



External Course

Course Title: **INTERPRETING THE PARABLES**
260 NT

I. COURSE OVERVIEW

This course on *Interpreting the Parables* is designed to introduce the student to the background, content, literary style, and message of the interesting stories which Christ used to teach people about the Kingdom of Heaven. The course will address the major the major classifications of the parables told by Jesus and the amazing parallels they drew about kingdom concepts. It is hopeful that at the conclusion of the course, students will have a clearer view of the context and message of the parables and to understand its significance and relevance for the church today.

II. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to be highly interactive in the exploration of *Interpreting the Parables*, and their implications for daily Christian living. As a result of participating in this discovery learning process, students should possess a biblical understanding of:

1. The definition of a parable
2. Why parables were used in teaching
3. The major truth taught by each parable
4. The major classifications of the parables
5. The major kingdom concepts of the parables
6. The teachings of the parables to daily life

III. REQUIRED TEXTS

1. *<The Holy Bible>*. <>. <year/edition/translation student's choice >.

IV. ADDITIONAL READINGS

Additional readings are also required. **YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL ASSIGNED READINGS.**

1. Copeland, Mark A. 2009. *The parables of Jesus: Executable outlines*.
http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/pa.htm.
2. Kistemaker, Simon J. 2009. *The parables: Understanding the stories Jesus told, 7th ed.*
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company.
3. Lockyer, Herbert. 1988. *All the parables of the bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The course grade will be based on the following elements:

1. **Reading Assignments:** (10%)

The reading of the course texts is a very important component of this course. It is expected that you will read the texts very closely and thoughtfully.

a. Complete all reading assignments of the course. There is no substitute for reading the Scriptures!

b. Read from the suggested additional reading lists to supplement Bible reading.

c. Compile a reading report to keep track and to mark the percentage of the assignment read.

Completed reading reports are due when the final exam is submitted. **Note:** "Reading" here involves reading the assignments with careful, thoughtful understanding and insight for thoughtful interaction preparation.

2. **Academic Character:** (10%)

Cheating in any form compromises your grade and lowers the quality of your education. Individuals who cheat may lower their grade by inflating grades, etc. To clarify, using someone's work without giving that person proper credit (i.e. properly citing them) or passing other people's works off as your own is considered plagiarism regardless of whether you got the material from a book or the Web.

3. **Research Paper:** (30%)

The research paper must be double spaced and at least-Associate/Bachelor (7-9 pages), Master (12-15 pages), Doctorate (17-20 pages). This will include a title page which must indicate the student's name, the course name and number, and other pertinent data. Students must include a bibliography as well.

These papers must be written with care, as they constitute a portion of your grade. Title page and bibliography do not count in the page count.

4. **FINAL EXAM:** (50%) The final exam must be completed and turned in to receive credit

VI. GRADING SCALE

A 95-100 (4.0) B 85-94 (3.0) C 70-84 (2.0) D 60-69 (1.0) F below 60 (0.0)

Interpreting the Parables
260 NT
Jacksonville Baptist Theological Seminary

Introduction

**All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables,
and He did not speak to them without a parable--Matthew 13:34**

When Jesus wanted to get a spiritual truth across to ordinary men and women, He used the vehicle of the parable. By teaching in parables Christ depicted what was happening in real life. He told a story taken from everyday life to convey a particular truth He was trying to teach. So, it logically follows that in order to fully grasp the truth, we must first grasp the parable. Any Bible student of today can greatly clarify their understanding of Jesus' teachings by examining the *nature* and *language* of the parable, as well as the reasons for which He chose to employ it. During His ministry, Jesus told more than *forty* parables. It is estimated that about *one-third* of Jesus' instruction has been given in parabolic form.

What is a Parable?

The word "parable" is a transliteration of the Greek "parabole" (para-bow-LAY) which means "to place beside, to cast alongside." As defined by Vine's Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words, "it signifies a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison."

Warren Wiersbe describes a parable as “a story that places one thing beside another for the purpose of teaching. It puts the known next to the unknown so that we may learn.” Another simple but sound definition of the parable is that it is an *earthly* story with a *heavenly* meaning--a story true to this house of earth, but with a window open to the sky. It is usually a story or narrative drawn from nature or human circumstances. A parable is usually identified by the use of the word, “*like*.” Certainly, many of the most often remembered sayings of Jesus are the parables He taught. The fact that these stories are remembered and have endured over two thousand years is evidence of their simplistic nature.

However, it is important to note that a parable is not an *allegory*, in which words are used figuratively. The parables of Jesus are simple stories illustrating truth that give some statement about the Kingdom of God. They generally teach *only one basic point*. One should never try to allegorize the parable - that is, to make every point of the story have a spiritual truth. The details of the story are only supportive of the message the parable conveys.

Why Did Jesus Teach in Parables?

It appears that Jesus was seeking, through parables to both *reveal* and *conceal* His word (Matthew 13:10-17; Luke 8:9-10). That is, the parables were used both to *project*, as well as, to *protect* God’s truth.

Because of the hard hearts of many in the multitude, Jesus began speaking to them in parables.

By resorting to parables, Jesus effectively separated the *truth*-seekers from *curiosity*-seekers. Those seeking the truth would desire an explanation of the parable, while those who were simply curious would dismiss its significance. Even though the primary purpose in telling the parables was to *conceal* the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” from the multitude, Jesus would *reveal* (explain) the parables in private to His disciples.

The Content of the Parables

The content of the parables was centered around the theme of Jesus’ ministry which was highlighted by the expression, “*the kingdom of heaven*” or “*the kingdom of God.*” As illustrated by many of His parables, Jesus would begin them by declaring the phrase, “the kingdom of heaven is like.” Three (3) sub-themes that are stressed in the parables are the character of the *Kingdom*, the character of the *King*, and the character of the *King’s subjects*.

The Kingdom of Heaven vs. The Kingdom of God

Because “the kingdom of heaven” is such a prominent subject in the parables of Jesus, it would serve a good purpose to preface our study of the parables with a careful look at what the term “the kingdom of heaven” means, and how a proper definition of it would benefit one’s understanding of our Lord's teaching on the subject matter.

While some scholars try to make a distinction between the two phrases, a quick comparison of the gospels indicates that the terms refer to the same thing.

- a. Cf. [Mt 4:17](#) with [Mk 1:14-15](#)
- b. Cf. [Mt 5:3](#) with [Lk 6:20](#)
- c. Cf. [Mt 13:31](#) with [Mk 4:30-31](#)

Matthew used the expression “kingdom of heaven” almost exclusively, while the other gospel writers used the phrase “kingdom of God.” It may be that since Matthew wrote his gospel to the Jews, he chose to use the phrase “kingdom of heaven” for several reasons:

- a. The Jews were reluctant to use the name of **God** (out of reverence)
- b. The Jews possessed a *misconception* of the coming kingdom
 - 1) Many anticipated a *physical* kingdom
 - 2) The expression “heaven” would emphasize a *spiritual* kingdom

What Did Jesus Mean by the Term, “Kingdom of Heaven?”

In researching the parables of Jesus, one will find many references to the “kingdom of heaven.” Sometimes it appears that Jesus refers to the “*present*” aspect of the kingdom.

But then, at other times He has reference to the “*future*” aspect of the kingdom. However, there are four (4) concepts or elements that must be kept in mind whenever we think of the kingdom of God. They are (a) the *reign* of God, (b) the *spiritual* nature of the kingdom, (c) the *visible* manifestation of the kingdom, and (d) the present or future *tense* of the kingdom.

A. The Reign of God

The term “kingdom” as used by the Jews often stressed the abstract idea of “*reign*” or “*dominion*,” not some geographical area surrounded by physical boundaries. Thus, the “kingdom of heaven” (or “kingdom of God”) is wherever the reign or dominion of God (who is in heaven) is manifested. In one sense, the kingdom of God has always existed, but in a special way the rule or reign of God is manifested with the coming of Christ. Indeed, it is in the Person of Jesus Christ that the “reign of God” is being expressly manifest today.

B. Spiritual in Nature

The kingdom (or reign of God) would not be found in the form of a physical kingdom. It is a spiritual kingdom where God rules in the hearts of men.

