father says to the first son, "Son, go work to day in my vineyard." The command is plain, personal, and immediate. "Son" shows relationship and responsibility. "Go work" shows action expected. "To day" shows urgency. "In my vineyard" shows ownership. The son is not asked to work in his own private field according to his own ambition. He is commanded to labor in the father's vineyard. This is important because the parable deals with obedience

to revealed will. The issue is not whether the sons can discuss vineyard theory, admire vineyard history, or wear vineyard clothing. The issue is whether they do the father's will.

In the immediate context, the father's will is connected with responding to God's message through John and, by extension, to Christ Himself. John came in the way of righteousness. He called Israel to repentance. He prepared the way of the Lord. The publicans and harlots believed him. The chief priests and elders did not. God was not unclear. The command was not hidden behind fog. The religious leaders were not lost because God failed to give them light. They were guilty because they refused the light. The father had spoken. The vineyard was his. The sons were accountable.

This principle applies in every age. God's will, once revealed, is not a matter for endless negotiation. A man may not understand everything, but he is responsible for what he does know. The lost sinner who hears the gospel is responsible to believe on Christ. The saved believer who knows the word is responsible to obey the light given. A preacher who knows the truth is responsible to preach it. A teacher who knows right division is responsible to handle Scripture honestly. A man who knows God has told him to do something has no right to hide behind religious talk. The father's command was not, "Son, discuss whether vineyard work has personal relevance to your journey." It was, "Go work to day in my vineyard."

Chapter 3: The First Son Said Wrong but Later Did Right

The first son answers, "I will not." That is a bad answer. There is no need to sanitize it. He is disrespectful, rebellious, and wrong. He refuses the father's command plainly. This son pictures those whose lives openly contradict God's will: publicans, harlots, and visible sinners in the Lord's immediate application. They were not pretending to be righteous. Their "no" was written across their lives. They were not dressed in priestly respectability. They were publicly stained, openly despised, and morally compromised. The first son's first words are ugly because open sin is ugly.

But the parable does not end with his first words. "Afterward he repented, and went." That is the turning point. He changed his mind and changed his direction. Repentance in the passage is not a vague feeling. It is not merely regret that he sounded bad. It is seen in action. He goes to the vineyard. He does the father's will after initially refusing it. That is why Jesus applies the parable to publicans and harlots who believed John. Their past refusal did not keep them from repentance. Their bad beginning did not have to be their final condition. When the message came, they responded.

This is a rebuke to religious people who think obvious sinners are beyond mercy. The first son's initial answer was wrong, but repentance changed the direction. A publican can

repent. A harlot can repent. A drunkard can repent. A thief can repent. A blasphemer can repent. A rebel can hear the word and turn. This does not excuse the earlier rebellion; it shows the mercy of God when the rebel stops defending it. The first son is not praised for saying "I will not." He is approved in comparison because he repented and went. A bad past is not the unpardonable sin when a man bows to God's word. A polished profession is no substitute for obedience.

Chapter 4: The Second Son Said Right but Did Wrong

The second son answers, "I go, sir." His words are respectful. He says "sir." He gives the proper answer. He sounds obedient. If someone heard only his reply, they would assume he was the better son. He knows how to speak. He knows how to address the father properly. He has the language of submission. But the Lord says, "and went not." That is the exposure. His mouth went, but his feet stayed. His profession was orthodox, but his obedience was absent. He represents the religious leaders perfectly. They had the titles, vocabulary, ceremonies, offices, and public claim of obedience, but when the will of God confronted them, they did not go.

This is one of the most dangerous conditions in religion: respectful disobedience. It says "sir" and stays home. It calls Jesus "Lord" but does not the things which He says. It honors God with lips while the heart is far from Him. It answers correctly in public but refuses privately. It loves the appearance of submission but hates the reality of obedience. That is exactly the spirit of the chief priests and elders. They looked like the obedient son. They had the temple, the Scriptures, the public prayers, the religious authority, the outward association with God's vineyard. But when John came in the way of righteousness, they refused him. When Christ came, they challenged Him.

This applies painfully to modern religious talkers. A man can say he believes the Bible and still refuse the Bible when it corrects him. He can say he believes salvation is by grace and still smuggle in works. He can say he believes in holiness and still live in secret sin. He can say he believes in the Great Commission and never witness. He can say he believes in prayer and never pray. He can say he believes in the King James Bible and then ignore its words when they cross his tradition. He can say "I go, sir" with his mouth while his life says "I will not." The second son is alive and well in churches, pulpits, comment sections, seminaries, and religious homes.

Chapter 5: Jesus Applies the Parable to Publicans, Harlots, and Religious Leaders

The Lord does not leave the application vague. After the leaders answer that the first son did the will of his father, Jesus says, "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." That statement would have landed like

lightning. Publicans and harlots were among the most despised classes in the eyes of religious Israel. Yet Jesus says they go into the kingdom before the chief priests and elders. Why? Not because sin does not matter. Not because publicans and harlots were secretly righteous. Not because God prefers immorality to religion. The reason is given in the next verse: John came in the way of righteousness, and they believed him, but the religious leaders did not.

That is the heart of the passage. Publicans and harlots, who had lived like the first son saying "I will not," repented at the preaching of John. The religious leaders, who had spent their lives saying "I go, sir," refused the messenger God sent. The issue is response to God's revelation. The sinners believed. The religious leaders did not. That is what made the difference. A publican who believes God's message is nearer the kingdom than a priest who rejects it. A harlot who repents under God's word is nearer the kingdom than an elder who hides behind religious authority. This destroys every system that trusts outward religious status.

The statement also shows that the kingdom context must be respected. Jesus is not giving Paul's later full Church Age explanation of justification by faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. He is speaking in Matthew's kingdom setting, dealing with Israel's leaders and the response to John's ministry. Publicans and harlots entering before the leaders is a kingdom rebuke. But the principle is consistent with the gospel of grace: God receives guilty sinners who believe His word, while self-righteous religious men remain condemned if they refuse the truth. The later fullness of the gospel does not weaken this parable. It shows the same God saving sinners and resisting the proud.

Chapter 6: Repentance Is More Than Words

The first son repented and went. That shows repentance in the parable has direction. It is not merely saying, "I should not have said that." It is not a religious mood. It is not public embarrassment. It is a change that results in obedience to the father's command. In the immediate setting, the publicans and harlots proved the reality of their repentance by believing John's message. They did not remain in the same posture of refusal. The second son had words without action. The first son had bad words at first, but repentance changed the outcome. The parable therefore exposes empty talk and honors genuine turning.

This must be handled carefully in relation to salvation. Repentance is not a meritorious work that purchases eternal life. A sinner is not saved because he has produced enough moral reform to pay for grace. Salvation in the present dispensation is by faith in Christ's finished work. But true repentance is never proud defense of sin. It is a change of mind toward God, self, sin, and truth, and where it is real, it changes direction. The publican who

believes God's word is not still standing there arguing that his rebellion was acceptable. The harlot who repents is not boasting in the far country. Repentance does not earn mercy; it stops making excuses against mercy.

This is a necessary rebuke today because many people want religious words without a changed direction. They say "Lord," but refuse God's will. They say "I believe," but remain hardened against the words of God. They say "I'm sorry," but do not go to the vineyard. They say "I'll pray about it," when they mean "I will delay obedience until conviction fades." They say "sir," but never move. The parable does not allow that hypocrisy to stand. The father's will is not done by words alone. The son who did the will of his father was the one who went.

Chapter 7: Right Division Protects Grace While Preserving the Rebuke

A careless interpreter can twist this parable into works salvation. He can say, "See, the one who went to work is the one who enters the kingdom; therefore salvation is by doing the work." That is not rightly dividing the word of truth. The passage is in Matthew's Gospel, in a kingdom setting, aimed at Israel's religious leaders, specifically in connection with John's ministry and their unbelief. The parable is not a doctrinal statement that Church Age justification is earned by vineyard labor. Paul later makes it unmistakably clear that the sinner is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Eternal life is the gift of God, not the wage of religious work.

But another careless interpreter can misuse right division to escape the rebuke entirely. He can say, "That is kingdom material, so it has nothing to say to me." That is also wrong. All Scripture is profitable. The parable still exposes empty profession, religious hypocrisy, and the danger of saying the right words while refusing God's will. A Church Age believer is saved by grace, but he is not called to be a second son who says "I go, sir" and goes not. A saved man should obey the Lord who bought him. A preacher should preach what God gave him. A teacher should teach honestly. A believer should respond to light. Grace does not make lip-service acceptable.

Right division therefore preserves both doctrines. It preserves grace by refusing to make vineyard work the basis of salvation. It preserves obedience by refusing to excuse empty religious talk. The publicans and harlots did not enter before the leaders because sin is better than religion. They entered before them because they believed the message while the religious leaders refused it. The issue is faith responding to God's word, repentance changing direction, and the exposure of men who use religious profession to cover disobedience. That truth is needed in every age.

Conclusion

The parable of the Two Sons is a direct rebuke of verbal profession without obedience. One son says, “I will not,” but afterward repents and goes. The other says, “I go, sir,” but goes not. When Jesus asks which did the will of the father, the answer is obvious: the first. Then the Lord applies the parable to publicans, harlots, and religious leaders. The publicly sinful believed John’s message and repented, while the outwardly religious refused to believe even after seeing the evidence. The men who looked like the obedient son were exposed as disobedient. The ones who looked hopeless were entering before them.

Rightly divided, the parable belongs in Matthew’s kingdom setting and should not be turned into Church Age salvation by works. The gospel of grace is not that a sinner earns justification by working in the vineyard. The gospel is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, and the sinner is saved by faith in Him. But the passage still rebukes empty profession with full force. Saying “sir” is not obedience. Wearing a religious label is not faith. Holding an office is not submission. Knowing the right language is not the same as doing the will of God when His word confronts you.

The lesson is sharp enough to search every heart. It is better to have a bad beginning and repent than to have polished words and refuse God. It is better to be a publican who believes the message than a priest who dodges it. It is better to come out of open rebellion and go to the vineyard than to sit in religious respectability saying, “I go, sir,” while never moving. God is not impressed with the sound of obedience when the feet remain still. The father’s will is done by the son who goes.

32 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Wicked Husbandmen

Introduction

The parable of the Wicked Husbandmen is one of the clearest and most direct indictments the Lord Jesus Christ ever gave against Israel’s religious rulers. This is not a vague moral tale about being better tenants, improving leadership skills, or learning to share the harvest. It is a courtroom charge spoken by the Son of God against men who had been entrusted with spiritual responsibility and had turned stewardship into rebellion. The Lord speaks of a householder who planted a vineyard, hedged it round about, digged a winepress in it, built a tower, let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. When the time of fruit drew near, he sent servants to receive the fruits of it, but the husbandmen beat one, killed another, and stoned another. He sent more servants, and they did unto them likewise. Last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, “They will reverence my son.” But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him,

and let us seize on his inheritance." They caught him, cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. Then comes the question: what will the lord of the vineyard do unto those husbandmen? The answer is judgment.

The vineyard imagery is not new when Jesus gives this parable. Any chief priest, elder, scribe, or Pharisee with an Old Testament in his head should have heard Isaiah 5 ringing in his ears. There the Lord speaks of His wellbeloved having a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. He fenced it, gathered out the stones, planted it with the choicest vine, built a tower, made a winepress, and looked for grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. Isaiah then identifies the vineyard: "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant." That Old Testament background is not optional. Jesus is deliberately using vineyard language that indicts Israel's stewardship and leadership. The householder is God. The vineyard is connected with Israel's national privilege. The husbandmen are the leaders entrusted with responsibility. The servants are the prophets and messengers God sent. The son is Christ Himself. The murder of the son points straight to the rejection and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ outside the gate. This parable is prophecy and indictment in one.

Rightly divided, the parable must not be stolen from its Jewish, kingdom, and national setting and turned into a generic sermon about "being fruitful" with no doctrinal backbone. There is application, but the interpretation is clear. Israel's rulers had rejected the prophets, would reject the Son, and would face judgment. Jesus Himself says, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." That statement must be handled carefully. It does not mean God is finished with Israel forever, and it does not mean the Church becomes Israel in a replacement-theology sense. Romans 11 forbids that pride. But it does mean the kingdom privilege and stewardship held by those leaders would be taken from them because of rejection and fruitlessness. God will have fruit. If entrusted husbandmen refuse the owner, beat his servants, and murder his son, the owner does not shrug and congratulate them for being religious. He destroys those wicked men and lets out the vineyard to others who will render fruits in their seasons.

Chapter 1: The Vineyard Belongs to the Householder

The parable begins with a householder planting a vineyard. That settles ownership before any conflict begins. The vineyard does not belong to the husbandmen. They did not create it. They did not plant it. They did not hedge it. They did not dig the winepress. They did not build the tower. They were tenants, not owners. Their position was stewardship, not sovereignty. That is the first truth the religious rulers had forgotten. God had entrusted Israel's leaders with responsibility over His people, His law, His temple service, His

vineyard, and His national testimony. But they began to act as though the vineyard were theirs. That is always the beginning of religious corruption: stewards start acting like owners.

The details show the householder's care. He plants, hedges, digs, builds, and lets out. The vineyard is not neglected. It is prepared. The hedge speaks of separation and protection. The winepress speaks of expected fruit. The tower speaks of oversight and watchfulness. Everything necessary for fruitfulness was provided. This lines up perfectly with Israel's privilege. God did not leave Israel in darkness. He gave them the covenants, the law, the prophets, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the temple, the promises, and the Scriptures. He separated them from the nations, protected them, corrected them, restored them, and continually dealt with them. If fruit did not come, the failure was not because the owner had been negligent.

This is a needed warning to every person entrusted with truth. Nothing we have began with us. The Bible was not our invention. The gospel was not our creation. The ministry is not our property. Children, churches, platforms, influence, spiritual understanding, and open doors are entrusted things. A preacher who thinks the flock belongs to him has become a wicked husbandman in spirit. A religious institution that thinks the word of God is subject to its authority has forgotten the owner of the vineyard. A nation or church with light that acts as though God owes it continued privilege is already moving toward judgment. The vineyard belongs to the Householder, and He has the right to come seeking fruit.

Chapter 2: The Husbandmen Were Stewards, Not Owners

The householder lets the vineyard out to husbandmen. That means they were given responsibility to work what belonged to another and render fruit at the proper time. Their place was honorable, but it was not absolute. Stewardship is a sacred thing precisely because it is accountable. A steward handles another man's goods. A husbandman tends another man's vineyard. He may labor in it, live near it, know its paths, understand its vines, and exercise daily authority within it, but he is still answerable to the owner. That distinction is the difference between faithfulness and rebellion.

Israel's rulers repeatedly forgot this. The priests, scribes, Pharisees, and elders sat in positions tied to Moses, the temple, the law, and national instruction. They were supposed to care for God's people, teach God's words, receive God's messengers, and prepare the nation for her Messiah. Instead, many of them used their positions to protect themselves. They devoured widows' houses, loved greetings in the markets, loved chief seats, made void the commandment of God by tradition, shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, and rejected the counsel of God against themselves. Their authority became self-serving.

They stopped asking what the owner wanted and started protecting their control over the vineyard.

That same spirit can appear anywhere religious authority is entrusted. A pastor can forget the sheep belong to Christ. A teacher can forget truth belongs to God. A ministry can forget its platform belongs to the Lord. A Bible college can forget it exists to serve the word, not correct it. A denomination can forget that history does not equal ownership. Once stewards begin to think, “This is ours,” they will resent the owner’s claims. They will resist His messengers, fear His Son, and defend their inheritance as though God were the intruder. That is the madness of religious power. It can stand inside God’s vineyard and treat God’s representatives like trespassers.

Chapter 3: The Servants Represent the Prophets God Sent

When the time of fruit drew near, the householder sent his servants to the husbandmen to receive the fruits. The husbandmen took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Then the owner sent other servants more than the first, and they did unto them likewise. The servants plainly picture the prophets and messengers God sent to Israel. The Old Testament is full of God sending prophets to call the nation back, rebuke idolatry, expose injustice, warn of judgment, and demand fruit. Again and again, Israel’s leadership and people resisted, mocked, persecuted, imprisoned, and killed the messengers. Jesus later says Jerusalem kills the prophets and stones them which are sent unto her.

This history is not hidden. Jeremiah was opposed, beaten, put in stocks, and cast into a dungeon. Micaiah was struck and imprisoned. Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was stoned in the court of the house of the Lord. Elijah was hunted. Amos was rejected. Isaiah, according to Jewish tradition, was sawn asunder. Stephen in Acts 7 later asks Israel’s council, “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?” That question summarizes the history behind the parable. God sent servant after servant, and the response of the wicked husbandmen was violence. The problem was not that God had failed to speak. The problem was that the leaders hated the message.

The persecution of the servants shows how rebellious religion treats correction. It does not merely ignore the messenger; it attacks him. Why? Because the messenger reminds the husbandmen that they are not owners. The prophet comes asking for fruit on behalf of the Lord of the vineyard, and that exposes the husbandmen’s theft. A faithful preacher is hated for the same reason when he speaks for God instead of flattering men. He reminds religious people that God has a claim. False religion can tolerate ceremonial speech, moral generalities, and harmless inspiration, but it hates the man who says, “The owner is coming for fruit.” That kind of preaching gets servants beaten.

Chapter 4: The Sending of the Son Reveals the Fullness of Their Rebellion

The parable reaches its climax when the householder says, “They will reverence my son.” This is not a statement of ignorance in God, as though God did not know what would happen. It is the moral exposure of the husbandmen. If they had any reverence at all for the owner, surely they would reverence his son. The son comes with a higher claim than the servants. He is not merely another messenger. He is the heir. Their response to him reveals the full measure of their rebellion. When the Son appears, neutrality disappears. They must either reverence him or kill him.

This is exactly what happened when Jesus Christ came to Israel. God had sent prophets, but in these last days He spoke by His Son. The Lord Jesus Christ did not come as one prophet among many in the ordinary sense. He came as the Son, the Heir, the King, the Word made flesh. He had authority over the vineyard because He was not merely a servant in the house; He was Son over His own house. His miracles, words, holiness, fulfillment of prophecy, authority over devils, power over sickness, command over nature, and resurrection power all testified to who He was. The rulers understood enough to fear what His presence meant. If they received Him, their control ended. If they rejected Him, their rebellion reached its peak.

The husbandmen say, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.” That sentence is the insanity of religious ambition. They think killing the son will secure the vineyard. They imagine rebellion can preserve their power. In the Gospels, the leaders repeatedly fear losing their place, influence, and nation. In John 11, after Lazarus is raised, they say that if they let Jesus alone, all men will believe on Him, and the Romans will come and take away both their place and nation. Their solution is death. That is the husbandmen’s reasoning in historical form. They would rather murder the heir than surrender the vineyard.

Chapter 5: They Cast Him Out and Slew Him

The parable says they caught the son, cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. This points directly to the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 13 says Jesus suffered without the gate. The Son was rejected by the leaders, delivered to Gentiles, mocked, scourged, crucified, and slain outside the city. The parable is not a vague symbol of general human meanness. It is prophetic. Jesus is telling the rulers what they are going to do, and He is doing it in a way that forces them to pronounce judgment on themselves.

This detail also shows the wickedness of religious murder. These men did not kill the son because he was a criminal. They killed him because he was the heir. Their crime was not a misunderstanding of a minor detail. It was rebellion against rightful authority. The cross

was not merely a tragic accident of political tension. It was the deliberate rejection of God's Son by sinful men, including Israel's rulers and Gentile authority. From the human side, it was the worst crime ever committed. From the divine side, it was the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God, by which Christ died for sins. Both truths stand. Wicked hands crucified Him, and God used the cross for redemption.

Right division is needed here. The parable indicts Israel's rulers, but it should not become an excuse for Gentile boasting or hatred of Jewish people. The Gentiles had their part in the crucifixion too. Pilate condemned Him. Roman soldiers nailed Him. The sins of the world put Him there. The Bible believer must reject anti-Semitic foolishness while still believing the parable's direct indictment of the national leadership. Peter in Acts speaks plainly to Israel about what they did, and Paul later explains Israel's blindness in part without allowing Gentiles to boast against the branches. The Son was slain, and every sinner who has ever been saved is saved by the blood shed in that rejection.

Chapter 6: The Lord of the Vineyard Will Judge the Wicked Husbandmen

Jesus asks what the lord of the vineyard will do to those husbandmen. The answer given is severe: "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." Mark and Luke record the same essential judgment. The rulers understand the force of it, and in Luke they answer, "God forbid." They know the parable has turned on them. This is not a gentle invitation to improve management style. It is a sentence of judgment. The husbandmen who beat the servants and murder the son will be destroyed, and their stewardship will be taken.

Historically, this looks toward the judgment that came upon Jerusalem and the temple, especially in A.D. 70, though the full prophetic dealings with Israel continue beyond that. The national leadership rejected the Son. The temple system was later overthrown. The city was destroyed. The people were scattered. The visible structures in which those rulers trusted did not protect them. The vineyard owner was not powerless. The husbandmen could kill the son, but they could not keep the vineyard. Their rebellion brought ruin.

This also reveals a broader principle: God does not leave stewardship forever in the hands of men who refuse Him fruit. Privilege can be removed. Offices can be emptied. Candlesticks can be moved. Ministries can be set aside. Nations can lose light. Churches can lose usefulness. A man may think his position is secure because of history, title, or influence, but the Owner is still alive. He can remove wicked husbandmen and give stewardship to others. The parable is a warning to every leader who thinks God's patience

means God's permission. The servants may be beaten, and the Son may be rejected, but judgment is coming.

Chapter 7: The Kingdom Taken and Given to a Fruitful Nation

Jesus applies the parable with a statement that must be handled carefully: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." This is one of the strongest kingdom transfer statements in the Gospels. The "you" is directed at the leaders He is confronting. The kingdom privilege and stewardship connected with their leadership would be taken from them. They had failed to render fruit. They had rejected the servants. They would murder the Son. God would not allow them to retain stewardship as though nothing happened. The kingdom would be given to a nation bringing forth fruits.

The meaning of "a nation" has been debated, but several safeguards are necessary. It cannot mean God is finished with Israel forever, because Romans 11 says blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, and then all Israel shall be saved. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. It cannot mean the Church simply becomes Israel and inherits every national covenant in a replacement-theology sense. That is Gentile boasting, and Paul forbids it. It does mean that the unfruitful leadership and that generation's kingdom stewardship are judged, and God will have a people bringing forth fruit. In a near sense, the apostolic remnant and believing Jewish nucleus, later joined by Gentiles in the unfolding mystery of the Church, bear witness after the rulers reject Christ. In a future sense, a repentant Israel will yet bring forth fruit when God restores the nation under Messiah.

The stone quotation confirms the Christ-centered judgment. Jesus says, "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner." The builders rejected the stone, but God exalted Him. That is the resurrection and exaltation of Christ over against the judgment of the rulers. The rejected Son becomes the cornerstone. The murdered Heir becomes the risen Lord. The leaders' rejection does not defeat God's purpose. It fulfills Scripture and becomes the basis upon which God brings in something greater than their corrupt stewardship ever imagined.

Conclusion

The parable of the Wicked Husbandmen is a direct indictment of Israel's rulers. The householder planted a vineyard, hedged it, provided for it, and let it out to husbandmen. At the time of fruit, he sent servants, and they beat, killed, and stoned them. He sent more, and they did likewise. Last of all he sent his son, and they murdered him in an attempt to seize the inheritance. The meaning is not hidden. God entrusted Israel's leaders with

stewardship. He sent prophets. They rejected and persecuted them. Then He sent His Son. They rejected Him and would soon deliver Him to be crucified. The parable is prophetic history before it happens.

