

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

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THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Parables are sayings that teach truth by comparison. The word *parable* means a placing alongside of; a parallel, comparison or similitude. In scripture it is a story drawn from nature or human circumstances to teach a moral or spiritual truth. Its purpose is to arrest and hold the attention of the hearer. The meaning of the parable has to be studied - it is not the story that is of value but the lesson it teaches. There is a comparison being made and the hearer has to perceive the likeness of the things compared to learn the lesson. Christians in the contemporary church tend to associate parables entirely with Jesus' teachings in the New Testament, but parables also abound in the Old Testament too. The book of Proverbs would be more correctly translated as the book of Parables (CP Pr 1:1). *Proverbs* means parables. Probably the best known parable in the Old Testament is Nathan the prophet's rebuke to King David for committing adultery with Bathsheba and then arranging for the death of her husband, Uriah (CP 2 Sam 12:1-9).

The apostle Paul taught in parables too on occasions in the New Testament. In Ro 6 he graphically portrays sin and death, grace and life as opposing rulers in men's lives to teach that Christians must choose which one they will serve (CP Ro 6:1-16). In Ro 7 he uses the analogy of a marriage partnership and the death of one of the partners to teach that the Old Testament law of sin and death only binds a person to the law as long as that person lives by the law, but once they die to sin, the law no longer has a hold over them and they are then free to embrace the teachings of Jesus, and become one with Him (CP Ro 7:1-6). Also in Romans, Paul uses a parable of a wild olive tree, representing Gentiles, being grafted to a cultivated olive tree, representing Israel, to teach that while the salvation benefits in the finished work of Christ have been made available to the Gentiles because of the Jews' unbelief, Gentiles are not to boast of being superior to the Jews (CP Ro 11:17-24).

Much of Jesus' teaching was in parables because parables have a double use - they reveal the truth to those who want it, and conceal it from those who do not (CP Mt 13:10-17). V11-15 does not teach as some suppose that Jesus deliberately withheld the truth from the Pharisees so that they could not get saved. The Pharisees wilfully rejected the truth, causing it to be veiled from them because they had hardened their hearts toward it. They did not want to be converted to Christ. Parables were such a significant part of Jesus' ministry that it is important that we should seek to understand them. To be correctly interpreted they must be studied strictly within their context and attendant circumstances - what precedes them, and what follows them; the conversations of which they formed a part; the questions and objections to which they were the explanations.

OLD AND NEW CLOTH AND WINESKINS

(CP Mt 9:16-17) This parable is also found in Mk 2:21-22 and Lu 5:36-39. Jesus told the parable in response to questioning by John the Baptist's disciples as to why Jesus' disciples did not follow the accepted religious practice of fasting (CP Mt 9:14-15). The old worn-out garment and wineskin represents the Old Testament

Judaistic religious system which kept people under its law in bondage to sin (CP Ro 7:14-23; 1Cor 15:56-57). Jesus' reference to new cloth and new wine was a way of saying that He did not come as a reformer to patch up an old worn-out religious system, but to replace it completely with a dynamic new teaching (CP Lu 4:17-21; Ga 3:22-26). Jesus' dynamic new teaching was salvation by grace through faith in Him, which was incompatible with the teaching of the law under the Old Testament. This new teaching could not be mixed with the old because of the new life and freedom impossible with the old (CP Ro 7:24-8:4). A good biblical example of how the old and the new could not be mixed is found in Ac 15 (CP Ac 15:1-21).

CHILDREN IN THE MARKET PLACE

(CP Mt 11:16-19) In this parable Jesus confronts His and John the Baptist's critics and exposes their inconsistency. The Pharisees criticised John, saying that he was demon-possessed because he did not socialise, while at the same time they criticised Jesus, calling Him a glutton and a wine-bibber, because He did socialise. Jesus compared them to a group of children who obstinately refused to take part in anything the other children did. Nothing the other children did could please them. The Pharisees were the same. They criticised John the Baptist for being austere and they criticised Jesus for not being austere. Jesus' closing statement in the parable "...but wisdom is justified of her children," was telling the Pharisees that notwithstanding that His and John's lifestyle were different they were both correct in their purpose, and would both be proved right by the results - people being saved.

SOWER

(CP Mk 4:1-13) It is also found in Mt 13:1-23 and Lu 8:4-15 and concerns the nature and development of the kingdom. Jesus gave this parable as a type of all the rest of His parables. His questions to the disciples in V13 implies that if one can understand this parable, he can understand all others, for in this one are the principles of interpretation in all of them. The questions were a gentle rebuke to the disciples because their hearts were enlightened by Jesus' teaching, not closed to it like the Pharisees, and they should have understood the parable. Instead Jesus had to explain it to them (CP Mt 13:18-23). The whole course of this age of grace portraying how God's word is received and acted upon is pictured in this parable. The emphasis is on the hearts of men and how they respond to the gospel. It is how they respond to the gospel that determines their eternal destiny. The core teaching of this parable is that most people who hear the gospel will reject it.

TARES OF THE FIELD

(CP Mt 13:24-30, 36-43) This parable is only found here in Mt 13. It is another parable the disciples could not understand and Jesus went on to explain it to them also, like the parable of the sower. What Jesus teaches in these two parables is crucial to our understanding of His other parables concerning the nature and development of the kingdom of heaven in Mt 13. The theme of His teaching is that evil will always be present in the world in opposition to the good and that the kingdom of heaven in its present

earthly aspect will always be befouled by the presence and the plots of Satan. In the parable of the sower Jesus shows us that among those who profess God's name there will be apostasy and worldliness, as well as faithfulness and godliness, and in this parable He teaches us that the children of the kingdom and the emissaries of Satan must exist side by side with each other in the world throughout the kingdom age until Christ's second coming, when they will be separated. *Children of the kingdom* refers to every born again believer from the day of Pentecost until the last soul saved during the Great Tribulation.

The terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" essentially mean the same and are interchangeable (CP Mt 19:23-24). They refer to the realm of God's rule, both in its present earthly aspect, and the future eternal kingdom.

They are not referring to the church as many suppose, although the professing church is the visible manifestation of the kingdom in its present earthly aspect. The kingdom works in the world through the church, bringing to all who will receive it the blessings of God's rule. However, the kingdom covers the whole of human society, whereas the professing church only covers professing Christians. Jesus ushered in the kingdom when He commenced His earthly ministry (CP Mt 4:13-17; 10:1-8; 12:25-28; Lu 17:20-21). The kingdom will continue in its present earthly aspect until Jesus' second coming, when the wicked will be cast down into hell and the righteous will rule and reign with Jesus, but until then Jesus has decreed that the righteous and the wicked must exist side by side with each other in the world. That does not mean that the righteous are to be passive spectators in the world. They still have to be God's witnesses to the wicked, vocalising the gospel, even though most who hear it will reject it, as the parable of the sower teaches.

But Christians know the terrible fate that awaits the wicked and this should make us all the more eager to see them saved. Sadly though many professing Christians do not believe they are meant to witness to them.

MUSTARD SEED

(CP Mt 13:31-32) This parable is also found in Mk 4:30-32 and Lu 13:18-19. Jesus did not interpret this parable, nor the ones that follow in Mt 13, and consequently there are many contrasting views among Christians as to what they teach. Every view must be respected, but they cannot all be right, and we can only agree with those that are strictly grounded in scripture and conform to the principles of interpretation Jesus outlined for us in the two previous parables.

The most popular view of this parable is that the enormous growth of the tree from such a small seed illustrates the rapid spread of the gospel and the growth of Christianity throughout the earth from a very small beginning, with the figure of the birds of the air lodging in the branches of the tree as typifying new converts to Christianity finding shelter in the church. The problem with this view however is that it illustrates the growth of Christianity and the professing church in the earth, whereas Jesus used the mustard seed to illustrate the present earthly aspect of the

kingdom of heaven, which as we learned earlier, having a much broader aspect than the professing church, covers the whole of human society (V32). The field represents the world here too the same as it does in the parable of the tares of the field, so the mustard seed represents the kingdom of heaven embracing all nations and filling all ages throughout the earth until Jesus' second coming at the end of this age.

Another view of this parable is that it teaches the destined greatness of the kingdom; that the kingdom fulfilled by Jesus now looks insignificant, but its greatness will be apparent in its consummation at the end of the age. This view is plausible but it does not harmonise with what Jesus teaches concerning the nature and development of the kingdom in the preceding two parables and the parables of "the leaven" and "the net" which follow in Mt 13. We learned earlier that in order to correctly interpret the parables of Jesus, we must study them in the context in which they are spoken, taking into account the teaching which precedes them, and that which follows.

In the parable of the sower Jesus showed us that as well as faithfulness and godliness among those who profess Christ, there will also be apostasy and worldliness, and in the parable of the tares of the field He showed us that the emissaries of Satan will always be present in the world in opposition to the children of the kingdom throughout the kingdom age. When studied in this context the parable of the mustard seed takes on a different meaning altogether to either of the views expressed above. It illustrates the abnormal growth of the kingdom from a small beginning to a vast sphere of operation for demon powers, represented by the birds of the air who lodge in the branches of the tree. As Jesus, when outlining the principles of interpretation used the figure of birds, or fowls of the air to symbolize demon powers in the parable of the sower, so too He uses them to symbolize demon powers here. Jesus would not use the same figure of speech in two different senses, making one parable contradict the teaching of another. The birds of the air do not represent the devil in one parable and Christians in another. The birds, or fowls of the air which lodge in the branches of the tree here, are a figure of the emissaries of Satan hiding behind the cloak of Christianity, disguised as apostles of Christ and ministers of righteousness (CP Mat 24:5 with 2Cor 11:13-15).

Satan has had to watch the spread of the gospel and the growth of Christianity throughout the earth from the time Jesus ushered in the kingdom, and he has ever sought to find a shelter in it. In the early centuries of church history he attacked the church from outside the kingdom, but when that failed to extinguish the light of the gospel he changed his tactics and moved his forces inside the kingdom, and since then countless millions of sincere people genuinely seeking the truth have been condemned to hell after being waylaid and deceived by his false apostles, and caught up in their counterfeit Christianity.

LEAVEN, LEAVEN OF PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES, LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES AND OF THE LEAVEN OF THE HEROD

(CP Mt 13:33) This parable is also found in Lu 13:20-21. Leaven is a fermenting agent used in bread-making to make the dough rise. It requires time to fulfill the process, but once introduced to the dough it permeates the whole mass, and the process is irreversible. Because of its pervasive nature leaven signifies a corrupting influence among God's people, and throughout scripture it is used to symbolize evil. The common bread in the Old Testament was made with leaven and was acceptable as wave offerings to the priests, and as loaves to accompany the peace offerings (CP Lev 7:11-13; 23:17). However, leaven and honey, which is a fermenting agent too, and thus also a symbolic source of corruption in the Old Testament, were strictly forbidden to be used in any sacrifice made by fire unto God, because these were typical (a type) of the offering up of the sinless sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ (CP 2Cor 5:21). Typical bread representing Christ had to be unleavened (CP Lev 2:4, 11; 6:14-17).