C. Visibly Manifested Today in the Lord’s Church

The visible manifestation of the kingdom today is the Lord's *church*.

It is a community of souls in whose hearts God is recognized as Sovereign. The terms “church” and “kingdom” can be used interchangeably. Thus, the church can properly be referred to as the kingdom of God today.

D. Both Present and Future

The “kingdom of heaven” has a future element as well as a present one. The kingdom was inaugurated on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), but the kingdom will be culminated with the coming of the Lord when Christ delivers the kingdom of God to the Father. At that point, the future state of the kingdom of heaven will involve the “new heavens and new earth” and the people of God.

These four (4) concepts or elements must be kept in mind whenever one thinks of the “kingdom of heaven.” Failure to remember all four can easily lead to misconceptions about the nature of the kingdom.

The Interpretation of the Parables

Study the *historical* setting of the parable - performing a detailed analysis of the religious, social, political, and geographical circumstances revealed in the parable

Study the *literary* and *grammatical* structure of the parable – identifying the introduction and conclusion of the parable, as well as, conducting word studies in their biblical context.

Study the *theological* unity of the parable – checking it against the teachings of Jesus and the rest of Scripture.

Study the *meaning* of the parable – translating the parable in terms of its contemporary relevance

Classification of the Parables

The parables of Jesus can be grouped and classified in various ways. For the purposes of this course, the parables of Jesus will be viewed in nine (9) divisions of kingdom emphases:

- *The Newness of the Kingdom*
- *The Climax of the Kingdom*
- *The Gift of the Kingdom*
- *The Certainty of the Kingdom*
- *The Nearness of the Kingdom*
- *The Universality of the Kingdom*
- *The Supreme Value of the Kingdom*
- *The Cost of the Kingdom*
- *The Challenge of the Kingdom*

The Newness of the Kingdom

The Kingdom is something completely new.

New Cloth and New Wine

(Matt. 9:16-17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-38)

The disciples of John the Baptist were upset with Jesus' disciples because they did not fast. Fasting was one of the three most important religious duties, along with prayer and almsgiving. Jesus gave a simple explanation.

There is a time for fasting and a time for feasting (or celebrating). In the narrative, fasting of which the Pharisees made much, was an old garment, for which a new piece of cloth was useless. It was like trying to put new wine into old wineskins. The whole system Jesus came to create was not something to be crowded into an old order but was something new. He goes on to warn his disciples about the danger of the “closed mind” that refuses to learn new things. Jesus uses the images of mended garments and wineskins to make plain His teaching on the nature of the Kingdom.

The Parable Explained

In this parable, Jesus is contrasting the old Mosaic covenant with the new covenant as foretold by the prophets and revealed in the New Testament. The old covenant is a *performance*-based salvation. One is saved if they live up to a certain level of performance. The new is a *salvation*-based performance. One is saved through the forgiveness of sins, which requires only faith in Christ’s atoning work. Having been saved, God regenerates the person, causing them to live a lifestyle consistent with that of a child of God. The old covenant is made ineffective by man’s innate sinful nature. Man has holes in his garments due to sin. But although sinful man fails to keep God’s standards, he believes that Christ came simply to help him become a better person so that he can be justified by his performance. He then tries to cut a patch out of the gospel and attach it to his old garment which does not work.

As for the second analogy, in Jesus' times, wine was stored in wineskins, not bottles. No one would think of putting new wine into an old skin. New wine poured into skins was still fermenting. The gases exerted gave pressure. New wine skins were elastic enough to take the pressure, but old wine skins easily burst because they could not withstand the fermentation process. Unfermented wine must be put into new bottles. Wine, when fermentation is complete, can be put into any bottle, whether new or old, without harming the bottle, and without harm to the wine. However, the Pharisees of old, persisted in believing that the old wine of the Law was better (Luke 5:39).

The Parable Amplified

The interpretation of this parable is clearly identifiable. Christ virtually supersedes the old Levitical law and offers a charter of a new freedom. To force His teachings into the old formula would bring decomposition and ruin. To take His truth and try to press it into some other form than His would be to make it deteriorate, as unfermented wine. The same principle applies to sewing new cloth on to old, frayed garments. The old garment of our sinful, selfish life cannot be mended. It must experience *regeneration* or the production of a new garment or creation. By "new cloth" we are to understand a piece of unshrunk cloth in its freshness and strongest state. Because such a piece of cloth does not agree with the worn-out garment, to patch it on to such would tear the cloth around it and result in a worse rent.

As we look at the parable of *The New Cloth and New Wine*, there are some symbolic truths to be gleaned from the passage to take personal inventory for our lives.

- The old garment is the *sinful* life of the old man (nature).
- The new garment is the life of *holiness*, which the new man wears in Christ
- The old wine represents the inner workings of the *flesh* which is alive to sin.
- The new wine represents the inner workings of the *Spirit* in the Christian life

The Parable Applied

Are we to reject the old in place of the new? Just as there is a right place and a right time for fasting and for feasting, so there is a right place for the old as well as the new. Jesus says *the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old* (Matthew 13:52). How impoverished we would be if we only had the *Old Testament* or the *New Testament*, rather than both. The Lord gives us wisdom so we can make the best use of both the old and the new. He does not want us to hold rigidly to the past and to be resistant to the new work of His Holy Spirit in our lives. He wants us to be clothed in the new garments of his righteousness. He wants our minds and hearts to be like the new wine skins — open and ready to receive the *new wine of the Holy Spirit*.

Applicatory Truth: *Righteousness by faith is independent of the Law of Moses.*

The Climax of the Kingdom

God's complete rule will one day come!

The Weeds

(Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43)

The *Parable of the Weeds*, or more popularly known as “*The Parable of the Wheat and Tares*,” is only recorded by the Gospel writer, Matthew. Jesus’ purpose is clearly to teach principles related to “the kingdom of heaven” for He begins with “The kingdom of heaven is like...” Therefore, Jesus intends to reveal principles related to the “rule of God” as it would soon be manifested in the Person of His Son.

The Parable Explained

This parable is one of the few in which we have Jesus' own explanation. The explanation was given in response to the disciples' inquiry ([Mt 13:36](#)). The explanation is found in [Mt. 13:37-43](#). In answer to the disciples' request, Jesus identifies:

THE SOWER – “*He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man*”

THE FIELD – “*The field is the world*”

THE GOOD SEED (Wheat) – “*The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom*”

THE TARES – “*The tares are the sons of the wicked one*”

THE ENEMY – “*The enemy who sowed them is the devil*”

THE HARVEST – *“The harvest is the end of the age”*

THE REAPERS – *“The reapers are the angels”*

Having identified the various elements of the parable, Jesus stresses the main points of the parable. In verse 40, the problem of the “tares” will not be fully addressed until the “harvest.” This is done out of consideration for the “good seed” (cf. [Mt. 13:29](#)). In verse 41, it is at the end of the age that the Son of Man will finally resolve this problem. With His angels He will “gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness” (i.e., the sons of the wicked one). In verse 42, those so gathered out of His kingdom will be properly dealt with! They are cast into “the furnace of fire”, where there will be “wailing and gnashing of teeth!” In verse 43, the blessedness of the “righteous” (the good seed, the sons of the kingdom) is described. After the harvest they will “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!” Jesus ends His explanation of the parable with the admonition: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” ([Mt. 13:9](#)).

The Parable Amplified

For those willing to listen, there are several truths to be gleaned from this parable as it relates to the kingdom of heaven, the church, and to our personal lives.

- Christ is long-suffering, so you can grow!

While Christ is certainly desirous that “all” men come to repentance, He has a special interest in those “sons of the kingdom” who are still growing!

- This parable does not preclude church discipline

The point of this parable is that Jesus Himself will not do anything visible until the end of the age when He comes with His angels. Those in the church, however, have a personal responsibility to withdraw from believers who refuse to repent of sin.

- The kingdom is both present and future

The kingdom is in existence prior to the end of the age when the Son of Man comes with His angels (v. 41) Upon His return, after the harvest, Christ will turn the kingdom over to His Father.

