

**THE
PARABLES
OF
JESUS**

Dr. Brian J. Bailey

Version 1.1

“The Parables of Jesus”

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PREFACE

This book was compiled and written from classroom notes taught to the students at Zion Ministerial Institute in the late 1990's. The purpose of that class was that the students might have a thorough knowledge of this very important subject—the Parables taught by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

No finer example of our Saviour's teaching can be found than in His exposition of the Parables. Thus this book is commended as a necessity for each pastor to expound on this valuable subject. The Parables teach us how to live in every aspect of our earthly lives. If we follow their instructions, we will be assured of an abundant entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Parables

There are many parables told throughout the Word of God, particularly in the New Testament. Our study will centre primarily on the Parables of Jesus. They contain relevant truth for our personal lives and for the Church Age in which we live.

Definition of a Parable

A parable can be defined as “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, which can only be interpreted by the grace and wisdom of God.” Jesus often used parables to illustrate the truths of the kingdom.

The Reason for Parables

Jesus spoke in parables because it is given unto one set of people to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, while that privilege is not granted to others. In Matthew 13:10, the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke in parables. They pointed out how much easier it would be if He just spoke clearly. In Matthew 13:11 Jesus said, “... *Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [the crowds] it is not given.*”

There we have the awesome reason why parables are given. It is a statement that should cause us to tremble. The reason

Jesus gives these parables is to definitely lock certain people out of the kingdom. Parables are given to deliberately veil the meaning of truth.

He continued this thought with another remarkable statement, *“For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath”* (Mt. 13:12).

We have this same principle in the natural realm. This thought was quoted to me in New Zealand several years ago: “The rich become richer and the poor become poorer.” The person with a million dollars will usually become richer, even if he does absolutely nothing with his money except to leave it in the bank. There it accumulates interest, growing without his lifting a finger. The poor man becomes poorer because by the very virtue of living, he incurs debts which weigh him down. This same principle applies in the kingdom of God.

In Daniel 2:21 we have a similar thought, *“... he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.”* Who receives knowledge? It is those who have understanding. Therefore, we have a confirmation from the Old Testament of the words of Jesus. The one who already has something receives more.

In the natural realm, if we have a particular job we want done, we do not give it to a novice, someone who is without experience. We give it to someone who has already done a good job previously. We entrust our car to someone who is a

skilful, proven mechanic. We invest our money in a sound, thriving business—certainly not in one that has had a history of bankruptcy.

The Lord does the same. He entrusts His riches to the one who has a proven track record. He is hardly going to give spiritual gifts to the one who, for example, goes around boasting, “I have the gift of prophecy,” while he has not been diligent to exercise that gift. Rather, He entrusts His riches to the one who is already proven and who utilizes what God has already given him. The Lord places as pastors those who will make good pastors. He looks for those who are, for example, already good pastors of their family. As the Apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy 3:5, *“For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?”*

In Gideon’s day, God looked at how the men drank water. It seems incredible to us, yet the final choosing of the army of Gideon was determined by how the men drank the water. This account is found in Judges 7:5-7: *“So he brought*

**A parable is an
earthly story
with a heavenly
meaning.**

down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their

mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.” Those who lapped the water as dogs were chosen because they showed their alertness for God’s task.

It is a solemn thought that our progress in the kingdom of God is determined by what we do and the choices we make each day, with the truth and resources already entrusted to us. We must understand the principles of the kingdom. These principles of the kingdom are what we see around us. In the classic work *Paradise Lost* by Milton, the blind poet, the angel said, “What if earth be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein, each to other like, more than on earth is thought?” (Milton, 1667, Book 5) In other words, earth is far more like heaven than people realize.

There are differences between heaven and earth, but there are also great similarities. There are also great similarities between the principles on earth and those in heaven.

In Matthew 13:13-15, Jesus again explains why He speaks in parables: *“Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are*

dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

Here, He is quoting from Isaiah 6:9-10. Jesus said that He spoke in parables so that certain people who have disqualified themselves from understanding the truth would not be converted and would not be healed. Now that is an awesome thought, and should inspire in us a holy fear of the Lord.