Leaven was forbidden in all offerings to God by fire. Being bred of corruption and spreading through the mass into which it is introduced, and therefore symbolising the pervasive character of evil, leaven was utterly inconsistent in offerings which typified the propitiatory (atoning) sacrifice of Christ. Leaven was also forbidden to be used in the feast of unleavened bread which was celebrated in conjunction with the Old Testament Passover festival (CP Ex 12:14-20; 23:15; 34:18; De 16:1-4). The Passover festival commemorated God's deliverance of the children of Israel from the corruption of Egypt where they had been kept in bondage for over 400 years. The Passover Lamb was an Old Testament type of Christ (CP 1Cor 5:7).

In the New Testament leaven is symbolic of any evil influence in the church which, if allowed to remain, can corrupt the whole body of believers (CP V1-8). Paul uses leaven here in the same sense Jesus does - as a type of sin in its development (CP Mt 16:6-12). Here we have the parable of the **Leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees**. Leaven here symbolizes false doctrines which can penetrate and influence the whole church (CP Ga 5:6-9). Here leaven typifies the harmful effects of false doctrine. Paul refers to it as a "persuasion" - something that exerts a powerful and moving influence - hindering men from obeying the truth of God (CP Lu 12:1-3). This is called the parable of the **Leaven of the Pharisees**. The hypocrisy that leaven symbolizes here is pretending to be something we are not - acting publicly as godly and faithful Christians when in reality we harbour sin, immorality, greed, lust and unrighteousness (CP Mk 8:15). This is the parable of the **Leaven Of The Pharisees and of the Leaven of Herod**. The word "Herod" in this context is used collectively of the Herodians - those belonging to the court of Herod Antipas, also known as Herod the Tetrarch - who combined with the Pharisees in an attempt to kill Jesus. The leaven here symbolizes the hypocrisy of both the Pharisees and the Herodians in asking Jesus for a sign although their minds were already made up to kill him (CP V11-12; 3:1-6).

Both Jesus and Paul use leaven to Symbolize the pervasive character of evil permeating the professing church, which is the visible manifestation of the kingdom of heaven in its present earthly aspect, yet a great many Christians believe that in the parable of the leaven our Lord uses leaven in a good sense to Symbolize the permeating effects of the gospel in Christianising the world. It seems incongruous that they could believe that because firstly, nowhere in scripture are we taught that the world will ever be Christianised. In fact the opposite is true - in the parable of the sower we learned that most people who hear the gospel will reject it, and this is the teaching throughout the whole of the New Testament (CP Mt 24:3-13; Ro 1:18-32; 2Th 2:7-12; 1Ti 4:1; 2Pe 3:3-4; Jude 17-19; Rev 3:14-16). Secondly, there is complete harmony in Jesus' parables concerning the nature and development of the kingdom in Mt 13, and it must be restated here that Jesus would never use a figure of speech in two different senses making one parable contradict the teaching of another. So, as leaven is symbolic of evil everywhere else in scripture, it is symbolic of evil in the parable of the leaven as well. Furthermore, the particular action of the woman in the parable *hiding* the leaven in the meal is a significant factor also in helping to interpret the parable. If the leaven represented something good, why hide it? The word "hid" means conceal. The meal typifies God's word and the leaven was concealed in it. It was not openly mixed in with the meal, but covertly introduced to it. This represents the subtle way in which the forces of Satan are at work in the kingdom spreading their corruptive influence by adulterating God's word and undermining its authority among professing Christians (CP Jude 3-4). Jesus' teaching concerning the nature and development of the kingdom of heaven in Mt 13 is quite clear - the kingdom will always be befouled by the presence and the plots of Satan.

Now let us summarise the teachings thus far: in the parable of the sower Jesus showed us that among those who profess God's name there will be apostasy and worldliness as well as faithfulness and godliness. In the parable of the tares of the field He showed us that the emissaries of Satan will always be present in the world alongside the children of the kingdom. In the parable of the mustard seed our Lord foretold the appearance of professed Christianity in its outward worldly form, and here, in the parable of the leaven He foreshows its - professed Christianity - internal corruption.

HIDDEN TREASURE

(CP Mt 13:44) This parable is only found in Mt 13. The most popular interpretation of this parable is that the treasure Symbolizes the kingdom. It is a priceless treasure to be desired above all else, and as such a person should be willing to part with everything in order to possess it. In this interpretation the term "selleseth all" means metaphorically that one must transfer his whole heart from other interests to the one supreme interest, our Lord Jesus Christ (metaphorically means not literally). Another view is that Jesus Himself is the priceless treasure, and that we must sell all that we have to possess Him. These are both commendable views, and what they express should be the

intent of every Christian, but they are not what the parable teaches, as this study clearly shows. Still another interpretation is that the treasure is Israel, which is called "God's peculiar treasure" in scripture (CP Ex 19:5; Psa 135:4). It would be easy to agree with this interpretation except for the fact that Israel was always openly in view as God's treasured possession right throughout scripture, whereas the treasure represented something hidden, even in Mt 13, as Jesus spoke this parable (CP De 7:6; Isa 62:1-5; Mal 3:16-17). Israel was never hidden like the treasure in the parable. Furthermore, Jesus did not pay the purchase price for Israel alone in His redeeming death, but for the whole world of sinners - Jews and Gentiles alike (CP Jn 1:29; 3:16; 4:42; 6:33, 51; 12:47; 2Cor 5:17-19; 1Jn 2:2; 4:14).

It is easier to understand this parable in the light of these scriptures. The word "world" here means all mankind. This is not teaching that all mankind will be saved, but that the price Jesus paid was sufficient for all mankind. Although the man purchased the field in the parable, it was the treasure, not the field, that was the man's object. He purchased the field in order to possess the treasure. The treasure represents something that was hidden even at the time our Lord told this parable in Mt 13. It was the church that was hidden. The church was decreed in God's eternal purpose before the beginning of time, but it was not revealed even to the angels in heaven until Jesus revealed it to the disciples in Mt 16 (CP Mt 16:13-18). This is the first mention of the church in scripture (CP Ro 16:25-26; 1Cor 2:7-8; Eph 1:3-5, 9-10, 3:1-11; Col 1:25-27; 2Ti 1:1, 8-10; Tit 1:1-3; 1Pe 1:3-12, 18-20). The church is the treasure, and the man who purchased the field in order to possess the treasure is Jesus. The field represents the world of sinners - the whole of human society - for whom He died. It is significant that Jesus did not call the field *His* field in the parable, but *a* field. It became His after He purchased it with His life-blood at Calvary, which is what Jn 1:29; 3:16; 4:42; 6:33,51; 11:51-52; 12:47; 2Cor 5:17-19; 1Jn 2:2 and 4:14 all teach. This interpretation harmonises with the rest of Jesus' parables in Mt 13 and it also shows why neither Jesus nor the kingdom can be the treasure as so many Christians believe.

PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

(CP Mt 13:45-46) This parable also is only found here in Mt 13. This is yet another parable which has many different meanings ascribed to it, but it is generally agreed among Bible scholars that this and the previous parable form a pair; that they both teach the same truth, namely, that the object of the man's desire is of such great value that he sells all to purchase it. The man in both parables is Jesus and the object of His desire is the church. In the parable of the hidden treasure we saw the incomparable worth of the church - represented by the treasure - underlined by the price Jesus paid at Calvary to possess it. He paid the redemption price for every living soul from that day forth to enter into the kingdom through the church, but sadly, most will not enter. We see in the pearl of great price in this parable a flawless pearl without spot or blemish, typifying the ultimate triumph of the kingdom at the consummation of this age when Jesus comes back to

present to Himself a glorious church without spot or blemish (CP Eph 1:3-14; 5:25-27). The man's purchase of the pearl in the parable symbolizes Jesus' redemption of His purchased possession in Eph 1:14.

This interpretation of the parable also harmonises with the rest of Jesus' parables in Mt 13. In its present earthly aspect the kingdom of heaven is fragmented by apostasy and backsliding (the parable of the sower); by the emissaries of Satan co-existing in the world with the children of the kingdom (the parable of the tares of the field); by counterfeit Christianity and false religious systems (the parable of the mustard seed); by internal corruption in professed Christianity (the parable of the leaven). Jesus then went on to show that the church would be the visible manifestation of the kingdom in the world (the parable of the hidden treasure) and here in the parable of the pearl of great price He foretells the kingdom's ultimate triumph at the end of the age when He returns for a church that is without spot or blemish. It is interesting to note here that pearls are formed as the result of an injury suffered by the living organism - such as oysters and other molluscs - that produces them. Thus it could be said that there is a sense in which the glorified church was formed out of the wounds of Christ.

THE NET

(CP Mt 13:47-50) This parable too is only found here, and is the last of the seven parables concerning the nature and development of the kingdom in Mt 13. It has a similar teaching to the parable of the tares of the field in that they both teach that good and evil - the righteous and the wicked - are presently intermingled in the kingdom. However, whereas the parable of the tares of the field describes the kingdom in its present earthly aspect, and the day of judgement when the wicked will be cast down to hell, as a future event, the parable of the net depicts the day of judgement itself in the figure of the fishermen casting the bad fish away and keeping the good ones in V48. In the seven parables relating to the kingdom of heaven in Mt 13, Jesus gives us a progressive insight into the earthly aspect of the kingdom from its inception until its ultimate triumph at the end of the age. Studied as a whole we see the contest between good and evil in the kingdom; between the power of God and the power of Satan, which fulfils the first messianic prophecy in scripture (CP Ge 3:15). Everything God said here is illustrated in the seven parables concerning the kingdom in Mt 13. Not everyone will agree with the foregoing interpretation of the parable of the net, nor with this summation of what the seven parables teach, but they all clearly harmonise with each other, and with what is taught about the kingdom of God in its present earthly aspect elsewhere in scripture as we have seen so many times in this study. These teachings by Jesus were mysteries of the kingdom which He revealed to His disciples to enable them to go forth and teach them.

HOUSEHOLDER

(CP Mt 13:51-52) This is the eighth and final parable in Mt 13, and while it does not concern the nature and development of the kingdom as such like the preceding

parables in Mt 13, it does concern teaching the mysteries of the kingdom which Jesus revealed in them. It depicts the responsibility of teachers in the kingdom. *Scribe* in V52 is the Old Testament equivalent to the New Testament teacher. As scribes gave progressive instruction of God's redeeming purpose in the Old Testament so Jesus here instructs teachers to do the same in the New Testament - not only with the parables though but with all the truths of God's word (CP 1Cor 4:1). Jesus compares teachers with their rich store of scripture knowledge to a householder with a treasure-house from which he shares his wealth with those for which he is responsible. Jesus is instructing teachers here that they are not to teach the mere letter of the word or doctrine as such, but are to share the scriptural riches with which they have been entrusted with others in the kingdom, the same as the householder shared the things from his treasure-house. This does not mean that there are two orders of truths for teachers to impart, but *new* light on *old* scriptures. The *new* is the gospel made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection. It came as the fulfilment of the *old*, the law.

