



The Wonders of the Parables of Jesus

Understanding the Stories Jesus Told

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Preface

We all love a great story. The aim of this book is to understand Jesus' use of the stories that are called parables. They confront us with the choice to examine our priorities, make our choices and act, especially if we want to be a part of His Kingdom. In some parables, our Lord describes God's nature and attributes. He sheds true light on the God's kingdom. They are an invitation to enter into the Kingdom of God. They are mirrors for us to reflect upon our behavior, especially to deepen our spiritual life with the Lord as our Saviour who is the author and the finisher of our faith.

To God be the glory. Forever and ever. Amen.

Botros Botrosdief

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Introduction

The parables of the Lord Jesus are natural and simple, and yet they contain wonderful depth of meaning. They are vivid pictures and snapshots of the ordinary lives of Jewish men and women in the first century.

The parables of Jesus are about us in our ordinary lives. God is there, offering us His grace and calling us to make a decision and response to His loving call. Our Lord's parables contain great volumes of truth in very few words and His parables, rich in imagery, are not easily forgotten. We need to see them as they are, without any forced interpretations.

In this book, we are going to explore some parables that Jesus told and understand the heart of His teaching in them. To do so, we need to answer some important questions:

1. What is a Parable?

The word 'parable' is used to denote proverbs and also for stories. An example of a proverb is: "*No one sews new cloth on an old cloak*" (Mark 2:21). A parable is a story that uses metaphors based on daily life to convey spiritual truths.

2. What is the central teaching of the parables of Jesus?

Each parable contains one primary lesson. Therefore, after reading the parable, the first task is to ask the question: *what specific lesson does this teach us?* The answer usually concerns the nature and character of God and what He wants us to do.

3. Why did Jesus teach in parables?

There are at least four reasons why our Lord used parables:

1. To teach a lesson clearly, and in such a way that it should be remembered easily.
2. To encourage the hearers to think for themselves about the meaning of His teaching. This is why He sometimes put it in the form of a question, such as, "*how can Satan drive out Satan*"? (Mark 3:23)
3. To persuade us to change our behaviour. (Luke 10:37)
4. To separate those who had come for instruction from those who had only come to see a miracle.

4. How do we apply the parables of Jesus in our daily life?

Our Lord Jesus often used parables to teach people and to make a point. The stories are drawn from ordinary life. Parables do not define things precisely, but use comparisons to point us in the direction of an understanding of how God works. The purpose of the parables is not to settle issues, but to challenge us to think more deeply about the issues.

The parables of Jesus continue to fascinate us 2000 years later. Choose any of the parables that Jesus told. Take time to read and re-read them. If the parable can be found in more than one Gospel, read that version as well. Think about the meaning of the parable Jesus was teaching. What was he trying to convey to His listeners? How did Jesus want them to think or act differently after hearing the parable? How does it encourage you to think or act differently? Talk to God in the quiet of your heart about the parable. Ask Him to help shed some light on it for you.

Part One

The Second Coming Parables

1. The Ten Bridesmaids
2. The Door Keeper
3. The Thief in the Night
4. The Talents
5. The Two Servants

1. The Ten Bridesmaids

"The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him! Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. "Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' "But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.' "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." (Matt. 25:1-13)

We can call the parable of the Ten Virgins in terms of our modern time, the parable of the ten bridesmaids. This parable is one of the many in the New Testament which teaches the sudden, unexpected, and dramatic coming of the Lord. To understand this parable, we need to answer the following important questions: what was the occasion of the parable; why Jesus did tell this parable; what were the customs of Jewish weddings in the first century; and, what is the purpose of the parable for us today?

This parable is one of several illustrations our Lord Jesus gave to answer the question from his disciples of when and how His coming will be. In Matt 24:3, the disciples of the Lord asked Him, "Lord! Tell

us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Our Lord instructed them to be prepared and be ready for His coming. He said to them, "keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matt 25:13).

To make His point, He tells this parable using a Jewish wedding as the illustration. The ancient Jewish custom used to include three basic things. First, the parents of the couple agreed on everything, for example, the marriage date and established a dowry. The second, was that the groom would come to the bride's house at night with his groomsmen with the sound of music as they go through the main street of the village. Ten bridesmaids would stand near the bride's house when they see the groom coming, and they would light the way with their lamps. Then the groom takes his bride and goes back to his father's house for the celebration. The bridesmaids, with their lamps light the way before the couples. The door of the house would be closed and then the celebration ceremony would begin with songs and music, and it ended with a great banquet for all the guests. Once the celebrations were over all the guests would go home. The third is that, at the father's house, the groom and his bride would be treated as king and queen for only one week. Then they would begin their life together as a new family.

If we read the parable in the context of this background then it will be easier for us to understand it. Now, after we have read it, what is the meaning of the parable? Jesus said "*Watch therefore, for you do not know the day nor the hour when the Son of man comes*" (Matt. 25:13). In other words, we must be sure that we are ready for the coming of Christ. This is the meaning that the lamps are filled with oil. The problem was, only five of the lamps actually worked. The shape of Jewish lamps, with the outside lips rounded inward, made it almost impossible for someone to pour oil from one lamp to another.

The story of the parable illustrates the unwise attitude of the five bridesmaids who were not well prepared for that important occasion. They could not make it. They missed everything, the marriage celebration and the banquet. They came after everything was over.

All ten young girls had to light their lamps all the way from the bride's house to the groom's house. The difference was that five bridesmaids were wise because they had plenty of oil with them so that no matter how long they might have to wait, they would be prepared to light the way when the groom came. The other five were foolish because they were not prepared. They lacked the oil necessary to do what they had to do in honouring the bride and the groom. Our Lord Jesus will come suddenly according to heaven's time, and beyond our expectation. He commands us to be ready because no one knows the day nor the hour of His return.

How can we ‘fill our lamps with oil’ and be ready for the coming of our Lord?

1. Watch and live a godly life. “*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven*

” (Matt. 5:14-16).
2. Pray and intercede for others. The apostle Paul instructed the believers to pray for all people for: “*this is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*” (1Tim. 2:3-4)
3. Share the Gospel with others whenever you have the opportunity. Christ will return, at any time, and only those whose lamps are burning and giving light to others, there will be welcomed into His wedding feast.

2. The Door Keeper

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13: 33-37).

The parable of the door keeper, is a story of a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.

To understand this parable, we must ask these questions: what was the occasion of the parable; why did Jesus tell this parable; what was the main role of the door keepers in the first century; and, what is the meaning of the parable?

In Matthew 24:1-3, one of Jesus' disciples said to him: “*Lord, look to the temple! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!*” Jesus replied: “*do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down*”. The disciples were terrified and asked Him two questions: about the time of the destruction of the Temple; and, what would be the signs and timing of His return at the end of the age.

To the first question Jesus answered that the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple would happen within the lifetime of their generation: “*When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by*

armies, you will know that its desolation is near” (Luke 21:20). “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (Matthew 24:34). And this is exactly what had happened in 70 AD, approximately forty years after the crucifixion, resurrection and the ascension of our Lord Jesus.

Regarding the second question of the time of His return, He told them the parable of the door keeper (Mark 13:34-37) to illustrate his point. The parable of the door keeper is about *not knowing* the day nor the hour of His coming, and He instructed them to be ready and watch for His coming. This parable shows the importance of watching, waiting, working for the Master, and anticipating His return.

What was the role of doorkeepers in the first century?

The doorkeeper's role was an important one, because he held the master's keys. His role involved not just watching for the master's return but, also to secure the master's property and servants. He had to keep out unwanted visitors and check any worker leaving the premises. Symbolically speaking, we may say that the man in the parable is Jesus and His journey is the ascension. His servants are the church, you and I, who are members of His body. The doorkeeper in the parable represents Jesus' disciples and all the pastors of His church who would play a very special role in protecting and building up His church. This is why the Apostle Paul said to the elders of the church, “*Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood... Watch... I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified*” (Acts 20:28-32).

Here in this parable, our Lord Jesus stresses *for the third time* our ignorance of the time of His coming. He has previously said, “*Of that day and hour no one knows*” (v.32). Then He said, “*You do not know when the time is... Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning lest, coming suddenly, he finds you sleeping... Therefore keep watch because you do not know when your Lord is coming*” (Mark 13: 33, 35, and 37).

Our Lord definitely wanted us not to be in state of apathy, but rather to have an awareness of our responsibility. His warning is to watch, “*... lest, coming suddenly, he finds you sleeping.*” The word ‘sleep’ in this parable is a symbolic word. It means that one is indifferent and unconcerned. The security guard should not fall asleep when he ought to be awake, alert, and watchful that no one gains entry into the house.

We may ask; what is the watchful to watch for?

Is he to watch only for the master's return? No. He is to start watching as soon as the master leaves. He knows that the master will not be back right away. He is to watch, lest somebody deceives him and distracts from his mission, and gains entry into the house and ruins and robs all the Master's house.

There are three things we are to ‘*be alert and watch*’:

1. Temptations and trials which will assault us, to make us sin or give up, and stop us from walking in faith and, to stop us believing the truth of God’s Word. Be on guard. We are not looking up into the sky waiting for His coming. Lord Jesus will come when it is His time to return.

2. We are to watch and be diligent that we are not deceived by the false teaching of demons that deny the deity and the incarnation of Christ for our salvation (1 John 4:1-3).
3. We are to watch and not to believe all the secular voices, ideas and trends that turn us away from God and our faith in Him. as the Bible says,

The Bible says, “*The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron*” (1 Tim 4:1-2).

“*But mark this: there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power... Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers*” (2 Tim 3:1-5)

We are to watch, and not allow anything to distract us from being what God wants us to be in this day and until He comes. This is the way we watch. Here our special obligation is, as the disciples did in the first century, we are to protect the church of God from the false doctrines. Yes, we are to be vigilant always. With one sharp word of command, Jesus ends his parable of the door keeper: “Watch!” Yes, Jesus is coming. We live in hope and anticipation of His return; living each day to love and serve Him. We pray: “Come Lord Jesus” Amen. May God grant us all grace to be faithful, both in watching for our Lord’s return, and in watching out for one another.

3. The Thief of the Night

"If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matt 24:42-44).

To understand this parable, we must ask these questions: what was the occasion of the parable; why did Jesus tell this parable; and what is the meaning of the parable? This parable is one of several illustrations our Lord Jesus used to answer His disciples' question of when and how He will return. He tells this parable, and points to the sudden and unexpected time when He will come, just like 'a thief in the night'.

Obviously, our Lord Jesus was not comparing Himself in character to a thief, but comparing His coming to sudden and unexpected time of the coming of a thief. If we knew when a burglar was coming to rob our house, we would be alert and ready to protect our house.

Our Lord Jesus, on many occasions emphasises four important points regarding the time of His coming: first, He will come suddenly - like a thief in the night; second, He will come unexpectedly during the normal activities of our daily life, like in the days of Noah; thirdly, He emphasises that no one knows the day or the hour of His coming; and fourth, He commands us to be ready for His coming. Our Lord Jesus said in Matthew 24:37-44,

"As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen

until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him".

The people of Noah's day were continuing in their daily lives without a single thought of the judgment of God. In His love and mercy for the people of Noah's day, God allowed Noah nearly one hundred and twenty years to complete the building of the ark. Noah was described as "a preacher of righteousness"(2 Peter 2:5), meaning that while he was building the ark he was continually warning his friends and neighbours what the Holy God was about to do. However, no one heeded his warning. Through all that time, God waited patiently as Noah preached and warned the people about what was coming (1 P 3:20 & Heb 11:7). However, they did not believe Noah. Their hearts were hard and their ears were dull; and no one repented, and no one cared to seek God. Then the flood came and took them all away, just as the Lord had said.

Our Lord warns us not to be indifferent or careless in our daily life. He tells us the importance of watching because we do not know when He will return. He said in Rev 3:3, "*I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you*". The image of the thief in the night was also affirmed by the apostles Peter and Paul as they said, "*For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night*" (1Thess. 5:2, 4; 2 Pet. 3:10). Therefore, it is important to be vigilant at all times.

The meaning of this parable of the thief in the night, is to heed Our Lord's warning of His sudden coming and our need to be ready

because no one knows the hour or the day of His return. He gives us a clear picture of the state of the world before His coming as it was in the days of Noah before the flood.

We can compare the suddenness of the return of our Lord to the moment when a thief unexpectedly strikes and robes. It will be disastrous with judgment and everlasting pain.

Those who heed the words of the Lord will be prepared when He comes. As the apostle Paul wrote:

“But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober” (1 Thess 5:4-6)

To be ready for His coming, we must live a godly life, sharing the good news of the gospel with others. Praying and interceding for all people that God opens their hearts to know Him as Lord and Savior.