- One may be in the kingdom now, but not in the future

The angels will gather certain ones “out of His kingdom” who were “in the kingdom” and “cast into the furnace.” Because of the very real danger of not “entering our heavenly rest,” believers find warnings to persevere in the faith. ([Hebrews 3:12-14; 4:1-2, 11](#)).

- A place of punishment is the reward of the wicked

Jesus in his teaching speaks often of a place prepared for the wicked. Thus, a proper proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom must of necessity include a warning to those who do not receive the kingdom!

The Parable Applied

This parable is a warning to all not to allow themselves to be influenced by the wicked one!

We learn from this parable, then, that the kingdom of heaven...

- a. Will spread as people become “sons of the kingdom”
- b. Will not prevent the efforts and influence of the devil (so expect to see some “tares”)
- c. Though inaugurated with the Son of Man's first coming and the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost will not be fully culminated until...
 - 1) The Son of Man returns with His angels
 - 2) He gathers all things out of His kingdom that offend and practice lawlessness
 - 3) And delivers the kingdom to God

Applicatory Truth: Until the judgment day, it may be difficult to distinguish between real and nominal Christians within the kingdom of God.

The Dragnet (Matt. 13:47-50)

The *Parable of the Dragnet*, also known as “*The Fishnet*,” is another parable only recorded by the Gospel writer, Matthew. Jesus taught two parables depicting the present *mixture* and future *separation* involving the kingdom of heaven. The first was “The Parable of The Weeds” (The Wheat and the Tares), which was just studied. The second is “The Parable of the Dragnet”, which will now be studied. While these two parables seemingly address the same subject, there are subtle differences in which different aspects of the kingdom are being stressed.

The Parable Explained

In this parable, a “*dragnet*” was cast into the sea. As defined by the Holman Bible Dictionary, a *dragnet* is “a large fishing net equipped with a weighted bottom edge for touching (“dragging”) the river or lake bottom and a top with wooden floats allowing the net to be spread across the water. Such nets were normally let down from a boat and then drawn to shore by a crew positioned on the beach. In the case of a large catch, the net was hauled to shore by boat. Once the dragnet was drawn to shore, the fish were separated; those good for eating were saved in vessels, the inedible were discarded.

Just like “The Parable of the Wheat and Tares,” Jesus explains what this parable means ([Matt. 13:49-50](#)). The kingdom of heaven, in its present state, will be a mixture of good and bad, just like a dragnet gathers in both good and bad fish. But in the future, there will be a separation (13:49). It will occur at the end of the age. The agents of this separation will be the “angels.” The “wicked” will be separated from the “righteous.” The punishment of the wicked is to be “cast into the furnace of fire where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (13:50). In giving His explanation, one can see the emphasis of Jesus in this parable, and the fundamental difference between it and “The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares.” The emphasis is upon...

- 1) The “future” *separation* of those in the kingdom
- 2) The *punishment* of the wicked

Unlike “The Parable of the Wheat and Tares”...

1) There is nothing in the explanation related to the “present” mixture in the kingdom (Matt. 13:24-30).

2) There is nothing depicting the blessedness of the righteous (Matt. 13:43)

The Parable of the Dragnet, then, reinforces the spiritual truths taught in "The Parable of the Wheat and Tares", especially those relating to the coming judgment and condemnation of the wicked. That Jesus would emphasize the judgment and condemnation of the wicked in this parable ought to impress upon us that the “good news” of the kingdom of heaven also contains “bad news” for those who reject it.

The Parable Amplified

Since this parable focuses on the “destiny” of the wicked, let us consider what Jesus Himself taught:

- The wicked will be judged (Mt. 11:20-24; Mt. 12:41-42; Jn. 5:24-30)
- The wicked will be separated from God (Mt. 7:21-23; Mt. 25:41-46)
- The wicked will be cast into hell (Mt. 10:28; Mk. 9:43-48; Mt. 25:41)

- The wicked will suffer torment ([Rv. 20:12-15](#); [Lk. 16:22-24](#); [2Thes. 1:9](#))

The Parable Applied

As Jesus went about “preaching the gospel of the kingdom” ([Mt. 4:23](#)), He did not hold back. He called upon the people to repent ([Mt. 4:17](#)). He warned them of the impending judgment and torment to come. If we are to proclaim the “gospel of the kingdom” faithfully:

- a. We must not only preach the “good news” of the kingdom...
- b. We must also tell the “bad news” Christ revealed through His parables and other teachings!

Applicatory Truth: *Though many enter into Christendom, they will be separated on Judgment day.*

The Gift of the Kingdom

*The Kingdom is something which cannot be earned by man.
It is a gift from God.*

The Places of Honor at the Table (Luke 14:7-14)

The parable of “*The Places of Honor at the Table*” is also known as “*The Parable of the Lowest Seat, or The Lowest Place.*” It was a parable which Jesus told in a very casual setting which illustrated the value of **humility**. Jesus had gone to eat at the house

of one of the rulers of the Pharisees on the Sabbath. They had watched Him closely, perhaps to see if He would heal the man with dropsy. However, Jesus had been watching them closely as well. He then posed a question to the Pharisees about the lawfulness of healing on the Sabbath to which they did not respond. Jesus then went on to pose another question after He healed the man, and they refused to respond to that query as well. He went on to pose yet a third question to the Pharisee rulers, revealing their consistency. Jesus had also noticed how those invited were selecting the best places to sit. This petty positioning around the tables prompted Jesus to teach a lesson using a parable.

The Parable Explained

The setting of the parable is a wedding feast, a common social event in those days. It is thought that the seating arrangements at that time may have involved three tables in the shape of a flat-bottomed “U”. The *triclinia*, or Grecian table, then in use had three sections which were placed together to form a flat-bottomed U. The space enclosed by the table was not occupied. It was left vacant that the servants might enter it and attend to the wants of the guests who reclined around the outer margin of the table. The central seat at each of these three sections was deemed a place of honor. Jesus warns against sitting down in the best place, for someone more honorable may have been invited. When they arrive, the host will ask you to move. With shame you will have to move to the lowest place (likely the only

place left!). Instead, He counsels them to sit in the lowest place. That way, the host will come along and say, "Friend, go up higher." So instead of shame, brought about trying to sit in the best place, you will receive glory among those who sit at the table with you.

The Parable Amplified

Jesus then concludes "*The Parable of the Places of Honor at the Table*" with this maxim: "For whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" ([Lk. 14:11](#)). This fundamental principle, general truth, and rule of conduct was not only one of Jesus' favorites, but also has its origin in the Old Testament (Ps. 18:27; Prov. 18:12) and is repeated many times in the New Testament by Christ and others (Lk. 18:14; Mt. 23:6-12; Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5)

As we look at the parable, there are two stark realities that are to be gleaned for us as followers of Christ:

- We learn the danger of **pride**.

The danger of pride is not just in social settings, but in our
relationship with God!

*"A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will
retain honor"* ([Prov. 29:23](#))

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall"
([Prov. 16:18](#))

“It is of the world, not of the Father” ([1 John 2:15-17](#))

“The Lord hates pride” ([Prov. 8:13](#))

“It is defiles man” (Mark 7)

- We learn the importance of **humility**. As disciples of Christ, we must:

Be clothed with humility ([Col. 3:12](#))

Be humble before God ([1 Pet. 5:6](#))

Be humble in our dealings with our brethren in Christ ([Phil. 2:3](#))

Be humble in our dealings with those around us (Tit. 3:2)

Be humble in our dealings with those who even oppose us ([2 Tim. 2:24-25](#))

The Parable Applied

Through this simple parable, Jesus teaches a most important truth: the need to be humble in our relations with God and those around us! Humility is not a popular grace in our culture. By many, it is considered a sign of weakness. Some people even fear that they will be made a floor mat by others. But we must remember that God is watching, and He is able to give us the grace to walk humbly before others and before Him (Micah 6:8).

Applicatory Truth: *Disciples are to be exalted by God, not by themselves.*

The Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24)

The parable of “*The Great Supper*” is also known as the parable of “*The Great Banquet*.” In this parable Jesus is still eating at the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees, along with a number of lawyers and Pharisees. He had just told the parable of “*The Places of Honor at the Table*.” He concluded the parable by telling His host that when he has a dinner or a supper, that he ought to invite those who cannot repay him ([Lk 14:12-14](#)). In saying this, Jesus was stressing hospitality towards those who cannot repay us in this life.