There are still five more parables referring to the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's gospel that we need to look at yet.

UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

(CP Mt 18:23-35) This is also known as the parable of the unforgiving servant. It is only found here and was spoken by Jesus in response to Peter's question concerning forgiveness in V21-22 (CP V21-22). What Jesus is teaching us here is that forgiveness must be a constant attitude with believers. When Jesus told Peter that he had to forgive someone who sinned against him 490 times Jesus was simply underlining the fact that believers cannot ever afford not to forgive others, irrespective of how many times they sin against them. We are to forgive others as God has forgiven us (CP Psa 103:10-12; Mt 6:14-15). Forgiving also means forgetting (CP He 8:12). We are to behave toward others as God behaves towards us. If we claim to be His then we must have His disposition to forgive, even our enemies (CP Mt 5:7; Lu 6:35-36). Forgiveness is a matter of life or death for believers. If we do not forgive others neither will God forgive us. Jesus teaches us in this parable that the forgiveness of God, though freely given to repentant sinners, nevertheless remains conditional according to their willingness to forgive others (CP Mk 11:25-26). The judgement the king pronounced on the unforgiving servant is the equivalent of eternal damnation upon unforgiving believers, because God has forgiven their debt, so too they must forgive others, just as the servant could never repay his debt to the king, believers can never repay their debt to God. Forgiveness is a kingdom principle, and it is incumbent upon Christians to live out this principle in their Christian life. Christians have had all their sins forgiven by God, so they must forgive others in return.

LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

(CP Mt 20:1-16) This parable too is only found here. It is a continuation of what Jesus was teaching in Chapter 19. Jesus told this parable to illustrate the meaning of His

closing statement in V30 there which He repeats in V16 here, but in reverse order to conform to the order in the parable (CP Mt 19:27-30). In answer to Peter's question as to what exactly could the disciples expect seeing that they had left all to follow Him, Jesus assures them that the blessings He gives will far outweigh any material loss they may suffer for Him. But in His closing statement that many that are first shall be last, and the last first, Jesus warns that not even those who have given up most for Him are to presume that the chief places in the future eternal kingdom are guaranteed to them, and then to illustrate the meaning of what He said, He told the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. Jesus teaches us in the parable that salvation is by grace alone, not by merit, and everyone who responds affirmatively to God's call to salvation will have a place of honour in the future eternal kingdom. Length of service has no bearing on it - new Christians in their service to God are just as important to Him as those who have served Him the longest. God is no respecter of persons (CP 23:12).

No one should feel superior because of position or length of service in the church. In the age to come many who held high office in the church and were thought to be great leaders will be placed behind others who held no office and were considered to be unimportant. In the future eternal kingdom every Christian will be treated according to how their works are made manifest at the Judgement Seat of Christ (CP Ro 14:10; 2Cor 5:9-10). Every Christian has to come before the Judgement Seat of Christ in the future eternal kingdom for their earthly works to be tried, and it is how those works stand or fall that will determine the Christians' position in heaven (CP 1Cor 3:11-15). God will evaluate every one of the earthly works we build upon the foundation of Christ, but only the works symbolized by gold, silver and precious stones will be able to withstand the heat of the refining fire. All lesser works, represented by the wood, hay, and stubble will burn up. Christians will not lose their salvation if this happens, but there will be a loss of heavenly rewards. The phrase that Jesus uses to close the parable, "... for many be called but few chosen," simply means that while God's call to salvation goes out to all of humanity, only those who respond affirmatively to the call and conform strictly to the conditions Jesus has laid down for salvation are chosen to inherit the future eternal kingdom. They constitute the glorious church, which is what God predestined before the foundation of the world, not the individuals themselves (CP Eph 1:3-5, 9-10; 3:1-11; 2Ti 1:1, 8-10).

TWO SONS

(CP Mt 21:28-32) Here Jesus illustrates for the Jewish religious leaders that the responsibility for propagating the Kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to the gentiles (CP V43-46). The religious leaders were like the second son in the parable who said he would go but did not. They were self-righteous hypocrites who not only would not enter into the kingdom themselves, but held others out who wanted to enter in. They had promised to do everything for God

but when the time came they did nothing (CP Mt 22:1-7; 23:13).

LANDOWNER

(CP Mt 21:33-41) This parable of the landowner is also recorded in Mk 12:1-12 and Lu 20:9-19. Here Jesus demonstrates the response to His ministry by the nation of Israel. The landowner symbolizes God; the husbandmen are the Jewish religious leaders; the servants are the Old Testament prophets, and the son is Christ Himself. What happened to the servants in the parable is what happened to the Old Testament prophets (CP 1Ki 22:7-9, 13-14, 19-28; 2Chr 24:20-22; 36:15-16; Neh 9:26; Jer 2:30). The "other vinedressers" in V41 typify the gentiles who obtained the salvation that the Jews rejected (CP Ac 13:46-47). This is not to say though that there will not be a rebirth of the Jewish nation (CP Ro 11:7-11). There will be a rebirth of the Jewish nation when they repent of their unbelief and accept Jesus as Messiah (CP Zech 12:8-13:2 with Ro 11:23-28).

MARRIAGE FEAST

(CP Mt 22:2-14). This parable is only found here but its subject matter is similar to the parable of the great supper in Luke's gospel (CP Lu 14:16-24). They both clearly allude to the rejection of Jesus by the Jews and the grafting in of the Gentiles into the kingdom. The prophetic aspect of the parable of the marriage feast concerning the destruction of the city and the murderers of the king's servants was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day were like the king's invited guests who refused his invitation to the marriage feast - they rejected Jesus and would not enter into the kingdom (CP Ac 13:46-48). The king having to turn to other guests both bad and good to take part in the marriage feast illustrates God turning to all men, and not to Jews only, to be a part of His kingdom. Notwithstanding though that anyone at all could take part in the marriage feast, those who did were under the king's authority and had to comply with the conditions of entry he had laid down - they had to wear a wedding garment, and they all complied with this condition except one man (CP Mt 22:11-12). In the Greek construction of this passage it shows that not only was the man not wearing a wedding garment, but that he had no intention of even putting one on. He wanted to partake of the king's provision, but on his terms not the king's. This was a gross insult to the king, accounting his authority for nothing. The man's punishment was to be cast into outer darkness.

Jesus is teaching us here that in the present earthly aspect of the kingdom of heaven there are many professing Christians like the man in the parable. They want to partake of the kingdom benefits, but on their terms also, not God's. They profess faith in Christ but are not yielded to the authority of God's word. Jesus said only those who hear God's word and do it will inherit the kingdom (CP Mt 7:21-27; Ro 2:13; Jas 1:22-25; 2:14-26). Only those who comply with the conditions God has laid down will enter the kingdom of heaven. Those who do not comply will be

cast down to hell. Wearing the garment in the parable and being yielded to the authority of the king is symbolic of our having "put on" Christ - being completely yielded to Christ in continued obedience to His word (CP Ro 13:12-14; Ga 3:27; 5:24). If we have not "put on" Christ then we cannot partake of His kingdom benefits, and just as the man without a wedding garment in the parable could not partake of the feast and was cast into outer darkness, so we will be damned for eternity in hell.

TEN VIRGINS, FIG TREE, GOODMAN OF THE HOUSE, FAITHFUL AND WISE SERVANT

(CP Mt 25:1-13) This parable is only recorded here and is a continuation of Jesus' discourse in Mt 24 about the events that will take place on earth during the time of the Great Tribulation just prior to His second coming. We need to read at least part of that discourse to better understand what Christ is teaching here because this parable has been used down through the ages to teach many different things in the contemporary church (CP Mt 24:27-51). There are three parables included in these scriptures all pertaining to the uncertainty of the time of Christ's return: **the parable of the Fig Tree** (V32-33), **the Goodman of the House** (V43-44) and **the Faithful and Wise Servant** (V45-51).

The core teaching in all of them is faithfulness, preparedness and watchfulness in view of the second coming of Christ, and the same teaching applies to the parable of the ten virgins. The church is not in view in any of these teachings either in Mt 24 or Mt 25 - it is raptured, or caught up to heaven before the emergence of Antichrist and the onset of the Great Tribulation (CP Ro 5:8-9; Eph 5:1-7; 1Th 4:13-18; 2Th 2:7-9; Rev 3:10). But by way of application the teachings in both Mt 24 and Mt 25 are relevant to all believers in every age until Jesus comes back, whether in the air to rapture the church, or on land to defeat Antichrist.

The parable of the ten virgins has been used variously to teach among other things that there are two kinds of Christians - wise and foolish; the oil is the baptism in the spirit; the rapture will take place at midnight or in the middle of the Great Tribulation; only those baptized in the spirit will be saved; only those baptized in the spirit will celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb; the door of mercy will be closed to the Gentiles after the rapture and the five wise virgins represent the true church, etc, etc. The list goes on, but none of these teachings have any grounding in scripture whatsoever. They only detract from the real meaning of the parable - that of Christians always being in a state of readiness for when Jesus returns. The bridegroom's response to the foolish virgins' knocking on the door echoes what Jesus also teaches in Mt 7:21-23 (CP Mt 7:21-23). Not everyone who calls Jesus Lord will enter into the eternal kingdom of heaven - only those will who have prepared themselves for His return. The kingdom will not be open to those who profess to belong to Christ but have no divine resources within.

TALENTS

(CP Mt 25:14-30) There are many profound truths to be gleaned from this parable and we need to study it carefully to fully understand them. What this parable teaches has a double application - present and future. In V29 Jesus reveals a very important principle with regard to the believer's reward and state in the future eternal kingdom. What he receives then will depend on what he possesses of the kingdom now. His position and inheritance of the future kingdom will be in proportion to his dedication and consecration to the service of God in the present earthly aspect of the kingdom. The basic teaching of this parable is that God has given every believer spiritual gifts and graces according to each believer's ability, and that these gifts and graces must be put to use in God's service (CP Ro 12:3-8; 1Cor 12:1-31; 2Cor 5:17-19; Eph 4:7-16; 1Pe 4:7-11). God means us to use these gifts and graces for the extension of His kingdom. They are not given to us for our profit, but for His. The believer who does not use his gift or grace for God's glory is the same as the servant in the parable who hid his talent in the ground (CP Mt 5:14-16).

There is a tendency among some Bible commentators to downplay the punishment the servant received in the parable of the talents. They teach that symbolically it compares only to loss of rewards in heaven, but that is not what the parable is teaching at all. The servant was not punished simply because he failed to return a profit to his master. He was punished because underlying his failure to return a profit was his prior intention not to even invest his master's money (CP Mt 25:24-25). He had no intention of putting his master's money to work, and then he justified himself for not doing so by finding fault with his master, and accusing him of unfair business practices. He was condemned by his own words (CP Mt 12:35-37). He was not a true and faithful servant as the other two were. He was found to be untrue and unfaithful, and the punishment he received is the equivalent of one who merely professes faith in Christ being condemned to hell. Not everyone who calls Jesus Lord is going to heaven (CP Mt 7:21-23). The slothful servant's prior intention not to put his master's money to work is reminiscent of the guest in the parable of the marriage feast in Mt 22 who had pre-determined not to put on a wedding garment. Their punishment was the same.