4. The Parable of The Talents

The parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30, tells us a story of a rich man who was going on a journey. He entrusted to his three servants eight talents which was a significant amount of money, each one according to his ability. He gave one servant five talents, another two talents and another one he gave one talent. When the rich man returned, he heard that the first two men had doubled his money. He was very pleased and said to them, “*Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness*” (Matthew 25:23)

The third man who was entrusted with one talent said to him “Sir, *I knew you to be a hard man, harvesting where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I hid your talent in the ground. Here is your money*” (Matthew 25:24). His master became very angry and said to him, “*You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I harvest where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.. Out to the outer darkness, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matthew 25:24-30).

The Occasion of the Parable

The story of this parable is set in the framework of our Lord's teaching on His Second Coming in Matthew 24 and 25. Our Lord told His disciples just one week before His crucifixion, five parables related to His Second coming. These parables were given to

encourage them to be ready and to use their gifts until He comes. One of these parables is *The Parable of Talents*.

After His resurrection and before ascension, He entrusted them to preach the Gospel, the Good News of salvation, to all nations. He encouraged them not to be afraid to do so, and said: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matthew 28:18-20).

What is the purpose of the parable?

The parable of talents teaches us to be faithful to use our different gifts as God gives us opportunities to serve Him. Our Lord uses this parable to help us understand our calling as Christians and our responsibility to use what God has given us to bring Him glory and honor. The talents represent opportunity to use our abilities, for example, the opportunity to witness to others and to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Good News of salvation. Some are given the opportunity according to their ability to communicate the gospel from door to door. Others are assigned to preach, others to pray, and others to give for the mission work. Some are assigned to write and defend the gospel like the apostle Paul did against the false teachers and the false doctrines.

These opportunities are for all of us to share the good news of salvation in Christ with others through our words and actions. It is a great privilege to serve the Lord, but it also comes with a great responsibility as described here in this parable. The three servants in

the parable fell into two categories: faithful and unfaithful. The first two servants were faithful and took the challenge and used every opportunity by putting their master's money to work. They traded and gained a profit. They received a great reward, sharing the master's happiness. "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness" (Matthew 25:23)

To share the Lord's own happiness is the joyful glorious crown that awaits us in the presence of the LORD, and in particular to those who are faithful in using their different gifts to bring the message of the salvation to others. Paul said to the church in Salonika, "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).

How can we apply the parable for us today?

Let us remember that the parable of the Talents is set in the context of our Lord's teaching of His Second Coming in Matthew 24 and 25. Our Lord said to His disciples in Matthew 25:13, "Watch, for you do not know the day nor the hour when the Son of Man comes". Watching and waiting does not mean sitting and not doing anything. We are to be watching and working.

The third servant was afraid and hid the one talent he was entrusted with. He did nothing. He had very little regard for his master. He saw him as a hard man who was demanding and unfair, and that evil thought create fear and crippled him to serve his master faithfully. He wasted his chances for investing the talents. The master scolded him saying that he should have invested the money

and received interest. The other two servants put their master's money to work, and because of their faithfulness, they each received the same praise and commendations, and both shared the master's happiness.

As the matter of fact, there is no such thing as standing still in Christian ministry. Do not claim that you have no gift. Everyone of us has given opportunities to serve the Lord. Wasted opportunity means loss of the privilege and rewards of service. If we do not use it, we will lose it. Fear to serve the Lord, because 'It is only one talent', means we have a distorted view of Christ our great and loving God. The Head of the Church, who is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, wants us to share His happiness.

To share His happiness is our great reward. Let us then heed His gentle voice "*your are the light of the world ... Be faithful... watch... I AM coming soon*" (Matthew 5:14, Revelation 22:20)

Let us serve the Lord without fear, trusting that He is the Sovereign Lord over all things in heaven and on earth, because He said, "*I will build my Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18). His great presence is always with us "*I am with you always to end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20).

Watch, wait, and work until He comes. Amen.

5. The Two Servants

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:45-51).

This parable is one of the parables in which our Lord Jesus teaches the necessity of watchfulness. Besides emphasizing watchfulness, the Lord also stresses faithfulness. To understand this parable, we need to look at the occasion of the parable; why our Lord Jesus did tell this parable; and, then to apply the message of this parable for us today.

Our Lord Jesus tells this parable in the context of His prophecies about His future return and the signs that will precede it. An important emphasis of this teaching is on the fact that we do not know when He will return. Indeed, He tells His disciples that this is one fact of which they can be sure, when He says, “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only*” (Matthew 24:36). The master in the parable, then, represents our Lord Jesus, and the servants represent those awaiting His return.

The Lord Jesus is coming back! It may be soon. It will be sudden. Is that good news or bad? That stands as both a warning and a promise throughout the New Testament. It's good news or bad, depending on who hears it. That is exactly what this parable is all about, whether or not we will be ready for Jesus' return.

The parable tells us about a good servant who is ready and an evil servant who is not ready. Both are entrusted with the responsibility of managing the household in the absence of their master. The good servant proves to be faithful and wise, and the master rewarded him generously upon his return. But the other servant was lazy, mean, and careless, and so the master inflicted him with severe punishment upon his unexpected return.

There are at least three lessons we can learn from the example of the good servant in this parable:

1. A Good Servant is Faithful

First, his faithfulness is seen in his wisely trusting that the master will return. We are told in verse 45 that he is a “wise servant,” and as such he knows to trust that the master *will return*, and he took his responsibilities so seriously. Notice also the contrast later drawn between this servant and the evil servant, who says in his heart, “*My master is delaying his coming*” (vs. 48).

This also nicely fits the context of the parable, in which Jesus has promised the disciples He will return and has told them to look for it. But watching for Jesus’ return entails a life of obedience to Him, which leads to the next way in which the servant’s faithfulness is demonstrated.

Second, his faithfulness is seen in his commitment to the task his master has given him. We are told in verses 45b-46 that he was “*made ruler over the master’s household, to give them food in due*

season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing."

The wise and faithful Christian is the one who understands the significance of the end and actively serves, whether the time is long or short. We should be impatient for the End to come, weary of evil and longing for the time when evil will be set aside and righteousness is established.

2. A Good Servant is Ready for His Master's Return

As we have seen in verse 46, Jesus says that the good servant is blessed because, when the master comes, he is found doing what he was told to do. Thus, the servant was ready to give an account of what he had done when the master appeared.

If the Lord were to come today, would we be found faithfully obeying what He has called us to do?

3. A Good Servant is Rewarded

We are told of the good servant in verse 47 that "*assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods.*"

This promotion definitely comes as a reward to the good servant for his faithfulness and fits nicely with our Lord's teaching elsewhere regarding rewards. For example:

Matthew 5:10-12, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you".*

The good servant is the one who looks for a heavenly reward from his Master, the Lord Jesus. And for him the comforts and delights of this world pale by comparison. Thus, he will always focus his life on faithful obedience to what Jesus has called him to do.

There are also at least three lessons we can learn from the example of the evil servant in this parable, and these contrast with the three lessons we learned from the good servant.

1. An Evil Servant is Faithless

First, his faithlessness is seen in his lack of trust that the master will return. The evil servant “says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming.’” And in verse 50 we see that he is “not looking for” his master’s return at all!

Second, his faithlessness is seen in his lack of commitment to the task his master has given him. Not only does he not properly look after those entrusted to his care, he mistreats them terribly! In verse 49 we are told that he “begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards.”

This description depicts a life of carelessness about the master’s priorities, which most notably concerns the care of one’s fellow servants. He is like the person who claims to love the Lord, but who does not love his brother. As the Apostle John warns us, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

2. An Evil Servant is Unprepared for His Master’s return

This is clearly seen in verse 50, where the Lord tells us that “the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of.”

Now, remember that the good servant didn’t know when the master would return either, but he was ready when the master came because *he was ready all the time*. In contrast, this evil servant is *never ready!*

3. An Evil Servant is Punished

This is what verse 51 is all about. There we read that the master of that servant “*will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*”

But what precisely does this mean? There are at least three aspects of this punishment that we need to consider.

First, when our Lord Jesus says that the master will “*cut him in two*,” He is using graphic imagery and speaking figuratively to describe the terrible punishment such a wicked servant deserves.

Second, when the Lord says that the master will “*appoint him his portion with the hypocrites*,” we have here an instance where the language of *final judgment* intrudes into the parable, for the parable in context definitely refers to a judgment that will take place *after the Lord Jesus returns*. Those hypocrites are in reality *unbelievers* and can be seen in several other references Jesus makes to hypocrites in this Gospel. For example:

Earlier in Matthew 17:7-9: “*Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”*

Later in Matthew 23:13-15: “*But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves”.*

Third, when our Lord says that there shall be “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*”, He is using a phrase that he typically uses to speak of the

agonizing torment of *the final judgment*, which He clearly has in mind in this passage.

Thus, the Lord warns those who claim to be His disciples that the truth of that claim will be seen in their faithfulness and obedience to Him as they await His return. And the truth of who they really are, even if it is not apparent now, will be made quite clear in the judgment that will occur when He returns. And this judgment will be terrible indeed!

Finally, we need to remember that our Lord Jesus never told His followers how to calculate the day of His return. Rather, He emphasized that our main priority is to make sure we're ready for Him, and that we are occupied in His service when He comes (vv.45-46). So we need not only get ready for His coming but also to keep ready at all time.

Are we ready for the coming of the Lord? Will you be glad to see Jesus when He returns? If not, get ready now. Without delay, turn away from your sin and trust Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. Then keep ready by walking in His will every day.

Part Two

The Parables of the Kingdom

1. The Farmer and His Harvest
2. The Wheat and Weeds
3. The Seed Growing of Itself
4. The Mustard Seed and the Yeast
5. The Treasure and the Pearl
6. The Fishing Net

1. The Farmer and His Harvest

In Matthew 13, there is a list of seven Kingdom parables that have three central themes: the kingdom, the King, and the citizens of the Kingdom of God. In these parables, our Lord Jesus teaches about, what the Kingdom of God is like, how its beginning is like, its progress, the opposition against it, and how its glorious end will be. We are going to study each parable to understand the different dimensions of the Kingdom of God and apply its message for today. Our Lord Jesus is like a Story-Teller. He told many parables to encourage His disciples and make people response to God's truth. A parable is a short story or a metaphor drawn from nature or everyday life, and it was used to illustrate a deeper message of God's truth.

What was the setting of the parable? What is the meaning of the parable? How can we apply the parable for us today? During the first year of Jesus' ministry, His disciples were going through a time of difficulty and disappointment. Jesus was the greatest person they had ever known. They believed that He was the Messiah, and yet they saw that He was being regarded as an enemy by their own religious leaders. He was accused of blasphemy, madness and sorcery. The Pharisees said "*He's blaspheming!*"(Mark 2:7). "*He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons*" (Mark 3:21). His family said, "*He is out of his mind*" (Mark 3:22). Very few people had any faith in Him "*He was amazed at their lack of faith*" (Mark 6:5-6). Some even drove Him out of the town, and led Him towards a hill that they might throw him over the cliff (Luke 4:29).

His disciples must have often asked the question, ‘Is Jesus’ work really going to be successful’ For this reason, Jesus gave them this parable of ‘the Farmer and His harvest’ to encourage them and to show them that although some reject Him, others will accept Him and His work will be successful in the end. With this background let us look at the story of the parable.

“A farmer sows his seed in His field. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It grew up quickly but the plants were scorched by the sun, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times” (Mark 4:1-8).

The disciples of Jesus asked him to explain this parable and He said; Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:

“When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” (Matt 13:18-23).

The point of this parable was this, the success of God's work is certain, in spite of all evil in the world symbolized by birds, rocks and thorns, the enemies of the farmer and his seeds. Just as the farmer looked at the harvest, and he saw his work in some parts of his field had been wasted, by birds, rocks, and thorns, yet his harvest was great, "Some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times", His work in the end succeed. In the same way God's work will succeed at the end.

Our Lord Jesus is encouraging the ministers of the gospel of His Kingdom as if He is telling us, "Don't be downhearted or surprised when you see that evil is strong. God's plan of bringing many to salvation will succeed. The end will show that". The Bible in Heb 2:9-10 "*But we do see Jesus... now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone and to bring many sons and daughters to glory*".

In Revelation 7, the Apostle John saw the vision of the end and he said, "*I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes*". And John knew who they are and where did they come from. "*These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God... Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst... For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.'* 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes'.

How do we apply this parable for us today?

Let us rest assured on God's perfect plan for your life and His wonderful end of His Church. If you do so you will be saved from despair. Despair comes to us when we do not look straight at evil, and are surprised when it comes. Despair comes to us when we forget that God cannot be defeated.