The vineyard language ties directly to the Old Testament, especially Isaiah 5, where Israel is the Lord's vineyard and God looks for fruit. Jesus uses that imagery to expose the rulers standing before Him. They understood that He spoke of them. That is why they sought to lay hands on Him but feared the multitude. The parable struck its target. It showed that their issue was not ignorance but rebellion. They were not innocent tenants confused by the owner's request. They were wicked husbandmen who wanted the vineyard without the owner, the inheritance without the heir, and religious power without submission to God.

Rightly divided, the conclusion must be kept balanced. The kingdom taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth fruits does not erase Israel forever or make the Church a simple replacement Israel. God still has future dealings with Israel, and Romans 11 must be believed. But the unfruitful leadership and that generation's rejection brought judgment, and God transferred stewardship away from those wicked husbandmen. The rejected stone became the head of the corner. The murdered Son rose from the dead. The Owner of the vineyard was not defeated. He will have fruit, He will judge rebellion, and He will never surrender His vineyard to men who think killing the Son gives them the inheritance.

33 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Marriage of the King's Son

Introduction

The parable of the Marriage of the King's Son in Matthew 22 is one of the most doctrinally loaded parables in the Gospel of Matthew, and it must be handled with care because it contains invitation, rejection, murder, judgment, a city burned, a wider gathering from the highways, a wedding furnished with guests, and finally a man cast into outer darkness because he had no wedding garment. This is not a little moral story about being polite when invited to a party. This is kingdom truth spoken by the King in the closing stretch of His public conflict with Israel's religious rulers. Matthew 22:1 begins, "And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son." That first sentence sets the frame. This is a kingdom of heaven parable. The central figure is a king. The marriage is for his son. The invited guests refuse. The king sends servants again. Some make light of it and go their ways, one to his farm and another to his merchandise. Others take the servants, entreat them spitefully, and slay them. The king then sends forth his armies, destroys those

murderers, and burns up their city. A man who misses the Jewish and kingdom weight of that language is not reading Matthew; he is reading his system into Matthew.

This parable stands close to the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, where Israel's rulers are exposed as men who rejected God's servants and would murder the Son. The chief priests and Pharisees understood that Jesus spoke of them. Now the Lord gives another parable pressing the same indictment from another angle. In the Wicked Husbandmen, the issue is a vineyard, fruit, servants, and the murdered heir. In the Marriage of the King's Son, the issue is a royal invitation, refusal, mistreatment of messengers, judgment, and replacement guests brought in from the highways. The pattern is unmistakable. God sent prophets. Israel's rulers rejected them. God sent more witnesses. The nation's privileged class rejected the invitation. The Son is central. Judgment falls. The invitation goes wider. But the wider invitation does not mean men can enter on their own terms. The king still inspects the guests. The man without the wedding garment is not treated as a harmless victim of confusion. He is speechless. He is bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The parable ends, "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Rightly divided, the wedding garment must not be reduced to a shallow cliché, nor should it be forced into a careless Church Age tract without regard for Matthew's kingdom context. Yes, there is a great gospel principle here: no man enters God's presence clothed in his own filthy righteousness. God must provide the proper covering. Adam's fig leaves did not do; God made coats of skins. Joshua the high priest needed filthy garments removed and a change of raiment given. Isaiah spoke of the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness. In the present Church Age, the believer's standing is in Christ, not in self-righteousness. But in Matthew 22 the direct issue is kingdom entrance, the King's terms, Israel's rejection, judgment, and the danger of coming into the feast without what the King requires. The man without the garment is not a poor fellow who did his best and missed a detail. He is speechless because the provision was available and required, and he refused it. Self-prepared religion cannot stand under the King's inspection.

Chapter 1: The Marriage Is Made by the King for His Son

The parable begins with a king making a marriage for his son. That sets the whole atmosphere. This is not a village supper, a casual gathering, or a private family meal. It is a royal marriage. The dignity of the invitation comes from the dignity of the king and the son. The king is not asking men to attend something small. He is summoning them to honor his son. Therefore, refusal of the invitation is not merely social rudeness. It is rebellion against royal authority and contempt for the son. That is why the parable becomes so severe. The

invited guests are not neutral men with scheduling difficulties. They are dishonoring the king and his son.

In Matthew's Gospel, the Son is no mystery. Jesus Christ is the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the beloved Son, the King of Israel, and the One whom the Father will glorify. The marriage for the son shows the Father's purpose to honor the Son. God's program is Christ-centered. Israel's leaders acted as though the vineyard, the temple, the law, the people, and the nation existed for their own religious authority. This parable corrects that. The kingdom is not for the glory of the Pharisees, priests, scribes, elders, or any religious institution. The marriage is for the King's Son. Everything God does ultimately magnifies Jesus Christ. The Son is the issue.

This matters for every religious system. Men want God's blessings while slighting God's Son. They want a kingdom without the King, morality without the cross, prophecy without the Messiah, religion without Christ's authority, and heaven without the wedding garment. God will not have it. The Father is not hosting a feast to celebrate human religion. He is making a marriage for His Son. If a man dishonors the Son, he has dishonored the King who sent Him. No amount of religious vocabulary can repair that. The question is not whether a man appreciates spiritual banquets in general. The question is what he does with the Son.

Chapter 2: The First Invited Guests Refused to Come

The king sends forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding, and "they would not come." That phrase is simple and damning. They were already bidden, meaning they were the privileged invited ones. In the immediate historical setting, this points to Israel, especially the leaders and privileged class who had received the promises, prophets, covenants, and kingdom expectation. They were not strangers to the idea of Messiah and kingdom blessing. They had been bidden through centuries of revelation. Yet when the time came and the servants called them to the prepared marriage, they refused. The issue is will: "they would not come."

That refusal is not based on lack of provision. The king has made the marriage. The invitation is sent. Later he says, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner." The oxen and fatlings are killed. All things are ready. The refusal is in the guests, not in the feast. That is one of the great truths about unbelief. Men often pretend they need more evidence, more time, more explanation, more signs, more accommodation, or more convenience. But beneath many excuses is the simple truth: they will not come. Jesus said elsewhere, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." The will is involved. The invited guests refused the king's summons because their hearts were elsewhere.

This is exactly what happened in the Lord's earthly ministry. The King came unto His own, and His own received Him not. John came preparing the way, and the leaders rejected the counsel of God against themselves. Christ preached, healed, cleansed, raised, warned, and invited, yet the rulers would not come. Their refusal was not ignorance in the darkness. It was rejection in the light. That makes it worse. The greater the invitation, the greater the guilt of refusal. The King's Son was being honored, and they would not come.

Chapter 3: The Second Call Was Met With Indifference and Violence

The king sends forth other servants, saying, "Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." This second call shows patience and renewed mercy. The king does not immediately destroy them after the first refusal. He sends again. He explains the readiness of the provision. He presses the invitation. That is the longsuffering of God toward Israel. Again and again God sent messengers. Even after rejection, further witness was given. In the Gospels and Acts, Israel receives repeated testimony. God is not rash in judgment. He sends, and sends again.

The responses divide into two kinds. Some make light of it and go their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise. Others take the servants, entreat them spitefully, and slay them. That is a perfect picture of unbelief. Some reject God through indifference; others reject through persecution. The farm and merchandise are not evil in themselves. The issue is that ordinary earthly interests become more important than the king's invitation. Farm and business outrank the son's marriage. This is the same spirit seen in the Great Supper. Men miss divine summons for land, oxen, marriage, commerce, and routine life. They do not always curse the king. Sometimes they simply make light of him.

But others go further and murder the servants. That points to Israel's long history of persecuting the prophets and messengers, and it also reaches into the apostolic witness after Christ's resurrection. Stephen is stoned. James is killed. Apostles are beaten. Messengers are persecuted. The parable's violence is not decorative. Jesus is exposing the blood-guilt of religious rebellion. When men hate the King's message, they eventually hate the King's messengers. Indifference and violence may look different, but they come from the same root: refusal to honor the Son on the King's terms.

Chapter 4: The King's Judgment Falls on the Murderers and Their City

When the king hears of the murder of his servants, he is wroth. He sends forth his armies, destroys those murderers, and burns up their city. This is severe language, and it should not be softened. The king does not treat the rejection as a minor discourtesy. The murderers are judged. Their city is burned. In Matthew's historical and prophetic setting, this strongly

points toward the judgment that came upon Jerusalem, especially in A.D. 70, when the city and temple were destroyed. The rulers rejected Christ, persecuted the messengers, and judgment came. The parable spoke beforehand of the consequences of rejecting the royal invitation and abusing the king's servants.

This does not mean every detail of A.D. 70 exhausts all prophetic judgment language in Matthew, nor does it mean God is finished with Israel forever. Right division requires balance. Israel's national rejection brought real judgment, but Romans 11 says Israel's blindness is partial and temporary. God still has future dealings with Israel. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. The burning of the city in this parable shows judgment on that guilty generation and leadership, but it does not cancel every covenant God made with the fathers. Gentiles have no right to boast over the branches. Judgment on rebellious Israel is Bible doctrine; replacement arrogance is not.

The severity of the judgment also rebukes modern soft preaching. Men want a king who invites but never judges, sends servants but never avenges them, honors his son but tolerates contempt of him forever. That is not the king in the parable. The same king who prepares the feast destroys the murderers. The same royal authority that invites also judges. God's goodness does not erase His wrath. If men refuse the Son and abuse the messengers, they will not escape because the invitation was gracious. Grace despised becomes judgment intensified.

Chapter 5: The Highways Show the Invitation Going Wider

After judgment on the first invited guests, the king says to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy." Then he commands them to go into the highways and gather together as many as they find. The servants go out into the highways and gather all as many as they find, both bad and good, and the wedding is furnished with guests. This shows the widening of the invitation beyond the original privileged group. Those who were first bidden refused, so the call goes outward. The house will not remain empty because the first guests despised the king's son.

This fits the great biblical pattern seen in the Gospels and Acts. Israel's leadership rejects. Publicans and sinners enter before the religious rulers. The poor, maimed, halt, and blind are brought. The gospel eventually goes beyond Jerusalem, beyond Judea, to Samaria and the uttermost parts. Paul turns to the Gentiles repeatedly when Jewish opposition hardens. Again, Matthew 22 is not a full Pauline mystery passage, but the pattern is clear: rejection by the privileged opens a wider field of invitation. God will fill the wedding. His Son will be honored. Men's refusal does not defeat the King's purpose.

The phrase “both bad and good” is important. The gathering is broad, but broad gathering is not the same as final acceptance without inspection. The servants gather all kinds. The wedding is furnished. But the king still comes in to see the guests. This guards against the idea that because the invitation widens, standards vanish. God’s mercy goes far, but God does not surrender His authority. The highways may be searched, but the king still requires the proper garment. Grace invites men who were not originally honored guests, but grace does not let them enter on their own terms. The widening invitation magnifies mercy; it does not abolish judgment.

Chapter 6: The Wedding Garment Was Required Provision

When the king comes in to see the guests, he sees a man who has not on a wedding garment. He says, “Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” The man is speechless. That silence is crucial. He has no defense. He does not say, “No garment was provided.” He does not say, “I was too poor to obtain one.” He does not say, “No one told me.” He does not say, “I was confused.” He is speechless because he is guilty. The required garment was available and expected, and he came without it. The king’s question exposes the man’s presumption. He entered the feast, but he rejected the king’s provision or requirement.

The wedding garment should not be reduced to a shallow slogan, but the doctrinal principle is unmistakable: no man stands accepted before God in his own covering. The Bible repeatedly contrasts man-made covering with God-provided covering. Adam and Eve made fig leaves; God clothed them with coats of skins. Isaiah speaks of all our righteousnesses as filthy rags, but also of garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness. Joshua the high priest stands in filthy garments and receives a change of raiment. In the Church Age, the believer is accepted in Christ and clothed in a righteousness not his own. In Matthew’s kingdom setting, the man without the garment shows the danger of trying to enter the king’s feast without the king’s required provision.

This man is not a poor sincere victim. He is speechless. That matters because men today love to sentimentalize judgment until the guilty look like victims of divine harshness. The king is not cruel for requiring the garment. The man is presumptuous for refusing it. He wanted the feast without the covering. He wanted the benefits of the invitation without submission to the terms of the king. That is self-prepared religion. It walks into sacred things wearing its own righteousness, its own merit, its own sincerity, its own tradition, its own works, its own spiritual costume, and then acts surprised when God inspects it. But under the King’s eye, self-made garments fail.

Chapter 7: Outer Darkness Shows the Seriousness of Coming on One’s Own Terms

The king says to the servants, “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” That is not mild correction. That is judgment. The man without the wedding garment is not merely moved to a lower seat. He is bound and cast out. The language of outer darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth appears in Matthew in serious kingdom judgment contexts. This is why the parable must not be turned into a soft illustration about forgetting proper attire. It is about entering a royal feast on one’s own terms and being rejected under inspection.

This judgment also prevents a sloppy view of invitation. Many are called, but few are chosen. The call goes out broadly. The highways are searched. Bad and good are gathered. But the king’s inspection remains. Being in the visible gathering is not the same as final acceptance. A man may be among the guests and still be exposed by the king. In Matthew’s setting, that is a warning to those who assume outward association with the kingdom invitation is enough. The kingdom is not entered by presumption. The King’s terms matter. The Son’s honor matters. The garment matters.

In Church Age application, this warns against every form of self-righteous religion. A man may be near Christianity, inside a church, active in religious circles, familiar with Bible language, and still clothed in himself. He may have morality, baptism, sacraments, charity, tradition, reform, emotional experiences, doctrinal labels, or religious heritage, but if he is not in Christ, he has no proper covering. The gospel of grace gives the full answer: the sinner must be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith. Matthew 22 is not a Pauline doctrinal treatise, but it agrees with the whole Bible’s witness that God rejects self-prepared religion. The man without the garment is cast out because he came without what the king required.

Conclusion

The parable of the Marriage of the King’s Son is a kingdom parable full of Israel’s rejection, royal invitation, judgment, widened mercy, and final inspection. The king makes a marriage for his son. The first invited guests refuse to come. More servants are sent, announcing that all things are ready, but some make light of it and go to farm and merchandise, while others mistreat and murder the servants. The king judges those murderers and burns their city. The invitation then goes out to the highways, and the wedding is furnished with guests. This is not a vague moral lesson. It is a direct indictment of those who rejected the King’s Son and the messengers sent to call them.

Rightly divided, the passage belongs in Matthew’s kingdom setting and must not be flattened into careless Church Age clichés. Israel’s privileged leaders rejected the invitation, and judgment followed. The invitation widened, but the King’s authority did not

disappear. The gathering of bad and good from the highways did not mean anyone could remain on his own terms. The king came in to inspect the guests, and the man without the wedding garment was exposed. He was not confused. He was speechless. He had no answer because he had rejected the required provision.

The warning is severe and needed. God supplies the proper covering, and God rejects self-prepared religion. No man honors the Son while refusing the King's terms. No man enters the feast because he likes the atmosphere but despises the garment. No man stands before God clothed in his own righteousness and survives inspection. The invitation is gracious, the provision is ready, the Son will be honored, and the King will fill the wedding. But the man who comes in his own covering will find out too late that religious presumption is not the wedding garment.

34 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Fig Tree Lesson

Introduction

The Fig Tree Lesson is one of the most abused prophetic teachings in the Gospels because men either run too far with it into reckless date-setting or run away from it into lazy unbelief that refuses to recognize any prophetic markers at all. The Lord Jesus Christ says in Matthew 24:32-33, "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." Mark 13 and Luke 21 give parallel statements, with Luke adding, "Behold the fig tree, and all the trees." The point is simple on the surface. A fig tree putting forth leaves teaches discernment. When the branch is tender and leaves appear, men know summer is near. In the same way, when the signs Christ has just described begin to appear in their proper prophetic setting, the generation seeing those things is to know that the end is near. The Lord is not telling men to be blind. He is telling them to watch intelligently. But He is also not telling men to set dates. He says later that of that day and hour knoweth no man. A wise man keeps both truths: signs matter in their setting, and date-setting is forbidden.

The key to this passage is context. Matthew 24 is not Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians, though there are related prophetic truths and both must be harmonized. Matthew 24 begins with the disciples asking about the destruction of the temple, the sign of Christ's coming, and the end of the world. The Lord then speaks of false Christs, wars, rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution, betrayal, false prophets, the gospel of the kingdom, the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, flight from

Judea, great tribulation, cosmic signs, and the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. That is not a description of the ordinary Christian life in the Church Age. That is prophetic, Jewish, kingdom, tribulational, and Second Advent material. The fig tree lesson comes after those signs. Therefore, the "when ye shall see all these things" must refer to the things He has just described, not to every political headline, earthquake report, eclipse, war rumor, or social trend that excites prophecy hobbyists.

Rightly divided, the Fig Tree Lesson helps separate the Rapture of the Church from the Second Advent of Christ to the earth. The Church is looking for the blessed hope, the catching away of the Body of Christ, which is not dependent upon Israel watching Matthew 24 signs unfold through Daniel's seventieth week. The Second Advent, however, is preceded by identifiable signs in the Tribulation, including the abomination of desolation and cosmic disturbances. Israel's prophetic program has signs. The Church's blessed hope is imminent. If a man confuses those two, he will either put the Church into Israel's Tribulation or rob Israel's prophetic signs of their force. The fig tree often points toward Israel, and the prophetic setting must not be ignored. But even if a man emphasizes Luke's phrase "and all the trees," the lesson still stands: when God gives signs in their proper context, wise men pay attention. When God withholds the day and hour, wise men refuse date-setting. The Bible believer is not a date-setter, but neither is he a prophecy denier.

Chapter 1: The Fig Tree Lesson Must Be Read After the Signs Christ Gave

The Lord says, "So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things." Those words require the reader to look backward in the chapter. What things? Not whatever a modern prophecy teacher wants to pull from a newspaper. Not whatever political movement happens to be trending. Not whatever technology scares people this week. The things in view are the signs and events Christ has just listed in Matthew 24. False Christs, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution, the gospel of the kingdom preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, great tribulation, false prophets and false signs, cosmic disturbances, and the Son of man coming in the clouds with power and great glory. The fig tree lesson is attached to that context.

This matters because careless prophecy handling often begins by disconnecting a phrase from its setting. Men grab "fig tree," run to a modern event, build a chart, attach a date, and then act shocked when the date passes and unbelievers mock the Bible. The problem was not the Bible. The problem was the man who refused context. Jesus does not say, "When you see any interesting event anywhere in the world, start calculating the date." He says when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. The signs belong to a specific prophetic sequence, and that sequence is tied to Israel, Judea, the temple context, Daniel's prophecy, the Tribulation, and the coming of the Son of man.

The same rule protects the reader from the opposite error. Some people see date-setting abuses and conclude no signs matter at all. That is also wrong. Jesus says the signs do teach nearness when seen in their proper setting. He does not rebuke men for knowing summer is near when the fig tree puts forth leaves. He uses that natural discernment as the lesson. The abuse of prophecy does not cancel prophecy. The failure of date-setters does not erase Matthew 24. The answer to sensationalism is not blindness; it is right division. Read the signs where Christ put them, and refuse to make them say what He did not say.

Chapter 2: The Fig Tree Often Points Toward Israel

The fig tree has strong connections with Israel in Scripture. It appears in national, prophetic, and agricultural imagery connected with fruitfulness, judgment, and restoration. Israel's peace and kingdom blessing can be pictured by sitting under the vine and fig tree. The absence of figs or the destruction of the fig tree can speak of judgment. The Lord's cursing of the barren fig tree in the Gospels is a living sermon against Israel's religious appearance without fruit. The parable of the Barren Fig Tree in Luke 13 points strongly toward Israel's national accountability under the ministry of Christ. So when Matthew 24 gives a fig tree lesson in a Jewish prophetic chapter, no careful Bible believer should pretend Israel has nothing to do with it.

That said, the fig tree lesson must not be made to carry more than the text states. Luke says, "Behold the fig tree, and all the trees." That means the immediate lesson includes a general principle of seasonal discernment: when trees put forth, summer is near. The fig tree may have a special Israel connection, but the parable's stated lesson is about recognizing nearness from visible signs. The danger is going beyond Scripture and building an entire speculative system around the fig tree as though every leaf is a modern geopolitical date marker. Israel matters. The fig tree matters. But the signs Christ listed in the chapter govern the interpretation.

A balanced reading recognizes both the national and the illustrative force. Israel is central to Matthew 24 because the chapter speaks of Judea, the sabbath, the holy place, Daniel's abomination of desolation, and the coming of the Son of man in a kingdom context. The fig tree therefore fits the Jewish prophetic atmosphere. At the same time, the visible budding of the tree teaches watchful discernment. When Israel's prophetic signs begin to unfold in their appointed context, the faithful are to know the end is near. The lesson is not that every generation gets to rename its favorite headline as the final leaf. The lesson is that God's prophetic markers are real and will mean something to the people appointed to see them.

Chapter 3: Matthew 24 Is Second Advent Ground, Not the Church's Blessed Hope

One of the greatest errors in handling the Fig Tree Lesson is confusing the Second Advent with the Rapture of the Church. Matthew 24 repeatedly speaks in terms connected with the Son of man coming after Tribulation signs. “Immediately after the tribulation of those days” the sun is darkened, the moon does not give her light, the stars fall, the powers of heaven are shaken, and then appears the sign of the Son of man in heaven. The tribes of the earth mourn, and they see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. That is public, visible, catastrophic, judgmental, and kingdom-connected. That is not the same doctrinal emphasis as the Church being caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Paul’s doctrine of the blessed hope gives the Church a different expectation. The Body of Christ waits for the Saviour from heaven. The dead in Christ rise first, then we which are alive and remain are caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. The emphasis is comfort, hope, and deliverance before the day of the Lord’s wrath. The Rapture is not presented as an event that can only happen after the abomination of desolation is seen by those in Judea. If a man makes Matthew 24 the Church’s direct rapture timetable, he has taken Israel’s Tribulation signs and hung them around the neck of the Body of Christ.

This distinction does not minimize Matthew 24. It puts it where God put it. The Church’s blessed hope is not dependent on the fig tree lesson. The Second Advent signs are. The Tribulation remnant, Israel, and those living under that prophetic pressure will need Matthew 24 in a way most modern prophecy dabblers do not understand. They will need to know about false Christs, the abomination of desolation, flight, endurance, and the nearness of the Son of man’s coming. The Church can learn from it, believe it, teach it, and be warned by its seriousness, but it should not steal it from its proper prophetic audience and then use it to create fear where God gave comfort.

Chapter 4: The Tribulation Provides the Setting for the Signs

The signs connected with the Fig Tree Lesson belong especially to the Tribulation context. Jesus speaks of the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place. He tells them in Judea to flee into the mountains. He warns about the sabbath. He says there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to that time, no, nor ever shall be. That language is not vague suffering. It points to a specific period of unparalleled trouble connected with Daniel’s prophetic program and Israel’s final national crisis before the kingdom. The fig tree puts forth leaves in that setting.

This is why prophecy must be rightly divided. General wars, earthquakes, and troubles have existed throughout history. Men have repeatedly seen troubles and concluded they were certainly in the last few months before the end. But Matthew 24’s signs are not merely

general troubles. They move toward a specific mid-tribulational event, the abomination of desolation, followed by great tribulation and then cosmic signs before the Son of man appears. The full pattern matters. A wise interpreter does not isolate one sign and pretend the entire sequence has arrived. He watches the order God gave.

For the people living in that time, the signs will not be academic. They will be survival truth. When the abomination stands in the holy place, those in Judea must flee. When false Christs and false prophets arise with great signs and wonders, the elect must not be deceived. When the cosmic signs appear, the coming of the Son of man is near. The fig tree lesson tells those people that prophecy is not random. God marks the season. The branch puts forth leaves. Summer is near. The King is at the doors. That is not date-setting. That is obedience to prophetic instruction.