His comments, however, prompted a response from one who heard Him, who said, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” ([Lk 14:15](#)). It was this comment by one of the other guests that prompts Jesus to tell another parable.

The Parable Explained

A certain man gives a great supper and extends his invitation. However, those invited began to make excuses. One had bought a piece of ground and said he must go see it (14:18). Another had bought five yoke of oxen and wanted to test them out (14:19). A third said he had married and could not come (14:20). The master, being angry, sends his servant to go out and invite others. At first, the poor, maimed, lame, and blind (*i.e., social outcasts*) accepted the

invitation (14:21), but there is still room! Therefore, the servant is sent out again to compel those among the highways and hedges to come (14:22-23). However, those invited who made excuses would not taste of his supper (14:24).

The Parable Amplified

Jesus' immediate audience in the Pharisee's home realized that the parable addressed all who listened. Hosts and guests were invited to God's banquet to which they originally consented to come. Jesus was telling the lawyers and Pharisees that God's banquet is not some event to be celebrated at the end of time. Rather, the feast is ready. God is calling them to respond now!

As a reply to the person who said, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God," Jesus said, "Yes, the time for this feast has come. You, who have been invited, need to come now. Hereafter, it will be too late!" The religious establishment in Jesus' days was not ready to accept the coming of the kingdom, even though the signs and wonders Jesus performed were there for all to see.

As you look at the parable, there are several observations to be made:

- God has made wonderful provisions for the future
- Not all invited will experience these blessings

God has graciously extended the invitation of salvation, along with its future blessings, to many: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (i.e., the Gentiles) - cf. [Ro 1:16](#)

While the invitation has been made to all, sadly, many will not accept the invitation, making excuses instead. These excuses may involve things that within themselves are noble (business and family responsibilities)

The problem is that priorities are misplaced, and one should not allow earthly matters to take priority over spiritual matters - cf. [Mt 6:33](#); [Lk 10:38-42](#)

- Those who experience the blessings might surprise us!

Many understand the parable to have initial reference to the offer of the gospel to Gentiles after its rejection by the Jews - e.g., [Mt 21:43](#)

Others see the reference to the offer of salvation to the publicans and sinners after its rejection by the religious leaders of that day - e.g., [Mt 21:31-32](#)

The Parable Applied

The lesson of the parable is clear, Jesus is sending His servants forth with the message that God's kingdom has come. Those who hear the message are invited to share in this kingdom. They should not make

excuses and delay, because Jesus will not keep a place for them. Instead, he will fill His kingdom with others. Jesus is committed to having a supper, and He wants a full house! Many professing believers with a spirit of self-righteousness expect to be “guests at the great supper.” However, in the end, it will be the humble, often despised yet ever faithful, servants of the Lord who shall eat from the banquet table (14:24).

Applicatory Truth: Though many are invited to partake of eternal life, few respond, and many have trivial excuses.

The Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)

The meaning of the parable of “*The Laborers in the Vineyard*” is one that has been challenged by many expositors, and explanations offered have been varied. However, with a fair degree of certainty, the main point of the parable can be determined, especially by taking into consideration the setting.

Jesus had been approached by the Rich Young Ruler with a question concerning eternal life. During their conversation, Jesus challenged the young man to give up all and follow Him. The man went away sorrowful, unable to accept the challenge (19:16-22). Jesus then proceeded to use this opportunity to teach how difficult it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. This causes the disciples to wonder, “Who then could be saved?” Jesus' response is that with God all things are possible (19:23-26). Unlike the rich

young man, Peter and the other disciples had accepted the challenge to give up all and follow Jesus. Thus, Peter asks, “*Therefore what shall we have?* (19:27)”. It appears that Peter wants to know, “If the rich can be saved, what more will those receive, who have given up all to follow Christ?” Jesus responds by giving an answer of assurance for both present and future followers. To the present followers, He states that in the “regeneration”, the apostles will be judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This promise could refer either to their role as apostles in the gospel age following Pentecost ([Mt 16:19](#)), or a special role following the return of Christ when He comes to judge the world ([Mt 25:31-ff](#)).

To future followers, Jesus promises in this life, a “hundredfold houses, brothers, sisters, etc., and in the age to come, “everlasting life” ([Mk 10:29-30](#)). He also promises those who give up all will receive more than enough in return. But then He issues a warning! "But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (19:30)

Since this warning both precedes and follows the parable, it is evident that the parable was told to explain the warning! And since the warning was first given in response to Peter's question, any explanation of the parable should be based upon the setting that preceded its telling. With this in mind, consider the message of the parable.

The Parable Explained

Early in the morning, a landowner hires laborers to work for an agreed upon wage (20:1-2). Later, at different hours of the day, he finds more and hires them also, for a fair but unspecified wage ([Mt. 20:3-7](#)). At the end of the day, they are all paid equally, which irritates those who had worked all day ([Mt. 20:8-12](#)). The landowner responds to the complainers by stating, “I treated you fairly, for you received according to our agreement ([Mt. 20:13-14a](#)). Do I not have the right to pay the others the same? ([Mt. 20:14b-20:15a](#)). Are you envious because I am gracious? ([Mt 20:15b](#)). Jesus concludes by repeating the warning (20:16).

The Parable Amplified

Many and varied have been the interpretations for this parable; for example:

- a. The various bands of workers are the O.T. *saints*; those called at the eleventh hour are the *apostles*
- b. The workers first called are the *Jews*, those called last are the *Gentiles*
- c. The parable represents the whole gospel age up to Christ's return, and the workers are groups saved at various periods
- d. It refers to different periods of a person's life in which he may respond to the Lord: some responding early, others late in life

Since this parable is in response to Peter's question, the context would suggest...

a. That the first workers represent the *apostles* and others like them

1) Who are called by Christ through the gospel early in life

2) And who therefore may labor long and hard in the vineyard
(the kingdom of God)

b. The other workers represent those called by Christ via the gospel at *various* times

1) Those who are called late in life

2) Those who do not have opportunity to do as much for the Lord

Considering this interpretation, the main points of the parable are...

- What everyone receives will be more than “**fair**”
(“*Did you not agree with me?*”)
- No one has the right to question the “**generosity**” of the Lord
(“*Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?*”)
- Those who may serve long and hard should not be “**envious**” if others receive the same reward (“*Is your eye evil because I am good?*”)
- No one should serve the Lord with a **capitalistic** or mercenary spirit! (“*What’s in it for us?*”)

However, it should also be stressed what this parable is **NOT** saying:

That those who purposely put off obeying Christ until the last moment can be saved! If that were the point, the parable would have been worded differently. Whether one can be saved at the last moment after lifelong rejection of the gospel is another question: one which only the Lord can rightfully answer.

- Notice that those who responded at the late hour of the day had not been working “Because no one hired us” ([Mt. 20:7](#))
- The workers accepted the offer as soon as they heard it, though late in the day. They were not people who turned down many opportunities to accept the offer to labor in the vineyard, only to accept at the last hour!

The Parable Applied

The kingdom of heaven is an age in which we *work* before we are *rewarded*. Some work much, and others work only a little, but all are paid. This does not mean that we earn our salvation. Work simply provides the setting of the parable. The point is that God is so generous that it troubles some people. The proper application of this parable is that:

a. When we are called by the gospel to obey Christ, we should respond at once!

- For some, we may hear the invitation early in life
- Others may not come to know of the gospel until late in life

b. As kingdom laborers, we should work diligently in whatever time we may have left.

- We may be blessed to offer a full life of service to the Lord
- Or we may only have a short time

c. We should do whatever we can without possessing an envious spirit.

- “Do I get more because I gave more?”

Applicatory Truth: *Believers should not be envious of the graciousness that God shows to others*

The Unworthy Servants (Luke 17:7-10)

In the parable of “*The Unworthy Servants*” Jesus is trying to help his followers understand what it means to be a servant. Jesus often used the **master-servant** relationship in His parables to teach His disciples important principles concerning their service to God. Jesus’ own disciples, who lived in a religious climate of merits and demerits, argued more than once as to which of them would be

greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus had to constantly teach His disciples not to work in God's kingdom for sake of rewards. God does not employ His servants to reward them for their services. He does not buy services like an employer buying the time and skills of an employee. Because God does not enter into an employer-employee relationship, no one can ever put a claim on Him for services rendered. To give His disciples a perspective on the true meaning of servanthood, Jesus tells the parable of the farmer and the slave.