Some may laugh at the good things you do. You may question why unjust accusations were made against you or to someone you love. Or you ask; why some Christians are being persecuted and many refuse to listen to the good News of salvation? You may be surprised why there is so much evil in the world!

But remember that our Lord Jesus was tempted; He was despised, rejected, accused and was killed. But He endured suffering and defeated Satan and death. And because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help us who are being tempted too (Hebrews 2:18).

The Bible says in, “*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Look to God's great harvest and do not worry about some parts of God's field are wasted, “for not all have faith, but those who God appointed for eternal life will believe”.

2. The Wheat and Weeds

The parable of the wheat and the weeds or tares in Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43 is filled with spiritual significance and truth. It comes with an explanation! Our Lord Jesus explains what it means! Let us see what was the occasion of the parable? What is the point of the parable? How can we apply the parable for us today?

When our Lord Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God is “*at hand and in it is their midst*”, the Jews misunderstood it and expected to be a kingdom of prosperity, health, wealth, and Israel would be the best nation on earth.

For that misunderstanding our Lord Jesus taught them many parables that explain what the kingdom of God looks like. He taught them that the kingdom of God is not like the kingdom of the world but it is a spiritual kingdom where people experience a time of conflict and deceit. He told the parable of the wheat and the weeds. Here is what the kingdom of heaven is like, “*A man planted good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came. The enemy planted weeds among the wheat. The wheat began to grow and form grain. At the same time, weeds appeared.*” *The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you plant good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?’ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.* The servants asked him, ‘*Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?’ ‘No,’ the owner answered. ‘While you are pulling up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the workers, first collect the weeds. Tie them in bundles to be burned. Then gather the wheat. Bring it into my storeroom.’”*

The Disciples of Christ did not understand the parable and asked Him; "*Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.*" He answered; the farmer who sowed the good seed is the Son of man (Jesus). The field is the world including the Church. The good seed are the sons of the kingdom. Weeds/Tares are the sons of the evil one, the unbelievers. The enemy who sows the weeds is the devil. The harvest is the End of the age. And the harvesters are the angles

"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear" (Matt 13: Matt 13:36-39 & 40-43)".

The question now is what is the point of the parable? The Parable teaches us about God, His Kingdom in the world. Also points to Satan's work in the world and what should we do until the coming of the Lord.

What does this parable teach us about God?

This parable teaches us that God is patient with the world. He waits until the message of the gospel reaches every corner in the world and people have the opportunity to hear the Gospel of salvation. The Bible say that God "wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4) God is "patient He does not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).God says also in Ezekiel 33:11, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live".

Yes, God is patient. He is giving people the maximum opportunity to mature into either wheat or weeds. But God's patient is not everlasting, and when His mercy is not matched by repentance, the result is judgment.

Hell is real. But there is hope for all people in their lifetime if they repent. Our Lord said in Matthew 13:40-50, "*This is how it will be at the end of the age; The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" And in John 5:28-29 the Lord said, "*Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned*".

What does this parable teach us about God's Kingdom in the world today?

When Jesus preached about the kingdom of God, He was not preaching about a golden age of peace and prosperity, but a long period of growth in which his disciples are to produce fruit for the kingdom. He told us in this parable that God's kingdom on earth is mixed with two types of people – the wheat, the sons of the kingdom. They are the good seed that Jesus planted in the world, His field, to shine in the darkness. The Lord also tells us that Satan is the enemy of God's kingdom. The devil tries to destroy Christ's work by placing his flowers, the bad seed in the world who lead many astray. The evil one comes to sow bad seed to spoil the good seed, to frustrate God's plan. The bad cause the good to sin. The conflict between good and evil, between God and Satan will continue to the end of the age and in this conflict Satan loses the battle.

But even though the kingdom is mixed now, and the weeds coexist with the wheat, but the time will come when the weeds are taken out at the end of the age and God's kingdom will only be wheat. Everything that causes sin and all who do evil will be thrown into hell forever. The righteous *will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*

What does this parable teach us about our spiritual work in the world till the coming of the Lord?

As God's children, we shouldn't be quick to judge the weed and try to root them out. We should tell people of God's patience and encourage them to choose to be wheat instead of weeds because a time for judgement is coming and then it'll be too late.

In farming, weeds can never produce grain. But when it comes to the gospel of the kingdom of God, weeds can be changed. God allowed good and bad grow together, but he doesn't want the bad to stay bad. He wants them to change. It depends on each person's choice. How the bad become counted as "good" is when he or she accepts Jesus as our lord and Saviour. God gives people time to choose. But this will not go on forever. The judgment day will come, and the weeds will be removed from the kingdom (v. 41).

The owner of the field tells the servants not to pull up the weeds, but to leave them until the time of the harvest. Our Lord Jesus never instructed us to be impenitent with those who refuse to accept him as the Lord and Saviour. Don't be too hasty, he tells his servants. Wait and see. There will be a harvest.

How then we apply the parable today?

- Be wheat. Be saved. Be light. Be patient.
- Preach the Gospel to them.
- Remember, Satan is your enemy not the weeds. Watch and live godly life.
- Pray and intercede for the weeds. Jesus is coming soon

As children of God we should hear what Jesus says here so that our attitude toward the world might be the loving, merciful, compassionate attitude of Jesus who has called us to witness rather than condemn, loving rather than hating, to show mercy rather than judgment.

When our Lord comes heaven will be a reality on earth, and in the New Heaven and the New earth and there will be “*what no eye has seen what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him*”. “He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will pass away.’ He who is seated on the throne says, ‘I am making everything new!’ Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

3. The Seed Growing of Itself

In Mark 4:26-29, our Lord Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. Each morning he saw the seed sprouts and grows. First produces a stalk and leaves, then the head, then the full grain in the head. Jesus emphasizes that the man who scattered the seed cannot even fully understand how it happens. The earth produces grain and reached harvest without his help. Seeds grow of themselves: farmers do not push them up

Why Jesus told this parable?

When Jesus declares "*the kingdom of God is at hand*", many people including His disciples were impatient to see this happen. They wanted Him to act quickly and use violence to implement the kingdom of God on earth. Some of them wanted to declare Him king. For these reasons Jesus told them the parables of the kingdom including this one "*the Seed growing of itself*". So what is the Kingdom of God means? When our Lord Jesus used the word "Kingdom" He did not mean the same thing as the Jews of the first did. Jesus emphasizes that the kingdom of God is not earthly kingdom, with a king's throne and armies to deliver the Jews from the Romans occupation. He said clearly "*My kingdom is not of this world*" (John 18:36). The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom, in which God in Christ, the Promised Saviour delivers all people from the power of Satan and sin. It is not a place you can see but it is in us where God rules in our hearts. Our Lord said in Luke 17:20-21, "*The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst*". It has begun like sowing the seed but it will completely arrive at the harvest time when Jesus comes. It

has begun when Jesus came to earth to destroy the devil's work as He said "*When you see Me casting out evil spirits by the finger of God, then you will know that the kingdom of God has began*" (1 John 3:8; Luke 11:20)

What is the point of the parable?

God is at work in the world just as He is at work in the ground when seeds have been sown. The Gospel of the kingdom, the Good News of Salvation is sown in the world, proclaimed by the Word of God which is the seed, and will bring the harvest. It grows secretly, although it seems hard to believe this. The result is in God's hand, not in us.

Seeds grow of themselves: farmers do not push them up. Do not be anxious. Trust God. Continue to work for Him. Plant the seeds and leave the result to God. The fact that the plant grows without the farmer's intervention means that God can accomplish His purposes in the hearts of those who believe in Him even when we are unaware of what He's doing. At the harvest time, the seed of God's Word will bring forth its fruit, and the Lord of the harvest will be glorified (Luke 10:2).

How do we apply this parable for us today?

Because our trust in God who is in control presents events as well as the future too, we learn how to control anxiety. Because our confidence in God, we learn how to overcome impatience.

We have a choice between trusting God or worrying. If we trust God, we can begin to face our situation in a new way. The Bible says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be*

anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7)

The Apostle Paul says, “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose ... For I am convinced that neither death nor life... neither the present nor the future, nor any powers... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:28 & 35-39).

The truth of this parable is well illustrated in the growth of the early church as the Apostle Paul says in 1 Cor 3:5-7, “*I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow”.*

Just like a farmer cannot force the plant to grow, we cannot force spiritual life or growth on others. But as the Apostle Paul says to the Philippine Church, “*Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 1:6)

The way God uses His Word in the heart of an individual is mysterious and completely independent of human effort.

Let us trust God. Do our best, plant the seed. Proclaim the Good News of the Gospel of salvation. Leave the result to God. God makes things grow and He will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. May we be faithful in “sowing the seed,” praying for a harvest, and leaving the results to the Lord!

4. The Mustard Seed and the Yeast

On the Sabbath Day, Lord Jesus asked the people who were at the Synagogue “*What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.*” Again he asked, “*What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough*” (Luke 13:18-21).

The occasion of the kingdom parables

During the ministry of Lord Jesus on earth, many Jewish religious leaders were against Him, they said “*He is possessed by the prince of demons*”. Even His family was against Him too, they said “*He is out of his mind*” (Mark 3:21-22).

His disciples and the ordinary people who followed Him must have been disappointed. They did not understand why Jesus having such opposition. For these reasons, our Lord Jesus told them many parables that describe the different aspect of the Spiritual kingdom of God. In these parables, our Lord Jesus pointed out to, what the kingdom of heaven is like; how its beginning, its progress, how the opposition against it is like and how its glorious end will be.

The beginning of the Kingdom of Heaven and its progress like mustard seed, small, but grows to be a great tree. The opposition against it likes weeds among the wheat. The weed planted by the devil who causes sin and disrupts our progress, our joy and our peace in Christ (Matt 13:24-29 & 37-43). But the glorious end of the Kingdom is like a great harvest of a hundred, sixty or thirty times of what was sown (Matt 13:23). Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

The Occasion of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

Our Lord told these two parables in Luke 13, after he healed a woman on the Sabbath day. She was bent over for eighteen years and could not straighten up at all. Jesus saw her and put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. The synagogue leader got angry and said, “*There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.*” The Lord answered him, “*You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, who suffered for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?*”

Healing on the Sabbath and Jesus' welcoming common people and non Jews, entering their homes and ate with them caused many religious leaders to act against Jesus and they made plan to kill Him. For these reasons, the disciples of Jesus were disappointed and they did not understand the nature of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus proclaimed. They hoped that He would overcome all His enemies with armies of angles from heaven and set immediately the golden kingdom of God and set on His throne and rule the world from Jerusalem. So the Lord told these two parables to show that, although God's kingdom was small at the beginning like a mustard seed, and like a small amount of yeast, it would be very great in the end.

What is the Point of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast?

These two parables are two sides of the same coin. The mustard seed portrays the extensive growth of the kingdom of God, and the yeast describes the intensive growth of the kingdom. So how is that a picture of the Kingdom of God?

To the disciples; small beginnings, much discouragement. To Lord Jesus; small beginnings led to large endings. Our Lord Jesus started

growing the kingdom of God with a handful of disciples. One by one, He called them. Then He sent them out to win others to the kingdom. Like mustard seed, from small beginning, the kingdom of God in Christ has grown and grown to be a great tree and its branches fill the earth. It will be at the end of time, as the vision of Revelation 7:9, “*a great multitude no one could count it*”.

Our Lord used the mustard seed to describe also the tiniest amount of faith (Luke 17:6). But in this parable He mentions the growth, but the main emphasis seems to be on the beginning (very small) and the end (very large).

But there's one more detail to consider: "*The birds of the air perched in its branches*" (Matt13:19), are not enemies but welcomed guests. The birds of the air represent the Gentile nations seeking God of Israel and they are those whom Christ admonished His disciples to go to them and preach the Gospel to all nations. See also (Daniel 4:12, 21; Psalm 104:13; Ezekiel 17:23; 31:6). But unlike that in the Parable of the Swore in Matthew 13:12, the birds pecking at seed along the path stand for the devil "*who comes and takes away the word from their hearts*".

Like a yeast: Small amount of yeast will leaven a large amount of flour. This is how the kingdom of in Christ will be. It may start as a very tiny “seed” or a tiny lump of “yeast,” but, it is able to grow from small beginnings, to large endings “*a great multitude no one could count it*” (Rev 7:9).

Occasionally people get confused about this parable. They reason that since leaven is used negatively sometimes (Luke 12:1; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 5:9), that it must be negative in the Parable of the Leaven. As we've seen in the Parable of the Mustard, that assumption isn't warranted.

How can we apply the parable for us today?