We need to understand to whom Jesus was speaking. This quotation was given to the people of Israel who had closed their hearts and minds to the Lord. They had hardened their hearts toward God and had chosen to close their eyes from seeing the truth. Therefore, we have the prophetic prayer by Isaiah, “...*Shut their eyes lest they see with their eyes....*” (Isa. 6:10). Isaiah prayed that God would close their eyes because they themselves had already closed their eyes and had made their decisions. On the other hand, we want to balance this teaching with the scripture from Ezekiel 36:27, where the Lord said: “*And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*”

We have here two ways or paths to choose from. On one hand, if we harden our heart and close our eyes to what God is trying to show us, there comes a point of no return, when God will close our eyes and harden our heart. On the

other hand, if we enquire of God and determine to walk in His ways, God will cause us to walk in His ways. Thus we see the sovereignty of God working together with the will of man. The hand of God will affirm the direction we are taking, for good or for evil. Another example of this is found in the life of Pharaoh. He hardened his heart so much that in the end *God* hardened his heart so he could not change his course (Ex. 8:32, Ex. 10:27).

We need to see the solemnity of what Jesus is saying here. Jesus spoke in parables so that those who are affirmed in the way of evil would not understand and could not turn around, and those He has affirmed in the way of good would understand. Once a choice has been made, there is a deliberate walking in one pathway or another. Thus, God comes on the scene and causes us to walk in the way we have chosen. This is an awesome truth.

Interpretation of Parables

Not only do we need to understand why parables were given, we also need to understand how to interpret parables. Much of the parable is like drapery and ornaments, necessary as background, but functioning only as a setting for the main focus of the parable. It is only the *intent* and *theme* of the parable that contains truth, and not the details that form the setting of the parable.

It is much like a knife. While the knife is used to cut, not all the knife is the cutting edge. There must also be the handle

and blade. Likewise, the harp and violin are not all strings. I am inclined to agree with the fathers of the Early Church who warned continually against pressing too anxiously all the circumstances of the parable. If we go too much into every detail of the parable in our preaching and interpretation, it can be quite dangerous. We can develop theories and cause people to walk in ways that were not intended by the Author of the parable.

To illustrate this point, let us turn to one of the most familiar of the Old Testament parables, found in 2 Samuel 12:1-15. This is the parable of the rich man, the poor man, and the poor man's little lamb. Nathan told this story to David, after David had sinned with Bathsheba. This is a good parable to study because we clearly understand the intent of the parable. However, if we pressed every detail in this parable, we would never arrive at David's sin with Bathsheba. There was no traveller involved. Bathsheba was a wife, not a child. Uriah (one of the mighty men in David's army) was slain, not a little lamb or a child. This was a story told to illustrate the absolute cruelty of David. If you tried to interpret it by expounding on each detail, you would get a completely erroneous picture.

The point of a parable is to illustrate a theme. It is extremely dangerous, unless Scripture specifically interprets the parable, to take all the elements of a parable and make a beautiful message. In Nathan's parable, he said that a lamb was slain; in actuality, it was Uriah who was slain. It is clear that if we did not know about David's sin, we would not have

come up with that interpretation. Therefore, it is essential that when we approach the parables, we cry out to God for the Spirit of revelation to reveal the meaning. A parable is, in truth, an earthly story with a veiled interpretation or heavenly meaning.

There is another Old Testament parable from Judges 9 that we want to consider. Here we are introduced to Abimelech, a son of Gideon by his concubine from Shechem. Although Gideon had won great victories and mighty deliverance for Israel while he was living, Israel did not truly appreciate all that he had done. When Abimelech communed with his brethren at Shechem, they gave him 70 pieces of silver, after which Abimelech slew 70 sons of Gideon.

Jotham (the youngest son) escaped and went up to Mount Gerazim, and there he spoke this parable concerning the trees of the field choosing a king from among them. If we preached on the olive tree, the fig tree or the vine, we would miss the whole intent of this parable. We would think that God sent this story to prevent a tragedy, but the tragedy had already occurred. After telling the parable, Jotham ran away. However, before he left he said, *“Let the fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon...Let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem...”* (Jdg. 9:15, 20).

This parable was an awesome decree. It had been given by God, and He moved upon that decree by sending an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. The

men of Shechem revolted against Abimelech, who killed all those who opposed him. Abimelech then encamped against a city. While he was standing outside the city walls, a woman threw a stone down upon him, and he died. The parable did not bring out all these facts. It merely pointed out that the men had made a wrong choice in a king and that they would suffer the deadly consequences of that choice.

We see from these two parables that we need to cry out to God for the interpretation of parables in the New Testament. In 2 Samuel 12 and Judges 9, we have a full background to help us understand the parables given there. However, in the New Testament this is not the case. In fact, some of the parables that Jesus told were on His Second Coming, and so we have to be extremely careful there. We need to cry out, “Lord, give us the interpretation.”