The Parable Explained

Jesus challenges His apostles to consider how they would act toward a servant. As master, none of them would be expected to invite the servant to sit down and eat with him ([Lk 17:7](#)). As master, any one of them would expect the servant to prepare his meal and serve him, eating only after he is done ([Lk 17:8](#)). As master, none of them would likely thank the servant for doing what has been commanded of him ([Lk 17:9](#)). So, they are to view themselves in regards to what they do as servants. When they have done that which they were commanded, they should view themselves as "unworthy" servants ([Lk 17:10a](#)). That is, they have simply done their duty as servants, doing nothing worthy of merit ([Lk 17:10b](#)).

The Parable Amplified

It is important to note that this parable is not trying to present the proper attitude of the “master”, but it is illustrating the proper attitude of the “servant.” In Luke 12:35-37, Jesus already describes what He Himself will do as Master. This parable is illustrating the attitude believers should have toward our own service to God. Since we were “bought at a price” ([1 Corinthians 6:20](#)), we are truly servants and should have the proper attitude of servitude. With this explanation, there are some thoughts related from the parable:

- It removes any idea of **earning** our salvation

Keeping God's commandments are important, but they do not merit salvation ([Titus 3:4-5](#))

After everything we do, we are still “unprofitable servants” ([Isaiah 64:6](#))

Whatever reward we receive is one of grace, not merit!

- It stresses the need for **obedience**

While we cannot earn or merit our reward, obedience is still essential! ([1 Corinthians 7:19b](#); [1 John 2:4](#))

We should never equate obedience with legalism...

- *Especially when it is pointed out that they are not keeping a particular command*
- *But legalism involves the idea that one earns or merits salvation by their obedience*
- *If we believe that obedience earns our salvation, then we are truly legalists*
- *But if we obey God out of love and duty, we are simply being faithful servants!*

The Parable Applied

The lesson of the parable reminds us of the need for obedience. Only those who do the Father's will enter the kingdom of heaven ([Mt. 7:21](#)). We must observe all that Christ commanded ([Mt. 28:20](#)). He is the author of salvation to all who obey Him ([Heb. 5:9](#)). But its primary lesson is to remind us that no matter how much we do for the Lord:

- We are still “**unworthy** servants”
- Whatever we have done was our **duty** as servants to begin with
- Whatever reward we receive will be one of **grace**, and not **merit**

Applicatory Truth: *Disciples are not to expect gratitude for everything they do; Service must come from a sense of mission.*

The Certainty of the Kingdom

The Kingdom will come no matter what obstacle stands in the way

The Sower

(Mt. 13:1-9; Mk. 4:1-9, 13-20; Lk. 8:4-8, 11-15)

The parable of “*The Sower*” can also be properly named “*The Parable of the Four Soils.*” As Jesus went about preaching the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, He did not always find a receptive audience. Even where He did mighty works, some did not repent. The problem Jesus faced was that many people, though they had ears to hear, their ears had become “hard of hearing” (Mt 13:14-15). To illustrate this problem, Jesus told the Parable of the Sower to illustrate different reactions to the gospel message. It is one of the few parables in which we have Jesus' own interpretation of the parable.

The Parable Explained

This parable is yet another of the few in which we have Jesus' own interpretation. The value of this parable becomes clearer in light of Jesus' explanation, for by it we can see ourselves as we really are in regard to how we have received the Word into our lives. The

explanation of the parable given by Jesus can be interpreted in this manner:

THE SOWER – “Likely interpreted as Jesus, Himself, the Son of Man” (Matt. 13:37)

THE SEED – “The word of the kingdom”

THE WAYSIDE (1st Soil) – “Those who have hardened their hearts to hearing God’s Word”

THE BIRDS – “The ‘wicked one’ who snatches the Word away from the hardened heart”

STONY PLACES (2nd Soil) – “Those who receive the Word gladly, but have no sustenance”

THORNY PLACES (3rd Soil) – “Those who receive the Word, but are stymied by the world”

GOOD GROUND (4th Soil) – “Those who receive the Word, understand it, and bear fruit”

The significance of this particular parable is further enhanced by the words of Jesus recorded in [Mk 4:13](#).

“Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all parables?”

The Parable Amplified

Having identified the various elements of the parable, Jesus goes on to make an important observation by stating that not all will bear the

same amount..."some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Mt 13:23).

It was this statement of the harvest that really captured the attention of Jesus' audience as He told the parable. In terms of an expected harvest, **twenty-fold** was the highest yield the people of Israel ever experienced. Seeds would be destroyed by the sun, birds, and weeds. A harvest of *thirty-fold*, *sixty fold*, or a *hundred fold* was completely unheard of! Therefore, one of the key teachings of Jesus is that despite all obstacles to the kingdom of God, there would be a great success in the end that could not be imagined!

With the explanation provided by Jesus Himself, there is very little problem understanding the parable and the spiritual truths Jesus was teaching. However, it is one thing to understand it, but quite another to make application of it. To make application of this teaching, one must wrestle with the question of, "What kind of *soil* are you?"

Are you like:

- The *Wayside*?
 - You have heard the gospel of Christ, but have not made a commitment to Him
 - You may be in the process of hardening your heart the longer you wait
 - You are susceptible to Satan's deception in some form, to blind you and not allow the Word of God to have its intended effect

- The *Stony* Places?

- You have responded to the gospel at one time, but not being grounded in the faith

- You will likely fall away when persecution or temptation comes your way

- The *Thorny* Places?

- You have you responded to the gospel at one time, but are becoming too pre-occupied with the cares, riches, and pleasures of this world

- You will not be able to bear much fruit (*Remember Jesus' warning* - Jn. 15:1-6)

- The *Good* Ground?

- If you have responded to the gospel and are bearing good fruit, several important

things are being demonstrated in your life....

a. You have a good and noble heart!

b. You have come to understand the Word!

c. You have been keeping it with patience!

- The Word of God has been able to produce its intended effect in you

The Parable Applied

When Jesus finished telling His parable of the Sower, He cried out:

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Mt 13:9)

Clearly from the explanation of Jesus Himself, we learn that not all those who have ears to hear, really listen! It is important that we listen well when God's Word is being proclaimed, for that is how

faith is obtained ([Rom. 10:17](#)). How well one has listened to this parable of Jesus and His explanation is imperative!

Applicatory Truth: Productivity within the kingdom depends upon the kind of response one makes to the Word.

The Mustard Seed **(Mt. 13:31-32; Mk. 4:30-32; Lk. 13:18-19)**

From the first two parables that Jesus taught and then explained in Matthew 13, it is easy to surmise that the disciples may have been discouraged by what they heard. In “The Parable of the Sower,” only one soil of four would be truly receptive to the Word sown. In “The Parable of the Wheat and Tares,” they learned that Satan would be doing his best to undermine the efforts of the Sower. Therefore, the next two parables were told by Jesus to encourage His disciples about the kingdom. The first parable is that of "The Mustard Seed." In this parable Jesus attempts to describe the kingdom as destined for remarkable growth.

The Parable Explained

The mustard plant is well known for its hot-flavored seeds. Among seeds sown in a garden it was generally the **smallest**. As a plant, it reached ten, sometimes fifteen feet in height. In the fall of the year, its branches become rigid, and the plant often serves as a shelter for

birds of many kinds. The mustard seed was used frequently to describe anything that is small in its beginning.

With this understanding of the mustard plant and its seeds, perhaps we are better able to appreciate the meaning of the parable as told by the Master.

The Parable Amplified

In the parable of the Mustard Seed, Jesus sought to magnify three spiritual truths about the kingdom.