Do you ever get discouraged? We all do. Sometime, you've worked so hard, but the outcome as you look at it seems so small and so tiny and you get discourage. The disciples of Jesus may have felt that way about the Kingdom of God. Too often we, like Jesus' disciples, are tempted to give up when we see the tiny, struggling beginnings, and think that's all there will be. Do not be discouraged "*Don't despise the day of small things*" Zechariah 4:10

So Jesus' parables about the small mustard seed turns to a big tree and tiny yeast transforms the flour to big dough are a very good encouragement for you and me, too. Don't quit. Don't judge your small efforts "*Little is much if God is in it.*" Look to everything from the lens of heaven, the end will be great "*For we walk by faith, not by sight*" (2 Cor 5:7).

Father, too often we believe only what our eyes see, and we get discouraged. Forgive our faint heart. Help us to be filled with your hope and your vision for your Kingdom. Expand our seeing, mushroom our understanding. Help us to see the Kingdom of God from the Heaven's eye not as our eyes see it. In Jesus holy name, we pray. Praise the Lord. Amen.

5. The Treasure and the Pearl

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44-46).

The story of the parable of the Hidden Treasure might be like this: Filed for sale, rented to a farmer who suddenly whiles he is working in it hit a hard object and discovered a treasure box. He knew the value of the treasure was clearly greater than that all he possessed. The man decided to sell everything he had to buy this field in order to have the treasure, and that what he did.

The story of the Pearl of Grate Price might be like this, there was a merchant who spent his life buying pearls and selling them at a profit. One day he found one was very especially valuable, but he could not pay the price. He went home and thought about this great pearl. Then he decided to sell all his possessions in order to have it. And that what he did.

In order to understand these two parables, we need to ask, first, what was the occasion of the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of great price? And what is the point of these two parables? And how can we apply its message today?

The occasion of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

There were some people who heard the teaching of the Lord Jesus and saw His miracles and had to decide if they would join Him or not. They were wondering, was it wise to follow Him, or foolish?

We read in Mark 10:17-30 of one of these people, a rich man, our Lord Jesus said to him “*Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me*”.

In these two short parables, our Lord Jesus was helping such people to make their decision. He was saying “*If you decide to follow me, you will gain more than you will lose*”. *I will fill your heart with great joy, like the man who found the treasure and the merchant who got the pearl of great price*”. And this is the point of these two parables.

The kingdom that our Lord Jesus offers us is worth the cost. God offers the treasure and the pearl to people who perceive the value of the kingdom. They find Christ as the priceless treasure. The Bible says Colossians 2:3, that in Christ “*are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*”. And He is as the Wisdom of God according to Proverbs 3:15, “*is more precious than rubies; and nothing you desire can compare with Him*”.

Our Lord Jesus made known the hidden things of the kingdom by these two parables, but they remain hidden for those who cannot see their value. But like the man who finds treasure or the merchant in pearls, those who do perceive the value of the kingdom will sacrifice anything to obtain it.

In the parable of the Hidden Treasure, the farmer found it although he was not looking for it. In the other parable of the Pearl, the merchant found it by searching. They find Christ, filled with joy, they count the cost, give up everything to gain Him, the priceless treasure, and enjoy Him forever.

All the Saved people find Christ and enjoy the eternal life He gives in different ways. It comes to some by surprise. Others find it after long years of searching. Let us look to some examples; In John chapter 4, our Lord Jesus revealed Himself to the Samaritan woman as the Living Water at the well of Jacob, and she became the first Gentiles believers who preach the good news of salvation.

In Acts chapter 8, our Lord Jesus revealed Himself to Saul of Tarsus, as the Risen LORD GOD, and Saul became the first Jew who preaches the Gospel of Salvation to the Gentiles (Acts 9).

In Matthew chapter 2, the Wise men came from the east looking for Christ, the King, and when they found Him, they were filled with great joy and worshiped Him. The first minister of Ethiopia came from the south to Jerusalem, and in His way back, Philip met him and He found Jesus, as the Crucified and Risen Saviour. Filled with joy, he went home rejoicing (Acts 8).

But to all the saved who search for Him or He comes to them, they find Christ as the priceless treasure. All may say with the Apostle Paul, “*Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him*” (Philippians 3:7-8).

When the Apostle Paul says: “*I consider all things loss that I may gain Christ and be found in him*”, one may say; “That God gives us eternal life freely and that no one can buy God’s gift of salvation”.

Yes, justification is only in Christ’s perfect work on the Cross. It is by God’s grace alone, received by faith alone. Yes eternal life is full

and free and no one can buy it. Yes, it is a gift of God not by work. But even gifts have to be received at the cost of something. Two children are playing outside their house. Their mother calls “*Come in and have your dinner.*” The dinner is free, but until they give up their play they will not be able to receive it and enjoy it.

We receive God’s grace of salvation by faith and surrender our heart to Him, giving up our old life and enjoy Him in the new life.

How we apply these two parables today?

Let us seek Jesus the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price. Let us enjoy His endless joy. Let us glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. Our Lord said in Mathew 13:43, “*Whoever has ears, let them hear*”. And he said in Revelation 22:17, “*Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life*”. His great invitation to the perfect happy life still for us today as it was to the people of old, “*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live*” (Isaiah 55:1-3).

Yes, still His voice is calling us today “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty*”(Matt 11:28 & John 6:35).

6. The Fishing Net

This parable of the fishing net is the seventh of a series of seven that Jesus told His disciples to describe the different aspect of the kingdom of heaven according to Matthew 13.

It is not really a story, but a description of what the fishermen do. Our Lord Jesus says, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:47-50)

What was the occasion of the parable?

What is the point of the parable?

How can we apply the parable to us today?

During the ministry of Lord Jesus on earth, many Jewish religious leaders were against Him, they said "*He is possessed by the prince of demons*". Even His family was against Him too, they said "*He is out of his mind*" (Mark 3:21-22).

His disciples and the ordinary people who followed Him must have been disappointed. They did not understand why Jesus having such opposition. For these reasons, our Lord Jesus told them many parables that describe the different aspect of the Spiritual kingdom of God. In these parables kingdom, our Lord Jesus pointed out to, what the kingdom of heaven is like; how its beginning, its progress, how the opposition against it is like and how its glorious end will be.

Q: What is the Point of the parable of the Fishing Net?

This Parable is telling us of three scenes; the net in the sea, the net at shore, separation the good fish from the bad. The net in the sea represents preaching of the Gospel of salvation in Christ, who came to save the lost in the sea of the world.

The sea in the Bible represents nations of the world “The waters which you saw, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (Revelation 17:15). Our Lord called His disciples to be fishers of men. He said to them “*Follow me and I will make you fishers of men*” (Matt 4:19) And He said to them “*Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation*” (Mark 16:15).

The net had to be cast in the sea. The Gospel of Christ has to be preaching to the whole world. As long as the net in the sea, all nations, all people, all have chance to hear the message of salvation.

But the net will not be in the sea forever, it will draw to shore. This was the second scene in the parable; the net at shore. Preaching the Gospel will not be forever, some day when Jesus comes, our work as light to the world is done. The door of Grace is closed. No more second chances.

Then we come to the third scene, separation the good fish from the bad. Separation the righteous from the evil at the end of time as our Lord said, “*So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matthew 13:49-50).

At the end of time, the Lord will come and then the greatest assembling and separation will occur. He says, “*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, He will sit on his*

glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left (Matt25:31-46; Mark 13:26-27)

We read also in Matthew 25:41-46, “*Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life’.*

The Lord has given the Apostle John to see a Vision of The Great White Throne and the Book of Life, and John say “*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life... Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).*

Our Lord also said in John 5:28-29, “*Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned*”.

The parable of the fishing net is a vivid description of the coming Day of the Lord, and how the believers in Christ will be at the place of honor and the unbelievers will be in outer darkness. But also the fishing net serves as an encouragement for us to continue to cast the net in the sea, preaching the Gospel of salvation to all people to hear it and repent while there is still opportunity. The Bible says, “*Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us*

take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it."
(Hebrews 4:1)

How can we apply the parable to us today?

Let us thank God, that He has chosen us to be in Christ as the good fish and we will be at the place of honour (at His right hand) when He comes where "*what no eye has seen what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him*" (1 Cor 2:9).

Let us then watch and live godly life. Let us pray and intercede for others people. Let us preach the Gospel whenever have the opportunity. And above all let us thank God that you are in Christ who took away our sins.

Part Three

The Nature of the Kingdom

1. The Tailor and Old Coat
2. The Children in the Marketplace

1. The Tailor and an Old Coat

“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse” (Mark 2:21).

The parables of Jesus are divided into three kinds: long story parables, such as “The parable of the wedding garment”; long saying parables, such as “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse” (Mark 2:21); and short saying parables, such as “Can a blind man lead a blind man?” There is no distinction between these three types except their length. There is a story in all of them, a story that uses metaphors based on daily life to convey spiritual truths.

The story of the old coat and the tailor in this parable might be told like this: a man was looking at his old coat, noticing the places where it was badly torn. He had a piece of new cloth in his house, so he took it with his old coat to the tailor, but the tailor said “I cannot patch your old coat with that new cloth. If I did that and you clean it later, the new piece would shrink and the holes would be bigger than ever. The two cannot go together. It will look bad. You need a new coat”.

What is the occasion of the parable?

The Jewish religious leaders came to Jesus with a problem. They said “the disciples of John the Baptist fast as we do. Why is it your disciples do not fast?” In other words, they were saying to Jesus, we keep the traditions of the elders, we do not mix with sinners, we fast, we please God, but you and your disciples do not follow our traditions. In His answer, our Lord used their question to tell them

about Himself and what the life of His followers looks like. The Lord compared Himself to the bridegroom, and His followers to the wedding guests who are joyful not mournful. He explains that in His presence there is no place for sorrow. It is a time of joy. You cannot mix your old way of mourning with the new way of joy that I offer.

And this is exactly what Jesus answered their question, “*How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins*

” (Mark 2:19-22)

What is the meaning of the parable?

Our Lord is saying, do not try to *mix* the life of sorrow, the ‘old garment’ of the traditions of the elders, which is religion of merits, to earn God’s forgiveness by keeping these traditions, with the ‘new garment’ which is the life of joy and God’s grace. In others word, our Lord is saying: Accept and receive God’s forgiveness by faith in me. This is the life of joy that I offer to those who follow Me.

Our Lord said, “*I have come that you may have life, and that you may have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10). The Gospel of John says, “*For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*” (John 1:16-17)

The two, the ‘Law, and the ‘Grace’, cannot go together. That was the problem of the Christians of the first century, particularly in the church of Galatia. The apostle Paul said to them, “*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ... You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?... So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?*” (Gal 1:6-7; 3:1-5)

When our Lord Jesus taught this parable of the Old Coat, he faced an audience trained in Jewish religion of merit. They believed that man must accumulate to his credit many good deeds so that he might convert them into rewards and claim it before God. The Pharisee prayed: ‘*God, I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, evildoers... or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.*’ (Luke 18:11-12)

However, Paul taught very clearly, “*For if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing*”(Galatians 2:21). And he said also “*For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says,*

"The person who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole" (Gal. 3:10-13)

The Bible tells us in Romans 3:24-26, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood to be received by faith".*

Yes, it is by the grace of God that we receive forgiveness of sins, through faith alone, in Christ alone and not of ourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Read Ephesians 2: 8-9).

Unlike the Pharisee in Luke 18:11-12, who was confident of his own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' He relied on God's mercy and grace. Our Lord said, *"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted"* (Luke 18:14).

How can we apply the parable for us today?

Because we are the wedding guests, our Christian life is a life of joy in the grace of God, so we rejoice because we know that Christ the Bridegroom is present with us all the days of our life. God's grace

gives us reason for a song of joy that tells us: we are accepted, forgiven and clothed with the righteousness of Christ. We can always sing "*I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness*" (Isaiah 61:10)

And as the Psalmist says, "*But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name be joyful in You. For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; with favor You will surround him as with a shield*" (Psalm 5:11-12).

2. The Children in the Market place

“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep” (Matthew 11:17)

The story of this parable might be told like this: here we are observing two groups of children at play. A boy of the first team said, “*let us play a wedding*”. Let Dena be the bride and I will be the groom. Bert can be the best man, and Helen the maid of honour. Peter the father of the bride, and Dan will be the priest. They joyfully started the wedding song, but the voices from the other team screamed, “*Not that silly stuff, too glad. That's not for us*”. “*Then let's play a funeral,*” said the leader of the team who first suggested playing the wedding. “I'll be the funeral director, the pallbearers are Steve, Bert, Peter and Larry and Dan can be the dead person. They started a funeral dirge, but the other team again refused to play. They protested saying “*Cut it out. We want none of this sad stuff*”. The boy of the first team said to them “*You are never satisfied. You don't want to play a wedding and you don't want to play a funeral, what do you want?*”

The occasion of the parable

Our Lord Jesus was describing the spiritual condition of the Pharisees and their followers and compared them to children in the marketplace who are not satisfied. Our Lord makes it clear that the religious leaders had rejected John's baptism and were also generally opposed to Jesus as well. He said, “*To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 'We played the flute for you,*

and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds” (Matthew 11:16-19).