Chapter 5: The Lesson Rejects Date-Setting

The same chapter that tells men to recognize the season also says, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man.” That sentence should shut the mouth of every date-setter. The Lord did not give the Fig Tree Lesson so men could announce the exact day of the Rapture, the exact day of the Second Advent, or some secret calendar code that overrides His warning. If a man claims to know the day and hour, he is already contradicting the passage. Prophetic discernment is not the same as date-setting. Knowing summer is near is not the same as naming the minute the first summer breeze will blow.

Date-setting damages the testimony of Bible prophecy. Every failed prediction gives scoffers another excuse to mock. The Bible did not fail. The date-setter failed. God’s words did not mislead anyone. A man’s speculation did. This is why Bible believers need discipline. It is one thing to say, “The Bible gives signs connected with Israel’s prophetic program, and when those signs appear in their proper setting, the end is near.” It is another thing to say, “I have calculated the date.” The first is faith in Scripture. The second is arrogance dressed as insight.

A man should also beware softer forms of date-setting. Some avoid naming a day but still imply certainty about a year, a feast day, a political term, an astronomical event, or a private calendar pattern. They keep moving the target and calling it watchfulness. That is not watchfulness. That is speculation with a Bible cover. The Lord’s warning stands. No man knows the day and hour. Watch, yes. Discern, yes. Study, yes. Believe prophecy, yes. But do not pretend God asked you to improve His timetable with your calculator.

Chapter 6: The Lesson Rejects Prophetic Blindness

While the passage rejects date-setting, it also rejects prophetic blindness. Jesus rebuked religious men in His day for being able to discern the face of the sky but not the signs of the

times. In the Fig Tree Lesson, He expects His hearers to learn from visible seasonal markers. When the fig tree puts forth leaves, ye know summer is near. So likewise, when ye see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. That is not optional ignorance. The Lord expects discernment. He does not praise men for shrugging at signs He Himself gave.

Modern Christianity often falls into a lazy reaction against prophecy abuse. Because some people have acted foolishly, others decide the safest position is to ignore prophecy altogether. They say, "No man knows the day or hour," and then use that as an excuse not to study anything else the Lord said. That is dishonest. The same Lord who said no man knows the day or hour also said learn the parable of the fig tree. The same chapter that forbids date-setting commands watchfulness. A man who uses one verse to cancel the rest of the chapter is not being balanced. He is being selective.

The Bible believer should neither chase every headline like a child chasing fireflies nor sleep through the prophetic markers God gave. He should know the difference between the Rapture and the Second Advent. He should know Israel's place in prophecy. He should know Daniel's seventieth week, the abomination of desolation, the time of Jacob's trouble, the gospel of the kingdom, the false Christ, and the coming of the Son of man. He should not be gullible, but he should not be blind. The fig tree lesson teaches watchful intelligence. When God gives signs, faith pays attention.

Chapter 7: The Generation Seeing These Things Will Not Pass Till All Be Fulfilled

The Lord says, "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." That statement has been debated, abused, and twisted because men argue over which generation is meant. In context, the strongest reading is that the generation seeing "all these things" unfold in the prophetic sequence will not pass until the fulfillment comes. The same "ye" that sees the signs knows the nearness. The generation that sees the fig tree put forth leaves in the full Matthew 24 sense will see the completion of the events leading to the Son of man's coming. The statement emphasizes certainty and compression once the final sequence begins.

This protects the text from both preterist reduction and wild speculation. The events of A.D. 70 were significant judgment and foreshadowing, but Matthew 24 includes elements that were not exhausted in A.D. 70: the abomination in the full Danielic sense, unparalleled great tribulation, cosmic signs, and the visible coming of the Son of man with power and great glory. Preterism tries to cram too much future glory into past judgment and ends up spiritualizing what the passage plainly says. On the other hand, date-setters try to identify

“this generation” from modern headlines and then set countdowns. Both errors mishandle the text. The generation in context is tied to seeing the full prophetic signs Christ described.

The certainty is reinforced by the Lord’s next words: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” That is the anchor. Prophecy rests on Christ’s words, not on man’s charts. The fig tree lesson is true because He spoke it. The signs will mean what He says they mean. The generation appointed to see them will not outrun their fulfillment. Heaven and earth are less permanent than the words of the King. That is where prophecy should leave a man: not obsessed with speculation, but anchored in the certainty of Scripture.

Conclusion

The Fig Tree Lesson teaches prophetic discernment in its proper context. When the fig tree’s branch is tender and puts forth leaves, men know summer is near. Likewise, when the signs Christ listed in Matthew 24 appear in their appointed setting, those who see them are to know that the end is near, even at the doors. The lesson is not vague. It is tied to the prophetic signs of the chapter: false Christs, tribulation, the abomination of desolation, Judea’s flight, cosmic signs, and the visible coming of the Son of man. The fig tree often points toward Israel, and Matthew 24 is filled with Jewish and kingdom context. That must not be ignored.

Rightly divided, this passage helps distinguish the Rapture of the Church from the Second Advent. The Church looks for the blessed hope and is not commanded to wait for Israel’s Tribulation signs before being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The Second Advent, however, is preceded by signs in the Tribulation, and those signs matter. The abomination of desolation, the time of Jacob’s trouble, the flight from Judea, and the coming of the Son of man belong to Israel’s prophetic program and the kingdom context. Confusing these truths creates fear, bad doctrine, and prophetic confusion.

The warning goes in two directions. Do not set dates. The Lord said no man knows the day and hour. Any man who claims to know what Christ said no man knows is already wrong. But do not become prophetically blind either. The Lord said to learn the parable of the fig tree. When God gives signs in their proper context, wise men pay attention. The Bible believer does not chase every headline, and he does not sleep through Scripture. He watches with discernment, divides the word rightly, refuses speculation, and trusts the words of Christ more than heaven and earth itself.

35 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Faithful and Evil Servants

Introduction

The parable of the Faithful and Evil Servants stands in one of the strongest prophetic sections of the Gospels, and it must not be ripped out of its setting and turned into a harmless leadership devotion for Sunday school workers. Matthew 24:45-51 says, “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?” The Lord then says, “Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.” But He also speaks of the evil servant who says in his heart, “My lord delayeth his coming,” and then begins to smite his fellowservants and to eat and drink with the drunken. The lord of that servant comes in a day when he looketh not for him and in an hour that he is not aware of, cuts him asunder, and appoints him his portion with the hypocrites, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. That is not soft language. That is not the Lord patting religious workers on the head and saying, “Try to do better.” It is a severe warning about stewardship, delay, abuse, worldliness, and accountability at the return of the Lord.

The context is Matthew 24, and that matters. The chapter deals with the destruction of the temple, the sign of Christ’s coming, the end of the world, false Christs, wars, famines, pestilences, persecution, the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, great tribulation, cosmic signs, and the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The parable of the Faithful and Evil Servants follows the fig tree lesson and the warning to watch because no man knows the day and hour. That gives the parable prophetic and kingdom weight. It is not first of all a Church Age passage about the judgment seat of Christ, though it contains principles that certainly apply to preachers, teachers, pastors, fathers, leaders, and anyone entrusted with feeding God’s people. Its doctrinal setting is watchfulness in view of the Lord’s return and accountability in a prophetic context. The servant is judged by what he does while the Lord is absent and how he behaves when he thinks the Lord delays.

Rightly divided, the passage must be handled with both caution and force. It should not be used to teach that a born-again member of the Body of Christ loses eternal life because he had a bad ministry season. The language of Matthew 24 is kingdom, prophetic, and connected with the coming of the Son of man, not the Church’s blessed hope as revealed through Paul. But neither should the passage be dismissed as irrelevant. It exposes a principle that cuts straight through every dispensation: a man’s view of the Lord’s return affects how he treats the Lord’s people. The faithful servant feeds the household in due season because he expects to answer to the Lord. The evil servant says in his heart that the lord delayeth, and that delay theology produces abuse, self-indulgence, and drunken

fellowship with the world. When a preacher stops watching for the Master, he often stops feeding the sheep. When a teacher no longer believes the Lord's return is a present accountability, he can become cruel, careless, or worldly. Delay in the heart produces decay in the service.

Chapter 1: The Servant Is Entrusted With the Lord's Household

The parable begins with a servant whom his lord has made ruler over his household. That phrase establishes stewardship. The household does not belong to the servant. The meat does not belong to the servant. The timing does not belong to the servant. The authority does not originate in the servant. Everything is entrusted. That is the first truth every preacher, teacher, father, pastor, and spiritual leader must remember. The people are not ours. The word is not ours. The ministry is not ours. The opportunity is not ours. The Master owns the house. The servant is appointed to feed, not to build a throne in the kitchen.

This is where many men go wrong. They begin as servants and slowly start acting like owners. A pastor begins to speak of "my church" in a way that no longer means responsibility but possession. A teacher begins to speak of "my people" as though God's saints exist to validate his ministry. A man with a platform begins to treat hearers like property. A denominational ruler begins to treat the household like a political machine. That is dangerous. The Lord made the servant ruler over the household for a purpose, and that purpose was not self-glory, control, ego, or personal empire. Authority in God's house is always accountable authority. The servant who forgets that is already moving toward evil.

The household needs meat. That is the reason for the appointment. The servant is not appointed mainly to entertain the household, impress the household, manipulate the household, brand the household, or beat the household. He is appointed to give them meat in due season. Feeding is the central duty. That means truth must be given, and it must be given at the proper time. A household cannot survive on speeches about the servant's greatness. It cannot grow on noise. It cannot be strengthened by religious sugar. It needs meat. The word of God, rightly divided and properly applied, is the food of God's people. A servant who does everything except feed has failed the assignment.

Chapter 2: Faithfulness Is Measured by Feeding in Due Season

The faithful and wise servant gives meat in due season. That phrase deserves careful attention. "Meat" speaks of nourishment, substance, doctrine, truth, and strengthening provision. "Due season" speaks of timing, discernment, and appropriateness. A faithful servant does not simply throw random food around the house and call it ministry. He knows what is needed, when it is needed, and how to provide it under the authority of the Master. There is milk for babes and meat for those of full age. There is comfort for the

broken, warning for the careless, correction for the erring, doctrine for the growing, rebuke for the rebellious, and encouragement for the weary. A faithful servant must know the difference.

This is a rebuke to preaching that is all hobbyhorse and no feeding. Some men have one subject, one grievance, one controversy, one pet doctrine, one target, and one tone. Every meal is the same. The household may need bread, but he serves pepper. The household may need meat, but he serves cotton candy. The household may need warning, but he serves entertainment. The household may need comfort, but he serves a beating. Feeding in due season requires more than having verses. It requires spiritual judgment, pastoral care, doctrinal balance, and submission to the Lord's purpose. A servant must not feed himself through the sermon while starving the household.

This also applies to right division. Meat in due season means the right truth in the right setting for the right people at the right time. A man can quote Scripture and still feed the wrong meal if he misapplies the passage. He can give Israel's Tribulation warnings to a trembling Church Age believer and call it meat, when he has actually produced confusion. He can give grace truths to excuse rebellion and call it balance, when he has actually served poison. He can preach prophecy without the gospel, or the gospel without discipleship, or correction without charity. Faithfulness is not merely speaking loudly. It is feeding accurately. The household belongs to the Lord, and His people deserve more than careless handling of His words.

Chapter 3: The Lord's Coming Is the Servant's Accountability

The Lord says, "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." That phrase places the servant's duty under the eye of the returning Lord. The issue is not whether men applaud him now. The issue is what the Lord finds when He comes. The faithful servant is not merely faithful in public seasons, special meetings, conferences, or moments when others are watching. He is found "so doing" when the Lord arrives. His service continues under the consciousness that the Master is coming. That expectation purifies his work. It keeps him from imagining that delay equals absence or that absence equals non-accountability.

In Matthew 24, the coming is tied to the prophetic coming of the Son of man, not the Pauline revelation of the Rapture in its full Church Age detail. That must be rightly divided. But the principle is still powerful. Every servant must work in light of the Lord's return and coming judgment. For the Church Age believer, the judgment seat of Christ is real. The Lord will test the quality of service. Wood, hay, and stubble will burn. Gold, silver, and precious stones will remain. The preacher who plays games with the household will answer. The

teacher who fed himself instead of the sheep will answer. The leader who used God's people to build his name will answer. Grace saves the believer from condemnation, but it does not cancel the audit of service.

The blessing is on the servant found doing his duty. That is beautifully plain. Not found speculating only. Not found boasting only. Not found criticizing only. Not found sleeping. Not found beating. Not found drunken with the world. Found feeding. Found serving. Found giving meat in due season. A man who wants the Lord's approval should not need to invent some dramatic secret. He should do what the Lord assigned. Feed the household. Watch. Serve. Stay faithful. The Master knows how to bless the servant who keeps working while others are distracted by delay.

Chapter 4: Delay Theology Begins in the Heart

The evil servant says "in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming." That is where the evil begins. He may not preach it openly at first. He may not write a doctrinal statement denying the return. He may still use the correct language in public. But in his heart, the Lord's coming has ceased to govern him. He believes he has time to act without consequence. He believes accountability is distant enough to ignore. Delay theology is not merely an eschatological position; it is a spiritual condition. When a man's heart says the Lord delays, his conduct begins to loosen.

This is one of the most dangerous forms of unbelief because it can hide behind normal life. The evil servant does not necessarily deny the lord will ever come. He simply pushes the coming far enough away to excuse present sin. That is how many people live. They believe judgment exists, but not today. They believe Christ is coming, but not in a way that disturbs their plans. They believe accountability is real, but functionally distant. So they delay obedience, delay repentance, delay reconciliation, delay service, delay prayer, delay feeding the household, delay getting serious. In the heart, "my lord delayeth" becomes permission to live like the Master is not at the door.

This attitude is deadly in ministry. A preacher who loses the practical expectation of the Lord's return will often become political, worldly, abusive, lazy, or self-indulgent. A teacher who no longer feels the weight of soon accountability may begin playing games with doctrine. A pastor who thinks the Master is far away may start treating the household as his own. Delay in the heart produces decay in the service. That is why prophecy matters practically. A man's eschatology is not just a chart on a wall. What he believes about the Lord's return affects how he feeds, how he watches, how he speaks, how he treats fellow servants, and how he handles authority.

Chapter 5: The Evil Servant Starts Beating Fellow Servants

The evil servant begins to smite his fellowservants. That is the first outward fruit of his inward delay. He stops seeing them as the lord's household and begins treating them as objects under his power. The man appointed to feed becomes a man who beats. That is one of the ugliest transformations in ministry. Authority that was given for nourishment becomes authority used for harm. The servant forgets he is a fellowservant and starts acting like a tyrant. The Lord's absence, misread by the servant, becomes an opportunity for abuse.

This has a direct warning for preachers and teachers. A man can become so accustomed to authority that he begins using truth as a whip rather than food. He can beat people with his knowledge, beat them with his office, beat them with fear, beat them with shame, beat them with constant suspicion, beat them with spiritual manipulation, and call it leadership. There is such a thing as biblical rebuke, and it is necessary. Paul told Timothy to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. But biblical rebuke is not the same as abusive domination. The faithful servant feeds and corrects as needed. The evil servant beats because he has become cruel.

The phrase "fellowservants" is important. The household may have order, but all servants remain under the same Lord. A preacher is not the Lord. A teacher is not the Lord. A pastor is not the owner. A father is not God. Anyone entrusted with authority must remember he is still a servant alongside others, not a master in place of Christ. When a man forgets that, he can justify almost anything. He can call control "protection," harshness "discernment," cruelty "boldness," and pride "authority." The Lord sees the beating. The Master will return. That is the warning.

Chapter 6: The Evil Servant Eats and Drinks With the Drunken

The evil servant not only beats his fellowservants; he eats and drinks with the drunken. That shows worldliness, self-indulgence, and corrupt fellowship. He is not feeding the household, but he is feeding himself with the wrong crowd. The drunken in Scripture are often connected with spiritual dullness, fleshly appetite, loss of sobriety, and worldly companionship. The evil servant moves from responsibility to indulgence. He neglects the table of the household and joins the table of the drunken. That is the second fruit of delay theology: after abuse comes compromise.

This is exactly what happens when spiritual leaders stop watching. They become intoxicated with the world's approval, methods, money, entertainment, politics, sensuality, celebrity, or comfort. They may not be physically drunk, though many are. They may be drunk with influence, drunk with applause, drunk with anger, drunk with controversy, drunk with ambition, drunk with success, drunk with fear of man, or drunk with the pleasures of

the present world. The point is that sobriety is gone. The servant is no longer governed by the Master's return. He is governed by appetite and company. He eats and drinks with those who are not watching for the Lord.

The faithful servant gives meat in due season. The evil servant consumes with the drunken. That contrast is powerful. A man cannot feed the household properly while intoxicated with the world. He may keep speaking, posting, preaching, and performing, but the food will be affected by the table where he sits. If he fellowships with the drunken, his message will lose sobriety. If he drinks deeply from the world, his discernment will blur. If his companions are mockers, compromisers, and worldly men, his service will rot. The Master's household needs sober servants, not drunken entertainers wearing religious language.

Chapter 7: The Lord Comes When the Evil Servant Is Not Ready

The lord of that servant comes in a day when he looketh not for him and in an hour that he is not aware of. That is the terror of the parable. The evil servant's entire conduct rests on the assumption of delay, and the lord's coming destroys that assumption. The delay was not denial. The absence was not abandonment. The waiting period was not permission. The servant misread the time, and the master returned unexpectedly. That is exactly what the Lord has been warning throughout the chapter: watch, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

The judgment language is severe. The lord cuts him asunder and appoints him his portion with the hypocrites, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is not the language of minor inconvenience. In Matthew's kingdom context, it is judgment language aimed at wicked and hypocritical servants under the return of the Lord. It should not be carelessly turned into the loss of salvation for a sealed Church Age believer, but neither should it be softened into nothing. The evil servant is exposed as a hypocrite. He had a place of service, but his heart and conduct showed rebellion. He used delay to justify abuse and worldliness, and the master's return found him unready.

For application, the warning is plain: the Lord's return will reveal what kind of servant a man has been. A preacher may fool his audience. A teacher may fool students. A leader may fool a household. A religious worker may keep the label while the heart says, "My lord delayeth." But the Master will not be fooled. He will know whether the servant fed or beat, watched or indulged, served or exploited, stayed sober or drank with the drunken. The unexpected return of the Lord is not a doctrine for charts only. It is a doctrine for conduct.

Conclusion

The parable of the Faithful and Evil Servants is a solemn warning about stewardship under the shadow of the Lord's return. The faithful and wise servant is the one whom the lord

makes ruler over his household to give meat in due season. He is blessed if the lord comes and finds him so doing. The evil servant says in his heart, “My lord delayeth his coming,” and that inward delay produces outward corruption. He begins to smite his fellowservants and to eat and drink with the drunken. Then the lord comes unexpectedly and judges him severely. The whole parable turns on watchfulness, feeding, abuse, worldliness, and accountability.

Rightly divided, the passage belongs in Matthew 24’s prophetic and kingdom setting. It is tied to the coming of the Son of man and the watchfulness required in connection with that return. It should not be confused with the Church’s blessed hope in every detail or used to overthrow the eternal security of a born-again member of Christ’s Body. But its principles apply with force to every servant entrusted with truth. The Lord’s household must be fed. Authority must not become abuse. Delay must not become an excuse for worldliness. A servant’s view of the Lord’s return affects how he treats the Lord’s people.

The warning to preachers and teachers is especially sharp. Do not stop feeding and start beating. Do not use doctrine as a club for your ego. Do not treat fellow servants like property. Do not sit at the table of the drunken and then pretend you can serve clean meat to the household. Do not say in your heart that the Lord delays. The Master is coming, and He will inspect the servants. Blessed is the man found feeding the household in due season. Miserable is the man found abusing the household while drunk on the world.

36 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Ten Virgins

Introduction

The parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25 is one of the most abused prophetic passages in the New Testament, and it has been used by more than a few frightened preachers to rob saved people of assurance, confuse the Church with Israel, turn oil into a leaking salvation substance, and make the blessed hope sound like a nightmare where born-again believers might wake up one second too late and find the door slammed in their face. Matthew 25:1-13 begins, “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.” Five are wise, and five are foolish. The foolish take their lamps but take no oil with them. The wise take oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarries, they all slumber and sleep. At midnight there is a cry made, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.” The virgins arise and trim their lamps. The foolish discover their lamps are gone out and ask the wise for oil. The wise refuse, not from cruelty, but because the issue cannot be transferred at that moment.

The foolish go to buy, the bridegroom comes, the ready go in with him to the marriage, and the door is shut. Afterward the foolish virgins come, saying, “Lord, Lord, open to us,” but he answers, “Verily I say unto you, I know you not.” Then the Lord gives the application: “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”

The first word of the parable is “Then,” and that word ties Matthew 25 directly to Matthew 24. That alone should stop a man from dragging the passage into whatever doctrinal debate he already wants to win. Matthew 24 has dealt with the sign of Christ’s coming, the end of the world, the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, flight from Judea, great tribulation, false Christs, cosmic signs, and the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Then the Lord gives warnings about watchfulness, the faithful and evil servants, and now the Ten Virgins. The setting is the kingdom of heaven and the coming of the bridegroom in connection with the prophetic return of Christ. This is not Paul’s doctrinal explanation of the Body of Christ being caught up before the day of wrath. It is not Romans 8, Ephesians 1, Ephesians 4, or 1 Thessalonians 4. It is Matthew 25, and if a man ignores that, he will soon be terrifying saved people with a passage that belongs in a different doctrinal lane.

That does not mean the warning is unreal. The practical force of the parable is deadly serious. Readiness matters. Empty profession is dangerous. The bridegroom’s delay tests reality. Midnight comes. The door shuts. Some say “Lord, Lord” and are not known. The foolish are not foolish because they lacked emotional enthusiasm for the wedding. They went forth with lamps. They expected some kind of participation. They looked similar to the wise for a while. But they lacked what was necessary when the bridegroom came. The point is not that a sealed Church Age believer can run out of the Holy Spirit and lose eternal life before the Rapture. That would contradict the clear doctrine of salvation by grace, the sealing of the Spirit, and the believer’s eternal security in Christ. The point is that in the prophetic kingdom setting, readiness is not optional, outward appearance is not enough, and no man can borrow another man’s reality when the Bridegroom arrives. Right division protects assurance without dulling the warning.

Chapter 1: “Then” Ties the Parable to the Prophetic Context

The parable begins, “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins.” That word “Then” is not decorative. It connects the parable to the preceding prophetic discourse. Matthew 24 has already established the atmosphere: the disciples have asked about the temple, the sign of Christ’s coming, and the end of the world. The Lord speaks of deception, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution, the gospel of the kingdom, the abomination of desolation, great tribulation, false signs and wonders, cosmic disturbances, and the Son of man coming visibly in glory. After that, He warns men to

watch because they know not what hour their Lord doth come. The Ten Virgins belongs to that flow. It is not sitting alone on a doctrinal island.

This matters because many interpreters begin with the virgins, lamps, and oil and immediately run to Church Age salvation categories without first reading the chapter. They see oil and say “Holy Spirit.” They see lamps and say “testimony.” They see the door shut and say “saved Christians losing salvation.” They see the bridegroom and say “Rapture.” Then they build doctrine from assumptions rather than context. The passage itself says “kingdom of heaven,” and the application at the end is connected with the coming of the Son of man. In Matthew, that phrase carries strong Second Advent, kingdom, and prophetic force. The context is not the Body of Christ losing salvation. It is watchfulness in relation to the coming King.