- The kingdom of heaven would have a **small** beginning
 - Old Testament prophecy foretold this concerning the Messiah (Is. 11:1; 53:2-3)
and the kingdom (Dan 2:35b, 44) (starting out as a stone; i.e. a great mountain)
- The growth of the kingdom would **dwarf** its humble beginnings
 - Acts 2:41-42
 - Acts 4:4
 - Acts 6:7
 - Acts 9:31
 - Acts 21:20

- The growth of the kingdom would be **beneficial** to the world

In the parable, Jesus spoke of how “the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.” The kingdom of God would become a blessing to all who take refuge in it.

With this simple parable, Jesus offers encouragement to the small band of disciples following Him over the hills of Palestine. They would be a part of something that would grow and bless the world immensely!

The Parable Applied

The kingdom of heaven continues to grow and spread out its branches to those who will accept it. Today we observe that growth both *physically* and *spiritually*. The seed of the gospel will produce fruit, but only if it falls on good soil. The potential for the kingdom's amazing growth rests in the Person who reigns as its King. Those who will abide in Christ can be used by Him to produce the remarkable growth in the kingdom illustrated by this parable. “*The Parable of The Mustard Seed*” serves as...

- a. An **encouragement** - The kingdom of heaven is destined for great things, though its beginning was small

b. A **reminder** - That if we are going to be useful to the Master in this ever-growing kingdom, we must “abide in Him” so we can “bear much fruit”

Applicatory Truth: *Though the kingdom begins small, it will be large at the end.*

The Leaven (Mt. 13:33; Lk. 13:20-21)

Immediately following the parable of the *Mustard Seed*, Jesus then tells a second parable which is known as the Parable of the *Leaven*. This second parable which Jesus gives appears to have the same purpose as the former in that it reassures His disciples that their involvement in the kingdom would not be for naught. Leaven was a small portion of fermented dough used to ferment other dough. Once inserted into a batch, it continues its process of fermentation until the whole batch has risen. Today, we more likely use the term “**yeast**” instead of “leaven.” In the New Testament, the term “leaven” was often used symbolically regarding a **negative** influence. However, in this parable, as with the Parable of the Mustard Seed, Jesus uses the term leaven as a **positive** force by connecting it with the growth of the kingdom.

The Parable Explained

As one reads the Parable of the Leaven, one can immediately we can see similarities to “The Parable of the Mustard Seed.” Both parables are quite brief, with no explanations by Jesus recorded. Both parables appear to be describing the remarkable spread of the kingdom of heaven. But some differences can be noted as well.

As was previous mentioned, in the New Testament, the term "leaven" was often used symbolically regarding a *corrupting* influence:

a. Jesus warned of “the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees,” which included their teaching and hypocrisy (Mt. 16:5-12; Lk. 12:1)

b. Paul wrote of the danger of how “a little leaven leavens the whole lump”, as he addressed the need to withdraw from the unrepentant brother (1 Cor. 5:1-13)

This has led some to conclude that "leaven" in the parable represents something evil. But there are several reasons why this is not likely true...

a. There is no reason why its use elsewhere must be the same here

b. The last phrase would then suggest that the kingdom is destined to fail!

c. The proximity of the parable to “The Parable of the Mustard Seed”

The Parable Amplified

In the parable of the Leaven, Jesus sought to magnify two spiritual truths about the kingdom.

- The kingdom's growth will be **wide-ranging**
 - *Just as leaven can ferment, the kingdom of God also possessed the quality of permeating, spreading, and flowing throughout the world. The word of the kingdom can be manifested in the form of the gospel, the form of the church, and the influence of the Word and church in society.*
- The kingdom's influence will be **complete**
 - *In speaking of the loaf, Jesus said "till it was all leavened." In other words, no part of the "loaf" (world) will be untouched by the influence of the kingdom. Although all will not obey the gospel, yet, we still see the leavening influence of the Word and Christ's reign in the growth of the church and the influence of the Word in society.*
- The kingdom's growth will be **inconspicuous**
 - *This parable also illustrates the "invisible" growth of the kingdom. As leaven does it work with less than noticeable*

effect, so the spreading influence of the kingdom is often unnoticeable, but real nonetheless!

The Parable Applied

As we seek application of the Parable of the Leaven, there are two ways in which we can incorporate the principle of leaven in our lives:

Do not lose **heart**

Do not measure the growth or success of the kingdom solely by visible standards (Lk. 17:20-21). The spread of the kingdom (the rule of God) is taking place wherever the “word of the kingdom” is being sown, and fruit will be borne. That which began as a mustard seed will become a great tree. That which started in one small portion of the loaf will eventually spread through the whole loaf.

Be a leavening **influence**

Allow the "leaven of the kingdom" to permeate your own heart and life. Take the Word of God into your own heart. Study and meditate upon it, and then seek to apply it! Allow that Word to produce fruit in your life, so that you become a leavening influence for the kingdom of God in word and in deed and for His glory!

Applicatory Truth: The inner workings of the kingdom will be visibly recognized and acknowledged one day.

The Seed Growing Secretly **(Mk 4:26-29)**

Up to this point our study has focused on parables found in Matthew's Gospel. Many were found only in Matthew, though some are also found in the other Gospels. We skipped a couple of parables found in Matthew that we will examine later in one of the other gospels.

In this lesson, however, we shall examine a parable that is found only in the gospel of Mark. It is called the parable of “*The Growing Seed*,” or “*The Parable of the Seed Growing Secretly*.” The setting of this parable appears to be the same occasion in which Jesus told the parable of “The Sower” and the parable of “The Mustard Seed.” Therefore, it was at the point in Jesus' ministry when He began to teach publicly in parables.

The Parable Explained

This parable describes how the Word of God produces **fruit** (i.e., how the kingdom grows). While the “seed” is not identified in this parable as the Word of God, it was defined as such in the parable of “*The Sower*.” The growth produced by the Word is a **mystery** (4:26-28a). The sower can sow the seed and see it sprout and grow. But the growth is beyond his comprehension, and even grows by itself. The growth produced by the Word is also **gradual** (4:28). It does not all occur at once; but step by step: first the *blade*, then the *head*, then the *full grain*. But through such growth, the harvest eventually comes

(4:29). So, the kingdom of God, growing by virtue of the Word of God being planted, is similar to the amazing growth observed in the sowing of grain.

The Parable Amplified

While the parable of “The Sower” emphasizes **human** responsibility the parable of “The Growing Seed” stresses the **divine** power within the Word. In the “Parable of the Sower,” the seed did not produce the desired fruit unless it fell on good soil. However, in “The Parable of the Growing Seed,” it takes a seed that has within itself the power to germinate and grow in good soil. “The Parable of the Growing Seed” emphasizes the need for those who sow to trust and hope in the power of the seed. The Word is the “seed” which contains the power for spiritual life and growth when planted in good soil. In “The Parable of the Growing Seed,” there are two (2) key observations that must be acknowledged:

- The Word of God is a *powerful* seed
- The Word of God can be used in *two* ways:
 - a. By **receiving** it into our own hearts
 - b. By **sowing** it as far and wide as we possibly can

As with the sower in the parable of “The Sower,” we must sow the seed everywhere. But like the sower in the parable of “The Growing

Seed”, we must remember that growth comes only through the divine power of the seed. It is God who gives the increase. We are simply “seed-throwers.” But we must also realize that growth comes in stages, not all at once.

There will be days when all we seem to be doing is “sowing.” There will be days when all we seem to be doing is “waiting.” Like the farmer, then, we must be patient.

The Parable Applied

This parable teaches us to trust and hope in power of the Word of God. Thus, the general lesson in the parable of “The Growing Seed” is this:

- In God’s kingdom, as in the kingdom of nature, we are *laborers together* with Him
- The results of our work depends on God
- God takes His own time in the perfecting process

With this being the case....

a. It is our duty to sow the seed (the Word of God); it is up to God to give the increase

b. Having sown the seed, we must wait for time and God to perfect the growth

c. The growth that comes will occur in gradual stages

d. Not until there has been time for development are, we to expect to reap

Applicatory Truth: *God will bring about His kingdom apart from human effort.*

The Nearness of the Kingdom

The Kingdom is near at hand – it is in fact already breaking in!