What is the meaning of the parable?

The Lord is saying to the Pharisees and their followers, that they are being childish. They are never satisfied, and rejected God’s Word that preached to them in many by John the Baptist and Himself. John the Baptist called them to repent and warned them of God’s judgment. However, they rejected his message saying that it is too severe and he must be possessed: “*He has a demon*”. Then Lord Jesus preached the gospel of joy to all people, but they sneered at Him and said “*He is the friend of tax-collectors and sinner*”.

God’s Word is proved right by all His children. God’s wisdom is not frustrated by an unbelieving generation. It is demonstrated in the changed lives of those who believe. This is how true wisdom of God is justified. Jesus said to the chief priests and the Pharisees “*Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the sinners are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John the Baptist came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the sinners did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him*” (Matthew 21:31-32).

How can we apply the parable for us today?

Have you ever felt frustrated and disappointed with those who criticize you and do not care about the good thing you do for them?

1. People of God, do not be frustrated but rejoice, when you see God's Word preached today in many different ways even though it will be rejected by some, as it was in the days of John the Baptist and Jesus. This will not stop God's plan of salvation to bring many to the light of Christ.
2. Yes, the light of God's Word and the gospel of Christ still shine today and people from every nation are still coming to Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord and saviour. The Lord God Almighty, our Great Redeemer, said, "*My word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it*" (Isaiah 55:11).
3. Our Lord gave His Apostle John who was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus, a great vision. A revelation of a great multitude who come to Christ that no one could count them:

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes...they are before the throne of God and serve him ... and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead

them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:9-17)

Let us trust God, He still at work. He will bring many to the knowledge of Gospel of salvation.

Let us do our best. Proclaim the Good News of the gospel of Christ. Do not be frustrated, but rejoice and plant the seed. Leave the result to God. Our Lord Jesus said, “*I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd*” (John 10:16).

Part Four

Parables of Prayer

1. The Midnight Visitor
2. The Perseverance Woman
3. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

1. The Midnight Visitor

The story of this parable comes after the Lord's teaching on the subject of prayer. His disciples asked Him; "*Lord teach us to pray?*" So the Lord Jesus guided them to what to pray and also how we should pray. Regarding what to pray, He gave us the model of prayer, the Lord's Prayer. It lists everything that we should ask and want in this life. How should we pray, He told them to avoid two kinds of prayers; the hypocrisy prayer and ritual babbling prayer. The Lord does not want us to be like an actor who put on a mask and do his part, or to be like a Parrot who repeats babbling words without understanding them. The Lord said, "*When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, to be seen by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. When you pray, do not keep on babbling like heathens, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him*" (Matthew 6:5-8).

Then our Lord showed us how to pray through two ways: through His own example and He told them the following three parables: the Midnight Visitor, the Perseverance Woman and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

Regarding **the midnight visitor**, the Lord said, "*Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will*

not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his boldness he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:5-13)

The story of this parable illustrates how we should approach God in our prayer. It answers "yes" to the question: *Does God really care about my need?* We should approach God boldly and with confidence with shamelessness persistence as His own dear children. The point of this parable is very clear: God wants us to view Him as the loving Father who cares for His own dear children. In the story we have a man who shows little concern for his friend who came asking for three *loaves* of bread. Why? It was midnight and he was in bed. Who can do such thing?

It was common, and still today in Eastern countries, to ask anything you need from your neighbours or friends. However, it is very odd to ask at midnight unless something is wrong. Hospitality is sacred duty in the Eastern tradition as Abraham showed towards the three visitors who came to him in the heat of the day (Genesis 18:1-8). Failure to show hospitality is shameful for anyone in Eastern communities, and people will look down at the one who did so.

The neighbour's friend gave the bread to his friend, not because of friendship, nor because of the obligation of the traditions of

hospitality, but because of his shamelessness persistence. The man in need was not ashamed to keep on asking even at midnight.

Let us see the story in more details: Here is the picture of a host who wants to show great welcoming and hospitality to his friend who arrives at midnight, but the host has no bread to offer. What is he going to do? There were no evening shops to get some as we have today. He thinks for a moment 'I have to go to my neighbour and ask him, but it is midnight'.

If he knocks at his neighbour door, he might wake the whole place up and his neighbour is not going to like that. 'Shall I let my friend who has just arrived be hungry until the morning, or shall I go and disturb my neighbour friend to get the bread?' You see his dilemma. If he refused to feed his traveller friend, he would break the norm of hospitality, and that would bring shame to his name; and if he would go to his neighbour, he might cause his displeasure. Well, after all, what are friends for? A friend in need, is a friend indeed, right? It is written in Proverb 27:10 "*Better is a neighbour who is near than a brother far away*". So I'm going to knock on my friend's door. It takes only a few minutes to give me the bread. Then he can go back to sleep again. Otherwise this poor fellow who has just arrived is going to be hungry until the morning.' Therefore, he decided to walk to his neighbour's house, knock on his door and ask him for three loaves.

However, he does not get a very enthusiastic response as you can well imagine. We all treasure our sleep. Who likes to be awakened in the middle of the night? So the friend inside the house replies, 'Don't bother me. The door is now shut and the children are sleeping. I cannot get up, go away. In his mind, he was saying, 'Doesn't he know how late it is? This is not the time to be knocking on somebody's door. He should be more considerate than that!'

In such circumstances, it was not easy to be asked to get up in the dark, and find some bread. There was no electricity as we have it today, but this friend is not going to go away. He keeps knocking on the door. He keeps saying, ‘Please, give me some bread because I can’t let my friend go hungry. Could you get up?’ After a while, the grumpy neighbour inside the house realised that he better do something about the request. ‘If I don’t give him these three loaves,’ he thought, ‘this annoying neighbour will keep knocking on my door. He is not ashamed to keep on asking even at midnight and he is going to disturb other people on this street, and put my face to shame. I think it’s better to give him what he wants. That is the only way to stop him from making all that noise’.

Here our Lord is telling us something very important about approaching God anytime, and that in contrast of us as human. The grumpy neighbour, who gave the bread, stands in sharp contrast to God. If even a human friend, however, grumpy, and unwilling he may be, can be forced and get up out of the bed at midnight and give help to his friend in need, how much more will God, Your Father, who is good, not be willing to give you your need?

We have here a ‘how much more’ a spiritual argument, that goes from the lesser to the greater. This rule declares that if it is true in the case of the lesser, so much more will it be true in the case of the greater. The ‘how much more’ argument is that if sinful people can give good gifts to their children, how much more can the heavenly Father make provision for His children.

The first greatest gift God gave us in time is His Son. The apostle Paul wrote, “*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*” (Romans 8:32). The second important gift God could ever give is the Holy Spirit. “*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father*

give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:11). The two highest gifts from God should give us every assurance that He will not withhold from us what really we need. Yes we can approach God anytime as his own dear children, and bring our concern to Him with confidence, with boldness and shamelessness persistence. Therefore, let us come to God, our Father, trusting Him and ask Him what we really need. He cares for you. He is not so distant or unavailable. God wants us to be like Jacob who hung on to the Lord and said, "*I am not going to let you go until you bless me*" (Gen 32:26). "*Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; He wept, and sought favour from* (Hosea 12:4).

Our Lord Jesus wants us to trust His promise "*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened*" (Luke 11:9-10). Let us therefore as the Bible says "*come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" (Heb 4:16).

2. The Perseverance Woman

Jesus told of a story of powerless widow who persistently came to a corrupt, unjust judge to ask for justice for herself: ‘*Grant me justice against my adversary*’ (Luke 18:3). In that story our Lord is encouraging us to persevere in our faith and keep praying and never give up hope, until His Second Coming. At the beginning of the story, in Luke 18:1, our Lord said that “we are to pray and not to give up. At the end of this story our Lord said “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” This parable also gives us the answer to the question: does God really hear our cry, and it is ‘yes’.

In this story of the poor widow, the judge refused to hear her. However, he finally said to himself: ‘*Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and wear me out!*’. The Lord said: “*Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18:4-8).

The Lord Jesus presents three contrasts in the story:

1. Praying contrasted with giving up (v. 1);
2. The widow contrasted with God's elect (vv. 2-5);
3. The judge contrasted with God our Father (vv. 6-8)

The Lord said to His disciples that “*they ought always to pray and not lose heart*” (Luke 18:1). He said this to them after his teaching on His Second Coming. He told them about the manner of His coming, how He will come and how we long to see Him coming to vindicate His people.

He is going to come in a way that is visible and the whole world will see His coming. It will flash across the sky like lightning from one end to the other. And He is going to come in horrific judgment upon unbelievers as it was in the days of Noah, and as it was in the days of Lot. He is coming in His great glory to execute His judgment on those who reject His love and bring glory and justice to those who believed in Him. In days of troubles and persecution upon God's people, as it always has been in the East, Christians in those days longed to see Him come, to vindicate His people with the glory of His eternal kingdom.

This call to pray and not to lose heart is not a call to prayer in general, but it is a call for continual prayer for the Lord's return, particularly in the time of severe persecution. "*Your Kingdom Come*".

If we do not pray, we will lose heart and give up our hope in the coming of the Lord to vindicate His people who cry for Him day and night. Until the coming of the Lord, God's people have to go through tribulation and many suffering. When we cry to the Lord for justice, it might seem that He is not vindicating his people. So here is the test of our faith to continual pray, 'come Lord Jesus'. God is saying that you need to view that event with prayer and not to lose heart. That is the key to unlocking the meaning of the story.

The next contrast in this story that our Lord presented: The Woman contrasted with God's elect (vv. 2-5). The woman came to a court of law, but God's people come to a throne of grace. "*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" (*Hebrews 4:16*). The woman was a stranger to the unjust judge, but we are the children of God. The apostle John wrote, "*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are!*" (*1 John 3:1*). The poor widow had no friend to help her at the court, but we have an advocate to intercede for us, the

Lord Jesus Christ, who is our great High Priest and He is able to empathise with our weaknesses, and gives us grace to help us in our time of need (1 John 2:1 & Heb 4:14-16).

The poor woman didn't lose heart. She kept going to the judge to seek justice and she got what she deserved from a selfish judge. We are to keep going to God in prayer, trusting that someday He will vindicate us.

The third contrast in this story, the Judge contrasted with God our Father (vv. 6-8). The judge was unjust and selfish, and showed no concern for other people, but God is a loving Father, just and attentive to our every cry and concern for our needs. The unjust judge helped the woman because he was afraid that she would wear him out. It is a boxing term and it means to strike someone with a full blow in the eye. It is if as he was saying to himself, "*She was beating me up. This is more than I can stand and she's going to do it forever, if I don't get rid of her. I will do justice to her because I cannot take it anymore*". So the powerful and unjust judge is defeated by her continued persistence, but God answers our prayer because He is good and He is not vexed when we come to Him.

If a poor woman got what she deserved from a selfish judge, how much more will God's children receive what is right from a loving Heavenly Father. The Lord knew then that a long time would go by, and now it is more than 2,000 years by our measurement, not by His. A day with Him is 1,000 years, and 1,000 years is a day because He is eternal. However, for us it is a long time. So God's message to us is very clear: don't lose heart and keep praying to that end. Do not give up hope that Jesus is coming. Mockers will come, as Peter says, "*Where is the promise of His coming? Denying the Second Coming*". Do not lose heart. The Lord said in Matthew 24:13, "*he that endures to the end shall be saved.*" It is that enduring faith that marks the true believer. Let us continue to pray

that the Lord will come and pray for the strength to endure until He arrives, to endure the flesh, the world, the devil, the hostility against the gospel, persecution, rejection, and even martyrdom. This is our continual praying "Your kingdom come. Come Lord Jesus".

There is a similar call by our Lord in Luke 21:36, "*Keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place and stand before the Son of Man.*" We need to pray that Christ will come. You need to pray that we will have the strength to endure until the end, the end of our life and the end until the Lord Himself comes and gather us with all believers since the creation of the world. So this is the meaning of what our Lord said, "*However, when the Son of Man comes will He find faith on the earth?*" Will He find this kind of persevering faith? Will He find this kind of persevering prayer? Will He find this kind of enduring confidence?