The parable of the talents illustrates the attitude of many professing Christians in the contemporary church. They are prepared to do the work of God on their terms, but not on His. They accept that part of the Bible that conforms to their theology, but reject the parts that do not. But God has the final word (CP Mt 25:28-30 with Mk 4:21-25). This is called the **parable of the lighted candle**. The kingdom of God would soon be made manifest that all can see it alike, and Jesus admonishes us to put into practice what we hear. It is not to be hidden, but used in the service of God. What we do with the truth we receive will determine whether or not we will be given more, or lose even that which we already have. This is a stern warning to believers to beware what they hear, and a promise that if they hear aright, more will be given them. We also see in the parable

of the talents the biblical pattern for promotion in the New Testament church. Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Apollos and Titus to name a few, were all promoted after proving their faithfulness in lesser areas of ministry first. God promoted them just as Jesus teaches here, and this confirms our opening statement that what a man receives in the future eternal kingdom will depend on what he possesses of the kingdom in its present earthly aspect.

LIGHTED CANDLE

(CP Mk 4:21-25) Jesus admonishes us here to put into practice what we hear. It is not to be hidden, but used in the service of God. Knowing that the gospel saves is not something believers can keep to themselves - it has to be shared with those who are not saved (CP Mt 5:14-16; Lu 8:16-17). We have not been given the light of divine truth to hide it from others - it must be shared with them. What we do with the truth we receive will determine whether or not we will be given more, or lose that which we already have (CP Mt 25:29; Mk 4:24-25; Lu 8:18). This is a stern warning to believers to not only be hearers of God's word, but doers also. Whoever does this will be given more light, while those who do not will lose even what little they have (See also comments on Mt 13:12; 25:14-30; 28:19-20 (A) and Lu 11:33-36.)

SEED SOWN IN THE GROUND

(CP Mk 4:26-29) This is one of three parables pertaining to the kingdom in Mk 4, but is the only one peculiar to Mark's gospel. The other two - the parables of the sower, and the mustard seed - were early subjects of this study. This is the only remaining parable pertaining to the kingdom we have yet to study. Jesus told this parable immediately after His admonition to believers to beware what they hear, and His warning that rejecting any truth would result in them losing what they already had. Like many other parables this one has also suffered the extremes of interpretation - from being seen as a teaching on evolution, to symbolising the three stages of the church in the world - but kept in the context in which Jesus told it, like His other parables pertaining to the kingdom, it teaches a very simple but profound truth, and that is that as surely as seed sown in good soil will germinate and grow to produce fruit of itself for harvest in due course naturally, outside of any human agency, so the manifestation of the kingdom of God will follow in due course the faithful ministry of God's word. Once the word is sown in the hearts of men the fruit it produces will be the result of the word itself, not the human agent who sowed it. God's word has the power within itself for its own fulfillment (CP Isa 55:10-11; Col 1:1-6; He 4:12-13; 1Pe 1:23-25).

That completes this part of our study on the parables of Jesus. There are 14 parables pertaining to the nature and development of God's kingdom in this part of the study, plus 7 others. It is important to Jesus that we understand the nature and development of the kingdom in both its present and future aspects, or the parable of the householder in Mt 13:51-52 is pointless (CP Mt 13:51-52). Let us look now at some parables which are peculiar to

Luke's gospel. It is nearly as rich in parabolic teaching as Matthew.

CREDITOR AND TWO DEBTORS

This parable is only found in Luke's gospel (CP Lu 7:41-43). Jesus told this parable because of the self-righteous and condescending attitude of Simon the Pharisee – in whose house Jesus was a guest – toward a woman who had just anointed Jesus' feet with expensive ointment after washing them with her tears, and drying them with her hair (CP V36-40). Scriptures do not tell us who the woman is. Some think it is Mary Magdalene because she is mentioned in Lu 8, but that is no proof. Suffice to say she was a repentant sinner.

The parable speaks of a certain creditor to whom two people were in debt. One owed the equivalent to nearly two years wages and the other the equivalent to two months wages. Neither could repay the creditor so he forgave them both their debt. When asked by Christ which one would love the creditor the most, Simon responded in the only logical way: the one who had been forgiven the greatest debt would love the creditor the most. Jesus told him that he had answered correctly and then went on to contrast his attitude toward Jesus and that of the woman (CP V44-50).

Wrapped up in his own self-righteousness, Simon did not express any gratitude or love toward Jesus that would be an acknowledgement of his faith in the person of Christ, and his need for forgiveness, as the woman did. That is why Jesus told her that her sins were forgiven; that her faith had saved her, and to go in peace. The woman was not saved because of what she did, but because of her faith in the person of Christ. Her faith led her to do what she did. We learn from this that love for Jesus can only be genuine when we sincerely acknowledge Him as the Saviour in whom we receive forgiveness of sins. We can believe in Jesus and even serve Him, but it is only by acknowledging Him as Saviour and Lord that we express our love for Him as He deserves (See also comments on Mt 26:6-13).

GOOD SAMARITAN

(CP Lu 10:25-37) This has one of the simplest teachings in all the parables Jesus told, yet it has been the subject of some of the most fanciful elaborations. The teaching is simply that our neighbour is any person whose need we know, and whose need we are able to meet. We fulfill the righteousness of God's commandment that we are to love our neighbour as ourselves when we respond to such a person's need, whether they be a brother or sister in the Lord, or our worst enemy (CP Ex 23:4-5; Lev 19:17-18; Mt 5:43-48 (Lu 6:27-35); 22:36-40; Jn 13:34-35; Ro 13:8-10; 15:1-3; Ga 5:14; Eph 4:25; Jas 2:8-10, 14-16; 1Jn 3:11, 16-18). God's command to love our neighbour as ourselves reaches out far beyond our immediate circle of friends and other Christians with whom we fellowship on a regular basis. It is a call to show mercy and love to every other human being we encounter in our Christian walk. There is a teaching within the teaching here, and that is that if we are to love our neighbour as ourselves then we are

not to shut ourselves away from them. We must remain in the world with them in order to fulfill the righteousness of this commandment. If we raise protective barriers to live sheltered lives as Christians, we transgress God's two greatest commandments and will incur His wrath (CP Lu 10:25-28). This clearly shows the error in the practice of some religious orders shutting themselves away from mainstream humanity. Christians are not to be merely hearers of the word deceiving themselves, but doers of the word, if they want to be blessed (CP Mt 7:21-27; Ro 2:13; Jas 1:22-27).

One of the more fanciful elaborations of this parable is that the man who was robbed is Adam; the robbers are the devil and his angels who stripped and robbed Adam of his immortality; they beat him by persuading him to sin; the priest and the Levite represent the priesthood and the ministry of the Old Testament which could profit nothing for salvation; the Good Samaritan is Jesus; the binding of the wounds is the restraint of sin; oil is the comfort of good hope; wine is the exhortation to work with fervent spirit; the beast is the incarnate flesh Christ deigned to come to us in; being set upon the beast is believing in the incarnation of Christ; the inn is the church; the two coins are the two commands to love God and our neighbours, and the innkeeper is the apostle Paul. Another interpretation has the two coins signifying the year 2000 as being the year Christ will return to earth. It is incomprehensible that such a simple parable could evoke such ingenious interpretations, but that will always happen when we look for hidden meanings and symbolism behind every teaching in scripture instead of keeping it in context as Jesus taught us in the parables of the sower and the tares of the field in Mt 13.

FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT

(CP Lu 11:5-10) This parable is used by some to teach the necessity of persisting in prayer when our prayers are not immediately answered. But that is not what the parable is teaching at all (CP V1-4). This is what is commonly called the Lord's prayer. Jesus used it as the model to teach His disciples to pray, and He then illustrates for them by the parable of the friend at midnight that they can expect their prayers to be answered. The man in the parable got what he needed because although it was midnight, he boldly and unashamedly went to his friend, knocked on his door, and asked for it. In V9-10 Jesus promises us that we can do the same with God. All we have to do is what the man in the parable did: ask, seek and knock. The word *importunity* in this parable means shamelessness, boldness, impudence, audacity. It does not mean persistence, as so many teach. This is the only place in the Bible where the word is used. To summarise this parable, it teaches quite simply that, as the man who shamelessly dared to ask his friend got what he asked for, so those who shamelessly through prayer ask, seek and knock, will also get what they ask for from God (CP Jn 15:7; 1Jn 5:14-15). God's will is His word and if we abide in Him and His word abides in us we will never ask for anything outside of His word.

RICH FOOL

(CP Lu 12:16-21) There is a wealth of teaching comes out of this parable. Jesus told it in response to a man asking him to make his brother share their inheritance (CP V13-15). Jesus refused to arbitrate in a dispute of this nature. His point was that there is much more to life than disputing an inheritance, and after warning His listeners against the sin of covetousness and the error of thinking that a man's life consists in the abundance of his possessions, He told this parable. It is a grim warning to Christians against making material possessions or riches the focus of this life at the expense of their souls in the next life (CP Mk 8:36). In Jesus' perspective riches are an obstacle to salvation because as He teaches in this parable the acquisition of wealth for the sake of it is covetousness which is futile and self-defeating, for the end of it is death. Paul teaches that covetousness is idolatry, and that no covetous person or idolater, shall inherit the kingdom of God (CP Eph 5:5; Col 3:1-6). This is a warning for believers, not unbelievers - Paul wrote these letters to two churches, and that applies to us too. A Christian's life is not to be spent accumulating material possessions and wealth which neither gives life nor provides security because death separates from things. *Abundance* in Lu 12:15 means more than is needed; surplus to needs. The fate of the rich fool generalises the fate of all who are more concerned with possessions than the things of God. This does not mean that we are not to labour for our own or our family's needs - we are obliged to provide for our family, and God blesses us for doing so (CP Pr 13:11; Ecc 5:18-20; 1Ti 5:8). We cannot confuse working to meet our needs with covetousness. Covetousness is greed for material things and the desire to have more.

Many Christians who would never consider themselves to be materialistic in the strict sense of the word nevertheless live as though material things are extremely important, yet in the parable of the rich fool Jesus shows us that the desire for wealth and material possessions directly conflict with the purpose of God for His children, and that the selfish amassing of wealth and possessions by Christians indicates that they no longer see life from the vantage point of eternity. Their goal and their fulfilment is no longer in God but in themselves and their possessions. It may not start out that way but that is how it will end up (CP De 31:20; 32:12-18; Hos 8:14; 13:6). *Jeshurun* in De 32:15 is a symbolic name for Israel. Because of their wealth and success the Israelites had become self-sufficient, thinking that they no longer needed God and His help. Likewise when we have an abundance of blessings we are also tempted to feel self-sufficient and that we do not need to seek God and His help either. History has repeatedly shown that in time of ease and plenty God's people are most prone to forget Him and stop seeking His face (CP Pr 20:21; 28:16, 20-22). Riches and possessions are only temporary. They should not be the object of a Christian's faith. The desire for them cause Christians to sin, and just as the Old Testament children of God forsook Him after they acquired wealth and possessions, so too according to scripture will New Testament Christians (CP 1 Ti 6:9-12).