The Budding Fig Tree (Mt. 24:32-35; Mk. 13:28-31; Lk. 21:29-33)

The Gospels reveal that Jesus was an astute observer of nature. His teachings often touched on the environment that surrounded Him and His listeners. They were also the subject of many of His parables. Christ used the parable of “*The Budding Fig Tree*” to alert His disciples of the *nearness* of the kingdom of God. The disciples had asked for a sign of Christ’s return to earth. Christ gave them the sign of Himself through the image of the fig tree. The image of the budding fig tree is usually associated with a period of **blessing**. Through this simple illustration from nature, Jesus assured His Jewish disciples that after Israel’s “winter” of discontent, there would be a “summer” of national blessing.

The Parable Explained

In biblical times the fig tree was a fruit tree common throughout Israel, especially near Jerusalem. It is believed that Jesus may have

taught this parable during early April, just at the time when the tree begins to show its first signs of life. As the buds of the fig tree swell and as its leaves begin to sprout, the nearness of summer is signaled. During the summer, the fig tree, with its large green leaves, provided ample shade. However, the tree loses its leaves with the approach of winter. With the coming spring, while other trees were showing vibrant signs of life, the fig tree thrusts its bare branches upward until the warm season of summer approaches once again. The point of Jesus' illustration is fairly obvious: when the trees begin to show tender leaves, you know that summer is approaching. In like manner, Jesus is saying the people will be able to *discern* when the coming of God's kingdom is near.

The Parable Amplified

In speaking the parable, Jesus tells His disciples, "This generation will certainly not pass away until *all these things* have happened" (13:30). One such *thing* believed to have been alluded to was the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem. Jesus' disciples would certainly be able to discern the approaching *deseccration* and *destruction* of the temple, just as they would the arrival of summer by looking at the budding of the fig tree. Nevertheless, this was a difficult saying for the Jewish people to digest. They were primarily a *past* and *future*-oriented people. To speak of the end of the age in the *present* time was incomprehensible! It is also important to note "*all these things*" predicted in the discourse on the end of the age go far beyond the

time of Jesus' contemporaries. The phrase "*this generation*" is not speaking of a duration that is limited to one life span and should not be taken literally.

It refers to people who persist and are faithful to the end. It includes, therefore the disciples who witnessed the fall of Jerusalem, as well as the believers throughout the centuries who have steadfastly looked forward to the fulfillment of the prophecies relating to the end of the age.

The Parable Applied

The parable concludes with the saying, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." The words of Jesus do not lose their impact when a particular prediction has been fulfilled in time. The words of Christ are as valid today as when they were first spoken. Until the day of Christ's return when the kingdom of God comes in all its fullness, no generation is exempt from calamities. Nevertheless, the Christian should stay *watchful, hopeful, and encouraged*. Believers ought to observe the signs of the time very carefully, much as they look at the budding fig tree, and know that the events occurring around them are ushering in a new age.

Applicatory Truth: *There will be signs of Christ coming available for believers.*

The Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9)

The context of the *Parable of the Barren Fig Tree* finds us with Jesus responding to news about a calamity (13:15). He was told of how Pilate (the Roman governor) had killed some *Galileans* and mingled their blood along with their sacrifices. Jesus anticipated the thinking of those who brought Him this news as those who suffered such atrocities were worse sinners than other Galileans? On the contrary, He replied that unless they repented, they would likewise perish! Jesus reinforces His point with a reference to a similar calamity in which a tower in *Siloam* (in Jerusalem) collapsed and killed eighteen people. Those victims were no worse sinners than others in Jerusalem. He then repeats His warning that unless they repent, they will all likewise perish and instructs them in the form of the parable.

The Parable Explained

In this parable, a man is disappointed that a fig tree in his vineyard is *unfruitful*. He wants to cut it down but is persuaded by the keeper of the vineyard to give it one more year. If no fruit is borne, then the tree is to be cut down. Those who heard Jesus would appreciate the point of this parable. Fruitlessness will not be endured forever! (*ex: What farmer desires to put up with a tree that will not bear fruit?*)

The Parable Amplified

In the parable of the Barren Fig Tree, Jesus sought to magnify three spiritual truths about the kingdom.

- Where God has extended **privileges**, He expects **returns**

The owner of the vineyard expected the fig tree to bear fruit. He had given it good soil. For three years it had been provided care. He was giving it an extra year, but only for the purpose of bearing fruit. Although God blesses us, He is disappointed when we do not bear fruit.

- The Lord is **longsuffering**, but His **patience** does not last forever

The owner of the vineyard was longsuffering. He had given the fig tree three years to produce fruit. He was persuaded to give it another year with special care. But that last year was the final opportunity the tree would be given. The Lord has been longsuffering to us. He desires that all be saved and does not want anyone to be lost. But the longsuffering will one day end, and the "day of the Lord" will come (2 Pet 3:7, 10).

- Those who are **unfruitful** will be **cut off**

The barren fig tree, if it remained so, was to be cut down. So Jesus warned His disciples that such would happen to them if they did not bear fruit ...- (John 15:2a, 6)

The Parable Applied

The basic lesson of the parable of “The Barren Fig Tree” is to “*repent*” (v. 1-5) and to “repent NOW!” (vs. 6-9).

The Lord has been longsuffering already, and what time one has left may be short! (*It truly may be later than you think!*) We also should not think that people who die tragic deaths are any worse sinners than ourselves (Rom. 3:23; James 2:10; Rom. 6:23). If we do not repent, our end will be no less tragic than the worst human calamity!

Applicatory Truth: God will bring judgment on those who produce no fruitfulness to God.

The Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21)

Jesus had been teaching a large multitude. He had warned them about the **hypocrisy** of the Pharisees (Lk 12:1-3), He had taught them about the **fear** of God (Lk 12:4-7), and He had instructed them on the need to **confess** Him before men (Lk 12:8-12). In the midst of this teaching, someone from the crowd makes a request. He wants Jesus to resolve a family dispute over an inheritance (Lk 12:13). The question reveals that the man's attention had not been on the spiritual truths being taught by Jesus. This prompted not only a terse response from the Master, but a warning and parable to the crowd about the dangers of **covetousness** and placing one's confidence in earthly riches

The Parable Explained

In the parable a rich man is richly blessed with large crops (12:16). As he considers his situation, he makes plans for the future.

He decides to build greater barns to store his crops (12:17-18), and to retire and enjoy the fruits of his labors for many years (12:19). Yet God tells him he is a fool (12:20), and declares that very night he is to die, and his soul will be required of him, and questions what will be become of the things he had provided! The rich man assumed that his life consisted in the abundance of things he possessed. However, the foolishness and selfishness of the rich man is seen in that he failed to realize his **mortality**, he failed to consider the **needs** of others, and he failed to **acknowledge** God for his blessings. He thought only of *self*!

The Parable Amplified

In speaking the parable, Jesus seeks to magnify three spiritual truths about the kingdom.

- Lay up spiritual wealth which is **imperishable** (Lk. 12:33-34)

- Store up treasure in heaven that does not fail

- Use material wealth to help the **unfortunate** (Lk. 16:9)

- Helping the poor is often connected with "laying up treasure in heaven"

- Maintain the right **motive** about your treasures (Mt. 6:19-21)

- Your heart determines your treasure

The Parable Applied

From the parable of “The Rich Fool,” we learn that one can lay up treasure for oneself and yet not be rich toward God. To do the first without the second ignores the **soul**, and has no guarantee for the **body**. To focus on being rich toward God saves the *soul*, while providing for the *body*! The key is to make the kingdom of God the focus of our life (Lk 12:31). Jesus follows the parable with a reminder of God's loving care (Lk 12:22-30). If we do so, God will do two things:

He will provide our **needs** (i.e., things necessary for life and body) - Lk 12:31

He will give us “the **kingdom**” (i.e., things necessary for the soul) - Lk 12:32

Applicatory Truth: *The faith that saves is one that looks to eternal rewards rather than earthly materialism.*

**The Watchful Servant
& The Wicked Servant
(Luke 12:35-48; Mt. 24:45-51)**

The parable of the servant in authority is one of the parables in which Jesus teaches the necessity of watchfulness. Besides emphasizing watchfulness, Jesus also stresses faithfulness.