At all times we ought to pray and not lose heart. We pray, "Come, Lord Jesus," "Your Kingdom Come" and this ought to be on our lips day after day, and we should live in that kind of anticipation until He comes.

3. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

“Two men went to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thanking God that he was not as sinful as other people, or even as this tax collector. He said to God: I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, humbly standing afar off, would not raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ Our Lord Jesus explained that the tax collector and not the Pharisee went home justified, “for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14).

Our Lord Jesus spoke this parable to some Pharisees who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. This parable teaches of God’s mercy and grace to the poor in spirit. It is in this parable our Lord Jesus illustrates our absolute inability to attain righteousness before God by our ‘good works’.

Our Lord Jesus told many parables to the Pharisees, for two reasons. First, He wanted them to see that their sins and ways of thinking that took them far away from God. Secondly, He wanted them to know that, God is the heavenly Father, who welcomes all people who come to Him and repent of their sins so that they may enjoy the blessings of His Kingdom regardless of their race, or occupation.

What was wrong with the Pharisees? The Pharisees were holding to the traditions of the Elders, the human laws that their father wrote and taught, and they did two wrongs: first, they rejected the

commandment of God; and second, they made the Word of God of no effect (Mark 7:7-13). For example, the Lord said to them, “God says; “*Honour your father and mother*”. But you say, “*If anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God) then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother*” (Mark 7:10-12).

In Matthew 23: 5- 23, our Lord scolded them saying, “*Everything they do is done for people to see... you shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces... Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for pretence make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation... They neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith. They on the outside appear to people as righteous but on the inside they are full of hypocrisy and wickedness*.

Now let us see how Jesus viewed the Pharisee's Prayer. The Pharisee starts off right, with thanking God for how good he himself is! “*That I am not like other men sinners or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and I give a tenth of all I get*” (Luke 18:11-12). The Pharisee did more than the Law of Moses required. The Law of Moses only required one fast per year, on the Day of Atonement, and the tithes of grain, wine, oil, and livestock. The Pharisees went further, to include even garden spices. He felt that He is too righteous and God must look at him and thank him.

In contrast to the Pharisee who come as close to Holy Place of the temple as possible, the tax collector stood at a distance, he would even not look up to heaven, ashamed of his sin, he beat his breast as a sign of mourning and regret , and prayed “*God, have mercy on me, a sinner*” (Luke 18:13). Our Lord's Jesus responded

to this humble attitude and says, “*I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God*” (Luke 18:14). God accepted the prayer of the tax collector and rejected the prayer of the Pharisee. This was shocking! Our Lord did not say that the Pharisee was bad man or did not say that the tax collector was good man.

Why did God accept the tax collector's prayer and reject the Pharisee's? The tax collector asks for forgiveness and God's mercy, and God granted Him. The Pharisee congratulated himself of what good he had done and believed that he could gain God's favour by his own merits. He believed in the traditions and human rules and rejected what the Word of God said by the prophets,

“*The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, No, not one*” (Psalm 14: 2-3). Isaiah 64:6 says: “*But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away*”.

All of us need God's grace and His forgiveness and for this reason Christ has come to the world and died for our sins. The Bible says in Galatians 2:16-21 that we are not “*justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain*” . Yes “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship,*

created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

So what are we going to do after we have heard what the Lord have said? Are we going to stand by our own merits and compare ourselves with others, and be rejected before God; or do we rely on God’s mercy and grace and trust only in Christ’s work on the cross, clothed with the righteousness of God and enjoy the joy of His salvation? We must join by faith relying in God’s mercy and grace with Charlotte Elliott, and sing her great hymn;

Just as I am, without one plea
but that Thy blood was shed for me
and that Thou bid'st me come to Thee
O Lamb of God, I come! I come

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind
Sight, riches, healing of the mind
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Part Five

Parables of service and Judgment

1. The Parables of Joy
2. The Rich man and Lazarus
3. The Shrewd Manger
4. The Generous Employer
5. The Good Samaritan
6. The Great Banquet
7. The Wedding Garment
8. The Wicked Tenants

1. The Parables of Joy

We may call the three parables found in Luke 15, the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son ‘the parables of joy’. They describe the citizens of the kingdom of God who are loved even though they were lost, but were found, accepted, forgiven and rejoiced.

The story of the lost sheep might be told like this, a shepherd had a hundred sheep and at evening he brought them home to his the sheep fold. As he counted them, he discovered that one was lost. He left the ninety-nine in the sheep fold, where his family lived, and went after the lost sheep to find it. After a long and hard search, he found it. Joyfully put it on his shoulders and took it home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘*Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep*’. Our Lord Jesus said: “*I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent*” (Luke 15:4-7).

In the parable of the ‘lost coin’, the ten silver coins refer to a very expensive piece of jewellery with ten silver coins on it which was worn by the Israelite women in the first century. It hung on a veil or around a woman’s neck. The story of the lost coin might be told like this, a woman who had ten silver coins and lost one of them. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house and searches carefully to find it. When she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘*Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I lost!*’

The Lord Jesus said, “*In the same way, I tell you, “there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents”* (Luke 15:8-10).

The story of the Lost Son might be told like this, a man had two sons; one day the younger demanded his inheritance, which would

belong to him after his father's death. His father gave it to him. The younger son left home and went to a far away country, and there lived he a wild life and wasted all his money. He became homeless, hungry, and sorrowful. He thought of his father's home and said to himself, my father's servants are cared for and happier than me. He hoped to be one of them and head home to ask his father to hire him as a servant.

As his father was watching the road, he saw his son, and ran down the road to welcome him. As the son began to confess the wrongs that had done, and before he could ask to be employed as a servant, his father called for a robe, a ring and sandals for his son, and declared that he is fully accepted and all is forgotten and forgiven.

What was the occasion of these three parables?

Our Lord told these three parables as a reply to the criticism of Jewish religious leaders who describes Him as "A *friends of tax collectors and sinners*". By telling the parables of the lost sheep, and the lost coin, and the lost son, our Lord explained why He welcomed such people. The point of these three parables is this: our Lord is calling the leaders to share in God's love and His care for the lost and not to despise them. The three parables describe the state of man and what sin has done to him, and how the loving God is seeking him and fulfils his need.

Like the shepherd who saved his sheep that does not know the way back; and the woman who found her coin that does not able to tell where it was, and the father who welcomed his rebellious son, who left home and went astray, so the loving God did so with all His redeem children. The Bible says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). These three parables reflect also three different joys in heaven: the joy of finding, joy of returning, and joy of forgiveness as our Lord

Jesus said, “*there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents*” (Luke 15:8-10).

The powerful message of these parables comes from the shame/honor aspect of Jewish biblical culture. To lose a sheep as a shepherd would be a very shameful thing; a coin from a piece of bridal jewelry lost in her own house would be sign of cold love; and the lost son, which was the worst of all in Jewish culture. God is saying to us: My glory, honour and joy is to find, display my love and forgive my loved one. I cannot, and I will not, rest until I find My sheep that have gone astray. The Bible says, “*For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations ... I will tend them in a good pasture ... There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture ... I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak*” (Ezekiel 34:11-16). Praise God

How can we apply these parables to us today?

Everybody in these stories experienced joy except the older brother. The shepherd, the woman, and their friends all experienced the joy of finding. The younger son experienced the joy of returning and being received by a loving and gracious father. The father experienced the joy of receiving his son back safe and sound, but the older brother had no joy. The older brother became very angry and refused to go in to celebrate his brother's return. So his father went out and pleaded with him to come in and rejoice and welcome his brother. His father said to him, “*my son, we had to celebrate and*

be glad, because your brother was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:25-32).

Our Lord Jesus is saying to us; will you have the outlook of the older brother or the loving attitude of the father towards the black sheep of the family? Are you going to stand apart from your younger brother, who is like a lost coin, or will you share in God’s love and seek and find him? If you share in God’s love, you will also share in His joy and you will sing praises to Him with all the angels of heaven.

Let us show God’s love and care to everyone. Let us continue to pray that: “God’s kingdom come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. Let us remember the words of our Lord in these three parables, *“I tell you there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent”*.

We must always celebrate and be glad, because we were dead and now we are alive again. We were lost but Jesus found us. God’s glory, honor and joy is to find, and display His great love to us all.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:1-6).

2. The Rich man and Lazarus

"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "(Luke 16:19-31)

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus may be viewed as a drama in two acts followed by a conclusion. The first scene is a presentation of life and death on earth, and the second portrays heaven and hell. The conclusion is given in the form of implicit application.

The story of the parable tells us about a very wealthy Jew, who lives a luxurious life like a king. Outside his gate a very poor Jew, named Lazarus, was looking just “*to eat what fell from the rich man’s table.*” In time, they both died. Lazarus was welcomed into the bosom of Abraham in heaven, while the rich man was condemned to hell. The Jews used to call heaven the “*bosom of Abraham*”, which means, “*side of or next to Abraham*” as a place of honor. God’s reward to all who believe in the one true God as Abraham did.

In hell, the rich man looked and saw Lazarus next to Abraham in heaven, and he prayed that Lazarus come down to cool his tongue with a drop of water to reduce his agony. He also asked Abraham to send Lazarus to earth to warn his five brothers not to come to this place of torment. Both requests were refused. He was told that if his brothers did not believe in the Word of God, neither would they believe even if one rose from the dead and appeared to them.

What was the occasion of the parable?

Some Pharisees and teachers of the Law were mingling in the crowd where Jesus has been teaching. They criticised Him, because He welcomed the sinners and spend time with them. They also mocked Jesus calling him, “*a friend of sinners and tax collectors*”. Our Lord Jesus illustrates to them two important facts: first, that God loves sinners and he came to save them; and the second, He said that everyone should be wise to secure their eternal life and set their minds on things above, not on earthly things. He stressed of this on many different occasions.

In Luke 16:9-13 our Lord said, “*I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves; so that when it is gone, you will be*

welcomed into eternal dwellings...You cannot serve both God and money". He also said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall added unto you...Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:19-33). When Jesus taught about the importance of seeking the heavenly things first, the Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus" (Luke 16:14). At this point, our Lord responded again and told them the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

The main point of the parable is this; the necessity of believing the Word of God before it is too late. The parable illustrates what eternity looks like on both sides – heaven and hell. Our Lord presented the call to repent before it is too late. Once we cross the eternal horizon, it is final. There is no second chance. God continues to offer the many chances to all people to believe His Word before it is too late.

There is much that we can learn from what our Lord said in this parable. First, Jesus teaches here that heaven and hell are both real, literal places. Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke about hell a great deal, as did Paul, Peter, John, Jude, and the writer of Hebrews. The *Bible* is clear that every person who has ever lived will spend eternity in either heaven or hell. The transition to our eternal state takes place the moment we die (2 Cor 5:8; Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23). When believers die, they are immediately in the conscious fellowship and joys of heaven. When unbelievers die, they are just as immediately in the conscious pain, suffering, and torment of hell. In hell, rich and poor are there not because of what evil they had done in their life, but for what they failed to do. They are there because they had disregarded God's love and did not accept His call to salvation and reject His Word. In heaven, both rich and poor are

there not because good things they had done in their life, but because they had received God's grace and accept His call to salvation and believed His Word. In hell, agony is forever, but in heaven, happiness is forever.

How can we apply this parable?

First, do not look for a big miracle to believe in God. The Word of God is all sufficient. The rich man and his five brothers were against the Word of God, and he thought that a miracle can change their lives. In the parable, Abraham said to the rich man, '*they have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them*', but he replied "*no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent*" (Luke 16:30). The rich man and his five brothers were saying 'no' to the Word of God. It was not sufficient. They said we need miracle to believe. There is no cure for the unbelief as Abraham said to him, '*If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead*' (Luke 16:31). It is not a matter of evidence, because Lord Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and He Himself raised from the dead, but the unbelievers leaders of the Jews, except for Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, rejected these great miracles of resurrection. The second application of the parable is this, take the attitude of Samuel toward God, "... Speak *LORD*, for your servant is *listening*" (1 Samuel 3:10).

There are three attitudes to the Word of God. One is to say, I do not believe it. This was the attitude of the rich man and his five brothers. They reject God's Word. The second is to put the Word of God even with you. You accept what you like and reject what you do not like. This was the attitude of some of the Pharisees and some of

the Jewish priests. The third attitude is put yourself beneath the Word of God. This is the attitude of those who say with David, “*Your Word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path*” (Psalm 119:105).

The Bible says, “*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...*” (Psalm. 95:8). “*Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Col. 3:16-17).