Right division does not weaken the parable. It makes it sharper. The people living under the prophetic conditions described in Matthew 24 will need this warning in a way that a comfortable Church Age reader may not immediately feel. There will be delay, darkness, false profession, expectation, and a decisive moment when the Bridegroom comes and the door shuts. In that setting, outward association will not be enough. A lamp without oil will not do. A profession without readiness will fail. The prophetic context gives weight to every detail. It keeps the passage from becoming a sloppy sermon against eternal security and turns it back into the Lord’s own warning about readiness in the kingdom setting.

Chapter 2: The Kingdom of Heaven Setting Must Be Preserved

The Lord says, “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins.” The kingdom of heaven is a key phrase in Matthew, and it has to be handled with care. Matthew’s Gospel presents Jesus Christ as King, the Son of David, Israel’s Messiah, and the One connected with the earthly kingdom promises. The kingdom of heaven in Matthew includes truths connected to the King, Israel, the kingdom offer, rejection, mystery form, and future manifestation. A man who turns every kingdom of heaven parable into a direct statement about Church Age salvation will produce confusion every time. Matthew 25 is no exception.

The Ten Virgins is not introduced as “the Body of Christ is like ten virgins.” It is not introduced as “the gospel of the grace of God is like ten virgins.” It is not introduced as “the sealing of the Spirit is like oil in a lamp that can run out.” It is introduced as a kingdom of heaven parable. That does not mean there is no application to believers today. All Scripture is profitable. But doctrine must be placed before application. Israel, the kingdom, the Tribulation, the Second Advent, the Church, and the gospel of grace are not interchangeable labels. When men flatten them into one pile, they start using Matthew 25

to contradict Ephesians 1:13, Ephesians 4:30, Romans 8:38-39, and John 10:28-29. That is not Bible study. That is doctrinal vandalism.

Preserving the kingdom setting also helps explain the severity of the warning. Matthew repeatedly includes kingdom warnings involving outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, unready servants, false profession, and exclusion. These warnings have their place. They should not be softened into nothing, but they should not be misapplied to destroy the security of the believer in the present dispensation. The Lord is warning about readiness for the kingdom and the coming Bridegroom. He is not saying that a born-again member of Christ's Body, sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption, may lose the Spirit because he failed to maintain enough oil in a prophetic lamp. Let Matthew say what Matthew says, and let Paul say what Paul says. Both are true when rightly divided.

Chapter 3: The Virgins Look Similar Until the Crisis Comes

All ten virgins take lamps and go forth to meet the bridegroom. That means the foolish virgins are not portrayed as open enemies of the wedding. They are not mocking the bridegroom. They are not atheists. They are not drunkards in the street saying there is no wedding. They are part of the waiting company. They have lamps. They expect the bridegroom. They outwardly resemble the wise for a time. That is what makes the parable so searching. The difference between wise and foolish is not immediately obvious by outward association. The crisis reveals the difference.

This is a major theme in Matthew. Wheat and tares grow together until harvest. The net gathers good and bad until the sorting. The wedding is furnished with guests, but the king inspects and finds a man without a wedding garment. Some say "Lord, Lord" and yet are not known. Some build houses that look stable until the storm comes. Matthew's kingdom teaching repeatedly warns that outward profession, proximity, expectation, and religious association are not the same as being accepted when the King comes. The Ten Virgins fits that pattern. They all go out. They all have lamps. They all sleep during the delay. But they are not all ready.

This should still warn modern hearers. A person can be around Christian things, use Christian words, expect prophetic events, discuss the Lord's coming, carry a lamp of outward profession, and still lack the inward reality God requires. A church can be full of people with lamps and no oil. A movement can be full of prophecy talk and no spiritual life. A man can say all the right things about the Bridegroom and still not be ready when He comes. That application is real. But again, it is not a license to tell saved people that eternal life is unstable. It is a warning against empty profession and unprepared association in the kingdom context. The crisis reveals what ordinary appearance conceals.

Chapter 4: The Oil Must Be Handled Carefully

The oil is the most debated element in the parable. The foolish take their lamps but take no oil with them. The wise take oil in their vessels with their lamps. At midnight, the foolish say, “Our lamps are gone out,” and ask the wise to give them oil. The wise answer, “Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you.” Then the foolish go to buy. Because oil is often associated with the Holy Spirit in Scripture, many interpreters immediately declare that the oil here is the Spirit. That connection may have devotional force, but it must be handled carefully, because if a man presses it wrongly, he will teach that the Spirit can be bought, borrowed, lost, or run out of in a way that contradicts clear Church Age doctrine.

In this parable, the oil represents the necessary inward provision for readiness. It is what the foolish lack and the wise possess. It cannot be borrowed at the last moment. It cannot be supplied by another virgin when the Bridegroom arrives. Whatever precise doctrinal label a man places on it, the lesson is plain: outward lamps without necessary provision are useless at midnight. The foolish had the appearance of readiness, but not the supply required for the crisis. They had lamps, but no oil. They had form, but not sufficiency. They had expectation, but not preparation. The Lord is warning that outward religious equipment cannot substitute for the real provision God requires.

For Church Age believers, the Holy Spirit’s sealing is not a temporary oil level maintained by human performance. Ephesians 1 says that after believing the gospel of salvation, believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Ephesians 4 says they are sealed unto the day of redemption. A saved man is not told to run to other Christians at midnight and borrow part of their sealing. That is not Pauline doctrine. Therefore, Matthew 25 must not be used to teach that the sealed believer can lose the Spirit and be shut out of salvation. The oil in the parable teaches readiness in the kingdom setting, not the mechanics of Church Age regeneration and sealing. It warns against empty profession, not against the sufficiency of Christ’s finished work.

Chapter 5: The Bridegroom’s Delay Tests Readiness

The parable says, “While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.” That is a striking sentence. The delay affects all ten. The wise sleep, and the foolish sleep. The issue is not that the wise never grew tired. The issue is that the wise had oil when the cry came. Delay tests readiness. It reveals whether preparation was real before the waiting began. The foolish may have looked acceptable when the lamps were first taken up, but the delay exposed the lack. Time has a way of proving what excitement cannot prove. A man can look ready in the first hour and be empty by midnight.

This connects with the broader Matthew 24-25 warnings. The evil servant says in his heart, “My lord delayeth his coming,” and delay produces abuse and drunkenness. The virgins experience a tarrying bridegroom, and delay reveals foolishness. The servants in the talents parable are tested during the master’s absence. The prophetic interval is dangerous because men misread delay. Some use it as an excuse for worldliness. Others grow careless. Others discover too late that their outward preparation was not real. Delay is not denial. The Bridegroom tarries, but He comes. That is the warning.

This has practical application for any age. Many people can maintain a religious appearance in a short burst. They can get excited at a meeting, talk boldly during a prophecy scare, make promises during a crisis, and carry a lamp while everyone is looking. But delay tests the soul. What remains when the emotion fades? What remains when the Lord does not come according to human expectation? What remains when midnight is long, dark, and quiet? The wise had oil in their vessels. The foolish had lamps without adequate supply. A man’s preparation must be deeper than the first excitement of going out to meet the bridegroom.

Chapter 6: The Midnight Cry Brings the Decisive Moment

At midnight there is a cry made: “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.” Midnight is a dark hour, an unexpected hour, and a crisis hour. The cry does not begin a long preparation season. It announces the arrival. The virgins arise and trim their lamps. At that point, the difference between wise and foolish becomes undeniable. The foolish say to the wise, “Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.” But the wise cannot give what the foolish lack. Readiness cannot be transferred at the moment of crisis. No man can borrow another man’s standing, another man’s faith, another man’s preparation, another man’s repentance, or another man’s reality when the Bridegroom comes.

This is a serious truth. There are things that cannot be borrowed. A child cannot borrow a parent’s salvation. A church member cannot borrow the pastor’s faith. A religious man cannot borrow the testimony of the group he belonged to. A prophecy watcher cannot borrow readiness from the wise. When the decisive moment comes, every empty lamp is exposed. The foolish had time before midnight to be prepared. They had opportunity. They had lamps. They had warning by the very nature of the wedding expectation. But when the cry came, it was too late to make up for the lack.

This is why the passage is a warning, not a comfort blanket. The Lord intends men to feel the seriousness of readiness. The midnight cry will not wait for religious procrastinators. The Bridegroom’s arrival will not be delayed because fools need one more errand. When God’s appointed moment comes, men cannot negotiate the schedule. The wise are ready,

and the foolish are exposed. That prophetic warning should make every hearer sober. But again, sobriety must not become confusion. The passage does not teach saved people to fear that Christ's finished work might fail. It teaches that empty profession in the kingdom setting will not survive the coming of the Bridegroom.

Chapter 7: The Shut Door Is Final in the Parable

The parable says, "They that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut." That is finality. The ready enter. The door shuts. The foolish come afterward saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us." The answer is, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Those words are severe, and they echo Matthew 7, where many say "Lord, Lord" and yet are rejected. The issue is not that the Bridegroom forgot sincere guests. It is that the foolish were not ready and were not known. The shut door teaches that opportunity does not remain open forever. Prophetic delay ends. The moment of inspection comes. The door shuts.

This is one reason the passage should not be played with. There is no universalism here. There is no "everybody eventually gets in" here. There is no post-door repentance that reverses the sentence. The foolish are outside. The Bridegroom refuses them. The warning is real. Men who preach a soft God who never shuts doors are not preaching Matthew 25. The same Lord who receives repentant sinners also warns that an unready company will face a shut door. Mercy is real, but so is judgment. Invitation is real, but so is exclusion. Readiness matters.

The final application is "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." The command is watchfulness, not date-setting. The passage does not tell men to calculate the day. It tells them to be ready because they do not know it. In the prophetic setting, those living through the signs of Matthew 24 are still warned about the exact day and hour. The Church Age believer can also learn watchfulness, sobriety, and the danger of empty profession, while maintaining the clear doctrine that salvation is secure in Christ. The door shutting in Matthew 25 should not be used to unseal what God has sealed in Ephesians. Let the warning warn whom it warns, and let the gospel comfort whom it comforts.

Conclusion

The parable of the Ten Virgins is a solemn kingdom warning about readiness for the coming Bridegroom. Ten virgins take lamps and go forth to meet him. Five are wise and take oil in their vessels with their lamps. Five are foolish and take lamps without oil. The bridegroom tarries, all slumber and sleep, and then at midnight the cry is made. The difference is exposed. The wise are ready and go in to the marriage. The foolish attempt last-minute

preparation, but the door is shut, and the Bridegroom says, “I know you not.” That is severe, final, and searching.

Rightly divided, the parable belongs to Matthew 25, tied directly to Matthew 24 and the prophetic coming of the Son of man. It is a kingdom of heaven parable, not a direct doctrinal passage teaching that sealed members of the Body of Christ can lose salvation by running out of Holy Spirit oil. The Church’s salvation rests on Christ’s finished work, and the believer is sealed unto the day of redemption. Matthew 25 must not be used to terrify saved people out of eternal security. But neither should eternal security be used to ignore the warning. Empty lamps, outward profession, prophetic laziness, and last-minute scrambling are all exposed in this passage.

The practical lesson is powerful. Be ready. Do not live on religious appearance. Do not assume association is enough. Do not borrow another man’s testimony. Do not confuse excitement about prophecy with actual preparation before God. Do not let delay make you careless. The Bridegroom may tarry, but He comes. Midnight may be dark, but the cry will sound. The wise will go in, and the foolish will find that a lamp without oil is worthless when the door is shut.

37 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Talents

Introduction

The parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30 is one of the strongest stewardship passages in the New Testament, and like many strong passages, it is often mishandled by men who refuse to rightly divide the word of truth. The Lord speaks of a man traveling into a far country who calls his own servants and delivers unto them his goods. To one he gives five talents, to another two, and to another one, “to every man according to his several ability,” and straightway takes his journey. The servant with five talents trades and gains five more. The servant with two talents gains two more. But the servant with one talent digs in the earth and hides his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants comes and reckons with them. The first two servants are commended: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” They are made rulers over many things and told to enter into the joy of their lord. The one-talent servant, however, comes with an accusation against his master, saying he knew him to be a hard man, reaping where he had not sown and gathering where he had not strawed. He says he was afraid and hid the talent in the earth. His lord calls him a wicked and slothful servant, takes the talent from him, gives it to the servant with ten

talents, and casts the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This parable must be handled in its context. It follows Matthew 24 and the parable of the Ten Virgins. The whole section is prophetic, kingdom-oriented, and connected with the coming of the Son of man, watchfulness, delay, readiness, and accountability. The parable is not an isolated Church Age sermon about becoming a better entrepreneur. It is not a lesson that a sinner today is justified by investment performance. It is not teaching that a born-again member of Christ's Body earns eternal life by doubling his spiritual assets. If a man makes the talents into the gospel of salvation by works, he has immediately contradicted the plain doctrine later given through Paul, where salvation is by grace through faith, not of works, and where the believer is justified freely by grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Matthew 25 must not be used to overthrow Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and the finished work of Christ. The parable belongs where God placed it: in a kingdom and prophetic context dealing with servants, stewardship, delay, accountability, and the return of the lord.

At the same time, right division must never be used as an excuse to make the parable harmless. The warning is real. The Lord expects His servants to use what He gives them. Gifts, opportunities, light, responsibility, time, truth, ability, and stewardship are not given so men can bury them in the earth and then blame the Master for their barrenness. The faithful servants are not praised because they were brilliant self-made achievers. They are praised because they were faithful with another man's goods. The wicked servant is not condemned because he lacked the same amount as the others. He is condemned because he did nothing with what he was given and then accused his lord to excuse himself. Fear, laziness, and a distorted view of the master produced barrenness. For Church Age application, the judgment seat of Christ gives the believer a distinct but related stewardship warning: saved believers will have their works judged, receive reward, or suffer loss, "but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." Matthew 25 and 1 Corinthians 3 are not the same judgment, but both teach that stewardship matters.

Chapter 1: The Talents Were the Lord's Goods

The parable begins with the master delivering "his goods" to his servants. That phrase is the foundation of the whole passage. The talents did not originate with the servants. They did not own them independently. They did not create them. They did not earn them as wages before the master left. They were entrusted with what belonged to another. That is stewardship. The moment a servant forgets that the goods are his lord's goods, he begins to think like a thief, a fool, or an owner. The faithful servants understood that what they had

received was to be used in view of the lord's return. The unfaithful servant treated his talent as something to hide, not something to employ.

This is one of the first lessons every servant of God must learn. Whatever a man has, he received. Ability, opportunity, Bible light, spiritual gifts, money, influence, time, health, family, ministry doors, a voice, a mind, a testimony, and a copy of the Scriptures are all entrusted things. A man may work hard, study long, labor faithfully, and discipline himself, but he still has nothing that God did not first allow him to possess. Pride says, "My talent." Stewardship says, "His goods." The difference between those two statements determines how a man lives. If it is mine, I will use it for self. If it is His, I must answer for it.

This also rebukes the modern obsession with comparing talents. The master gives one servant five, another two, and another one. He does not give the same amount to each. He gives "to every man according to his several ability." That means the issue is not equality of entrustment, but faithfulness in entrustment. The two-talent servant is not rebuked for not having five. The one-talent servant is not condemned because he only had one. He is condemned because he buried the one he had. God does not require a man to answer for gifts He never gave him. But He absolutely requires a man to answer for what He did give him. The servant with one talent cannot hide behind the servant with five.

Chapter 2: The Servants Were Tested During the Lord's Absence

The master takes his journey, and the servants must act while he is away. That absence is a test. It reveals what the servants think of the master, what they think of his goods, and whether they believe his return matters. The faithful servants do not wait until they hear his footsteps to begin working. They trade while he is gone. The wicked servant uses the absence as an opportunity to do nothing. This fits the prophetic setting of Matthew 24 and 25, where delay tests readiness, watchfulness, and faithfulness. The lord tarries in the Ten Virgins. The lord delays in the Faithful and Evil Servants. The man travels into a far country in the Talents. In each case, the absence exposes the servant.

The test of absence is one of the great tests of the Christian life as well, even though the Church Age application must be kept distinct from the doctrinal setting. A man's true view of the Lord is revealed by what he does when the Lord is not visibly standing in front of him. Does he serve when no one applauds? Does he labor when the return seems delayed? Does he feed the household when the Master has not yet appeared? Does he invest what was entrusted, or does he bury it under earthly concerns? Many men can act religious for a short crisis. Fewer can be faithful over a long absence. Time exposes the difference between excitement and stewardship.

The Lord's absence is not abandonment. That is crucial. The master leaves, but his goods remain under his authority. The servants are not free to redefine the mission. They are not free to act as if no account will be required. The absence does not cancel ownership. The long delay does not erase responsibility. This is where many go wrong. They interpret divine patience as divine forgetfulness. They say in their heart, "My lord delayeth his coming," or they bury the talent as though reckoning will never arrive. But the lord comes back. The whole parable turns on that certainty. The Master returns, and when He returns, He reckons.

Chapter 3: Faithfulness Is Measured According to Entrustment

The five-talent servant gains five more, and the two-talent servant gains two more. The numbers differ, but the commendation is the same: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." That is one of the most encouraging details in the parable. The servant with two talents is not given a lesser commendation because he did not produce five. He was faithful with what was entrusted to him, and his lord honors that faithfulness. God does not judge stewardship by fleshly comparison. He judges according to what He gave and what the servant did with it. The two-talent servant doubled what he had, just like the five-talent servant. The scale differed, but the faithfulness matched.

This should comfort servants who think their stewardship is small. Not every man has five talents. Not every preacher has a large congregation. Not every teacher has a wide audience. Not every believer has money, health, influence, or public opportunity. Some serve in hidden places. Some teach children. Some pray in secret. Some support truth quietly. Some speak to one soul at a time. Some have only a small field, a small gift, a small platform, or a short season. But if God gave two talents, He is not asking for five-talent accounting. He is asking faithfulness with two. A small stewardship handled faithfully is not small to God.

This also humbles men with larger entrustment. Five talents are not proof that the servant is better flesh. They are proof that more was entrusted and more will be required. The five-talent servant had greater opportunity, but also greater responsibility. Public ministry, broad influence, strong gifts, deep knowledge, financial resources, and open doors are not toys. They increase accountability. A man with five talents should not strut around the vineyard mocking the one with two. He should tremble because he must answer for five. The Lord's commendation is not "Well done, thou famous and impressive servant." It is "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Faithfulness is the issue.

Chapter 4: The Wicked Servant Hid His Talent in the Earth

The one-talent servant digs in the earth and hides his lord's money. That action is full of meaning. The talent was meant to be used, but he buried it. It was his lord's money, but he treated it as something to preserve by neglect. He did not lose it in trade. He did not risk it and fail. He did not come back saying, "Lord, I tried and fell short." He hid it in the earth. The earth becomes the grave of his stewardship. That is a powerful picture of wasted opportunity buried under earthly-mindedness, fear, and sloth. The talent is safe in one sense, but useless. It is preserved from activity but lost to purpose.

Many people bury what God gives them. They bury Bible knowledge under silence. They bury opportunity under procrastination. They bury gifts under fear. They bury influence under self-protection. They bury money under covetous hoarding. They bury time under entertainment. They bury testimony under cowardice. They bury convictions under the desire to be liked. They bury spiritual responsibility under earthly business. Then, when accountability comes, they point to the buried talent and say, "There thou hast that is thine," as though returning unused stewardship is faithfulness. It is not. The Master did not give talents for burial. He gave them for service.

The fact that the servant had only one talent does not excuse him. In fact, it may make the rebuke sharper. If he had less to manage, then he had less excuse for total neglect. The master even says he could have at least put the money to the exchangers so that it might return with interest. He did not even do the least. This exposes the lie that small stewardship is no stewardship. Some men do nothing because they cannot do something large. They bury the one because they envy the five. That is wicked. If God gives one talent, use one. The smallest entrustment becomes serious because it belongs to the Lord.

Chapter 5: His Fear Came From a Distorted View of the Master

The wicked servant says, "Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." His defense is an accusation. He blames his master's character for his own barrenness. He calls him hard. He presents him as unreasonable, severe, and demanding. That distorted view of the master becomes the excuse for inaction. He says he feared, but his fear is not holy reverence producing obedience. It is a crooked fear producing sloth and accusation. He is not trembling because he values the master's goods. He is hiding because he resents the master's authority.

This is one of the marks of a wicked servant: he justifies disobedience by accusing the Lord. "God is too demanding." "The assignment is unreasonable." "The standard is impossible." "The Master expects too much." "I was afraid." Men still talk this way. They bury their gifts and blame God for giving them a hard path. They refuse to witness and

blame God for making people difficult. They neglect service and blame God for not giving them more talent. They refuse to obey Scripture and blame God's commands for being too narrow. The problem is not the Master's character. The problem is the servant's heart.

The lord answers him out of his own mouth. If the servant truly believed the master reaped where he had not sown and gathered where he had not strawed, then he should at least have placed the money with the exchangers. His own excuse condemns him. He claims fear, but his conduct does not match even his stated belief. This is how excuses work. They sound good until examined. A man says he did nothing because he feared failure, but he never even attempted the smallest faithful step. He says he lacked opportunity, but he ignored the opportunity he had. He says God is hard, but the real issue is that he is slothful.

Chapter 6: The Judgment Here Must Be Distinguished From the Judgment Seat of Christ

The judgment of the unprofitable servant in Matthew 25 is severe. He is called wicked and slothful. His talent is taken. He is cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. That language belongs to Matthew's kingdom warning context. It should not be casually equated with the judgment seat of Christ for sealed Church Age believers. At the judgment seat of Christ, saved believers have their works tried by fire. If any man's work abide, he receives a reward. If any man's work is burned, he suffers loss, "but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." That is not the same as being cast into outer darkness. The distinction matters.

This does not make Matthew 25 less serious. It makes it accurate. In Matthew, kingdom servants are being warned in a prophetic setting. False, wicked, and unprofitable servants are exposed in connection with the coming of the Lord. In Paul's doctrine to the Church, the believer's standing is secure in Christ, but his works are judged for reward or loss. A born-again member of the Body of Christ is not justified by investment performance. He is justified by faith in Christ's finished work. But he will answer for stewardship. If he builds with wood, hay, and stubble, loss is real, even though he himself is saved. The Church Age believer needs 1 Corinthians 3 without stealing Matthew 25 out of its doctrinal setting.

The contrast protects both assurance and accountability. Without assurance, believers become terrified slaves trying to earn salvation by producing enough profit. Without accountability, believers become lazy and bury talents under the banner of grace. The Bible teaches neither. Salvation is free in Christ. Stewardship is accountable before Christ. Grace gives life; service is judged. The believer cannot lose Christ, but he can waste his life. He cannot be cast out of the Body of Christ, but he can suffer shame and loss at the

judgment seat. Right division lets Matthew 25 warn in its kingdom setting and lets Paul define Church Age judgment with clarity.

Chapter 7: The Lord Expects His Servants to Use What He Gives

The practical lesson is unavoidable: the Lord expects His servants to use what He gives them. The faithful servants do not merely preserve the talents. They employ them. They trade. They gain. They act in view of the lord's return. The wicked servant hides. That is the difference. The Lord is not impressed by unused gifts returned in the same condition because fear or laziness kept them buried. Stewardship means responsibility. If God gives light, use it. If God gives ability, use it. If God gives opportunity, use it. If God gives a voice, use it. If God gives resources, use them. If God gives time, do not bury it in the earth.

Fear must not be allowed to masquerade as humility. Some people say they are too humble to serve when they are simply afraid. Others say they do not want to make mistakes, so they do nothing. Others say they are waiting for a better opportunity while burying the opportunity in front of them. Fear of failure can become disobedience. Laziness can hide behind caution. A distorted view of God can produce spiritual paralysis. The faithful servant does not need to know every outcome before obeying. He knows the talent belongs to the master, the master will return, and the proper thing is to use what was entrusted.