Paul's perspective of those desiring wealth is the same as Jesus'. He teaches here that the pursuit of wealth debases the mind, destroys Godly traits and makes Christians selfish, proud, and avaricious, which all lead to destruction and perdition. *Perdition* refers to the state after death wherein exclusion from salvation is a realised fact, wherein man, instead of becoming what he might have been in God, is lost and ruined forever. This is a warning for those inside the church, not outside it - for believers, not unbelievers. Paul teaches here that perdition is the final destiny of Christians who determine to be rich because this desire for wealth is not a passing emotional thing, but the result of a process of reasoning. (The word "will" in V9 is from the Greek word **boulomai**, which refers to a desire that comes from the reasoning faculties, not from the emotions, while "coveted" in V10 is **orego**, which means to stretch one's self out in order to grasp something; to reach after, or desire something.) This applies to all grades of wealth and Paul's warning to Timothy to flee it in V11 is a warning to all Christians whose ambition is to have more money than that which satisfies their everyday needs (CP Psa 37:16; Pr 15:16; 30:7-9; Ecc 5:10-17; 6:9; Jer 45:5; Ro 12:16; Php 4:11-13; 1Ti 6:6-8; He 13:5-6). These scriptures all teach the same thing: godliness with sufficient material blessings to meet our everyday needs should make us content with life. Money and the abundance of material things do not give life meaning and thus cannot bring real happiness. Ecc 5:10-17 teaches that in general an honest working person can sleep more peacefully after working all day than those who accumulate riches. The fear of the wealthy is that something will happen to cause them to lose everything, but even if they do not lose anything, they can take nothing with them when they die.

It is sad to have to say this but it needs to be said, and it should challenge every one of us to be constantly re-evaluating our lifestyles to ensure that our heart is centred on heavenly treasure and not on treasures on earth: many Christians do not mind how hard they work for an abundance of earthly possessions, but do no work at all to lay up treasure for themselves in heaven. The word *conversation* in He 13:5 means manner, or way of life. This passage teaches that a Christian's way of life has to be without the desire for more than that which will satisfy our everyday needs. This is what Jesus means in Lu 12:15 when He says that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth. Covetousness and financial fear are overcome by a contentment founded upon the assurance of God's constant presence for those who seek his help. In order that we may have a clearer understanding of what 1 Ti 6:6-10 teaches here is the literal English rendering from the Greek according to **Kenneth Wuest's Word Studies in the Greek New Testament**:

"But godly piety associated with an inward self sufficiency which is its natural accompaniment, is great gain; for not even one thing did we bring into this world, because not even one thing are we able to take out. And having food and clothing, by these we shall be fortified sufficiently; but they that are after giving the matter mature consideration, desire to be wealthy, fall into temptation and a snare and many

hurtful cravings which drown men in destruction and perdition; for a root of all the evils is a fondness for money, which certain ones bending their effort to grasp, have been led away from the faith and have pierced themselves through with many consuming griefs."

None of this teaching denies the promises of God in scripture to prosper His children, but that is the point the parable of the rich fool makes: God is the one who blesses, and believers with wealth and possessions must not see themselves as being rich, but merely stewards of that which is God's. They must be generous, ready to share, and rich in good works (CP De 7:11-15; 28:1-14; Josh 1:8; Psa 1:1-3; 34:9-10; 112:1-9; Pr 11:24-26; 19:17; 22:9; 28:27; Lu 6:38; 1Ti 6:17-19; Jas 2:14-17; 1Jn 3:16-19). In the parable of the rich fool, and the scriptures which precede and follow it, Jesus is clearly teaching Christians against making temporal wealth the object of life. He sees in the desire for riches a life-goal totally opposed to God, which claims men's hearts and therefore estranges them from God (CP De 8:10-19). This scripture teaches how Christians must guard against pride and backsliding when God does prosper them. Prosperity brings with it the temptation to be arrogant, causing us to forget that God is the source of all blessings, and it is because it is God Himself who gives us the power to get wealth, wealth itself is not sinful. It is the pursuit of wealth and our misuse of it that is sinful (CP Psa 39:4-7). This teaches us that God has given unto each one of us a certain life span in which our faithfulness toward Him will be tested and determined. How we spend that span of life will determine our destiny in eternity (CP Mt 7:21-27; Ro 2:13). We can spend it chasing wealth and material things for our own self-gratification, or we can spend it doing God's work, which is the only way we can be saved (CP Psa 49:1-20). Whilst this is a call to all mankind, as Christians we need to know what it is saying to us. It stresses both the futility of trusting in riches, and the transitory nature of all that the world has to offer. Anyone at all whose life consists in an abundance of earthly possessions or in worldly pleasures or fame rather than in seeking after God and His kingdom will perish (CP 1Jn 2:15-17). Only those totally consecrated to the service of God and completely yielded to the authority of Jesus will be redeemed from the grave (CP Ecc 2:18-23).

All these scriptures teach the same thing. They are a true picture of man in his best state. All his imaginations, plans, schemes and ways soon come to nothing. He heaps up earthly treasure for himself and does not even know what will really happen to it after he dies (CP Pr 23:4-5). No human labour has any enduring value if it is not dedicated to God (CP Ecc 6:1-2). Dedication to work as its own reward is a vain pursuit. The ability to enjoy what we have depends on a right relationship with God. Without God it is all in vain. The rich fool in the parable gave no thought to the things of God. He mistook the purpose of life, imagining it consisted in the abundance of his possessions rather than it being a channel of blessing for others of God's children in need. Scriptures teach that the primary purpose for Christians even getting a job is to help others in need (CP Eph 4:28). Jesus equates our

treatment of others in need with our treatment of Himself (CP Pr 19:17; 21:13; 22:9; Mt 25:31-46). Our Christian work is not only a spiritual walk, it must also serve the need of others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ (CP Jas 2:13-17; 1Jn 3:16-19). What we do of the work of the word proves our Christian consecration to the service of God, and confirms our love for God and each other. This is the acid test of Christianity by which we know whether we are following the example of God's love to others. If we are not willing to give of our material things to others in need, we certainly would not lay down our lives for them like God expects us to, and like Jesus did for us. 1Jn 3:16 is the exact counterpart of Jn 3:16 (CP Jn 3:16).

All the scriptures studied so far very clearly warn Christians against making temporal wealth the object of life (CP Mt 6:19-21, 24). Here Jesus equates the desire for wealth with serving mammon. *Mammon* refers to earthly riches. Jesus solemnly warns us that we cannot be faithful to God and also covet wealth. Covetousness is idolatry and behind every idol are demons, and although Christians pursuing wealth would not worship idols made out of wood or stone, they are in reality worshipping the demonic forces behind idolatry (CP 1Cor 10:1-7, 14-22). Paul's warning here that Christians "cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils" is essentially the same as Jesus' warning that Christians "cannot serve God and mammon" in Mt 6. The majority of Christians see these passages in 1Cor 10 as merely referring to food sacrificed to idols and idolatrous feasts, but there is much more to it than that. Paul teaches here that although an idol is nothing in the world, it does represent something that is not the true God. An idol is not only an image of something, it is also a representation, whether corporeal (material, physical) or imaginary, or some other thing. Idolatry can involve professing allegiance to God and His word while at the same time giving equal or greater allegiance to someone or something else. As Christians we must learn to distinguish between the things the world loves because that which is esteemed by the world is an abomination before God (CP Lu 16:13-15).

Christians must ever be alert to the danger of being seduced from their allegiance to God by the allurements of riches and earthly possessions. We must guard against any preoccupation at all with material things lest they become more important to us than the things of God (CP Mt 13:3-9, 18-23). This is the parable of the sower. It was the first parable we studied concerning the nature and development of the kingdom. It perfectly describes what the end is for Christians caught up in the pursuit of wealth, which the parable calls *the deceitfulness of riches*. The teaching in this parable centres on the soils, which represent those who receive God's word, and how they respond to it. The term *deceitfulness of riches* means that wealth gives a false impression, whether by appearance, statement, or influence - a false sense of security. *Choke* here means figuratively to overpower. What this teaches is that the false sense of security emanating from earthly riches overpowers the word of

God in Christians and prevents them bearing fruit for the kingdom. They have been seduced by their wealth from continuing in the word of God. This is the same teaching as 1Ti 6:10 where those that coveted after wealth “erred” from the faith. *Erred* here also means seduced. They were all seduced by their wealth away from God (CP 1Ti 6:10). Christians succumbing to wealth and material possessions are yielding to forces in opposition to the nature of the word of God which they received for their salvation. Christians cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils. We cannot have both salvation and covet earthly things. We cannot serve God and mammon (CP Rev 3:14-20).

This is called the letter to the church at Laodicea. It is one of seven letters to seven churches Jesus addresses in Rev 2 and 3, and while these seven churches actually existed at the time of John’s Revelation, they are also representative of all churches since then, and the letters have an ongoing application for all generations since then too. They are for the admonition of both the corporate body of the church, and for each of us individually. The Laodicean church is a lukewarm church, but churches are people - Christians – so a lukewarm church is made up of lukewarm Christians – in this context Christians who have compromised God’s word with worldly things. In their self-sufficient prosperity and worldliness Laodiceans have excluded Jesus from fellowshiping with them. They see themselves as rich, increased with goods and needing nothing, but Jesus sees them as poor, blind, wretched, miserable and naked. He counsels them not to lay up treasure for themselves on earth, but to store it up for themselves in heaven. He then invites anyone who will repent to restored fellowship with Him, otherwise they will be rejected (CP Job 31:13-28).

What Job says here should be the testimony of every New Testament Christian, because one day, like Job, we will all have to give an account to God for everything we lavish on ourselves and withhold from others (CP Lu 16:19-25). This is not teaching that the rich man went to hell just because he was rich and Lazarus went to Abraham’s bosom because he was poor. Neither affluence nor poverty determines our eternal state, but the life we live on earth. The rich man went to hell because his life was consumed with self-centred living, not caring about others of God’s children worse off than himself. He fared sumptuously every day while Lazarus went hungry. In his self-indulgent lifestyle the rich man violated God’s two greatest commandments (CP Mt 22:34-40). God says it is only our love for others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ, that proves our love for Him, and we cannot honestly say we love them if we are not prepared to give of our material possessions to them, which is what we learned in Jas 2:13-17 and 1Jn 3:16-19 (CP Jas 2:13-17; 1Jn 3:16-19 with Ga 6:7-10). Anyone claiming to be a born again believer, who at the same time consciously sows to their flesh is guilty of mocking and despising God, and will forfeit their place in His kingdom.