3. The Shrewd Manager

This parable is mentioned in Luke 16:1-13, and tells us a story of a rich landowner, and his shrewd manager who had complete responsibility for his estate, and certain tenants who owed rent to the landowner. There are two things we need to look at in that parable: First, the narration of the parable. The drama of the story which focuses on the carelessness of the steward, his concern, his shrewdness and the commendation he received from his employer. The second is, the applications of this parable for us today. “*There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, ‘what is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer”* (Luke 16:1-2). The rich man accuses his manager of carelessness and misusing the money of his estate. He fired him and asked him to close up the books.

“*The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I will do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses”* (vv.3-4).

The manager is concerned about his future. He has a big problem. He knows what it is, and he thought how he can solve it. The manager said, ‘I cannot dig, I cannot beg’. I am no longer young to work, I am ashamed to beg, I cannot do so. I found a solution of my problem’ “*So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master? ‘Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.’ Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe? ‘A thousand bushels of*

wheat,’ he replied. He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred’” (Luke 16:5-7).

Here we see his shrewdness, his wisdom to secure his future. The manager gets each tenant to reduce the amount owed and signs it himself. One reduced his bill to fifty percent and another to twenty percent and he did the same with each tenant. The manager felt satisfied about what he did. Although he lost his job with the rich man, he had made some new friends who now owed him substantial favours. They could hire him for causal work to manage their business, and so, he secured his future. That is what he meant by saying, “*When I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses*” (Luke 16:4).

Now, to the most puzzling thing in the story, Jesus said that, “*The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly*” (v.8). The rich man’s response was upside down. He commended his dishonest steward, which is opposite to what one would expect. Such a person would normally be thrown into jail. Our Lord, too said “*For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light*” (v.9)

On the surface it looks as though Jesus is here commending this steward for his unjust actions, and that, even more so, he seems to be commanding him for using his money to win friends. Jesus does not actually commend the actions of the steward, just his tactics and his shrewdness, which means his wisdom to secure his earthly future.

What is the purpose and applications of the parable?

The dishonest steward secured his earthly future by being generous to his master's debtors. He used the opportunity and the authority which was still in his hand, worldly wealth of his master, and he made his master's debtors friends who would hire him in the future. The Lord Jesus said, "*I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money*" (Luke 16:9-13).

The Lord Jesus is giving us two lessons to apply. The first lesson is, be like the manger in his wisdom, work for your future in heaven. The second lesson is, do not be like the manger in his dishonesty, but be honest in all that you do. Jesus wants us to see a comparison of how we live our lives and how God would like us to live our life. The people of this world who only live for this world, with their shrewd wisdom and methods, they may have their 5-year business plans, their schemes to reduce costs and their strategies to maximise output. They study, work, save, calculate, and predict, in order to achieve their aims. They seize every opportunity that is available, and when none is available they create opportunities. They will often sacrifice their time and energy, in order to achieve their ambitions. They are often very shrewd.

What about us, we who are called ‘the people of the light’? What are our spiritual plans for the future? We who have a clear mandate to preach the Good News of salvation, to win friends for Christ; to obtain our crowns in heaven; to do good; to oppose evil; to resist temptation; to relieve suffering; to promote unity in Christ and, to support honest practices in the workplace. How do we compare to that manager for shrewdness, what noble sacrifices are we engaged in to further the work of God’s kingdom, or are we just leaving it all to someone else? The Bible says, “*Be very careful, then, how you live not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil*” (Ephesians 5:15-16). Our Lord’s message today, from this parable can be summarised when He said in Matthew 6:19-20, “*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*”.

Our Lord once said that his disciples needed to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16). The manager in this parable was certainly not as innocent as a dove, but he was as shrewd as a snake, and in this one respect he is held up by our Lord as an example to us all.

“*Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval*” (John 6:27).

4. The Generous Employer

Jesus' Parable of the Generous Employer in Matthew 20:8-15, tells us a story of a man who owned a vineyard and needed workers. At 8 o'clock, he hired some workmen for the usual day wage of a denarius. At 9 o'clock, he hired more workmen and told them, "*You also go and work in the vineyard, and I will pay you a fair wage*". At 12 o'clock, and at 3 o'clock, he did the same thing. At 5 o'clock he went again to the market place and hired more workmen to work in the vineyard. At the end of the day, and to the surprise of everyone, all the workers were given the same amount: they were all given a full day pay, a denarius.

This act of generosity angered those who had work all day in a hot day and regarded this as very unfair. They complained to their employer: "*These who were hired last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day*" The employer said to them: "*I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?*" (Matthew 20:11-15).

What was the occasion of the parable? The Jewish people of Jesus' time were steeped in the religion of merit: one good deed merits another. Matthew 19:16-27, tells us just before that parable that a rich man asked the Lord, "*What good thing must I do to get eternal life*". And then Peter said to the Lord "*We have left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us?*" So the Lord gave them that parable to tell them and us that in His kingdom, He is like that generous employer. He calls each one of us in different times: one is called in early age, another in late age. No matter what we do and

for how long, His grace gives us the same eternal life and a place to work in his kingdom.

The apostle Peter wrote to all Christians, “*Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*” (2 Peter 1:1-2).

What is the purpose of the parable?

The parable teaches us about the grace of God and that God is always more than fair. In Psalm 145:9, the psalmist wrote, “*God is good to all. He has compassion on all He has made*”. In this parable, the workmen worked in the vineyard, each at different times. Everyone, no matter how long they worked, received the same amount, one day’s wage, a denarius. This example defies modern labor practices. We may think it unjust that one who works only for one hour is paid the same as the one who works all day, but let us remember it is a parable, told to teach a specific lesson. The lesson is this, God in His grace and goodness, has pity upon those who waited all day to find work to feed their families. Yes God cares for those who were left out without help. This is what God wants us to do, to have compassion, spiritually and physically, upon the needy and the outcast. Our Lord Jesus is our great example. The Bible says in the Book of Acts 10:38, “*Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil*”.

Those who are called and chosen at the end of the day access to God’s Kingdom just as those called and chosen at the start of the day. The first being last and the last being first may be Jesus’ way of saying that whatever time a person comes to His kingdom, will receive the same grace, because, “*The wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life*” (Romans 6:23). Jesus said to the thief on the cross “*You will be with me in Paradise*” (Luke 23:43). He received

the same gift of God's grace, eternal life, as those who laboured for the Lord most of their lives. This does not mean that those who worked for years in God's kingdom will not have reward for their labour. On the contrary, they will receive their reward for their faithfulness. The apostle John had given a vision about this. He wrote in Revelation 14:12-13, "*Then I heard a voice from heaven say, write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.*" "Yes," says the Spirit, "*they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them*", and our Lord said, "*Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done*" (Revelation 22:12).

How then we do apply the parable for us today?

Do not be among the first who become last. In the story of this parable, the workers who started first were paid last. Why? They watched those who came last become first! I believe that God wants us to learn three lessons. Avoid working for the Lord with the spirit of receiving a reward. This is what was wrong with Peter's expectation "*See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?*" (Matthew 19:27). The second lesson is this, God wants us to avoid the sin of envy that fails to recognise God's grace and goodness on other people whom we think are not deserving of it. The third lesson is this; God wants us to serve Him with love not of duty. He has for you a wonderful blessing beyond what you see. "*What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him*" (1 Corinthians 2:9). "*Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain*" (1 Corinthians 15:58). "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for humans, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving*" (Colossians 3:22-24).

5. The Good Samaritan

In Luke 10:25-37, our Lord told a story of a man who travelled down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Robbers attacked him, took everything he had and nearly killed him. A Jewish priest came along the same road and looked at the wounded man, but he walked past him on the other side of the road. Next, a Levite, who assisted the priests in Temple worship, came along, looked to the wounded man and walked away too. Then came a Samaritan on the same road, where he looked at wounded man, he was filled with compassion, and gave him first aid, using oil and wine, and tearing some cloth to make bandages for his wounds. Then he put the man on his donkey, took him to an inn, and stayed with him until next morning. The Samaritan man had to continue on his journey, and then he gave the innkeeper money and asked him to take care of the wounded man until he gets better. He promised that if there were any further expenses he would pay them when he travelled back that way again.

What was the occasion of story of this parable?

A teacher of the Law of Moses came to ask Jesus a question. It seems that he had been troubled by the things that Jesus was doing and saying. So he put Jesus to a test by asking, “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” Instead of replying, Jesus asked, “*What is written in the Law? How do you read it?* (How do you understand God’s Law?) (Luke 10:26).

The man summarises the law of Moses, the 613 commandments, to two: Love God and love your neighbor “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*

and with all your mind; and, love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27; Deuteronomy 6:5 & Leviticus 19:18)” Jesus said “Yes” Your have answered correctly. Do this and you will live”.

According to Talmudic teaching of the 11th century ad, Rabbi Moses Maimonides, said “*My neighbor is only standing for the “good Jews”, not including “sinful” Jews or Gentiles. This is my neighbor, my brother in law and observance of the Torah*”. The teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “*Who is my neighbour?*” The teacher of the Law was in the habit of saying that good Jews were only neighbors to the good Jews, and he was rejecting Jesus attitude toward the sinners Jews and Gentiles. Therefore, our Lord Jesus told the teacher of the Law the story of three Jews and a Samaritan.

We know from John 4:9, that the Jews considered Samaritans people as enemies and that they did not greet or speak to any Samaritan. Why? The Samaritans were a rival religious group with another Temple, and a bit different Torah. It was because of these differences, the Jews despised the Samaritans (see John 4). After hearing the story, that the priest, and the Levite, did not help their fellow wounded Jew, our Lord asked the teacher of the law: “*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*” (Luke 10:36). The teacher of the Law did not gave friendly answer and even did not want to pronounce the word ‘Samaritan’ who was behaving like a neighbor to the wounded Jew, but instead he said: “*The one who had mercy on him*” (Luke 10:37).

Our Lord said to him “Yes,” “Go and do likewise” This is what you yourself must do if you want eternal life.

The purpose of the parable

The parable was a rebuke, and calling with gentleness, to the Jewish religious leaders to change their ways, “*Go and do likewise*”. They gave much attention to the sayings of their Rabbi's and traditions of the elders, but neglected and disobeyed the Word of God that emphasises mercy and love (Matthew 15:1-9).

Our Lord is saying to them to show mercy and love to all people, even to those you consider sinners and enemies. God says in, “*For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings*” (Hosea 6:6-7). And our Lord Jesus reminds them of what God has said “*Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners’*” (Matthew 9:12-13).

How can we apply the parable for us today?

It all depends on what you see and do. What you see and do is determine who you are. Our Lord wants us to display His love to all people, and not to see a problem in them that would bother us. Why the Priest and the Levite did not help the wounded man? Why did the Samaritan stop and help the wounded Jew?

Did they see the wounded man as a trap to harm them; or a problem that defiled them and their families and friends, and confine them to be at home for seven days? Did they see him as a problem that stopped them in serving their week duty in the Temple if they became unclean for touching him? What they saw, determined what they did. They overlooked mercy and love that God desires and they were only concern about themselves. The Samaritan was a true follower of Jesus, a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. He displayed

God's love and mercy toward the wounded Jew. He saw a need, and he filled with compassion, he did what Jesus would do.

Let us reflect on God's love to all as our Lord said in "*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven*" (Matthew 5:14-16). It is written to us, "*Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth*" (1 John 3:17-18).

6. The Great Banquet

“A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper’ ” (Luke 14:16-24).

Lord Jesus attended a banquet which was given by a religious leader. During the dinner, Jesus said to his host,

“When you give a dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:12-14). When one of the

guests heard the blessing “at the resurrection of the righteous”, he said, “*Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God*” (Luke 14:15).

The feast of the kingdom of God is the hope of God’s people through all generation. For us as believers in Jesus this feast is refers to the feast in Heaven which is to come at the Resurrection Day when Jesus comes. It is called “*The Great Supper of the Lamb*” (Rev 19:1-10).

In the Old Testament, Isaiah 25:6-9 gives us a vivid picture of that great banquet of the kingdom of God. We read,

“The LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of the best of meats and the finest of wines. On that day He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him, and He saved us. This is the LORD; we trusted in Him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation”.

In the first century, at every banquet one of the guest offers a toast to all as they look to that great day, and says as the man said to Jesus, “*Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God*” (Luke 14:15). And all guests would say as they raise their glasses, “*O Lord, may we be among the righteous and be counted worthy of that day*” See, F. H. Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953) p.61.