This is especially important for preachers and teachers. A man with Bible light has no right to bury it. A man who understands right division has no right to hide it because others may criticize him. A man who knows the gospel has no right to keep silent while souls are perishing. A man with influence has no right to spend it all on self-promotion. A man with time has no right to waste it in vanity. The talent belongs to the Lord. The Master is coming. The reckoning is certain. Faithfulness is not optional. Use what He gave you, and leave the accounting to Him.

Conclusion

The parable of the Talents is a powerful kingdom warning about stewardship, accountability, and the return of the lord. The master delivers his goods to his servants according to their several ability, then takes his journey. The five-talent and two-talent servants use what they were given and are commended as good and faithful servants. The one-talent servant hides his lord's money in the earth, accuses the master, excuses himself by fear, and is condemned as wicked and slothful. The parable is severe because stewardship is serious. The Lord does not give talents to be buried.

Rightly divided, this passage belongs in Matthew 25's kingdom and prophetic context. It should not be twisted into a Church Age doctrine of justification by investment performance. A sinner today is saved by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, not by

doubling talents. The judgment on the unprofitable servant in Matthew 25 must be distinguished from the judgment seat of Christ in 1 Corinthians 3, where saved believers receive reward or suffer loss, yet the man himself is saved. Confusing these judgments produces either terror against eternal security or laziness against stewardship. The Bible teaches security in Christ and accountability in service.

The practical warning remains sharp. Do not bury what God gave you. Do not use fear as an excuse for sloth. Do not accuse the Master to justify your barrenness. Do not compare your one talent with another man's five and then do nothing. The Lord knows what He entrusted to each servant, and He will reckon accordingly. The faithful servant does not need to be famous, equal to another, or impressive in the eyes of men. He needs to be faithful. When the Master returns, the words worth hearing are still these: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

38 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Sheep and the Goats

Introduction

The judgment of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25:31-46 is one of the most abused passages in the Bible because men love to grab the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, and then build a false gospel of humanitarian works while ignoring the setting, the Judge, the throne, the nations, the timing, and the phrase "my brethren." The passage begins with words that should control every interpretation: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory." That is not the judgment seat of Christ. That is not the Great White Throne. That is not a vague picture of people going to heaven because they volunteered at a soup kitchen. It is the Son of man coming in glory, sitting on His throne, with all nations gathered before Him, separating them as a shepherd divides sheep from goats. The setting is the Second Advent and the kingdom judgment connected with the Lord's return to earth. If a man misses that, he will turn the passage into a social gospel and make Paul's gospel of grace disappear under a pile of sandwiches and blankets.

The passage is serious. The King says to those on His right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." He speaks of hunger, thirst, estrangement, nakedness, sickness, and imprisonment, and says, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." To those on the left hand He says, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." He then gives the opposite reason: they did not

minister to Him in the persons of His brethren. The chapter ends with the plain statement: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” No honest Bible believer can make that harmless. Everlasting punishment is real. Eternal life is real. The division is final. But the question is not whether the passage is serious. The question is what judgment this is, who is being judged, when it happens, and what role the treatment of “my brethren” plays in that judgment.

Rightly divided, this passage fits the Tribulation and Israel’s prophetic program, not the Church Age gospel of salvation by grace through faith apart from works. The “brethren” in this context are not generic poor people worldwide, nor are they the Church as the Body of Christ standing there needing Gentile nations to decide her destiny. In Matthew’s Jewish kingdom setting, with the Son of man coming after the Tribulation, the brethren connect especially with the Lord’s Jewish brethren, the persecuted remnant and witnesses associated with His kingdom program during that terrible period. How the nations treat them under Antichrist pressure reveals whether they received or rejected the King’s messengers and message. Good works appear as evidence in the judgment, but the works are not Paul’s gospel. Feeding, clothing, visiting, and receiving the brethren are not the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for our sins. They are evidences connected to a specific judgment at the return of the King. Confuse that, and you will preach another gospel while quoting Jesus.

Chapter 1: The Passage Begins With the Son of Man Coming in Glory

The first phrase fixes the timing: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory.” This is not a general moral scene floating above history. This is the visible coming of the Son of man in glory, following the prophetic material of Matthew 24 and the kingdom warnings of Matthew 25. The Son of man comes with all the holy angels and sits upon the throne of His glory. That is Second Advent ground. It is the King returning to earth to judge and reign. A man who reads this as an ordinary description of someone dying and going to heaven or hell has ignored the first sentence. The Judge is on His throne in glory after coming.

The title “Son of man” carries prophetic weight. Daniel 7 speaks of one like the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven and receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him. Matthew 24 has just spoken of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Matthew 25 now shows Him sitting on the throne of His glory and judging the nations. This is not hidden, private, or merely spiritual. It is public, royal, judicial, and connected with the kingdom. The King has returned, and the nations are gathered before Him.

This matters because the passage is commonly ripped out of prophecy and turned into a modern social-ethics sermon. Men say the point is that all people are judged simply by whether they were nice to the poor. But the Lord does not begin with “When a man dies.” He begins with “When the Son of man shall come in his glory.” The judgment follows the return. The throne is a kingdom throne. The nations are assembled. The angels are present. That setting must govern the works mentioned later. Good works toward the brethren matter in the passage, but they matter in a specific prophetic judgment, not as a replacement for the gospel of grace.

Chapter 2: This Is the Judgment of the Nations, Not the Judgment Seat of Christ

Matthew 25 says, “And before him shall be gathered all nations.” The word “nations” is critical. This is a judgment of nations before the King at His return. It is not the judgment seat of Christ, where saved members of the Body of Christ have their works judged for reward or loss. Paul tells Church Age believers that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and 1 Corinthians 3 explains that a man’s work may abide and receive reward, or be burned and suffer loss, “but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” That is not Matthew 25. In Matthew 25, the separation is between sheep and goats, kingdom inheritance and everlasting fire. The judgments are different.

At the judgment seat of Christ, the issue is the service of saved believers, not the separation of nations into sheep and goats for entrance into the kingdom. The Church is already in Christ. The believer’s standing is settled by the finished work of Christ. His works are judged, but his sonship and membership in the Body are not up for reversal. Matthew 25, by contrast, presents nations gathered before the Son of man after His glorious return. The judgment is tied to how they treated the King’s brethren during the preceding period. That is not the same courtroom, not the same timing, not the same group, and not the same doctrinal issue.

This distinction protects eternal security and preserves the seriousness of stewardship. A saved Church Age believer should feed the hungry, help the poor, visit the sick, care about prisoners, and show mercy as the Lord leads. But he is not saved by doing those things, and he does not appear at the judgment seat to find out whether he is a sheep or goat based on humanitarian performance. His salvation is in Christ. His works are judged for reward. Matthew 25 is a kingdom judgment of nations at the Second Advent. Mix those up, and assurance gets destroyed while the passage itself gets misapplied.

Chapter 3: This Is Not the Great White Throne

The Sheep and Goats judgment must also be distinguished from the Great White Throne of Revelation 20. The Great White Throne occurs after the Millennium, after Satan is loosed

for a little season, after the final rebellion, and after heaven and earth flee away from the face of Him that sits on the throne. The dead, small and great, stand before God. The books are opened. The dead are judged according to their works. Death and hell are cast into the lake of fire. Whosoever is not found written in the book of life is cast into the lake of fire. That is a final judgment of the dead after the thousand years.

Matthew 25 is before the kingdom reign is entered, not after it is completed. The King says to the sheep, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” That places the judgment at the threshold of the kingdom, not after the kingdom has run its millennial course. The nations are living nations gathered before the returning King. The goats are sent into everlasting fire, and the sheep enter life and kingdom blessing. This is not Revelation 20’s Great White Throne scene of the dead after the Millennium. Again, right division matters.

Confusing these judgments produces a chain reaction of doctrinal errors. If Matthew 25 is made the Great White Throne, then the timing of the kingdom is blurred. If it is made the judgment seat of Christ, eternal security is attacked. If it is made a general judgment of all humanity at death, the Second Advent setting is ignored. God gave details for a reason. The Son of man comes in glory. The nations are gathered. The kingdom is inherited. The brethren are in view. The judgment happens before the kingdom is entered. Keep those things where God placed them, and the passage becomes clear.

Chapter 4: “My Brethren” Is the Key Phrase

The central phrase in the judgment is “my brethren.” The King says, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” He does not say, “Inasmuch as ye did general humanitarian work for mankind, ye earned eternal life.” He identifies a specific group: “these my brethren.” The sheep are judged by their treatment of those brethren. The goats are judged by their failure to minister to them. Therefore, the identity of the brethren is the key to the passage. Ignore that phrase, and the whole interpretation drifts into religious socialism or works salvation.

In Matthew’s Jewish and kingdom context, “my brethren” connects especially with the Lord’s Jewish brethren and the faithful remnant associated with Him during the Tribulation. Matthew 24 has spoken of Judea, the sabbath, the abomination of desolation, great tribulation, persecution, and the gospel of the kingdom preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations. During that period, those connected with the King’s testimony will be hated, hunted, hungry, thirsty, naked, imprisoned, and cast out. The nations’ treatment of them will reveal their response to the King whose messengers and brethren they are. To receive them is to receive the King’s interest. To reject them is to reject Him.

This does not mean Christians today should ignore the poor because “that passage is not about them.” That would be a wicked abuse of right division. The Bible elsewhere commands mercy, kindness, charity, hospitality, care for the poor, and doing good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. But Matthew 25’s doctrinal judgment is not a general social-work test for Church Age salvation. The works are directed toward “my brethren” in a prophetic kingdom context. Once that is seen, the passage stops contradicting Paul and starts fitting perfectly into the Tribulation and Second Advent framework.

Chapter 5: The Works Are Evidence, Not Paul’s Gospel of Grace

The sheep fed, gave drink, took in, clothed, visited, and came unto the brethren. The goats did not. Those works are real in the passage. They are not imaginary. The King treats them as meaningful evidence. But evidence must not be confused with the gospel of salvation in the Church Age. Paul’s gospel is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. The sinner today is saved by grace through faith, not of works. Feeding the hungry and clothing the naked are good works, but they are not the blood atonement. Visiting a prisoner is not the resurrection of Christ. Hospitality is not justification by faith.

In Matthew 25, the works show allegiance, reception, mercy, and identification with the King’s brethren during a time when doing so will likely be dangerous. Under Tribulation pressure, helping the Lord’s brethren will not be a casual act of public charity for applause. It may mean risking one’s life, reputation, safety, resources, and standing under the beast’s system. The works reveal whether the nations responded rightly to the King’s representatives. They are outward evidence of inward alignment. The sheep are not buying the kingdom with sandwiches. They are manifesting their response to the King by how they treated His brethren.

This distinction is essential because the social gospel loves Matthew 25 while ignoring Calvary. It preaches food, clothing, shelter, and activism as if that were the gospel. But a man can feed every hungry person in a city and still be lost if he rejects Jesus Christ. A man can give coats to the naked and still die in his sins. Humanitarian works can be noble on the human level, but they cannot wash away sin. Matthew 25 does not cancel the cross. It does not rewrite the gospel of grace. It describes a specific judgment where works reveal how nations treated the King’s brethren in a prophetic context. Do not turn evidence into atonement.

Chapter 6: The Goats Are Condemned for Refusing the King’s Brethren

The goats are shocked by the King's sentence. They ask, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" Their answer shows they did not understand that rejecting the brethren was rejecting the King. They may have thought they would have treated the King differently if He had appeared personally in visible glory. But He judges them by how they treated "the least of these." That is a searching principle. Men reveal their heart toward the King by their treatment of those who bear His interest when doing so costs something.

During the Tribulation, the pressure will be intense. The Antichrist system will control buying and selling. Those who refuse the mark and stand with God's testimony will suffer. The Lord's brethren will be hungry, thirsty, estranged, naked, sick, and imprisoned. To help them will not be fashionable charity. It will be dangerous identification. The goats refuse. Their refusal is not merely bad manners. It is practical rejection of the King's cause during the hour of testing. They stand with the world system against the Lord's brethren, and when the King returns, their neutrality is exposed as rebellion.

This has a devotional application beyond the exact prophetic setting. A man's treatment of the weak, despised, persecuted, and needy among God's people matters. It is easy to claim loyalty to Christ in theory while despising His people in practice. It is easy to say "Lord, Lord" while ignoring those who bear His reproach. But again, application must not erase doctrine. In Matthew 25, the goats are not simply people who failed to support a charitable program. They are judged in connection with the returning Son of man and their treatment of His brethren. Their failure reveals their rejection of Him.

Chapter 7: The Judgment Ends in Kingdom Inheritance or Everlasting Punishment

The outcome is final and severe. The sheep inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. The goats depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. The passage ends, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." There is no universalism here. There is no annihilation here. There is no soft temporary correction here. The same verse that speaks of life eternal speaks of everlasting punishment. If the life is eternal, the punishment is everlasting. A man who tries to shorten the punishment must be prepared to shorten the life by the same grammar, and that only exposes his unbelief.

The everlasting fire was prepared for the devil and his angels, yet the goats go there because they align with rebellion against the King. That should terrify every man who thinks hell is only for devils in theory. Human beings can go there. Nations can be judged. The King who speaks tenderly to the righteous also says, "Depart from me, ye cursed." Modern preaching often wants Jesus as a humanitarian mascot, but Matthew 25 shows Him as

Judge. He separates. He blesses. He curses. He admits. He rejects. He assigns everlasting punishment. That is the Jesus of the Bible.

The kingdom inheritance also matters. The sheep are told to inherit the kingdom. That is not heaven as a vague floating afterlife. It is the kingdom connected with the Son of man's throne and glory. Matthew has been moving toward the King's return and reign. The sheep pass through judgment into kingdom blessing. The goats are removed. This fits the prophetic order: the King returns, judges, and establishes His reign. That is a far cry from the modern idea that Matthew 25 is merely a timeless appeal to charity. It is the King's judgment at the doorway of the kingdom.

Conclusion

The judgment of the Sheep and the Goats is a kingdom judgment at the Second Advent, not a social gospel tract and not Paul's gospel of grace to the Church. The passage begins with the Son of man coming in His glory with all the holy angels and sitting on the throne of His glory. The nations are gathered before Him. He separates them as a shepherd divides sheep from goats. The sheep inherit the kingdom. The goats depart into everlasting fire. That setting must govern the interpretation. This is not the judgment seat of Christ, where saved believers receive reward or suffer loss. It is not the Great White Throne after the Millennium. It is the judgment of the nations before the kingdom is entered.

The key phrase is "my brethren." The treatment of the Lord's brethren reveals the nations' response to the King in the Tribulation setting. Feeding, giving drink, clothing, receiving, visiting, and coming unto them are real works, but they are evidential works in this judgment, not the Church Age gospel of justification by humanitarian performance. The gospel today is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for our sins, received by faith. Matthew 25 does not replace that gospel. It belongs to the prophetic and kingdom context of the Son of man returning to judge the nations.

The warning remains sharp. God sees how men treat those who belong to His purpose. He sees the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned, persecuted, and rejected. He sees whether nations receive or reject the King's brethren. He sees through empty words and judges actual alignment. The soft preacher may try to turn Matthew 25 into generic charity, and the works-salvation crowd may try to turn it into another gospel, but the Bible believer should let it stand where Christ put it. The King is coming. The nations will be gathered. The sheep and goats will be divided. The kingdom will be inherited by the righteous, and the cursed will go away into everlasting punishment.

39 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Pounds

Introduction

The parable of the Pounds in Luke 19:11-27 is one of the most important kingdom parables in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ because it lays out the whole pattern with remarkable clarity: a nobleman goes into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return; his servants are entrusted with money and told to occupy till he comes; his citizens hate him and send a message after him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us"; the nobleman returns having received the kingdom; the servants are called to give account; faithful service is rewarded with authority over cities; the slothful servant is rebuked and loses what he had; and the enemies who rejected the nobleman's reign are brought and slain before him. That is not a vague moral story about being productive with your talents. It is a kingdom parable about the rejected King, His departure, His return, servant accountability, and judgment on His enemies. If a man cannot see the Second Advent and kingdom atmosphere in this passage, he is not reading Luke 19 carefully.

The setting is crucial. Luke says Jesus spoke this parable "because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." The disciples and the crowd had kingdom expectation. They were approaching Jerusalem. They knew the promises. They expected visible kingdom manifestation. Jesus does not deny the kingdom. He corrects their timing and explains the pattern. The kingdom would not immediately appear in the way they expected. The Nobleman must depart to receive the kingdom and return. During His absence, His servants have responsibility. Meanwhile, His citizens reject His rule. Then He returns in authority. That is exactly the pattern of Christ's rejection by Israel, His ascension to the Father, the interval of stewardship during His absence, and His future return to reign. The parable is not teaching that the kingdom is imaginary or that Christ will never reign literally. It teaches that the King is rejected first, absent for a time, and then returns with the kingdom in hand.

Rightly divided, this parable must be distinguished from the parable of the Talents in Matthew 25. They are similar, but not identical. In the Talents, different servants receive different amounts according to ability. In the Pounds, each servant receives the same pound, and the difference is in how they use it. In the Talents, the emphasis falls heavily on stewardship according to varied entrustment. In the Pounds, the political and kingdom setting is even more explicit: the nobleman receives a kingdom, citizens reject his reign, and enemies are slain upon his return. Both parables teach accountability during the Lord's absence, but the Pounds especially exposes the rebellion of those who say, "We will not have this man to reign over us." That sentence is the heart of the lost world and the Christ-rejecting religious world. Men do not merely need therapy for their discomfort with Jesus.

They need repentance. If they remain His enemies, they are not corrected by a counselor's couch when He returns. They are judged by the King.

Chapter 1: The Parable Was Given Because Men Expected the Kingdom Immediately

Luke tells us why Jesus spoke this parable: He was near Jerusalem, and they thought the kingdom of God should immediately appear. That explanation governs the interpretation. The parable is not detached from prophecy. It is not merely about personal responsibility in a general religious sense. It is answering a kingdom timing question. The people were expecting the kingdom to appear immediately because the King was approaching Jerusalem. Their expectation of a kingdom was not wrong in itself. The Old Testament prophets promised a kingdom. Israel had every reason to expect Messiah to reign. The problem was not the existence of the kingdom. The problem was their misunderstanding of the timing and the suffering, rejection, departure, and return that had to come first.

This is one of the great mistakes people make with prophecy. Some deny the kingdom because it did not appear immediately in the form Israel expected. That is unbelief. The kingdom did not vanish because it was delayed. Others, like the crowd in Luke 19, expect the kingdom without understanding the rejection of the King and the interval before His return. That is also confusion. Jesus corrects both errors. He does not say, "There will be no kingdom." He says, in parabolic form, "A nobleman must go into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return." The kingdom is real, but the manifestation is not immediate.

This matters for rightly dividing the Gospels and the Church Age. Christ came presenting Himself to Israel as King, but He was rejected. He ascended to the Father. During His absence, servants have stewardship. The mystery of the Body of Christ is later revealed through Paul, but that mystery does not cancel the future kingdom. Christ will return. He will reign. He will judge His enemies. Luke 19 gives that pattern before the cross. The King is not defeated because He departs. He departs to receive the kingdom and return. The delay is not failure. It is part of the plan.

Chapter 2: The Nobleman Is the Rejected King

The nobleman in the parable is the central figure. He is a man of rank who goes into a far country to receive a kingdom and return. This plainly points to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the rightful King. He is the noble One. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. He approached Jerusalem, not as an ambitious revolutionary needing men to crown Him by political force, but as the King fulfilling Scripture. Yet His path to the throne would go through rejection, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and return. The parable makes

clear that His reign is not abandoned because men reject Him. He goes away and comes back with authority.

The phrase “to receive for himself a kingdom” is important. The kingdom is not created by a popular vote of the citizens. The citizens can reject Him, but they cannot veto God. The Nobleman receives the kingdom from a higher authority. That matches Daniel 7, where the Son of man receives dominion, glory, and a kingdom from the Ancient of days. Christ’s kingdom authority is not dependent upon Israel’s rulers approving Him, Rome recognizing Him, or the nations voting Him in. The Father gives the kingdom to the Son. The world may send its message of rejection after Him, but heaven’s decree stands.

This corrects the modern religious idea that Jesus is merely waiting to see whether humanity will accept His moral influence. He is not a candidate. He is the King. He is not running for office. He is the heir of all things. Men may reject Him now, mock Him now, reinterpret Him now, commercialize Him now, sentimentalize Him now, or exclude Him now, but He will return having received the kingdom. The Nobleman’s departure is temporary. His reign is certain. The world’s rejection does not change His title deed.

Chapter 3: The Servants Are Commanded to Occupy Till He Comes

Before the nobleman leaves, he calls ten servants, delivers them ten pounds, and says, “Occupy till I come.” That command is the servant’s marching order during the nobleman’s absence. They are not told to sit around doing nothing while discussing the nobleman’s return. They are not told to bury the pound in a napkin. They are not told to join the citizens in rebellion. They are told to occupy. That means they are to do business, trade, labor, and use what was entrusted to them until the lord returns. The absence of the King is not a vacation for servants. It is a stewardship period.

In the parable, each servant receives one pound. That is one important difference from the Talents. In Matthew 25, the servants receive different amounts according to ability. In Luke 19, the servants begin with the same pound. The emphasis therefore falls on faithfulness in using a common entrustment. Whatever broader applications one may draw, the pound represents something entrusted by the Lord during His absence that must be used for His interests. The servant is not free to treat it as private property. The command is attached to the entrusted pound: “Occupy till I come.” He must live and labor in light of the return.

This is a needed rebuke to idle prophecy watchers. Some people love the doctrine of the Lord’s return but use it as an excuse for speculation rather than service. They study charts, argue timelines, chase headlines, and never occupy. That is not faithfulness. The King’s return is supposed to produce labor, sobriety, courage, holiness, witness, and

accountability. A man who believes the Nobleman is coming back should be more faithful, not less. The command is not “Speculate till I come.” It is “Occupy till I come.”

Chapter 4: The Citizens Hated Him and Rejected His Reign

The parable says, “But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.” That sentence is one of the most revealing statements in all the parables. It shows the heart of rebellion. The citizens do not merely misunderstand the nobleman. They hate him. Their issue is not lack of evidence. It is rejection of his authority. “We will not have this man to reign over us.” That is the voice of Israel’s unbelieving leadership in the immediate setting, and it is also the voice of the whole rebellious world toward Christ. Men may tolerate Jesus as a teacher, healer, symbol, moral example, or religious brand. They will not have Him reign.

In the historical setting, Israel’s rulers made this rejection plain. They did not want Christ’s authority. They feared losing their place. They rejected His words. They plotted His death. They cried, “We have no king but Caesar.” That is the citizens’ message in real history. The King stood in front of them, and they refused Him. They did not merely decline a private spiritual experience. They rejected their King. That rejection brought judgment, but it did not cancel the kingdom. The Nobleman went away to receive the kingdom and return.

This sentence also exposes modern unbelief. Men like a Jesus who affirms them, comforts them, and stays out of their politics, bedrooms, wallets, churches, ambitions, and scholarship. But the real Jesus reigns. The real Jesus has authority over doctrine, bodies, nations, kings, homes, churches, money, speech, worship, and eternity. The rebellious heart says, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” It may say it through atheism, false religion, liberal theology, Roman tradition, modern Bible correction, moral rebellion, political pride, or private sin. The wording changes, but the rebellion is the same. The issue is reign.

Chapter 5: The Returning King Reckons With His Servants

When the nobleman returns, having received the kingdom, he commands the servants to be called, “that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.” The return brings reckoning. The servants do not decide whether their labor mattered. The lord does. He asks for an account. The first servant’s pound has gained ten pounds, and he is rewarded with authority over ten cities. The second has gained five pounds and is rewarded with authority over five cities. The reward corresponds to faithfulness and gain. Service during absence affects position in the kingdom.