One of the best examples of how Christians can get caught up in self-centred living and forfeit God’s blessings is to be found in the Old Testament book of Haggai the prophet

(CP Hag 1:2-10; 2:10-15). God’s children in Haggai’s time had forfeited God’s blessings because of their apathy toward the things of God. They were preoccupied building and beautifying their own houses while God’s house remained desolate. They needed to be reminded of their obligation to God, so God used Haggai to rebuke them. God’s purpose was to motivate them to reorder their lives and their priorities so they could resume building His house. This same obligation is ours today and God’s rebuke to them is for us also. Many of us are so busy with our own lives and self-interests that we too are neglecting to build God’s house. We do not have to physically build the temple like the children of Israel had to in Haggai’s time, but we are responsible for extending God’s kingdom in the earth by the giving of ourselves and our finances into it. Haggai’s call to the Israelites to consider their ways is a call to God’s children in all ages to consider their ways. As Haggai insisted that God’s work must come first with the Israelites, so too it must come first with us. God’s kingdom and His righteous concerns must be the first and foremost priority in our lives. We cannot live self-seeking lives apathetic to God’s purpose, or we will also be cut off from His blessing.

We must all make the work of God our first priority by committing what we are, what we have, and all that we do, to Him. We must turn from selfish ambition and personal agendas to focus on advancing His kingdom (CP Lu 12:22-23). Jesus continues on here after telling the parable of the rich fool. He is not teaching that Christians cannot make provision for their physical and financial needs to be met, but that there are to be no life-style excesses in so doing. It needs to be restated here that believers with wealth and possessions must not see themselves as being rich, but merely stewards of that which is God’s. They must be generous, ready to share, and rich in good works. Whatever we have belongs to God and whenever we use it to advance His kingdom we are simply redistributing the wealth He has entrusted to us (CP 1Chr 29:10-16). This has been a rather lengthy treatment of the parable of the rich fool but it was considered necessary in view of the proliferation of prosperity doctrines sweeping the contemporary church. Believers need to know what God’s view is concerning Christians and wealth.

UNFAITHFUL SERVANT

(CP Lu 12:41-48). This teaches that those who profess to love God but are indifferent and careless about the things of God will forfeit their place in His eternal kingdom. They will be eternally damned along with unbelievers (CP V46 with Rev 21:8). They will also suffer worse torment in hell than those who never professed to love God (CP Lu 12:47-48 with Mt 10:14-15; 23:14; Lu 10:12-16; He 10:29; Jas 3:1). Just as there are degrees of rewards in heaven (CP 1Cor 3:13-15), so there are degrees of punishment in hell. This also teaches that ignorance of God’s will is no excuse either. An ignorant person will receive less punishment than one who knows God’s will, but they will both still be in hell.

BARREN FIG TREE

(CP Lu 13:6-9) This illustrates the fruitlessness of Israel (CP Isa 5:1-7). Jesus told the parable of the barren fig tree to enforce His declaration in Lu 13:1-5 that unless the Jews repented they would all perish (CP Lu 13:1-5). In the context of the calamities that overtook the Galileans and those on whom the tower of Siloam fell, Jesus teaches in the parable that God's patience eventuates in judgement if sinners do not repent. The owner of the vineyard is a figure of God, and the vinedresser, Jesus. The parable also teaches that just as the vinedresser was only prepared to give the tree another year to bear fruit, so too Jesus will not plead for sinners any longer once the day of grace has passed. But this is not only a warning to a fruitless nation or a fruitless sinner, it is also a warning to a fruitless church or a fruitless believer (CP Mt 3:7-10; 7:15-27; Lu 8:5-9, 11-15; Jn 15:1-6, 16; He 2:2-3). The barren fig tree in the parable should not be confused with the fig tree Jesus cursed in Mt 21:17-22 or Mk 11:12-14, 20-24. The lesson we learn from Jesus cursing that fig tree is a divine object lesson in faith. It is not about the fruitlessness of Israel (CP Mt 21:17-22). See also comments on Mt 21:17-22.

LOWEST SEAT AT THE FEAST

(CP Lu 14:7-11) Christ told this parable when He saw how the guests at the house He was visiting picked the places of high honour to sit in without waiting for their host to assign them the places. The point the parable illustrates is found in V11: those that exalt themselves in the present kingdom of heaven will be put to shame in the future kingdom. There is perfect harmony here with the parable of the labourers in the vineyard in Mt 20:1-16 which we have already studied. The expression "...whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" in this parable means the same as "...so the last shall be first, and the first last..." in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. They are both lessons on humility which abound in scripture (CP Pr 25:6-7; 29:23; Mt 18:3-4; 19:27-30; 23:11-12; Lu 9:46-48; Jn 13:3-17; Ro 12:3,16; Php 2:5-9; Jas 4:6,10; 1Pe 5:5-6). The spiritual reality that Christ teaches in this parable is that true honour is not the honour that one claims for oneself, but rather it is the honour conferred on one by God (CP Job 22:29; Psa 18:27; Lu 1:52; 13:29-30; 18:9-14; Jn 5:44; 2Cor 10:18). Honour cannot be secured by self-assertiveness - it comes only through humility and servanthood.

GREAT SUPPER

(CP Lu 14:16-24) Jesus told this parable in response to what one of the Pharisees who sat with Him at the meal table said in V15 (CP V15). Jesus uses the supper as a figure of the future eternal kingdom, and the guests who were invited first as a figure of the Jews. Jesus is illustrating by the parable His future rejection by the Jews, and as a result the kingdom being opened up to the gentiles. The servant being sent out to bring in guests for the supper is a figure of the evangelical church. *Compel* in V23 does not mean to use force, but rather to persuade (CP V23). This typifies sinners being persuaded to partake of

the kingdom benefits by evangelical Christians. This teaching should not only be seen as a rebuke for the Jews, but also as a reminder for contemporary Christians to also "...go out into the highways and the hedges and compel them to come in" (*hedges* here refers to the narrow ways among the vineyards). See also comments on Mt 20:16.

TOWER BUILDER, A KING GOING TO WAR, SAVOURLESS SALT

(CP Lu 14:26-35) Jesus told three parables here to stress the importance of what He was teaching - the qualifications of discipleship. Jesus spoke these parables so that there would be no misunderstanding of what He said in V26-27 (CP V26-27). Jesus is quite clear here - these are the qualifications we must meet if we want to be saved. This teaches us that we are to love Jesus above all else, including our family and our own life. The word *hateth* in V26 does not mean that we are to literally hate our fathers and mothers, etc, but that we are to love them less than we love Jesus (CP Mt 10:37). Jesus demands that our love and our loyalty for Him be greater than any other attachment we may have, including even our attachment for our families, and He goes on then in the parable of the tower builder to warn all who would follow him to first count the cost of what it involves. This all highlights the radical nature of the discipleship to which Christ has called us. While the benefits of the gospel are solely on the basis of personal choice, complying with the conditions for appropriating those benefits are part of the cost of that choice. Salvation is a paradox - it is both free and costly. Free because Jesus has already paid for it with His life's blood, yet there is a cost in terms of its impact upon those who would follow after Jesus. Jesus demands that all that we have: material possessions, family, even our own life must be placed at the service of God. He also requires our total renunciation of all self-interests and ambitions and everything else that would take precedence in our life over the things of God (CP Mk 10:17-27).

This teaching can also be found in Mt 19:16-22 and Lu 18:18-23 but we will study Mark's version here because it really shows how anxious the rich young ruler was to be saved. In V17 it says he came running, and kneeled before Jesus, but he did not get saved - he failed the test of discipleship. He sincerely wanted to be saved, but on his terms, not the terms Jesus laid down. He was not prepared to forsake all for Jesus, which is one of the conditions of salvation laid down by Jesus. This does not teach that believers have to sell or dispose of all their possessions in order to be saved, but it does teach that believers must place all their wealth and possessions at the service of God once they are saved. There is a message for the church here, and that is that nobody can be saved by a gospel of easy believism. We must never represent salvation to anyone as something that requires no commitment on their part because Jesus has done it all for them and all they have to do is merely believe in Jesus to be saved.

In the parable of the tower builder Jesus illustrates the absurdity of seeking to follow after Him without first counting the cost (CP Lu 9:57-62). Here we have three

more seemingly sincere candidates for salvation but they too, like the rich young ruler, also failed to measure up to the standards Jesus has set for His disciples. These passages teach above all else that anything less than total consecration to the service of God and complete surrender to the authority of Jesus eliminates one from the kingdom of heaven. The first incident teaches that an emotional enthusiasm that has not considered the cost of abandoning material security to follow Him is insufficient by Christ's standards. The second incident teaches that loyalty to Christ must take precedence over all other loyalties. Following after Jesus must be our highest priority. Jesus is not being insensitive to the propriety of funerals here, but is teaching against procrastinating - putting off doing the work of God. Followers of Christ have the urgent task of proclaiming the life that is in Him to them that are lost. This is more important than burying spiritually dead people who have died physically. Jesus said to let their own spiritually dead bury them. The third incident teaches that once we start in God's service we cannot turn away from it. Service to God commands our undivided attention and if we are not prepared to single-mindedly serve God, then we will forfeit our place in the future eternal kingdom (CP Ge 19:1,12-26). Lot's wife would not let go of Sodom where her treasures were. She disobeyed God's word, looked back on Sodom and forfeited her place in the kingdom - she was turned into a pillar of salt. There must be no confusion in our mind as to what all these scriptures teach. To be a true disciple of Jesus requires our total consecration to the service of God and complete surrender to the authority of Jesus. Anything less will cost us the kingdom.

In the parable of the king going to war Jesus illustrates the impossibility of being saved unless one forsakes all for Him (CP Lu 14:31-33). The word *forsaketh* means to place in order; to assign to different places; to farewell, dismiss, renounce. It carries the notion here of putting something aside to prevent it being a hindrance or gaining excessive control (CP V34-35). This is the parable of savourless salt. It teaches us that like salt that loses its saltiness has no value and is thrown out, so disciples who no longer contain the characteristics of discipleship - that of total consecration to the service of God and complete surrender to the authority of Jesus - are of no value either. This very clearly teaches that *once saved* does not mean *always saved* as a great many Christians believe. If it were not possible to forfeit salvation then this scripture and others which teach the same thing would not be in the Bible (CP Mt 5:13; Mk 9:49-50).