As Jesus was teaching His disciples, Peter interrupted Jesus with the question of whether the parable was meant for the disciples or for everyone. Jesus answered Peter's question by telling another parable: the story about the faithful servant. In brief, the parable concerns a servant who is entrusted with the responsibilities of managing the household in the absence of his master. If he proves faithful and wise, the master will reward him generously upon his return. But if he is lazy, mean and careless, the master will come back unexpectedly and inflict severe physical punishment.

The Parable Explained

A master of number of servants has to leave his household for an undetermined length of time. He makes the necessary plans for his departure and calls in one of his servants who, in the master's opinion, is able to manage the day-to-day duties of the household. It is the servant's duty to be in charge of his fellow servants, to give them their food at the proper time, and to prove his faithfulness and prudence in his master's absence. If the master finds everything in order upon his return, he intends to promote the servant to be the

manager of his possessions. However, if the master returns and finds the servant that he put in charge is irresponsible, slothful, and unfaithful, then the master must administer the appropriate punishment of separating, casting out, and cutting off the servant from his people.

The Parable Amplified

The point of the parable is to call attention to the responsibility given to the follower of Jesus. Some followers receive greater **privileges** than others, but they also are charged with greater **responsibilities**. Because each one has his or her own duty in the service of the Lord, no one is excluded or exempt. Everyone is accountable to Jesus. Whereas Mathew concludes the parable with the familiar s'aying "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, only Luke records these definitive concluding words from Jesus Himself:

That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving of punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (12:47-48).

The Parable Applied

If believers are faithful and wise in the discharge of their duties, Jesus will reward them abundantly upon his return. But if they are unfaithful and behave irresponsibly, at Jesus' return, they face

complete separation from the people of God along with dreadful punishment. In Matthew's sequence this parable serves as an introduction to the parables of the Ten Virgins and of the Talents.

Applicatory Truth: The faith that saves is one that looks to the return of the Master. All true followers will watch and be ready for His return.

The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

According to Matthew, Jesus addressed the discourse on the end of time (Chapter 24) to his disciples and followed it with a few parables related to his eventual return. Thus, the instruction of these parables took place two or three days before the celebration of the Passover feast (Matt. 26:2). The Parable of the Talents is one of those told by the Master during this time. This parable is the longest parable in Matthew's Gospel. It is preceded by the parable of the Ten Virgins, which we will look at in another section of our study. The Parable of the Talents teaches that the servants of the Lord must be faithful by promptly and efficiently administering what has been entrusted to them until the day of reckoning.

The Parable Explained

A man, about to travel to a far country, distributes his goods ("talents") among his servants. A "talent" is a monetary measure, amounting to 6000 denarii (a denarius being a day's wage), *which*

would take an ordinary laborer twenty years to earn. The number of “talents” was given “to each according to his own ability.” Two of the servants doubled their talents (25:16-18). One servant simply hid the money. The lord of the servants’ returns, after a long period of time, and a reckoning is made (25:19-30). The lord is pleased when the first two servants describe how they doubled their amount.

He praises them for their work, (*“Well done”*), commends them for their service (*“Good and faithful servant”*), and rewards them through promotion (*“made them ruler over many things”*). He then invites them to share in his happiness (*“Enter into the joy of the lord”*). The servant who hid his money when confronted by his lord begins to make excuses, *“Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown...”* and *“I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground.”* He seeks to appease the lord by returning what he had been given: *“Look, there you have what is yours.”* The lord responds by calling him a “wicked and lazy servant” and tells him the least he should have done was to put his money in the bank to earn interest. He takes away what he had, and gave it to the servant with ten talents and cast the unprofitable servant from his presence, and made this statement:

“For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance. But from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.”

This parable teaches us the need to be faithful in using the opportunities for service which the Lord has given us. From this parable we learn:

- God grants opportunities for service in keeping with our *ability* to make use of them
- Whatever we have, whether opportunities or abilities, belongs to God; *we may possess, but God owns; we are simply stewards.*
- Diligence is **rewarded**; negligence is **punished**

In the Day of Judgment, the number of “talents” will not matter. The major question will be, “Have you been faithful in your use of the talents?” While the master of the servants did not return immediately, everything that is done by servants of God should be done with a view that a day of reckoning which is coming! (2 Cor. 5:10). Those servants who are profitable will experience the joy of the Lord. Those servants who are unprofitable, or who make excuses, have a place of punishment reserved for them. *The consequences for the sin of OMISSION will be just as bad as those for the sin of COMMISSION.*

The Parable Applied

The main lesson of this parable is very simple: Be productive where the Lord has given you **ability** and **opportunity**

The **number** of the talents may be different (**ability given**)

The **nature** of the talents may be different (**grace given**)

If we are in the kingdom, the Lord has given us all some ability in which to serve Him.

We are servants who not only need to be **prepared**, but we must also be **productive**! What the Lord will say to us in the END depends upon our service in the kingdom NOW!

Applicatory Truth: *One must be prepared for the coming of Christ by commitment to service*

The Parable of the Minas (Pounds) (Luke 19:12-27)

The Parable of the Minas, also known as *The Parable of the Pounds*, is one that finds many similarities with the preceding parable of “The Talents. It teaches basically the same lesson, that of faithful service as we await the Lord's return. But there are some differences. The setting in which Jesus told each parable is different, and the details vary slightly. This parable was told on the way to Jerusalem (19:11). This would be shortly before Jesus’ His triumphal entry (19:28). The Parable of “The Talents” was told after His arrival and during His last week. It was told to correct misunderstandings about the kingdom. While some thought that the kingdom would “appear immediately,” Jesus had already taught that the kingdom of God “*does not come with observation*” (Lk. 17:20-21). Therefore, Jesus used this opportunity to explain His kingdom would not be readily

apparent, and there would be a need for faithful service in His absence.

The Parable Explained

Jesus used a historical incident as the basis for His parable. Apparently this parable has the historical basis of Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, who actually went from Jerusalem to Rome on this very errand to get a kingdom in Palestine and to come back to it. This happened while Jesus was a boy in Nazareth and it was a matter of common knowledge. In the parable, a nobleman is going away to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. He calls ten of his servants, giving them each one “mina” (about three month's wages - *whereas in “The Talents” one talent would take an ordinary laborer twenty years to earn*), and instructing them to “Do business until his return.” There are citizens who send a delegation to express their displeasure with having the nobleman reign over them. Having received the kingdom, the nobleman returns and calls for his servants and asks for an accounting. One servant earned ten minas, and was rewarded with authority over ten cities. Another earned five minas, and was granted authority over five cities. Another simply returned his original mina which angered the nobleman, who then gave the one mina to him who earned ten. An objection is raised by some standing by, but is answered by the nobleman. The enemies who did not want the nobleman to reign over them are slain.

The Parable Amplified

This parable first explains how the kingdom of God would not appear immediately.

The Lord would be going away to receive His kingdom. This He did when He ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. While His reign began, it would not be readily apparent. Second the parable portrays the rejection of the Lord's reign. There are many who do not wish to submit to the authority of the Lord. However, such rejection did not mean His reign has not yet begun! Then third, the parable reveals the role of a disciple between the Lord's departure and His return. The disciple is to be productive (“do business until I return”). The disciple is to be faithful while awaiting the return of his King. Upon the king’s return the parable describes two actions:

- It describes the **reckoning** that awaits all Christians
 - a. A reckoning which takes into consideration our **service**
 - b. A reckoning in which some are **blessed** and others are not
- It alludes to the **punishment** awaiting those who reject the Lord as King
 - a. Some do not wish to acknowledge or **submit** to Christ as king
 - b. When He returns, it will be to render **judgment** upon them

The Parable Applied

The parable of the Minas is a “kingdom parable,” even though it is not introduced by the familiar phrase, “the kingdom of heaven is like...” The kingdom of God exists in the present, but is also in a state of expectant fulfillment. It is therefore, *now*, but at the same, time *not yet!*

The point of the parable for application is this: every follower of Jesus is given gifts and opportunities of service. Each follower is to put these gifts to work and is expected to make the most of these avenues of service. Soon the time, which God in His providence has allotted, will be over, and then a day of judgment and reckoning will be at hand.

Applicatory Truth: *Disciples of Jesus are to remain faithful until he returns.*