This is kingdom accountability. The faithful servants are not merely handed abstract compliments. They are given governmental responsibility: authority over cities. That fits the

kingdom setting. Christ will return to reign, and faithful service will matter in relation to kingdom responsibility. This should not be confused with the Church's judgment seat of Christ in every detail, though there is a parallel principle of reward for faithfulness. The Church Age believer's works will be judged for reward or loss, but the doctrinal scene in Luke 19 is the returning King reckoning with servants in relation to the kingdom He received.

The reckoning also shows that the Lord cares about increase. He does not give pounds merely so servants can say they possessed one. He expects them to trade. He expects gain. He expects usefulness. Faithfulness is not passive preservation. It is active obedience. A servant cannot say, "I kept the doctrine in my pocket and never used it," and expect commendation. A man who has the truth must use it. A man who has opportunity must act. A man who has light must shine. The King returns to ask what was gained through the stewardship He gave.

Chapter 6: The Slothful Servant Was Condemned by His Own Excuse

Another servant comes and says, "Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin." Like the one-talent servant in Matthew 25, he returns what was given but unused. He says he feared the lord because he was an austere man, taking up what he laid not down and reaping what he did not sow. His excuse is an accusation. He blames the lord's character for his own unfaithfulness. He says fear kept him from trading. But the lord answers, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." If the servant truly believed the lord was austere, he should at least have put the money in the bank so it could gain interest. His own words condemn him.

This shows that fear can become an excuse for laziness. There is a holy fear that produces obedience, but this servant's fear produced burial in a napkin. That is not reverence. That is wicked sloth dressed in cautious language. Many people do the same thing. They do nothing with what God gave them and then blame God for being hard, circumstances for being difficult, people for being unresponsive, or their own fear for making obedience impossible. But the Lord sees through excuses. If the pound was His, then the servant had no right to hide it. If the lord would return, then the servant had no right to act as if preservation without use were enough.

The napkin is a sorry grave for stewardship. It is cleaner than the earth in Matthew 25, perhaps, but just as useless. Some men bury truth in the dirt of worldliness; others wrap it neatly in a napkin of religious caution. Either way, it is unused. The Lord did not give the pound to be admired, hidden, protected from all risk, or returned untouched. He gave it to

be employed. A servant who refuses to act because he has a distorted view of the Master will find that the Master judges both the distortion and the refusal.

Chapter 7: The Enemies Are Judged When the King Returns

The parable ends with one of the strongest judgment statements in the Gospels: “But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.” That is not modern soft preaching. The enemies are not brought in for group therapy. They are not told their resistance was caused by low self-esteem. They are not affirmed in their alternative kingdom vision. They are judged. The issue was their refusal of the nobleman’s reign, and when the nobleman returns as king, that rebellion is answered with execution. The King’s enemies do not get to rewrite the ending.

This is a major reason the parable matters. The modern religious world often presents Jesus as though He will forever beg rebels to consider His kindness while never enforcing His authority. Luke 19 says otherwise. The rejected King returns. The citizens who hated Him and refused His reign are called His enemies. Their sentence is not correction, but destruction. This fits the broader Bible. Psalm 2 says the nations rage and the rulers take counsel against the Lord and His anointed, but God sets His King upon His holy hill of Zion. The Son will break them with a rod of iron. Revelation shows Christ returning in judgment. The meek and lowly Jesus is also the warrior King.

This judgment must be preached without apology. Christ-rejecting men are not merely spiritually confused. They are enemies if they persist in refusing His reign. The gospel of grace is now preached freely, calling sinners to be reconciled to God through the blood and resurrection of Christ. But grace despised does not remove judgment. The same Christ who saves now will reign and judge later. A man who says, “We will not have this man to reign over us,” had better understand that the Man will return. And when He returns, He will not ask His enemies to vote again.

Conclusion

The parable of the Pounds clearly presents the rejected King, His departure, His return, servant accountability, and judgment on His enemies. Jesus spoke it because they were near Jerusalem and the people thought the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He corrected their timing without denying the kingdom. The nobleman goes into a far country to receive a kingdom and return. That points straight to Christ’s rejection, ascension, reception of kingdom authority, and future return to reign. The kingdom was not canceled because Israel rejected the King. The King went away and will return.

The servants are commanded to occupy till He comes. That is the stewardship lesson. During the King’s absence, servants are not to sleep, speculate, or bury what was

entrusted. They are to trade with the pound. When the King returns, He reckons with them and rewards faithful service with authority. The slothful servant, who hid the pound in a napkin and blamed the lord's character, is judged by his own excuse. The distinction between the Pounds and the Talents matters: in the Pounds, each receives the same pound, while in the Talents different amounts are given according to ability. But both parables warn that the Lord expects what He gives to be used.

The enemies are the final warning. They hated the nobleman and said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." That is the heart of unbelief. They did not want His reign. When the King returns, those enemies are not rehabilitated by sentiment. They are judged. The world may reject Christ now, Israel's rulers rejected Him then, and modern religion may prefer a harmless Jesus who never rules, but the Nobleman is coming back with the kingdom. The only wise response is to bow to the King, serve during His absence, and occupy till He comes.

40 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Watchful Porter and the Absent Master

Introduction

The parable of the Watchful Porter and the Absent Master in Mark 13:34-37 is short, but it carries the weight of the entire prophetic warning that surrounds it. The Lord says, "For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch." Then He says, "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning." He warns that the master may come suddenly and find them sleeping. Then He ends with the universal charge, "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." That is the parable. A master leaves. The house remains. Servants are given authority. Every man has work. The porter has a special command to watch. The time of return is unknown. Sleeping at the post is dangerous. The repeated command is not "calculate," not "speculate," not "argue," not "build a date chart," but "Watch."

The context is Mark 13, which runs parallel to the prophetic discourse in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. The Lord is answering questions connected with the temple, coming destruction, signs, deception, persecution, the abomination of desolation, tribulation, false Christs, cosmic disturbance, and the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. This is not a random devotional about paying attention in ordinary life. It is prophetic

watchfulness connected with the coming of the Son of man. The Lord places His servants in a house during His absence and gives them responsibility while the master is gone. That responsibility includes work and watching. If a man tries to remove this from its prophetic setting, he will flatten the warning. If he tries to force it into a direct Church Age rapture passage in every detail, he will confuse Israel's prophetic program with the Body of Christ's blessed hope. The passage must be rightly divided.

That said, right division does not make the command useless to believers today. "Watch" is one of the great words of Scripture. The Church Age believer is not watching for the abomination of desolation so he can flee Judea, and he is not waiting through Daniel's seventieth week for the Son of man to descend to the Mount of Olives before he has hope. The Church looks for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, and the catching away of the Body of Christ is not the same event as the Second Advent judgment scene in Mark 13. But believers today still have no business sleeping at the post. The Lord has given work. He has given authority. He has entrusted truth, time, ministry, homes, churches, witness, doctrine, and responsibility. Watching in Scripture is not lazy curiosity about headlines. It is faithful readiness under the authority of an absent Master who will return when men do not expect Him.

Chapter 1: The Parable Belongs in Mark 13's Prophetic Setting

The parable comes at the end of Mark 13, and Mark 13 must be allowed to speak before the parable is applied. The chapter begins with the disciples looking at the temple, and the Lord declaring that not one stone would be left upon another. Then Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask Him privately when these things shall be and what sign there shall be when all these things shall be fulfilled. The Lord answers with warnings about deception, false Christs, wars, earthquakes, famines, persecutions, the gospel preached among all nations, family betrayal, the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not, flight from Judea, great affliction, false signs, cosmic disturbance, and the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. That is the soil in which the porter parable grows.

Because of that setting, the parable's command to watch has prophetic teeth. It is not a vague call to be emotionally alert. It is tied to the master's return after a period of absence and responsibility. The servants in the house do not know whether the master will come at even, midnight, cockcrowing, or morning. They are not to sleep. That fits the wider warning of the chapter: the Lord's people under prophetic pressure must not be deceived, must not be spiritually careless, must not be caught unaware, and must not abandon their assigned duty. The porter's watching stands at the doorway of the house while the master is gone.

This matters because men often misuse prophecy in two opposite directions. Some turn prophecy into a playground of charts, guesses, dates, and sensational claims. Others react by saying prophecy is too confusing or too divisive to study seriously. Both are wrong. Mark 13 was given by Christ to be understood by those who will need it. The Lord did not waste words. If He says watch, then watching matters. If He gives signs, warnings, and timing language, then context matters. A Bible believer should not be a prophecy clown, but neither should he be a prophecy coward. He should read the chapter, believe it, divide it properly, and watch in the way the Lord commanded.

Chapter 2: The Master Takes a Far Journey

The Lord compares the Son of man to a man taking a far journey. The master is absent from the house, but his absence is not abandonment. He remains the master. The house is still his. The servants are still his servants. The authority they possess is derived from him. The work they perform is assigned by him. His departure creates a stewardship period, not a lawless interval. That is one of the great truths of this parable. The Master may be away, but the house is not ownerless. The servants may not see Him, but they are still accountable to Him. His journey is temporary, and His return is certain.

This fits Christ's rejection, departure, and future return. The King came, was rejected, died, rose again, and ascended. He is not presently sitting on David's throne in Jerusalem visibly reigning over the nations with a rod of iron, but He is not defeated. He is seated at the right hand of God until the appointed time. He has gone into the far country, so to speak, and He will return. That pattern appears repeatedly in the parables: the nobleman goes to receive a kingdom and return, the lord of servants travels and later reckons, the bridegroom tarries but comes, and the master of the house returns at an unknown hour. Delay is part of the testing of servants.

The danger during the far journey is that men begin to live as though the Master will not return. The evil servant says in his heart, "My lord delayeth his coming." Scoffers say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" Religious workers settle into routines without urgency. Watchmen fall asleep. Servants become distracted. The house begins to feel ordinary, as though the absence were permanent. The parable says otherwise. The far journey has an end. The Master is coming back. Faithfulness during absence is what He will inspect when He returns.

Chapter 3: He Gives Authority to His Servants

The master gives authority to his servants. That is a serious phrase. Authority in the Lord's house is not self-generated. It is delegated. A servant has no right to invent authority for himself, abuse it for himself, or detach it from the master's will. He receives authority for

service, not self-exaltation. The Lord never gives authority so a servant can become a tyrant in the house while the Master is away. Authority is given to maintain order, carry out assigned work, guard the house, feed properly, and serve the interests of the absent Master.

This truth rebukes religious abuse. Many men love authority but hate accountability. They want people to obey them, honor them, support them, fear them, and protect their position, but they forget that authority in the house came from the Master and will be judged by the Master. A pastor, teacher, elder, father, preacher, or ministry leader is not the owner of the house. He is a servant with delegated responsibility. If he uses that authority to beat fellow servants, starve the household, advance himself, hide sin, protect a brand, or silence truth, he has turned authority into rebellion. The Master will not be impressed.

This also rebukes false humility that refuses responsibility. Some servants act as though having authority is automatically pride. It is not. The master gave authority. The issue is not whether servants should exercise authority, but whether they exercise it under the master's command. God's work needs order, teaching, correction, leadership, warning, and watchfulness. A porter must watch. Servants must work. Authority must function. But every ounce of it must remain conscious that the Master is away only for a time. Delegated authority without watchfulness becomes tyranny. Watchful authority remains servanthood.

Chapter 4: Every Man Has His Work

The parable says the master gave "to every man his work." That is one of the most practical phrases in the whole passage. Every man has his work. Not every man has the same work, but every man has assigned responsibility. The porter watches. Other servants serve in their places. The house is not maintained by one man doing everything while everyone else sleeps. The master assigns work according to his own will. The servant's duty is not to envy another man's assignment or abandon his own. He is to do his work.

This is desperately needed in modern Christianity. Many people want someone else's work. They want the platform, but not the burden. They want the pulpit, but not the study. They want the influence, but not the tears. They want the authority, but not the accountability. Others despise their own work because it seems small, hidden, or ordinary. But the Master gives to every man his work. If God gave a man a home to lead, that is work. If He gave him children to teach, that is work. If He gave him a pulpit, that is work. If He gave him a sickbed and a testimony, that is work. If He gave him money to steward, that is work. If He gave him truth to speak, that is work. If He gave him a post at the door, that is work.

A servant asleep at another man's post is still unfaithful. A servant admiring another man's assignment while neglecting his own is still wrong. The question at the Master's return is

not whether you did the work you preferred, but whether you did the work He gave. The porter is not called to abandon the door because the kitchen looks more interesting. The servant inside is not called to neglect his task because the porter's position seems more visible. Every man has his work, and faithfulness begins by accepting the assignment.

Chapter 5: The Porter Is Commanded to Watch

The porter receives a specific command: watch. A porter is connected with the door, the entrance, the threshold, the place where approach and access must be observed. He is not commanded to sleep near the door, decorate the door, discuss the history of doors, or write theories about doors while ignoring footsteps. He is commanded to watch. That means alertness, sobriety, readiness, and attention under orders. Watching is not curiosity. It is duty. The porter who watches is not entertaining himself with speculation. He is guarding the house in view of the master's return.

This is where prophecy students often fail. They confuse watching with headline addiction. They think watching means chasing every rumor, decoding every eclipse, naming every Antichrist candidate, predicting every war as the final war, and terrifying people with half-baked charts. That is not biblical watching. Watching is sober readiness in the light of what God has revealed. It includes discernment, prayer, obedience, doctrinal stability, moral alertness, and refusal to be deceived. A man who knows a thousand prophecy theories but is asleep in holiness is not watching. A man who can identify ten possible prophetic developments but neglects prayer, witness, family, and service is not watching. He is daydreaming with a newspaper in his hand.

The porter's command also applies to those who guard doctrine and warning. A watchman must not be afraid to sound the alarm. If deception comes, he must not sleep. If false Christs arise, he must not flatter them. If the house is threatened, he must not remain silent to preserve popularity. Watching has a cost because sleepy people resent alarms. But the porter answers to the Master, not to the comfort of sleepers. The command is plain: watch.

Chapter 6: The Time of Return Is Unknown

The Lord says, "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh." He lists watches of the night: even, midnight, cockcrowing, or morning. The uncertainty is part of the warning. The servants are not given permission to sleep because they prefer one watch over another. The master may come at an hour they do not expect. The unknown timing is meant to produce readiness, not speculation. If the exact hour were given, the flesh would sleep until the last minute. Since it is not given, the proper posture is watchfulness throughout the night.

This connects with the broader warning against date-setting. The Lord repeatedly says men do not know the day and hour. A Bible believer has no business pretending to know what Christ said was not given. Prophecy is not a license to become a calendar prophet. The unknown time should humble us. It should make us careful. It should make us watchful. It should not make us arrogant. The servant who claims to know exactly when the master returns is already in danger of ignoring the master's own words.

Yet the unknown hour does not mean there are no prophetic markers in their proper context. Mark 13 gives signs. Matthew 24 gives signs. Daniel gives a prophetic framework. The Lord tells those in the Tribulation setting what to watch for. But signs are not the same as date-setting, and watchfulness is not the same as presumption. The servants do not know whether He comes at even, midnight, cockcrowing, or morning. Therefore, they must be ready in all watches. The lesson is not ignorance as a virtue. It is readiness without presumption.

Chapter 7: Sleeping at the Post Is the Great Danger

The Lord warns that the master may come suddenly and find them sleeping. That is the danger. Not necessarily open rebellion, though that is possible. Not necessarily public blasphemy. Sleep. Spiritual dullness. Carelessness. Assumption. Weariness without watchfulness. A sleeping servant may still be in the house. He may still have a title. He may still be near his post. But he is not doing what he was commanded to do. The porter asleep at the door is as useless as no porter at all when the moment of return arrives.

Sleep is a major biblical picture of spiritual danger. Men sleep when they should pray. The disciples slept in Gethsemane. The foolish virgins slept along with the wise during the tarrying of the bridegroom, but the wise had preparation the foolish lacked. Paul tells believers not to sleep as do others, but to watch and be sober. Sleep dulls discernment, weakens reaction, and makes sudden arrival dangerous. The sleeping servant is not ready for the master's knock. That is why the Lord says watch.

For believers today, the application is obvious even while the prophetic setting remains distinct. Do not sleep at the post. Do not sleep in doctrine. Do not sleep in prayer. Do not sleep in holiness. Do not sleep in your home while your children are being catechized by the world. Do not sleep in the pulpit while wolves circle the flock. Do not sleep in discernment while false teachers creep in. Do not sleep in witness while souls perish. The Church may be looking for the blessed hope rather than the Second Advent signs of Mark 13, but no Christian has permission to be asleep. The Master's absence is not an excuse for drowsiness. It is the reason to watch.

Conclusion

The parable of the Watchful Porter and the Absent Master is short, but it gathers the force of Mark 13 into one final command. A man takes a far journey, leaves his house, gives authority to his servants, assigns every man his work, and commands the porter to watch. The servants do not know when the master will come: at even, midnight, cockcrowing, or morning. The danger is that he comes suddenly and finds them sleeping. The repeated command is clear: watch. The passage is not about idle curiosity. It is about faithful readiness during the Master's absence.

Rightly divided, the parable belongs in Mark 13's prophetic setting. It is connected with Israel's prophetic program, the Tribulation context, the abomination of desolation, the coming of the Son of man, and the command to be watchful in view of the Master's return. It should not be confused in every detail with the Church's blessed hope or used to erase the distinction between the Rapture and the Second Advent. The Church is looking for Christ to catch away the Body before the day of wrath, while Mark 13 gives prophetic instruction tied to the Son of man coming in power and glory. The settings must be kept straight.

The application remains powerful. The Master has gone on a far journey, but He has not surrendered ownership of the house. He has given authority. He has assigned work. He has commanded watchfulness. A servant has no business sleeping at the post, abusing authority, neglecting duty, or turning prophecy into lazy speculation. Watch means stay sober, stay faithful, stay ready, stay at your work, and keep your eyes open under the command of the Lord. What He says unto them, He says unto all: Watch.

41 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God

Introduction

One of the biggest reasons men butcher the parables of Jesus is that they read the phrase "kingdom" like it always means the same thing in every verse, to every audience, under every covenant, in every dispensation, with no change in setting, no attention to context, and no fear of jamming God's program into one religious blender. That is how people turn Matthew into Romans, Israel into the Church, the Tribulation into the Christian life, the Second Advent into the Rapture, kingdom reward into Church Age justification, and warnings to Jewish servants into threats against a sealed member of the Body of Christ. The Bible uses words with precision, and "kingdom" is one of those words that demands attention. Sometimes the issue is a literal, earthly, Davidic, Messianic kingdom promised to

Israel. Sometimes the issue is God's spiritual rule, righteousness, and entrance by the new birth. Sometimes the issue is the mystery form of the kingdom while the King is absent and rejected. Sometimes the issue is a prophetic judgment connected with the Son of man returning in glory. If a man refuses to distinguish those settings, he is going to make a mess long before he reaches the hard parables.

The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are closely related, and in some passages they overlap so strongly that a man would be foolish to pretend they have no connection. Matthew often says "kingdom of heaven" where Mark and Luke say "kingdom of God" in parallel accounts. That is why a Bible believer must not create artificial divisions just to sound clever. The point is not to invent two unrelated kingdoms that never touch. The point is to recognize the Bible's own distinctions and emphasis. Matthew is the Gospel that especially presents Christ as King, Son of David, Israel's Messiah, and the One connected with the promised kingdom from heaven coming to the earth. The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is peculiar to Matthew and is deeply tied to that Jewish, Messianic, earthly, governmental setting. The kingdom of God, while it can overlap with kingdom truth, often emphasizes God's rule in a broader and spiritual sense, including righteousness, spiritual entrance, and realities that cannot be reduced to outward national form. If a man cannot handle overlap and distinction at the same time, he will either flatten the whole Bible or split it into nonsense.

This foundation essay matters because the parables depend on this distinction. Matthew 13's mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are not generic Church Age moral tales. They reveal the form of the kingdom during the King's rejection, showing mixture, corruption, false growth, hidden treasure, the pearl, the net, and final separation. Matthew 24 and 25 are not simple devotional teachings detached from prophecy. They are loaded with the coming of the Son of man, Israel, the Tribulation, readiness, and judgment. Luke's parables often emphasize mercy, repentance, stewardship, and the spiritual realities of God's dealings with sinners and servants, but even there the setting must be watched. The Lord Jesus Christ did not speak carelessly. The Holy Ghost did not preserve loose terminology. If God says "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew and "kingdom of God" elsewhere, the student of Scripture should slow down, compare spiritual things with spiritual, and ask what the wording and setting are doing. That is not nitpicking. That is Bible study.

Chapter 1: The Word "Kingdom" Must Be Defined by Context

The word "kingdom" does not automatically mean "heaven when you die," nor does it always mean "the Church," nor does it always mean "the Millennium," nor does it always mean "God's spiritual rule in the heart." Context determines the use. A kingdom can involve a king, subjects, law, territory, authority, throne, judgment, and administration. It can also

be spoken of in terms of spiritual entrance, inward reality, righteousness, peace, and joy. The Bible is not confused, but readers become confused when they demand one definition everywhere. A word can have a central idea while carrying different applications according to setting. That is true with “law,” “gospel,” “salvation,” “world,” “church,” and “kingdom.” A lazy reader wants one flat meaning. A careful Bible believer asks how the Holy Ghost uses the word in the passage.

When the Old Testament promises a kingdom to Israel, it is not talking about a vague religious feeling. God promised David a throne. He promised a Son who would reign. The prophets speak of Jerusalem, Zion, nations, judgment, peace, Israel restored, land promises fulfilled, Messiah ruling, and the knowledge of the Lord covering the earth. That kingdom has visible, earthly, political, and governmental features because God promised real things to a real nation under a real Messiah. To spiritualize all of that into “the Church age in symbolic language” is not reverence. It is unbelief wearing a scholar’s robe. If words mean anything, Israel’s kingdom promises include earth, throne, nation, covenant, land, and King.

At the same time, the New Testament also speaks of spiritual realities connected with the kingdom. Jesus says except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Paul says the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. He says flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. These statements cannot be reduced to mere political territory. They involve spiritual fitness, divine life, righteousness, and God’s rule beyond outward form. The right answer is not to deny the earthly kingdom or deny the spiritual kingdom. The right answer is to let each passage define its own emphasis. That is what right division does.

Chapter 2: The Kingdom of Heaven Has a Strong Matthew and Jewish Emphasis

The phrase “kingdom of heaven” is found in Matthew, and that alone should get a Bible student’s attention. Matthew opens by presenting Jesus Christ as the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. The genealogy, the wise men seeking the King of the Jews, Herod’s fear of a rival king, John the Baptist preaching the kingdom of heaven at hand, and Jesus preaching the same kingdom all establish a Jewish and Messianic atmosphere. Matthew is not written in a vacuum. It is the Gospel of the King. Therefore, when Matthew repeatedly uses “kingdom of heaven,” it is not accidental religious wording. It has to do with the rule of heaven in relation to the earth, the promised King, Israel’s expectation, and the kingdom program being offered, rejected, hidden in mystery form, and later manifested in glory.

This kingdom of heaven has outward features that can include both true and false elements during its mystery form. That is why Matthew 13 can include wheat and tares, a

mustard tree with birds in the branches, leaven hidden in meal, a net gathering good and bad, and final separation by angels. If the kingdom of heaven always meant the pure spiritual state of born-again believers, those parables would become impossible or absurd. The kingdom of heaven in Matthew can describe the outward sphere of kingdom profession and development while the King is rejected. It can contain mixture until judgment. It can have tares among wheat, bad fish among good, and corrupting leaven at work. That is not the same thing as the spiritual standing of a saved Church Age believer in Christ.