These seem to be harsh conditions, but Jesus has set the standard for discipleship and no one can come to Him on any other terms (CP Lu 9:23). To deny one's self is to put the interests of the kingdom above all else. It means that Christians are to completely disregard themselves and abstain from any self-indulgences. They have to renounce all self-interests and ambitions that are contrary to God's word, and subjugate all selfish desires and enjoyments. There can be no compromise, because the choice between denying ourselves and living for our own selfish desires has to be made daily, and that choice will determine our eternal destiny. We are to take up our cross daily also. Not

periodically, or when it is convenient or popular, but daily. This means that we must be committed sacrificially continuously to the service of God (CP He 13:10-14). The cross is a symbol of suffering, ridicule, self-denial and rejection, and we must be prepared to suffer the reproach, hatred and ridicule of the world for Jesus' sake (CP Mt 10:38-39; Mk 8:34-37; Lu 9:23-25; Jn 12:24-26). These scriptures all teach that to be a disciple of Jesus we must be prepared to lose our life, not gain it. This means that making the achievement of happiness and pleasure our goal in life, instead of living in God's will and by His principles, will end in disappointment and loss. To renounce our ways and to live in fellowship with Jesus, basing our lives on His teachings is to find true life and joy, here and hereafter. This explains the paradox of discipleship which those scriptures all highlight - to lose life is to find it; to die is to live. Although Jn 12:24 is a prediction by Jesus of His death, the principle by which He illustrates it applies to us too. Unless we die to self we cannot bring forth any fruit fit for the kingdom.

To get the full impact of what Jesus is teaching in Lu 14:25-35 we need to read the literal English rendering from the Greek. This is what it says according to **Kenneth Wuest's Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament**:

"Now many crowds were journeying along with Him. And having turned around, He said to them, if anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters in the event that they become hindrances to his supreme love for me, yes, moreover his own life in the same manner, he is not able to be my disciple. And whoever is not taking up and carrying his own cross and coming after me, is not able to be my disciple. For, who is there of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first, having seated himself, compute the expense, whether he has sufficient resources for its completion, lest perchance, having laid the foundation and not being able to complete it entirely, all who examine it with a view to carefully observing its details should begin to be mocking, saying, this man began building operations and did not have sufficient resources to complete it entirely? Or, what king on his way to an open encounter with another king in war, having seated himself, does not first take counsel with himself whether he is able with ten thousand to go to meet the one who is coming against him with twenty thousand? In the event that he does not think himself able to do so, while he is still a long way off, having sent an ambassador, he requests details looking toward peace. Therefore in the same manner every one of you who does not in self-renunciation bid farewell to all his possessions, is not able to be my disciple. Therefore the salt is excellent in its nature and characteristics, and therefore adapted to the purpose for which it is in existence. But if also the salt lose its strength and flavour, by what means shall it be restored to its original state? Neither for the land nor for the manure pile is it fit. They throw it outside. He who has ears to be hearing, let him be hearing!"

This helps us to better understand what those parables are really saying. Once again there must be no confusion in our minds as to what they really mean.

LOST SHEEP, LOST COIN, LOST SON

([CP Lu 15:1-32](#)) Jesus told three parables in one here. They are three aspects of the one central truth Jesus was impressing upon the Pharisees in response to their murmuring about Him fraternising with sinners in V1-2. The Pharisees had no concept of a God who loved sinners and sought to restore them to fellowship with Himself. Their view was that God loved the righteous, but hated sinners. The discrepancy between Christ's actions and the Pharisees' concept of God raised the question of what God's attitude was toward sinners. The question was so vital that Christ went into great detail here to provide the answer, illustrating three aspects of how the Father heart of God is directed toward sinners.

In the parable of the lost sheep (V3-7), Jesus compares sinners to a sheep which has gone astray ([CP Isa 53:6](#)). The focus of the parable is on the effort expended by the shepherd, and the joy experienced when the sheep is found. In the context of the controversy over His relationship with sinners, Jesus illustrates by the parable that His ministry is one of seeking and saving sinners, and He emphasises the joy that abounds in heaven even if just one sinner repents and is saved. The friends and neighbours who rejoice with the shepherd when the lost sheep is found Symbolize the members of the local assembly whose joy also abounds when a sinner repents and is saved. The ninety-nine just persons in Luke 15:7 are the righteous who have already repented and been saved. This parable is also found in Mt 18 ([CP Mt 18:11-14](#)). In the parable of the lost coin Jesus once again shows how the Father heart of God is turned toward sinners, and how He diligently seeks to save them ([CP Lu 15:8-10](#)). Jesus uses a woman and a coin this time to make His point: just as the woman diligently sets about to find a lost coin, so too God diligently sets about to find a lost sinner, and just as the woman rejoiced at finding her lost coin, so too God rejoices over each sinner who repents and is saved ([CP V11-24](#)). This is the parable of the lost son, also known as the parable of the prodigal son - so-called because *prodigal* means recklessly wasteful, which is what the son was. This parable simply teaches another aspect of the same central truth illustrated in the two preceding parables - how the Father heart of God is directed toward the salvation of sinners and restoring them to fellowship with Himself.

The parable of the lost son proclaims the good news of the gospel. All that is taught throughout scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is a running commentary on this parable. The father's compassion toward his repentant son in the parable portrays God's infinite love and forgiveness toward every sinner who repents, and as the father joyfully celebrated his son's return and restored him to his position of sonship in the family, so too God rejoices over every sinner who repents, and restores them to sonship with Him ([CP Jn 1:12](#)).

But the parable goes even further yet in its teaching ([CP Luke 15:25-32](#)). This final section of the parable describes the attitude of the elder son. The elder son Symbolizes the Pharisees and scribes who murmured against Jesus fraternising with sinners in V2 ([CP V1-3](#)). They had the same attitude toward sinners as the elder son had toward his brother, and the elder son's self-righteous claim to having obeyed all his father's commandments Symbolized their self-righteous claim to having obeyed all of God's commandments ([CP V31](#)).

The elder son had no right to complain - the same privileges the younger son was now enjoying were always available to him, but he never availed himself of them. This Symbolized the Pharisees and scribes never availing themselves of the kingdom benefits Jesus was offering them, and as the elder son refused to go in to the feast, they too refused to enter into the kingdom. Jesus was revealing to the Pharisees and scribes in this passage that the same privileges of sonship sinners receive when they repent and are restored to fellowship with God are available to them too, but sadly they rejected Christ's teaching and thus disqualified themselves from receiving God's blessings ([CP Ac 13:46](#)). Paul said that they judged themselves unworthy of salvation.

Some Bible scholars believe there is no blame attached to the elder son in this parable, that in fact he deserves our sympathy. He had never given his father a moment's worry, yet no fuss was ever made over him. They see him as someone who was never lost, representative of Christians who have been in Christ all their lives, having joined the church at a young age and never leaving it - growing up in the Lord through Sunday school and Bible college, etc. They do not agree that Jesus portrays the elder son as angry, bitter, unforgiving, and loveless toward his brother, and resentful and self-righteously indignant toward his father. They contend that he was always on hand, always dependable, but he did not like being taken for granted by his father. All this of course contradicts everything that Jesus Himself taught about love and mercy and forgiveness, and what the Bible teaches elsewhere about self-righteousness ([CP Isa 64:6](#); [Mt 5:7](#); [9:12-13](#); [Lu 6:36-38](#)). And to say that the elder son did not like being taken for granted by his father also contradicts what Jesus himself teaches about what God expects of His children in Lu 17.

UNJUST STEWARD

([CP Lu 16:1-13](#)) This is an unusual parable which has been the subject of many and varied interpretations and explanations also, but it is simple to understand when we are clear in our minds what it does not teach. Firstly, it does not teach that Christ condones the cunning deceit of the steward - it is the steward's own lord who commends his ingenuity, not the Lord Jesus Christ ([CP V8](#)). Jesus simply contrasts the shrewd foresight of the steward in using present opportunities to ensure his future earthly well-being, with the lack of foresight by the children of God in not using their earthly resources for their future heavenly well-being. The point he makes is that worldly men in their sphere to scheme and provide for themselves

are wiser than the children of God in their sphere; unbelievers are shrewder in handling their own temporal affairs than Christians are in handling the affairs of God. This should impress upon us how vital our stewardship is as a test of our relationship with God.

Secondly, the parable also does not teach that by using the mammon of unrighteousness we can buy our way into heaven. The mammon of unrighteousness refers to material wealth and Jesus is telling us to use what material wealth we have to win souls to Christ, so that when we get to heaven they will be there to welcome us. For Christians the “everlasting habitations” in V9 refers to the kingdom of heaven as our eternal home. Souls won through the deployment of our finances now will become our joy and crown of rejoicing in eternity (CP Dan 12:3; 1Th 2:19-20). The core teaching of the parable of the unjust steward is not that believers are to make friends of material wealth, but to make friends by means of it. We must use all the temporal resources at our command for God’s purposes on earth in order to secure our place in heaven; if the people of the world know how to use worldly possessions and apply materialistic ways to ensure their earthly well-being, how much more should Christians use the resources at their command to ensure their eternal well-being. Our Lord is teaching us that the manifestation of common sense or prudence is the test of faithfulness. If what we have, whether much or little, is faithfully used as a servant, then it is capable of providing us with resources of eternal value. This is not teaching that Christians have to accumulate wealth for the purpose of extending God’s kingdom. Nowhere in the Bible does God tell us that we need to accumulate money on His behalf - we are simply to make what we have available for His purpose.

RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

(CP Lu 16:19-31) Many Bible scholars do not regard this narrative as a parable, but the facts are in symbolic form and that warrants its inclusion as a parable in this study. We have already looked at V19-25 in our earlier study on the parable of the rich fool, but there is much more teaching in this parable than just those verses, so we do need to include them again here. Jesus spoke this parable after the Pharisees derided Him for teaching the parable of the unjust steward (CP V14-17). The Pharisees were not interested in using their personal wealth to benefit others with eternal life as Jesus taught in the parable of the unjust steward – they were only concerned with using their wealth for their own self-indulgent lifestyle, portrayed by the rich man in this parable “...which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day...”

As was stated in our study of these verses previously in the parable of the rich fool, this is not teaching that the rich man went to hell just because he was rich and Lazarus went to Abraham’s bosom – paradise – just because he was poor. Neither affluence nor poverty determines our eternal state, but the life we live on earth. The rich man went to hell because his life was filled with self-centred living, not caring about others of God’s

children worse off than himself. He fared sumptuously every day while Lazarus went hungry. In his self-indulgent lifestyle the rich man violated God’s two greatest commandments (CP Mt 22:34-40). Lazarus went straight to paradise where all the righteous dead went before Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ took them to heaven with Him when He “ascended on high” (CP Eph 4:8-10). Lazarus was declared righteous, not because he was poor, but because he found his help in God. Lazarus’ name depicted his relationship with God. *Lazarus* means “God has helped” or “God, the helper”. The significance of his name suggests that Jesus meant Lazarus to Symbolize all the outcasts of society who had no other help but God (CP Mt 5:3; Lu 4:17-18).