Those who were at the banquet, expected Jesus to say Amen! But instead Jesus told them a parable that would debunk the popular notion of the Jews that say “*they would be their because they are*

keeping their rabbinic traditions; but the rest of men, the sinners, the publicans and all non Jews would be cast out in hell". (Ibid., p. 62)

With this background, let us study the parable and its meaning to the people of Jesus' day; and its applications for us today. In the parable, a man planned a great banquet and sent out invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to the invited guests, telling them that all was ready and the meal was about to start (Luke 14:16-17). However, the invited guests, one after another, made excuses for not coming. The first said, "*I have just bought a field and I must go and see it*" (verse 18). This excuse to not attend the banquet does not make any sense because no one buys land without seeing it first. Another said "*I have just bought five yoke of oxen and I am going to test them*" (verse 19). This excuse for rejecting the great banquet is a lie. No one buys oxen without seeing them first. Again, another said "*I just got married so I can't come*" (verse 20). It is feeble excuse. What exactly would keep a newly married couple from attending a great banquet? They can go together.

In Jewish tradition of the first century, each of these excuses were offensive and insulting to the host. When the great host heard these feeble excuses, he became angry. He told his servant to forget the guest list and "*go out quickly to the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame*" (verse 21). The invitation now shifts from those who think that they are worthy of being invited to those who think that they are unworthy; to the outcast, to those who no one would ever expect to be invited to this kind of a banquet. The servant did what his master told him to do, but there is still room in the banquet hall. So the master sent again and said: "*Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel*

them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet” (v 24).

The last statement of the parable is the key. The great host is God, and the great banquet is the kingdom of heaven. The invited guests picture the Jewish nation. God, through the prophets, invited them to His kingdom. When Jesus, the God in the flesh, came to them preach that “*the kingdom of heaven is near*” (Matt 4:17), He was rejected by most of the religious Jews. “*He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave them right to become the children of God*” (John 1:11-12)

The Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day rejected Jesus to be their Messiah, because His association with the tax collectors, sinners and Gentiles, whom they considered “unclean” and under God’s curse (John 9:1-2, 34). And also because His invitation and welcoming them to come into the kingdom of God. And throughout his ministry, the merciful Jesus, the God who came in the flesh, taught that the kingdom of heaven is available to all people even to those considered by the Jewish leaders as “unclean” (Acts 10:28).

The great host in the parable is not satisfied with a partially full banquet hall; he wants every place at the table to be filled. This reflects God’s heart of love to all people, and the fact is that, God is more merciful to save everyone who accepts His invitation to that great banquet.

Now let us apply the parable for us today. One application is a clear warning. The other is a specific encouragement.

God's grace of salvation is like a great banquet, we do not parapet it, and we don't pay for it and we do not earn it. Yes, His grace of salvation is free, but it's never cheap. There is a cost! Jesus has paid his own life to make it available to all who will come to him by faith. Those who enjoy Heaven's kingdom are those who accepted Jesus' invitation to His great banquet. Is it big deal?

Yes it is. Those who ignored the invitation to the banquet chose their own punishment, they missed out. God accepts their choice by making it permanent. Jesus said they would not "*taste of my banquet.*" So it will be with God's judgment on those who choose to reject Christ. They will have their choice confirmed, and they will never taste the joys of heaven. Jesus still spreads His arms wide and says, Come! Welcome! Come, for everything is now ready. The invitation still stands. God said in Hosea 2:23 to all of us who think that they are unworthy, "*I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'*" God is "*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*".

It is written in 2 Peter 3:9, "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*.. And in Romans 10:13, "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*". This is an invitation has been made. Will you attend? The Bible says in Revelation 19:7-9, "*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory... For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear... Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!*"

7. The Wedding Garment

“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”’ But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:2-14).

In this parable, our Lord Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding banquet that a king had prepared for his son, the crown prince.

To understand this parable, we need to answer these questions: what was the occasion of the parable; what is the meaning of the

parable; why is dressing properly at a wedding so important; and how can we apply the parable for us today?

During his last week on earth, Jesus experienced great opposition and hostility from the Jewish leaders. They agreed that anyone who acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah will be cast out of the synagogue. So Jesus gave them the parable of '*the wedding garment*' as a warning to them not to reject the salvation that God offered to them. The Pharisees who heard this parable did not miss the point that Jesus was making. However, instead of heeding His warning, they plotted to kill Him.

The parable tells us that is a wedding and invitations have been sent. The king's son is getting married. The feast begins as soon as the king makes sure that all the invited guests wear the wedding garments that have been provided for them. The king sent his servants to call the first groups of the invited guests; but they were not willing to come. They reject the invitation! Again, he sent other servants, saying, "*All things are ready. Come to the wedding.*" They made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, and another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.

It is difficult to understand this parable as to why some would reject a wedding invitation from the king. The invited guests didn't care that the one getting married was the king's son. By rejecting the invitation from the king they disrespected him. They also mistreated and killed his servants. The king was furious and sent out his soldiers, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. They paid the price for their rejection of the king's invitation.

Who were the invited guests in the parable?

The people of Israel were invited first to receive God's blessing of salvation, but many of them reject it. Many prophets of the Old Testament, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zachariah, Malachi, and the last one was John the Baptist to make the first invitation. The second invitation came with the New Testament by God Himself, the Lord Jesus, who came in the flesh, but the leaders of Israel and their followers rejected His call and crucified Him. In His mercy God gave them 40 years more, to be the last opportunity to repent, through the preaching of His apostles, but they continued to reject his call. Israel paid the price for rejection God's blessing of salvation. Judgment came upon Israel in 70 AD. The city was burned and destroyed.

The Apostle Paul said to the Jews "... *It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles*" (Acts 13:46).

Stephen said to the Jews, "... You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:51, 52). They did not repent but stoned Stephen to death.

The prophets and God's messengers throughout the history of Israel endured much suffering in order to bring the invitation. About those suffering servants we read in Hebrews 11:37-38,

"They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented- of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth".

In the parable verses 8-10, a second group is invited,

"Then the king said to his servants, the wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding. So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good." Who are they? They come from the highways, and they are described as good and bad"

They were the common people, sinners, tax collectors and Gentiles. Those who were considered by the Jewish leaders as not worthy to be in the Kingdom of God; but Jesus welcomed them, and for this reason the Pharisees hated Jesus and wanted to kill Him.

In the parable, the wedding hall was filled with guests. The feast will begin as soon as the king made sure that all the invited guests wore the wedding garments that were provided for them by the king. However, when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there "who did not have on a wedding garment". So he said to him, "*Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?*" And he was speechless. What did the king do with the man who did not wear the wedding garment? "The king said to the servants, *"Bind his hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*" The man accepted the invitation, and came to the wedding reception, but he refused to

put on the wedding garment that was provided by the king himself, instead choosing to come with his own clothes. He was cast out into outer darkness. Christ concludes the parable with the sad fact that “*many are invited, but few are chosen.*” In other words, many people hear the call of God, but only a few heed it.

What are the main points of this parable and how can we apply it today?

The king is God the Father, and His Son is Promised Saviour, the Messiah, and our Lord Jesus. The first invited guests were the people of Israel, who rejected their Messiah because they did not believe in Him: “*He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive him.*” (John 1:11). The second group of the invited guests represent the sinners, the tax-collectors and Gentiles who were rejected by the Jewish leaders and considered unworthy to receive God’s blessing. This group is given the opportunity to receive God blessing of salvation. The wedding garment represents the righteousness of Christ.

The call to salvation, depicted here by the glory of a marriage feast, is a beautiful, precious and once in a lifetime matter. This is why the garment, or lack of one, was such an important issue for the king. Many seek to attend Heaven’s Feast with their own garment. They want to obtain salvation by their own righteousness. They want to be in heaven without having the wedding garment, the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us exactly what the meaning of garment is in this parable. Revelation 19 states:

“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thundering, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright” (Rev. 19:6-8).

Just as the king provided wedding garments for his guests, God provides the wedding garment of the righteousness of Christ to everyone who receives Him. The meaning of the parable is not just about accepting the invitation to the Heaven's feast, but to be dressed with the wedding garment of the righteousness of Christ. Unless we have it, we will miss the wedding feast.

Are you properly dressed for the wedding? A royal wedding is coming. Are you ready? An invitation has been made. Will you accept the wedding garment?

If you do so, you will join with all the multitude of the redeemed and sing: *“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD. My soul rejoices in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, and He has covered me with the robe of righteousness”* (Is. 61:10).

8. The Wicked Tenants

This Parable is one of the last parables that Jesus told in Jerusalem before His atoning death on the cross for our sins. It is found in Matt 21:33-46, Mark 12:1-12 and in Luke 20:9-19. It is a story of a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers. At harvest time, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit from the vineyard. The tenants mistreated his servants. They beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his only beloved son to them saying, “*They will respect my son*”. However, when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘*This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.*’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. The owner of the vineyard punished those wicked tenants and gave the vineyard to other new tenants” (Mark 12:7-9).

When the Jewish leaders heard of this, they were even more determined than before to kill Jesus, because they understood its meaning.

The Occasion of the Parable

During the last week of his earthly ministry, Jesus went every morning to the temple court to teach. After He cleansed the temple and said “*My house is the house of prayers for all nations, and you have made it a market place*”, the chief priest and teachers of the Law confront Him asked “*By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you authority to do this?*” (Mark 11:28). Jesus replied, “*I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. “John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!*” They discussed it

among themselves and said, “*If we say, ‘from heaven,’ he will ask, then why didn’t you believe him? But if we say, ‘of human origin’ everyone held that John really was a prophet. They answered, “We don’t know.”* Then Jesus said, “*Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things*” (Mark 11:29-33). And then He told them this parable of “The wicked tenants and the vineyard” (Mark 12:1-12).

There are 6 main characters in this parable that explain to us the meaning of the story:

- (1) The landowner represents God. He had chosen the Jewish people and given them all they needed for producing fruit and to be His light among the nations of the world.
- (2) The vineyard refers to Israel. Isaiah 5:7 says, “*The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel. He looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit*”.
- (3) The tenants or farmers are the religious leadership of the Jews.
- (4) The servants are the prophets who preached God’s Word to the people of Israel. They were often ill-treated or killed.
- (5) The beloved Son is our Lord Jesus, the Promised Messiah, whom they rejected and crucified.
- (6) The new tenants is referring to the believers in Christ from every nation, who become His light to the world and salt to the earth.

The purpose of the Parable

The reason why Jesus told this parable was to warn the Jewish religious leaders not to reject Him, because He is God’s Messiah, the Cornerstone, who had been sent to save mankind from their sin. Jesus referred to Himself as God’s Son in the story, and especially in this verse “*He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent*

him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son’ (Mark 12:6). He told them that disaster would result if they refused to receive Him and hear his voice. He said to them, “*Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed*” (Matthew 21:42-44).

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people believed He was a prophet. They ignored His warning. They refused and crucified him and disaster followed as He said. The Jewish religious leaders committed two sins: They would not believe God's message by John the Baptist who said about Jesus “*Behold the lamp of God who take away the sins of the world*” (John 1:29). And also they rejected God's own Son and crucified Him. They would not repent of their sins for 40 years after his crucifixion. The result was that God's judgment came upon them. The Roman army destroyed the Temple and the city of Jerusalem and scatters them from the land in 70 AD.

What is the application of this parable for us today?

1. **God expects us to be good steward of the gospel.** We are to be faithful in share the Good News of salvation with others. Unlike the Jewish religious leaders, who had been bad steward, “*they shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. They did not enter, nor would let in those who are trying enter*” (Matthew 23:13)
2. **God is patient.** He keeps on giving us opportunities to repent for our sins and serve Him better. He regards none of us as hopeless. Yes we can produce a good fruit.

3. God is not defeated. Although the Romans with the request of the Jewish leaders to kill Jesus, God's plan for saving mankind could not thwarted. He called upon His new tenants, the faithful believers from every nation to do the His work which He had first given to Israel.

God's work of salvation never fails. He always gets His work done even today, whether some like it or not. He said

"My word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

Let us then, keep preaching the gospel. Do not give up. God is not defeated. The gospel of Christ is preached in the whole world and it will continue to be so until the end of the world when Jesus comes.

May God our Father be praised and His name highly exalted for all good things that come from Him and to Him alone be glory forever and ever Amen.

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“The Wonders of the Parables of Jesus”

Rev Dr Botros Botrosdief

The parables of Jesus continue to fascinate us two thousand years later. Pick any of the parables listed in this book. Take time to read and reread it. If the parable can be found in more than one Gospel, read that version too. Think about what Jesus might have had in mind when he was telling that parable. What was he trying to get across to his listeners? How did Jesus want them to think or act differently after hearing the parable? How does it encourage you to think or act differently? Talk to God in the quiet of your heart about the parable. Ask him to help shed some light on it for you.

Dr. Botrosdief has authored 42 books.

He is the minister of

Mernda and Whittlesea Presbyterian Church

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