The kingdom of heaven also carries future governmental force. Matthew 25 speaks of the Son of man sitting on the throne of His glory and the nations being judged. Matthew 19 speaks of the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory and the twelve apostles will sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. That is not merely a spiritual feeling in the heart. That is governmental kingdom language. A man who reads Matthew and refuses to see Israel, thrones, tribes, nations, and earthly rule is not rightly dividing. He is sanding the corners off the text so it will fit his system.

Chapter 3: The Kingdom of God Often Emphasizes Spiritual Rule and Entrance

The kingdom of God can overlap with the kingdom of heaven, but it often emphasizes the spiritual reality of God's rule, the necessity of divine life, and entrance by God's work rather than outward Jewish privilege. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. That statement strikes at the heart of religious confidence. Nicodemus had Jewish birth, religious office, knowledge of Scripture, and association with Israel's covenant people, but the Lord tells him he needs a birth from above. Physical descent, religious rank, and national privilege are not enough. The kingdom of God requires life from God.

Paul's use also shows a spiritual emphasis. Romans 14:17 says, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." That is not a denial of the future kingdom. It is a statement about the character of God's rule in the believer's walk and present spiritual reality. First Corinthians 4:20 says, "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." First Corinthians 15:50 says, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." These passages are not focused on Israel's national political administration in the land. They are dealing with spiritual power, righteousness, resurrection fitness, and divine realities that natural flesh cannot possess.

This is why a man must be careful. If he says the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God are always identical in every sense, he will miss these differences in emphasis. If he says they are totally unrelated, he will miss their overlap in the preaching of Christ and the synoptic parallels. The right approach is to compare Scripture with Scripture. The kingdom

of God is broader and deeper in many contexts, emphasizing God's rule wherever it is manifested, especially spiritually. The kingdom of heaven in Matthew has a narrower and often more dispensationally marked emphasis connected with the heavenly rule coming to earth through Messiah and its mystery form during rejection. Both belong to God. Both relate to His reign. But they are not to be mashed together until all distinctions disappear.

Chapter 4: The Kingdom Was Offered, Rejected, and Then Revealed in Mystery Form

John the Baptist preached, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus preached the same message. The King was present. Israel's Messiah had come. The kingdom was genuinely at hand because the King was there. That does not mean God was surprised by rejection or that the cross was an emergency plan. The death of Christ was foreordained. But in the historical presentation to Israel, the kingdom was announced, the King was manifested, and the nation's leaders rejected Him. That rejection becomes a turning point in the Gospel record. The rulers accuse Him, resist Him, and eventually plot His death. Matthew 12 is especially important because the leaders attribute His works to the power of the devil, and then Matthew 13 begins the mystery parables of the kingdom of heaven.

The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are not the same thing as the Old Testament prophets simply repeating the visible kingdom glory. A mystery in Scripture is something hidden and now revealed. Matthew 13 reveals what the kingdom would look like while the King is rejected and before the visible kingdom is established. That is why the parables contain sowing, mixed responses, tares among wheat, abnormal outward growth, leaven, hidden treasure, a pearl, a dragnet, and final separation. This is not the kingdom in full manifested glory with Christ ruling from Jerusalem. It is the mystery form of the kingdom during the period between rejection and final establishment.

This helps explain why parables are so often misunderstood. People read Matthew 13 as though Jesus is describing the Church as a pure, ever-improving, world-conquering institution that gradually Christianizes everything. But the chapter says otherwise. It shows mixture, corruption, counterfeit growth, and judgment. The mustard seed becomes a tree with birds lodging in the branches. The leaven works through the meal. The field contains tares until harvest. That is not a triumphalist church-growth manual. It is the King revealing what happens in the kingdom sphere while He is rejected. The kingdom is not canceled, but its open glory is delayed, and the mystery form includes serious corruption.

Chapter 5: Confusing the Kingdoms Corrupts Salvation Doctrine

One of the worst results of kingdom confusion is corrupted salvation doctrine. Men take kingdom passages with conditions, endurance, judgment, and works evidence and aim

them straight at Church Age justification. Then they tell saved believers that if they do not endure to the end of Matthew 24, they will lose salvation; if they do not have enough oil in Matthew 25, they will be shut out; if they do not feed the hungry in the Sheep and Goats judgment, they will go to everlasting fire; if they are unprofitable servants in kingdom parables, they will lose eternal life. That kind of preaching terrifies the sheep because it refuses to divide the passages.

The gospel of the grace of God for the Church Age is clear. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. The sinner is justified by faith apart from works. The believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption. He is accepted in the Beloved, complete in Christ, and kept by the power of God. Those doctrines are not guesses. They are plainly revealed after the cross and resurrection, especially through Paul's ministry to the Body of Christ. A man has no right to take Israel's kingdom passages and use them to unseal what God has sealed.

But the opposite error is also dangerous. Some men use grace as an excuse to ignore every warning in the Gospels. They say, "That is kingdom material," and then act like no practical truth remains. That is not right division. That is laziness. The parables still teach God's holiness, accountability, readiness, stewardship, fruitfulness, judgment, mercy, repentance, and the danger of empty profession. The issue is not whether the passages matter. They do. The issue is how they matter. They must be applied after being interpreted. Interpretation comes first. Application follows. When that order is reversed, salvation doctrine becomes a wreck.

Chapter 6: Confusing the Kingdoms Corrupts Prophecy

Kingdom confusion also corrupts prophecy. If a man cannot distinguish Israel from the Church, the Rapture from the Second Advent, the Tribulation from ordinary suffering, and the kingdom of heaven's earthly Messianic aspect from the kingdom of God's broader spiritual rule, his prophecy will become a tangled knot. He will put the Church in Matthew 24 as though the Body of Christ is waiting for the abomination of desolation in Judea. He will make the Sheep and Goats judgment a general final judgment of all humanity. He will turn the Millennium into a symbol. He will spiritualize David's throne into religious influence. He will make Israel's promises vanish into Gentile theology.

Matthew 24 and 25 are especially clear examples. The disciples ask about the sign of Christ's coming and the end of the world. Jesus speaks of Daniel's abomination of desolation, Judea, the sabbath, great tribulation, cosmic signs, the Son of man coming with power and glory, angels gathering the elect, the fig tree lesson, watchful servants, virgins awaiting the bridegroom, talents, and the judgment of the nations. That is prophetic

kingdom territory. The Church can learn from it, but it should not steal it and pretend the Body of Christ is Israel going through Daniel's seventieth week. The Church's blessed hope is revealed with its own doctrinal clarity elsewhere.

Israel's prophetic program remains real. God has not cast away His people forever. Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, and all Israel shall be saved. The King will return. The kingdom will be established. The apostles' thrones, the twelve tribes, Jerusalem, the nations, and the reign of Christ are not poetic leftovers waiting to be dissolved by Gentile theologians. The kingdom of heaven's earthly, governmental, Jewish, Messianic aspect must be preserved, or prophecy becomes a fog bank. Right division lets the Church be the Church and Israel be Israel without robbing either of what God gave.

Chapter 7: The Parables Make Sense When the Kingdoms Are Rightly Divided

Once the kingdom distinctions are honored, the parables begin to make sense. The Sower shows the word received in different grounds, especially in connection with kingdom preaching, while still applying devotionally to hearing the word today. The Wheat and Tares makes sense because the field is the world, not the local church, and the harvest is the end of the world. The Mustard Seed and Leaven no longer need to be forced into a rosy picture of Christian progress; they can warn of abnormal growth and corruption in the kingdom sphere. The Hidden Treasure and Pearl can be distinguished without making sinners purchase Christ. The Net can remain a final judgment parable rather than an evangelism technique.

The later parables also fall into place. The Ten Virgins no longer have to be used to teach that sealed Church Age believers lose the Holy Spirit. The Talents can warn of kingdom stewardship without becoming justification by investment. The Sheep and Goats can be recognized as the judgment of the nations at the Son of man's return rather than Paul's gospel of grace. The Pounds can speak of the rejected King going away to receive a kingdom and returning to judge servants and enemies. The Fig Tree Lesson can remain tied to Israel's prophetic signs rather than becoming either date-setting material or meaningless symbolism.

This is the value of right division. It does not make the Bible smaller. It makes it clearer. It does not rob passages of application. It protects them from misapplication. It does not deny spiritual profit. It preserves doctrinal accuracy so the profit is clean. The parables are not random moral tales. They are placed in specific Gospels, spoken to specific audiences, under specific circumstances, with specific kingdom truth in view. When a man honors

those distinctions, the parables stop fighting Paul, stop terrorizing saved people, stop feeding replacement theology, and start doing what Christ intended them to do.

Conclusion

The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are not terms to be shoved into one careless religious blender. They overlap in places, and a wise interpreter will not create artificial separation where Scripture shows connection. But they also carry distinct emphases that must be honored. The kingdom of heaven in Matthew has a strong Jewish, Messianic, earthly, governmental, and prophetic emphasis connected with the King, Israel, the kingdom offer, rejection, mystery form, and future manifestation. The kingdom of God often emphasizes God's broader and spiritual rule, righteousness, power, new birth, and realities that flesh and blood cannot inherit. Both belong to God's reign, but the Bible's own wording and context must be respected.

This distinction explains why so many parables are misunderstood. Men confuse Israel and the Church, kingdom warnings and Church Age salvation, the Rapture and the Second Advent, the judgment seat of Christ and the judgment of the nations, the mystery form of the kingdom and the future visible reign of Christ. Then they blame the Bible for the confusion they created. The Bible is not confused. The reader who refuses right division is confused. God put passages in order, used words carefully, and gave progressive revelation. A man who studies to shew himself approved must compare spiritual things with spiritual and keep the doctrinal lanes clear.

The result is not dry technical study. It is spiritual safety. Right division protects the gospel of grace, preserves Israel's promises, honors the Church's heavenly calling, keeps prophecy intact, and lets the parables of Jesus speak with their full force. The kingdom parables are not sentimental illustrations. They are royal teachings from the King. Some reveal mercy. Some reveal judgment. Some reveal corruption. Some reveal stewardship. Some reveal Israel's rejection. Some reveal the coming kingdom. If we let the Bible define its own kingdoms, the parables open up. If we refuse, we will keep turning royal doctrine into religious confusion.

42 of 42: The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided - The Final Key to Understanding the Parables

Introduction

The final key to understanding the parables of Jesus is not hidden in a seminary library, a Greek lexicon, a denominational confession, a mystical allegory chart, or some emotional sermon where every character gets turned into the Church and every warning gets turned into a threat against eternal security. The final key is the same key that unlocks the whole Bible: study the passage in its own setting, believe the words as God gave them, compare Scripture with Scripture, and rightly divide the word of truth. Every parable must be interpreted by its speaker, audience, context, doctrinal setting, and place in God's revealed program. Who is speaking? To whom is He speaking? Why is He speaking? What has just happened? What covenant setting is in view? Is the Lord dealing with Israel under the law? Is He rebuking Pharisees? Is He revealing mysteries of the kingdom of heaven? Is He warning of Tribulation judgment? Is He teaching disciples about service and accountability? Is He giving a principle that later applies to the Church, or is He giving direct Church doctrine? Those questions matter. Ignore them, and the parables become a religious swamp where every doctrine sinks into mud.

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke His parables in a specific historical and doctrinal setting. He came to Israel. He ministered under the law. He announced the kingdom. He offered Himself as King. He exposed the Pharisees, scribes, priests, elders, lawyers, and self-righteous religious crowd. He received publicans and sinners. He revealed mysteries hidden from the foundation of the world. He warned about judgment, fruitlessness, false profession, stewardship, the coming of the Son of man, the Tribulation, the judgment of the nations, and the kingdom. He also laid down spiritual principles that remain profitable for believers today: hear the word, bear fruit, beware covetousness, pray and faint not, serve without entitlement, show mercy, receive the lost with joy, watch, and be ready. But profitable application is not the same thing as stealing the passage from its doctrinal setting. If a man treats everything Jesus said in the Gospels as though it were directly addressed to the Body of Christ after the cross, after the resurrection, after the ascension, and after the revelation of the mystery through Paul, he will make the Bible contradict itself. The contradiction will be in his handling, not in the Book.

This series has aimed to do more than explain individual parables. It has aimed to train the reader how to think through them. The parables are not little religious bedtime stories. They are royal teachings from the King. Some reveal truth. Some hide truth. Some comfort broken sinners. Some expose religious hypocrites. Some warn Israel's rulers. Some reach forward to the end of the age. Some teach prayer, mercy, humility, stewardship, and readiness. Some show the kingdom in mystery form during the King's rejection. Some show the King returning in judgment. The three common errors must be rejected: making every parable about the Church, making every parable about individual salvation, and making every warning overthrow Paul's gospel of grace. Rightly divided parables magnify Christ,

clarify the kingdom, protect eternal security, preserve Israel's prophetic place, and keep the Bible from being turned into religious oatmeal. The parables are sharp. Let them stay sharp.

Chapter 1: The Speaker Matters

The speaker of the parables is the Lord Jesus Christ, and that must be the starting point. He is not merely a wandering moral teacher telling rustic illustrations to make people more thoughtful. He is the Word made flesh, the Son of God, the Son of David, the King of Israel, the prophet like unto Moses, the greater than Solomon, the Lord from heaven. When He speaks in parables, He speaks with divine authority. His words are not suggestions. His parables are not human folklore. They are inspired speech from the mouth of God manifest in the flesh. Therefore, no man has the right to handle them carelessly, sentimentalize them, modernize them into slogans, or twist them to protect a theological system. If Jesus says the field is the world, the field is the world. If He says the harvest is the end of the world, the harvest is the end of the world. If He says the enemy is the devil, the enemy is the devil. Let the Speaker interpret His own speech.

But the identity of the Speaker also means His earthly ministry setting matters. Jesus Christ in the Gospels is ministering before the cross is historically accomplished, before the resurrection is preached as completed gospel truth, before the ascension, before Pentecost, and before the full revelation of the mystery of the Body of Christ through Paul. He speaks as Israel's Messiah under the law. He tells cleansed lepers to show themselves to the priest. He attends feasts. He preaches the kingdom of heaven at hand. He sends the twelve initially to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to the Gentiles. He deals with Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, lawyers, chief priests, elders, and the nation's leadership. That does not make His words untrue for us. It means His words must be placed where God placed them. The same Lord who spoke Matthew 5 later revealed Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and the gospel of grace through His apostle to the Gentiles. He does not contradict Himself, but He does speak in different settings.

A man who claims to honor Jesus while refusing to rightly divide His words is not honoring Him. He is using Him. Some men quote Jesus against Paul, as though the Lord of glory did not send Paul and reveal truth through him. Others quote Paul to ignore Jesus, as though the Gospels are dead material with no profit. Both errors are foolish. The correct approach is to believe all of it and put each passage in its proper doctrinal place. Christ's parables must be received as Christ's words, but they must also be understood according to the audience, timing, and purpose of His earthly ministry. That is not diminishing Jesus. That is listening to Him carefully.

Chapter 2: The Audience Matters

One of the quickest ways to ruin a parable is to ignore the audience. Jesus does not always speak to the same group. Sometimes He speaks to the multitude. Sometimes to His disciples. Sometimes to Pharisees and scribes. Sometimes to lawyers. Sometimes to chief priests and elders. Sometimes to publicans and sinners by way of mercy. Sometimes to religious hypocrites by way of exposure. Sometimes He speaks privately after speaking publicly. The audience controls the edge of the parable. The Lost Sheep in Luke 15 is aimed at Pharisees and scribes who murmured because Jesus received sinners. The Prodigal Son is not merely about a wayward boy; it is also about an elder brother, because the elder brother stands for the religious crowd outside the joy of grace. The Two Sons is spoken to religious leaders who rejected John. The Wicked Husbandmen is aimed at leaders who understood He spoke of them. The audience is not decoration. It is doctrine and application in motion.

If a parable rebukes Pharisees, do not immediately aim it at a trembling believer trying to rest in Christ. If a parable warns servants in a kingdom setting, do not automatically turn it into Church Age loss of salvation. If a parable comforts sinners coming to hear Christ, do not use it to excuse sin without repentance. If a parable exposes Israel's rulers, do not erase Israel and make the Church the villain or hero in every detail. Audience discipline protects the text. A lawyer trying to justify himself is not the same as a publican smiting his breast. A Pharisee murmuring over mercy is not the same as a disciple asking to be taught to pray. A servant awaiting a returning master is not the same as a lost sinner hearing Paul's gospel.

This also keeps application honest. A Bible believer can still be rebuked by a parable spoken to Pharisees if he has a Pharisee's spirit. He can still learn from a parable spoken to disciples if the principle fits. He can still be warned by kingdom accountability even while knowing his salvation is secure in Christ. But he must not pretend the original audience does not exist. Application must come after interpretation, not before it. First ask who heard the words when Christ spoke them. Then ask what doctrine is being taught. Then ask how the principle applies today in the light of later revelation. That order will save a man from a thousand bad sermons.

Chapter 3: The Context Matters

Context is the fence God put around a passage to keep fools from trampling the field. Every parable sits in a context. Something happened before it. Something follows after it. A question was asked. A criticism was made. A miracle was performed. A rejection occurred. A statement provoked the teaching. The context often tells you exactly why the parable was

given. Luke 18 says the parable of the Persistent Widow was given to teach that men ought always to pray and not to faint, but the ending connects it with the Son of man coming and finding faith on the earth. Luke 18 also says the Pharisee and Publican was spoken to certain men who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. Luke 15 begins with sinners drawing near and Pharisees murmuring. Matthew 24 and 25 are tied to questions about the temple, the sign of Christ's coming, and the end of the world. These contexts are not optional.

A man who ignores context can make the Bible say almost anything. He can turn the Good Samaritan into salvation by social work. He can turn the Rich Fool into an attack on all savings and business. He can turn the Unjust Steward into praise for dishonesty. He can turn the Ten Virgins into saved people losing the Holy Spirit. He can turn the Sheep and Goats into Paul's gospel by charity. He can turn the Talents into justification by performance. He can turn the Fig Tree Lesson into date-setting. He can turn the Leaven into the gospel spreading through the world, even though Scripture repeatedly uses leaven as corruption. Context keeps the interpreter from becoming a religious ventriloquist throwing his own voice into Christ's mouth.

Context also reveals progression. Matthew 13 comes after Matthew 12, where the leaders attribute Christ's works to the devil. That rejection is followed by the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 21 and 22 come during the final confrontation with Israel's rulers, which explains the severity of the Wicked Husbandmen and the Marriage of the King's Son. Matthew 24 and 25 come after the Lord leaves the temple and speaks prophetically about coming judgment, the Tribulation, and His return. Luke 15's three parables belong together as one answer to murmuring over mercy. When context is honored, the parables begin to align. When context is ignored, everything becomes mush.

Chapter 4: The Doctrinal Setting Matters

The doctrinal setting of a parable may be law, kingdom, Israel, discipleship, prophetic judgment, Tribulation, Second Advent, stewardship, mercy toward sinners, or general spiritual principle. It is not always Church Age salvation doctrine. That is where many people stumble. They read "servant," "kingdom," "outer darkness," "weeping and gnashing," "endure," "watch," "fruit," "works," and immediately apply it to the eternal security of a born-again believer in the Body of Christ. That is how doctrinal confusion is born. A passage can contain serious warnings without being a direct threat that a sealed believer will lose eternal life. A passage can demand fruit without teaching justification by fruit. A passage can judge nations by treatment of the King's brethren without replacing the gospel of grace.

The Gospels are transitional in history. Christ is present with Israel under the law. The kingdom is preached. The King is rejected. The cross is approaching but not yet completed historically. The disciples often do not yet understand His death and resurrection. The Church as the one new man, Jew and Gentile in one Body, is not yet revealed in the fullness later given through Paul. That doctrinal setting affects interpretation. A man cannot responsibly take every statement before Calvary and apply it as though it were written after Romans 3, 1 Corinthians 15, Ephesians 1, and Colossians 2 had already been revealed in fullness. Progressive revelation matters because God Himself reveals truth progressively.

This does not mean the Gospels are less inspired or less important. It means they must be read as God wrote them. The doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ's finished work is not weakened by rightly dividing the parables. It is protected. The doctrine of kingdom judgment is not weakened either. It is protected from being misapplied. Israel's national accountability remains real. The Church's eternal security remains real. The Tribulation warnings remain real. The judgment seat of Christ remains real. The judgment of the nations remains real. The Great White Throne remains real. Right division does not erase doctrine; it keeps doctrine from devouring other doctrine.

Chapter 5: The Parables Must Not All Be Made About the Church

The first major error is making every parable about the Church. This is one of the main causes of confusion. The Wheat and Tares becomes a local church discipline passage, even though Jesus says the field is the world. The Ten Virgins become Church Age believers at the Rapture, even though the setting is the kingdom of heaven and the coming of the Son of man. The Sheep and Goats become Christians being sorted by charity, even though the text says nations are gathered before the Son of man after He comes in glory. The Wicked Husbandmen becomes a generic warning to church leaders, while its direct indictment of Israel's rulers gets softened or erased. The Marriage of the King's Son becomes a vague church invitation without the burning of the city, murder of the servants, and kingdom judgment being dealt with honestly.

The Church is a glorious truth, but it is not the subject of every passage in the Bible. The Body of Christ was a mystery hid in God until revealed in due time through Paul. Israel is not the Church. The kingdom is not the Church in every setting. The Tribulation remnant is not the Church. The nations at the Sheep and Goats judgment are not the Church. The twelve apostles sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel are not a metaphor for a Baptist business meeting. God knows the difference between Israel, Gentiles, and the Church of God, and so should a Bible believer. If a man cannot allow Israel to have passages addressed to Israel, he is not interpreting. He is stealing.

This error often comes from replacement theology or from a vague Protestant habit of spiritualizing everything Jewish into “the Church.” It sounds pious until it starts erasing promises God made to the fathers. Romans 11 warns Gentiles not to boast against the branches. God has not cast away His people forever. Israel’s blindness is partial and temporary, and God still has a future national dealing with Israel. The parables that expose Israel’s rulers and describe kingdom judgment must be allowed to stand. The Church can learn from them, but the Church does not have to become every vineyard, every fig tree, every virgin, every nation, every servant, and every guest in every parable. Let the Church be the Church, and let Israel be Israel.

Chapter 6: The Parables Must Not All Be Made About Individual Salvation

The second major error is making every parable about individual salvation from hell. Some parables certainly deal with lostness, repentance, mercy, justification, or final judgment. The Pharisee and Publican plainly contrasts self-righteousness with mercy and justification. The Rich Man and Lazarus warns of conscious torment after death. The Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost Son deal with recovery and joy over repentance. But not every parable is primarily a salvation text. Some deal with Israel’s national accountability. Some deal with kingdom mysteries. Some deal with prophetic watchfulness. Some deal with stewardship of servants. Some deal with judgment of nations. Some deal with prayer, humility, covetousness, fruitlessness, or religious hypocrisy.

When every parable becomes “how to get saved,” doctrine gets twisted. The Talents becomes salvation by investment. The Pounds becomes salvation by trading. The Unprofitable Servants becomes salvation by doing duty. The Good Samaritan becomes salvation by helping the wounded. The Sheep and Goats becomes salvation by feeding the hungry. The Ten Virgins becomes salvation by maintaining oil. The Barren Fig Tree becomes loss of salvation for fruitlessness. These interpretations do not magnify grace. They corrupt the gospel. The sinner today is not saved by doubling talents, trading pounds, feeding prisoners, or keeping a lamp burning. He is saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for his sins, was buried, and rose again.

At the same time, the parables that are not primarily about salvation can still expose false profession and warn of judgment. A man should not hide behind doctrinal categories to escape conviction. If a parable rebukes laziness, be rebuked. If it warns against covetousness, be warned. If it exposes religious pride, tremble. If it commands watching, watch. If it demands fruit in a kingdom context, understand the doctrine and then ask whether your own life is barren in application. The problem is not application. The problem is making every application the doctrine of individual salvation. Let salvation be defined by the clear gospel passages, and let each parable teach what it was given to teach.