This parable teaches above all else that men cannot profess reverence for God while at the same time living only for the fulfilment of their own self-gratifying desires. God says it is only our love for others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ, that proves our love for Him, and we cannot honestly say we love them if we are not prepared to give of our material possessions to them (CP Jas 2:13-17; 1Jn 3:16-19). As previously noted, anyone claiming to be a born again believer who at the same time consciously sows to their flesh, is guilty of mocking and despising God, and will forfeit their place in His kingdom (CP Pr 19:17; 21:13; 22:9; Ga 6:7-10). Another clear teaching in this parable, confirmed by many other scriptures also, is that the souls and the spirits of the righteous go straight to heaven when they die (CP Lu 20:38; 23:42-43; Jn 11:25-26; Ac 7:59-60; 2Cor 5:1-9; Eph 3:15; Php 1:21-24; He 12:22-23; Rev 6:9-11). There is no intermediate state between death and our final destination in eternity called “purgatory” as some believe, where Christians supposedly must go to suffer for a time and be purified on account of their earthly sins before they can be accepted into heaven. Neither is there any further opportunity for sinners to repent after they die. Everyone’s eternal destiny is settled forever at death (CP He 9:27; 2Pe 2:9; Rev 22:11). This parable also teaches that we have no light beyond the revelation of God in scripture (CP Lu 16:27-31). Nothing supernatural or miraculous can have any effect on anyone’s lifestyle if the word of God is not believed and obeyed. The rich man thought that if someone came back from the dead to warn his brothers of their impending doom that it would appeal to their consciences to alter their lifestyles and so be saved, but Abraham said that nothing could prevent them sharing the same fate as their brother even if someone came back from the dead if they did not believe and obey God’s word, which they already had. Jesus Himself came back from the dead but most people still do not believe on Him.

Summing up this parable the lessons we learn are that man cannot serve two masters – he cannot serve God and mammon; if a man gains the world but loses his soul his loss will be eternal - there is no further opportunity to repent after death; heaven and hell are realities, and personality – feeling, knowing, seeing, reasoning and remembering – continues in eternity, whether it be in heaven or hell. It depends entirely upon how we spend

our life on earth whether these faculties will aid our bliss in heaven, or add to our torment in hell.

UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS

(CP Lu 17:7-10) This is also known as the parable of the servant's reward; the unworthy slave; the farmer and servant, etc. It clearly shows the error in believing that the elder son in the **parable of the lost son** in Luke 15:11-24 had no blame attached to him (CP 15:11-24). Luke 17:7-10 answers two questions: "What is the obligation of a disciple toward Christ? What attitude should a disciple have while serving Christ?" Jesus told this parable to give His disciples a perspective on the meaning of servanthood. He explains that in doing what is required, the servant in the parable is not doing anything creditworthy, deserving his master's thanks; he is simply fulfilling his duty, and He goes on to say that Christians also, in fulfilling their obligations to God should not expect any special rewards either. All that we can do as servants of God is merely our common duty. We merit nothing and should not expect anything for what we do. This clearly teaches against the attitude of the elder son toward his father in the **parable of the lost son**.

UNJUST JUDGE

(CP Lu 18:1-8) This is also known as the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow. This parable is used by many in the contemporary church to teach that when we bring a petition before God we should persist in praying for it like the widow persisted with the judge until God answers us, like the judge eventually answered the widow. But that is not what the parable is teaching at all. If it did then we are putting a just and holy God in the same category as an unjust and unholy judge. The parable does not compare the two, it contrasts them. The spiritual teaching of the parable is not about prayer in general, but prayer pertaining to the Lord's second coming – intercessory prayer. It is the concluding part of a fairly long discourse by Jesus about His second coming in Lu 17. It is a call to believers to persevere in prayer against the works of the devil until Jesus comes back (CP Lu 17:20-18:8). The conjunction *and* in 18:1 means that V1-8 are a continuation of the same discourse Jesus commenced in 17:20.

The widow's adversary in the lawsuit before the judge in the parable is the equivalent to our adversary the devil in the earth. The parable teaches us that we are not to be passive spectators in the kingdom of God but to persist in faith and persevere in prayer for God's will to be done on earth in spite of continued opposition and rejection, which is what the unjust judge portrays in the parable. This is what Jesus means when He says that men ought always to pray and not faint in 18:1. He wants us to keep praying the kingdom in and not give up, even though His second coming may not be immediate. That is why He questions whether the Christians then remaining when He does come back will still be faithfully pressing in for the things of the kingdom and persevering in prayer, as portrayed by the widow in the parable, or will they have given up hope and lost their faith. Jesus then contrasts the unwilling and

uncaring judge's tardiness in vindicating the widow, to God's willingness and readiness to vindicate His children. When Jesus comes back God will vindicate His righteous cause and therewith the cause of His children, but they must trust Him and not lose heart in the meantime. They must here and now continue faithfully in the work He has assigned to them.

PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

(CP Lu 18:9-14) For the benefit of those who do not know, a publican in scripture is a tax-collector, one who pays the Government for the privilege of collecting the customs and taxes of a particular district. They were the objects of bitter hatred and scorn by the Jews because of the excessive profits they made. They were placed in the same category as harlots (CP Mt 21:32). Matthew was a publican before he became a disciple of Jesus' (CP Mt 9:9-13). Zacchaeus was also a publican - the chief among publicans - when he got saved (CP Lu 19:1-10). Jesus was scorned and derided by the Pharisees and scribes for fraternising with publicans (CP Mt 9:10-11; Lu 15:1-2). Jesus told the three-in-one parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son as a result of the Pharisees and scribes murmuring against Him in Lu 15:1-2.

This parable is not teaching that we have to bow our heads and close our eyes when we pray – that we cannot look up to heaven. The parable is not primarily concerned with prayer at all, but self-righteousness and religious pride. The purpose of the parable was to expose those who trusted in their own righteousness and despised others. It is about justification and getting right with God. The way to justification is expressed in the parable and summed up in what Jesus asserts at the end of the parable "...for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted...". This means the same as what Jesus said about the labourers in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard in Mt 20 "...so the last shall be first, and the first last...". In both these passages Jesus teaches that true humility leads to exaltation. God's generosity and mercy reaches out to the lost and it can be received only by the person concerned acknowledging the need of that mercy, like the lost son, in the parable of the lost son, and the publican here. Those, like the elder brother in the parable of the lost son, and the Pharisees and scribes throughout scripture, who object to the generosity of God to sinners, and who insist on their own righteousness, are not only setting themselves against the purpose of God for others, but are cutting themselves off for atonement. The publican went home justified before God because he acknowledged his need for God's mercy. God acquitted him, but not the Pharisee - he came into the temple a sinner, and left the same way. The Pharisee was self-righteous, he was not conscious of his own sinful nature. He considered himself righteous because of his acts of piety and outward goodness. He is justified in his own eyes and therefore does not need God's mercy. As a result he excluded himself from God's redeeming love and without he repented, salvation as well.

POUNDS

(CP Lu 19:11-27) In many respects it is very similar to the parable of the talents in Mt 25, yet it is so different. Jesus spoke the parable of the talents to His disciples, this to the crowd. This was spoken in Zacchaeus the tax collector's house at Jericho after his conversion, just before Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (CP V8-10). The parable of the talents was spoken later, on the Mount of Olives (CP Mt 24:3). In the parable of the talents there are only three servants involved who each received a different number of talents according to their several abilities. In this parable there are ten servants and they all received the same amount. There is a variety of stewardship in the parable of the talents, here all are alike responsible. This is the key to the distinctive teaching in the two parables. Here all of us are responsible to God for certain things which have been committed to each one alike, but there are also varieties of gifts and graces as in the parable of the talents (CP Ro 12:3-8; 1Cor 12:1-11). There are two reasons why Jesus spoke this parable: firstly, because He was nearing Jerusalem, which signified that the end of His earthly ministry was at hand - Jerusalem was Symbolized in the parable by the nobleman's citizens who said "we will not have this man to reign over us" (CP Mt 27:21-25; Jn 1:11; 15:18). The nobleman Symbolized Jesus Himself - and secondly, because the crowd with Him thought the kingdom of God should immediately appear and Jesus wanted them to know that there would be an interim between His first and second coming.

The parable sets out what Christians are to do until Jesus comes back to establish His millennial kingdom - His thousand year reign on earth. The word "occupy" in V13 in the King James Version means be busy, do business, trade with. This is a specific command that has to be obeyed. The pound which all the nobleman's servants alike were given, represents the word of God all Christians alike have been given (CP 2Cor 5:17-19), and as the servants had to trade with the pound for the nobleman's profit, so too Christians have to do the work of God's word for the advancement of His kingdom (CP Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16 with Ac 1:7-8; 2Cor 5:17-20; Jude 3). The servant who hid his pound had the same excuse for not investing it as the servant who hid his talent in Mt 25, and both lost what they were given as a result. It was taken from them and given to the servant who already had the most (CP Mt 25:24-30; Lu 19:20-26). The simple teaching here is that worthy Christians will be rewarded while unworthy Christians will be punished - doers of the word will be saved while merely hearers will be lost (CP Mt 7:21-27; Ro 2:13; Jas 1:22-25; 2:14-26; also Jn 14:15 with 1Jn 2:3-5).

Clearly Jesus, Paul, James and John all teach here that only doers of the word are justified before God, and that those who hear the word and do not do it will forfeit their place in His kingdom, yet there are many in the contemporary church who teach that the servants' punishment for not trading with their masters' goods in the parables merely translates to loss of rewards in heaven for Christians who do not do the work of God's word. But that is not what Jesus teaches as we shall see once more (CP Mt 12:30). Jesus makes it quite clear here that there is no neutrality in the Christian walk: if Christians are not actively involved in doing the work of God's word for Christ, then they are actively involved in doing the work of the devil in opposition to Christ. That is what this passage means: if we are not doing the work of God then we are doing the work of the devil, and it is hardly likely that those who do the work of the devil in this life will rule and reign with Christ in the next life. The dominant idea in this parable is of a time of trial which must needs come between the departure and return of our Lord to prepare the judgement which shall fix the position of every man in the state of things which shall follow the second coming (CP Mt 16:27; Rev 22:11-14).

GOOD SHEPHERD

(CP Jn 10:1-9) This is an extension of Jesus' teaching in Ch 9. Jesus told this parable as a sequel to the behaviour of the chief priests and Pharisees after He opened the eyes of the blind man in Ch 9 (CP 9:1-7, 35-41). Jesus is illustrating by the parable that the chief priests and Pharisees are false shepherds. They claimed insight but were spiritually blind, missing the point completely in Jesus' healing of the blind man. In their blindness they could not see Jesus as the Lord who is the Shepherd (CP Psa 23). When Jesus said that all who came before Him were thieves and robbers He was referring to the religious leaders of Israel who had only ever cared about themselves, and not the spiritual good of the people (CP Isa 56:9-12; Jer 23:1-6; Eze 13:22-23; 22:23-29; 34:2-10; Zech 11:15-18 with Mt 23:1-7, 13-33 [also Lu 11:42-52] Jn 10:11-14). The religious leaders of Israel were hypocrites. They not only rejected God's offer of salvation for themselves, but hindered others from accepting it as well (see also comments on Lu 11:46 and Jn 10:10).

That concludes this study on the parables of Jesus. It is not an exhaustive study - some Bible scholars list more than 100 sayings of Jesus as parables - but what we have learned from our examination of the 46 parables listed here should enable us to better understand the other sayings of Jesus in scripture.