Chapter 7: The Parables Must Not Be Used to Overthrow Paul's Gospel of Grace

The third major error is using the parables to overthrow Paul's gospel of grace. This happens constantly. A man reads a warning in Matthew and then uses it to deny eternal security. He reads a works judgment in a kingdom setting and then uses it to add works to justification. He reads a passage about enduring to the end and makes it the condition for a saved member of Christ's Body to keep salvation. He reads the Ten Virgins and tells sealed believers they may be shut out if they do not have enough oil. He reads the Sheep and Goats and preaches that eternal life is obtained by social compassion. He reads the Unprofitable Servant and makes God's acceptance depend on obedience. That is not honoring Jesus. That is rejecting the full revelation Jesus gave through Paul.

Paul did not invent a different savior. He received revelation from the risen Christ. The gospel he preached is not man-made. The doctrine of justification by faith apart from works is not a loophole; it is Bible truth. The sealing of the Spirit is not a Baptist slogan; it is Scripture. The believer being complete in Christ is not spiritual laziness; it is the believer's standing. The judgment seat of Christ, where saved believers receive reward or suffer loss while the man himself is saved, is not a lesser judgment invented to avoid hard verses; it is written doctrine. A Bible believer must not use Matthew's kingdom warnings to erase Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Corinthians. All Scripture must stand.

The correct answer is not to choose Jesus over Paul or Paul over Jesus. The correct answer is to believe the whole Bible rightly divided. Jesus in His earthly ministry spoke to Israel under the law and revealed kingdom truth. Jesus from heaven revealed Church truth through Paul. Jesus will return as King and Judge according to the prophets. It is all Christ's doctrine when placed properly. The parables sharpen our understanding of the kingdom, hypocrisy, judgment, mercy, and stewardship. Paul's epistles establish the Church's standing, gospel, justification, sealing, heavenly calling, and walk. These truths do not fight when the Bible is divided as God instructs. They only fight in the hands of men who refuse to divide.

Conclusion

The final key to understanding the parables is to interpret each one by its speaker, audience, context, doctrinal setting, and place in God's revealed program. The Lord Jesus Christ spoke to Israel under the law, announced the kingdom, revealed mysteries, exposed hypocrites, received sinners, warned servants, rebuked rulers, and pointed toward judgment and glory. His parables are not generic religious oatmeal. They are precise, sharp, layered teachings that must be handled with reverence and discipline. A man who ignores

the setting will either dull the warning, corrupt the gospel, erase Israel, confuse the Church, or turn Christ's words into whatever his system already wanted them to say.

This series has shown that the parables contain mercy, judgment, kingdom doctrine, prophetic warning, national accountability, personal conviction, stewardship, prayer, humility, fruitfulness, and the glory of the King. The Sower teaches reception of the word. The Wheat and Tares reveals the field as the world and the harvest as the end of the world. The Mustard Seed and Leaven warn of abnormal growth and corruption. The Hidden Treasure and Pearl distinguish Israel and the Church without making sinners purchase salvation. The Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Prodigal Son expose religious murmuring and magnify recovery. The Wicked Husbandmen, Marriage of the King's Son, Ten Virgins, Talents, Sheep and Goats, Pounds, and Watchful Porter place us on prophetic and kingdom ground that must not be confused with Paul's gospel of grace. Every parable has its lane. Stay in the lane, and the Bible opens beautifully.

Rightly divided parables magnify Christ. They show Him as Sower, Shepherd, Son, King, Bridegroom, Master, Judge, and returning Nobleman. They clarify the kingdom by distinguishing the physical, earthly, Jewish, Messianic, governmental promises from the spiritual realities of God's rule and the Church's heavenly calling. They protect eternal security by refusing to use kingdom warnings to overthrow the finished work of Christ. They preserve accountability by refusing to use grace as an excuse for laziness, pride, worldliness, or barren service. They keep Israel in her prophetic place, the Church in her doctrinal place, and the nations in their judgment place. That is what right division does. It does not weaken the parables. It lets them speak with the full force of the King who gave them.

Conclusion to The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided

After walking through all 42 lessons in The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided, the one thing that should be settled in the mind of every serious Bible believer is that the parables of Jesus Christ are not simple religious decorations attached to the Gospels to make sermons more interesting. They are not children's stories. They are not vague moral fables. They are not safe little illustrations for people who want a soft Jesus, a soft kingdom, a soft judgment, a soft hell, and a soft Bible. They are royal teachings from the King, spoken in exact settings, to exact audiences, under exact doctrinal circumstances, with exact truth being revealed and, in many cases, concealed. The Lord did not speak in parables because everybody was ready to receive everything plainly. He spoke in parables because some had

ears to hear, and some had already rejected the light they had been given. That truth alone changes the way a man reads the Gospels. Parables are not a shortcut around doctrine. They demand doctrine. They demand context. They demand right division.

This study has shown that the parables are one of the clearest places where a man either learns to rightly divide the word of truth or exposes that he does not know how. If a man reads every parable as though it is directly about the Church, he will confuse Israel's kingdom program with the Body of Christ. If he reads every parable as though it is directly about individual salvation, he will turn stewardship passages into works salvation, kingdom warnings into threats against eternal security, and national judgments into private devotional lessons stripped of their prophetic force. If he reads every warning as though it cancels Paul's gospel of grace, he will rob saved people of assurance and make the finished work of Jesus Christ look unfinished. But if he reads each parable by speaker, audience, context, doctrinal setting, and place in God's revealed program, the confusion begins to clear. The Bible stops fighting itself. Matthew does not overthrow Romans. Luke does not erase Ephesians. The kingdom does not swallow the Church. Grace does not cancel accountability. Prophecy does not become oatmeal. The Book lines up because God wrote it to line up.

We began by asking why Jesus spoke in parables, and that opening lesson became the foundation for everything that followed. The Lord Himself made it plain that parables reveal and conceal. They reveal truth to disciples who are willing to hear, and they conceal truth from hardened hearts that have already rejected Him. That means the parables must not be approached casually. A man must come to them with humility, not with a theological crowbar. He must not force every parable into his favorite system. He must not make the Lord say what his denomination needs Him to say. He must let the King speak. Once that foundation was laid, the early kingdom parables in Matthew 13 began to open up. The Sower showed the word going forth and the heart-condition of the hearers. The Wheat and the Tares showed that the field is the world, not the local church. The Mustard Seed and the Leaven warned of outward abnormal growth and inward corruption. The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl helped us distinguish Israel and the Church without making sinners purchase salvation. The Net reminded us that final separation belongs to God at the end of the age.

From there, the series showed how many of the Lord's parables expose the heart. The Two Debtors taught that the man who knows he has been forgiven much loves much, while the self-righteous man can sit near Christ and still be cold as a stone. The Good Samaritan showed that religion can walk around a dying man while grace gets down in the ditch, but it also warned us not to turn mercy into a false gospel of social work salvation. The Friend at Midnight taught persistent prayer and the need for bread to feed others, reminding every

preacher and teacher that hungry souls cannot be fed from an empty cupboard. The Rich Fool showed that a man can build bigger barns while starving his soul. The Barren Fig Tree warned of Israel's national fruitlessness and God's patience without turning the passage into loss of salvation for a Church Age believer. The Lowest Room rebuked pride, religious ambition, and self-promotion. The Great Supper exposed excuses and showed that religious privilege does not guarantee participation in what God is doing.

Luke 15 became one of the great mercy sections of the whole series. The Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Prodigal Son showed heaven's joy over recovery while exposing the cold suspicion of religious critics. We learned that the Shepherd values the one lost sheep, the woman diligently seeks the lost silver, and the father receives the returning son with compassion. But we also learned that these parables are not sentimental excuses for sin. The lost are truly lost. The prodigal truly sinned. Repentance matters. Grace receives the sinner who stops defending the far country and comes home confessing his guilt. The elder brother then showed us one of the most dangerous forms of religion: a man can be near the house, in the field, outwardly obedient, and yet farther from the father's heart than the boy who just crawled out of the hog pen. That lesson alone is worth the whole series. A religious man who cannot rejoice over mercy has not understood the Father.

The more difficult parables also became clearer when handled rightly. The Unjust Steward did not teach dishonesty; it rebuked children of light for having less foresight about eternity than worldly men have about temporary survival. The Rich Man and Lazarus gave us one of the Lord's strongest teachings on conscious torment, the great gulf fixed, and the sufficiency of Scripture. Whether a man calls that account a parable or a historical account, the doctrine stands like iron: hell is real, torment is conscious, signs will not persuade a man who rejects the written word, and a man can fare sumptuously every day and wake up in flame. The Unprofitable Servants reminded us that service is duty, not leverage; after a man has preached, taught, labored, sacrificed, and endured, he is still a servant, not God's creditor. The Persistent Widow and Unjust Judge taught prayer without fainting, but it also carried prophetic weight connected with God avenging His elect and the Son of man coming. The Pharisee and Publican showed that God can justify a guilty man seeking mercy while rejecting the religious performer who trusts himself.

The parables dealing with labor, stewardship, and reward forced us to distinguish service from salvation. The Labourers in the Vineyard taught that God is not unjust when He is generous and that the religious worker with an evil eye reveals a crooked heart. The Two Sons showed that saying "I go, sir" means nothing if a man refuses the father's will, while the son who first rebelled but afterward repented and went is the one who did the will of the father. The Talents and the Pounds both taught accountability during the Lord's absence,

but they were not the same parable and should not be blurred together. The Talents emphasized varied entrustment according to ability, while the Pounds emphasized a nobleman going to receive a kingdom and return, servants occupying till he comes, and citizens declaring, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” These lessons did not teach Church Age justification by investment performance. They taught stewardship, accountability, and the certainty that the returning King will reckon with servants and judge enemies.

Then the series moved into some of the strongest prophetic kingdom parables, where right division became absolutely necessary. The Wicked Husbandmen showed Israel’s rulers rejecting the servants and murdering the Son. The Marriage of the King’s Son showed the royal invitation refused, the servants abused, the city burned, the highways searched, and the man without a wedding garment exposed and cast out. The Fig Tree Lesson taught prophetic discernment without date-setting, preserving the distinction between Israel’s signs connected with the Second Advent and the Church’s blessed hope. The Faithful and Evil Servants showed that a man’s view of the Lord’s return affects how he treats the Lord’s household. The Ten Virgins warned of readiness in the kingdom context without being twisted into a doctrine that sealed Church Age believers can run out of the Holy Spirit. The Sheep and the Goats clarified the judgment of the nations, distinct from both the judgment seat of Christ and the Great White Throne, and showed that the treatment of the Lord’s brethren during the Tribulation matters in that prophetic judgment. The Watchful Porter closed the prophetic section with the command to watch, reminding us that watching is not lazy curiosity but faithful readiness at an assigned post.

One of the most important lessons in the whole series was the distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. That study helped explain why the parables are so often misunderstood. The kingdom of heaven, especially in Matthew, carries strong Jewish, Messianic, earthly, governmental, and prophetic emphasis. The kingdom of God can overlap with that, but often emphasizes God’s broader spiritual rule, righteousness, power, and entrance by new birth. The point was not to create artificial divisions where Scripture shows overlap. The point was to recognize the Bible’s own distinctions. If a man cannot distinguish the physical kingdom promised to Israel from spiritual realities connected with God’s rule, he will jam the parables into one religious blender. He will turn Matthew 13 into church history optimism, Matthew 24 into the Rapture, Matthew 25 into works salvation, and the judgment of the nations into a soup-kitchen gospel. But when the kingdoms are rightly divided, the parables begin to make sense in their own lanes.

The final lesson gave us the governing rule: every parable must be interpreted by its speaker, audience, context, doctrinal setting, and place in God’s revealed program. That

rule is not optional. It is not a scholar's trick. It is basic honesty with the Bible. Who is Jesus speaking to? Why is He speaking? What just happened? Is He dealing with Pharisees, disciples, publicans, lawyers, chief priests, or the multitude? Is the setting before the cross? Is the kingdom being offered, rejected, hidden in mystery form, or revealed in future glory? Is the parable about Israel's rulers, individual repentance, servant accountability, prophetic watchfulness, or final judgment? These questions keep the reader from stealing doctrine from one passage and using it to contradict another. They keep the Bible from becoming a bowl of religious mush where everything means everything and therefore nothing means exactly what God said.

The importance of this study cannot be overstated. The parables are often the very passages people use to attack eternal security, confuse the gospel, preach works salvation, promote social gospel religion, erase Israel, deny the literal kingdom, or spiritualize prophecy into fog. A man who does not know how to handle the parables is vulnerable to every smooth teacher with a soft voice and a wrong division. But once he learns to rightly divide them, he becomes much harder to move. He can hear someone quote the Ten Virgins and immediately ask, "What is the context? What is the kingdom setting? Is this Paul's doctrine of the sealed believer?" He can hear someone use the Sheep and the Goats to preach salvation by charity and ask, "What judgment is this? Who are the nations? Who are the brethren? Where is the Son of man?" He can hear someone preach the Good Samaritan as the gospel and answer, "Mercy is taught there, but Calvary is the gospel." He can hear someone use the Talents to threaten saved people with hell and answer, "Stewardship matters, but Church Age justification is not investment performance." That is what this series equips a Bible believer to do.

This study also helps our daily Bible reading. It trains the mind to slow down. It teaches us not to grab a verse and run. It teaches us to read before and after. It teaches us to ask why the Holy Ghost placed a parable where He did. It teaches us to respect Matthew as Matthew, Mark as Mark, Luke as Luke, John as John, and Paul as Paul. It teaches us to stop forcing every passage into our favorite doctrinal argument. It teaches us that application is precious, but application must follow interpretation. It teaches us that all Scripture is profitable, but not all Scripture is doctrinally addressed to the same people in the same way. Once a person learns that, the whole Bible becomes clearer. The Old Testament, the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles, the general epistles, and Revelation begin to stand in their proper order. The Book becomes less confusing because we stop shuffling its pages like a deck of religious cards.

This series also protects the heart, not just the doctrine. The parables did not merely teach us charts and categories. They exposed pride, covetousness, excuses, self-righteousness,

resentment, laziness, prayerlessness, religious cruelty, and empty profession. A man can be doctrinally correct and still have the elder brother's heart. He can know right division and still act like the Pharisee in the temple. He can preach grace and still resent mercy shown to someone else. He can defend eternal security and still bury his pound in a napkin. He can know the kingdom distinctions and still fail to give meat in due season. The parables search the conscience. Right division does not give a man permission to dodge conviction. It gives him the right conviction from the right passage in the right way.

That is one of the beauties of this series. It protects grace and intensifies responsibility at the same time. It protects eternal security by refusing to let kingdom warnings overthrow Paul's gospel of grace. But it also refuses to let eternal security become an excuse for barren service. It protects the believer from legalistic terror, but it also warns him not to sleep at his post. It distinguishes the judgment seat of Christ from the judgment of the nations, but it still reminds him that he will give account for his works. It preserves the Church's heavenly calling, but it also preserves Israel's prophetic future. It keeps salvation free and service serious. That is Bible balance. That is what happens when doctrine is rightly divided instead of blended into confusion.

The greatest result of the whole study is that Christ becomes larger, not smaller. The parables reveal Him as the Sower who sends out the word, the Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, the Son who is rejected by wicked husbandmen, the Bridegroom who comes at midnight, the Master who returns to reckon with servants, the King who makes a marriage for His Son, the Nobleman who goes away to receive a kingdom and return, the Judge who separates sheep from goats, and the Lord who commands the porter to watch. These parables magnify His mercy, His authority, His patience, His holiness, His rejection, His return, and His judgment. A wrongly divided Bible often makes Christ vague. A rightly divided Bible makes Him glorious in every office and setting.

So the conclusion of this series is simple but weighty: the parables must be believed, feared, studied, divided, and applied lawfully. They are not to be softened for modern religion. They are not to be hijacked by works salvation. They are not to be flattened into church clichés. They are not to be used against the gospel of grace. They are not to be stripped of Israel, kingdom, prophecy, judgment, or context. They are to be read as the words of the King, preserved by the Holy Ghost, placed exactly where God wanted them, and profitable when handled the way Scripture commands. The man who learns to read the parables rightly will be a better Bible student everywhere else, because the same principles apply across the whole Book.

We have learned that the Bible does not need to be corrected. It needs to be believed and divided properly. The confusion is not in the Book. The confusion is in men who refuse the

Book's own distinctions. The parables of Jesus rightly divided clarify the kingdom, preserve the gospel, expose hypocrisy, strengthen watchfulness, warn of judgment, encourage prayer, magnify mercy, and keep the believer grounded. They teach us how to read carefully, how to compare Scripture with Scripture, how to avoid doctrinal theft, and how to let each passage speak with its own God-given voice. That is not merely useful for this series. That is a lifetime Bible-study tool.

In the end, this study has accomplished more than collecting 42 essays. It has built a framework. It has shown that the parables are a map of Christ's dealings with Israel, sinners, servants, hypocrites, disciples, the kingdom, the nations, and the coming age. It has shown that grace and judgment are both real. It has shown that mercy does not erase truth, and truth does not cancel mercy. It has shown that the Lord receives repentant sinners and resists proud religion. It has shown that servants will answer for what they did while the Master was away. It has shown that the rejected King is coming back. And it has shown that the safest place for a Bible believer is not in tradition, not in speculation, not in religious emotion, but in the written word of God, rightly divided, believed exactly as it stands.

The Parables of Jesus Rightly Divided

42-Lesson Series Overview • KJV • Rightly Divided • VerseQuest Study Chart

Parables reveal truth, expose hypocrisy, clarify the kingdom, and must be interpreted in their proper doctrinal setting.

VerseQuest Ministries

1 Why This Series Matters

- Parables reveal and conceal truth
- Context, audience, and doctrinal setting matter
- Right division protects the gospel of grace
- Israel, the Church, the kingdom, and prophecy must not be blended

KJV Snippets

- **Matthew 13:11** "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven…"
- **Matthew 13:13** "…seeing they see not; and hearing they hear not…"
- **Luke 8:11** "The seed is the word of God."

2 Foundational Rules for Interpreting the Parables

1. Identify the speaker, audience, and context
2. Distinguish Israel from the Church
3. Distinguish kingdom truth from Church Age doctrine
4. Distinguish salvation from discipleship, service, and stewardship
5. Distinguish the Rapture from the Second Advent
6. Distinguish the judgment seat of Christ, the judgment of the nations, and the Great White Throne
7. Let Christ interpret His own parables
8. Application follows interpretation

⚠ **Do not make every parable about the Church.**
Do not make every parable about individual salvation.
Do not use every warning to overthrow Paul's gospel of grace.

3 Kingdom of Heaven vs Kingdom of God

Kingdom of Heaven

- Matthew emphasis
- Earthly / Messianic / governmental
- Strong Jewish and prophetic setting
- Connected with the King and His rule from heaven over earth
- Includes mystery form while the King is rejected
- Can show outward sphere, mixture, and final separation

Matthew 3:2 — "the kingdom of heaven is at hand"
Matthew 13:38 — "The field is the world"
Matthew 25:34 — "inherit the kingdom"

Kingdom of God

- Broader emphasis on God's rule
- Spiritual entrance by new birth
- Righteousness, peace, and joy
- Cannot be reduced to outward profession
- Often stresses divine life and inward reality

John 3:3 — "Except a man be born again…"
Romans 14:17 — "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost"
1 Corinthians 15:50 — "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"

Related, but not always identical in emphasis.

4 42 Lesson Map

Group A — Foundation & Matthew 13 Kingdom Mysteries (1–9)

1. **Why Jesus Spake in Parables** — reveal / conceal / kingdom mysteries
2. **The Sower and the Seed** — hearts and reception of the word
3. **The Wheat and the Tares** — field is the world
4. **The Mustard Seed** — abnormal outward kingdom growth
5. **The Leaven Hidden in the Meal** — inward corruption and false doctrine
6. **The Hidden Treasure in the Field** — Christ and Israel
7. **The Pearl of Great Price** — Christ and the Church
8. **The Net Cast Into the Sea** — end-time separation and judgment
9. **The Householder Bringing Forth Things New and Old** — rightly dividing revelation

Group B — Early Practical / Transitional Parables (10–14)

10. **The Wise and Foolish Builders** — hearing and doing the King's words
11. **New Cloth on an Old Garment** — law and grace not patched together
12. **New Wine in Old Bottles** — new revelation needs right container
13. **The Candle Under a Bushel** — light must not be hidden
14. **The Growing Seed** — God gives the increase

Group C — Mercy, Prayer, Humility, and The Heart (15–24)

15. **The Two Debtors** — forgiveness and love
16. **The Good Samaritan** — mercy without works-salvation confusion
17. **The Friend at Midnight** — persistent prayer for bread
18. **The Rich Fool** — covetousness and soul neglect
19. **The Barren Fig Tree** — Israel, fruitlessness, and patience
20. **The Lowest Room at the Feast** — humility over self-promotion
21. **The Great Supper** — excuses and rejected invitation
22. **The Lost Sheep** — the Shepherd seeks the lost
23. **The Lost Coin** — diligent seeking and heaven's joy
24. **The Prodigal Son** — repentance, restoration, elder-brother spirit

Group D — Stewardship, Hell, Service, and Justification (25–29)

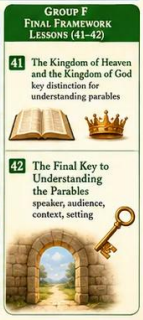
25. **The Unjust Steward** — wisdom about coming accountability
26. **The Rich Man and Lazarus** — conscious torment and Scripture's sufficiency
27. **The Unprofitable Servants** — duty does not put God in debt
28. **The Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge** — prayer and prophetic endurance
29. **The Pharisee and the Publican** — self-righteousness vs mercy

Group E — Kingdom Conflict, Rejection, and the Return of the King (30–40)

30. **The Labourers in the Vineyard** — grace and resentment of the first
31. **The Two Sons** — professions versus obedience
32. **The Wicked Husbandmen** — Israel's rulers reject the Son
33. **The Marriage of the King's Son** — rejected invitation and wedding garment
34. **The Fig Tree Lesson** — prophetic signs in proper context
35. **The Faithful and Evil Servants** — feeding the household while watching
36. **The Ten Virgins** — readiness in the kingdom setting
37. **The Talents** — stewardship during the Lord's absence
38. **The Sheep and the Goats** — judgment of the nations
39. **The Pounds** — rejected nobleman receives kingdom and returns
40. **The Watchful Porter and the Absent Master** — watch at your post

Group F — Final Framework Lessons (41–42)

41. **The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God** — key distinction for understanding parables
42. **The Final Key to Understanding the Parables** — speaker, audience, context, setting



5 Major Doctrinal Distinctions This Series Protects

Do Not Confuse

- Israel / Church
- Rapture / Second Advent
- Salvation / Service
- Kingdom warnings / Gospel of grace
- Judgment seat of Christ / Sheep & Goats / Great White Throne

This Series Shows

- Why context rules interpretation
- Why prophecy has structure
- Why kingdom parables cannot be flattened
- Why works passages must be placed carefully
- Why eternal security must be protected by right division

Key Results

- Christ is magnified
- The kingdom is clarified
- Hypocrisy is exposed
- Grace is protected
- Bible study becomes clearer

6 Strong Bottom Summary

- Rightly divided parables magnify Christ.
- *They clarify the kingdom and expose false religion.*
- *They protect eternal security by refusing to confuse kingdom warnings with Paul's gospel of grace.*
- *They sharpen prophecy, stewardship, mercy, and Bible study.*
- *The confusion is not in the Book — it is in men who refuse to divide it properly.*

2 Timothy 2:15
"Study to shew thyself approved unto God… rightly dividing the word of truth."
KJV

Handle the Word of truth accurately — For the Glory of Christ and the good of souls.

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