CHAPTER TWO

The Seven Parables of the Kingdom

The first parables we want to examine are commonly referred to as the *Seven Parables of the Kingdom*. They are found in Matthew 13.

First of all, we are going to examine them in a straightforward manner, after which we will compare them to the seven churches of Revelation and the seven feasts of the Lord. Finally, we will link them with the historical events of the Church Age.

Let us look first at a short comparison of the seven parables with the seven feasts of the Lord and the seven churches of Revelation:

PARABLE	FEAST	CHURCHES
1. Parable of the Sower	Passover	Ephesus
2. Parable of the Tares	Unleavened Bread	Smyrna
3. Mustard Seed	Firstfruits	Pergamos
4. Leaven	Pentecost	Thyatira
5. Hidden Treasure	Trumpets	Sardis
6. Pearl of Great Price	Atonement	Philadelphia
7. Parable of the Net	Tabernacles	Laodicea

Now let us consider the Seven Parables of the Kingdom in detail.

1. The Sower (Mt. 13:3-9, 14-23)

The first parable is the Parable of the Sower. This parable is the key for understanding all parables. If we do not understand this parable, we will not be able to understand the other parables.

“And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Mt. 13:3-9).

Then Jesus continues in verse 14: *“And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear; and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not*

perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their

**We need to ask
God for a
hearing ear.**

ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” (Mt. 13:14-15).

We need to ask God for a hearing ear. In Mark 4:10-12 where this same parable is given, we read: *“And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.”* While half of these seven parables were spoken to the multitudes and a part only to the disciples, it is significant that the interpretation to this parable was given only to His disciples, and not to the multitude.

Then in Matthew 13:16-17, Jesus spoke to His disciples of a sobering truth before He gave them the interpretation of the Parable of the Sower: *“Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”* This is an awesome truth. All these righteous men wanted to see the things the disciples saw but they could not because they were not born in that dispensation.

The dispensation in which we are born determines what we see. On one occasion, I was in a Presbyterian church

when the charismatic movement was beginning in that denomination. There, men on the platform (who were leaders of the charismatic revival at that time) were emphasizing the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. I asked the Lord if baptizing His children in the Holy Spirit fulfilled the desires of His heart.

Like a shaft of light coming into my heart, the Lord spoke to me what He really wanted. It is important to realize that God can be speaking one thing from the platform and desiring something else in His heart. While He receives pleasure in the development and spiritual hunger of His young children, His mature, faithful sons who have become like Him, who share His desires, and who can commune and fellowship with Him—these are the ones who bring delight to His heart.

Thus, the dispensation in which you are born is important. The nearer we are to the Second Coming of the Lord, the greater the revelation which shall be released to His Church, and therefore the more mature it will become. Being born in the last generation of the Church Age, we have a tremendous privilege, as we are going to see everything fulfilled that has been prophesied concerning the end times. In these perilous times, many will want to give up, but we must keep going on. It is not a matter of age. There are some in their twenties and thirties who feel that they are finished; they have little expectation of being part of God's great end-time revival. It is rather a matter of attitude—we must be faithful and continue to walk forward with the Lord, realizing that the best is yet to be.

There are those who hear and obey God's word, and then there are those who refuse to hear. That is the purpose of these parables—to separate these two groups. The key to understanding them is a hearing heart, open to the truths of God.

In this Parable of the Sower, we are going to look basically at four different kinds of hearts:

- 1. A “wayside” heart,**
- 2. A heart of stony ground,**
- 3. A heart filled with thorns, and**
- 4. A good heart of rich, fertile ground.**

In Matthew 13:19-23, the Lord gives the interpretation of the parable:

“When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of

riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

The Wayside

The first heart condition is likened to the wayside upon which the seed fell. Matthew 13:19, *“When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.”* There are two key words in this description—‘hearing’ and ‘understanding.’ It is very important to *hear* what God is saying, not just what we think He is saying. We must also *understand* what He is saying. We live by the words that proceed out of the mouth of God (Mt. 4:4).

During the charismatic movement, many would ask, “What is God saying?” They asked this question because they could not hear from God themselves. In the natural realm, there are radio waves constantly being broadcast around us, yet we cannot hear them if we do not have a radio or television tuned in to those radio frequencies. Those whose hearts are likened to the wayside were not tuned to God’s voice. Even if they heard the Word of God, they did not understand what they were hearing.

We obviously hear through our natural ears, but we all have spiritual ears as well. In Psalm 40:6, King David

speaks of the spiritual ears, saying, “*Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.*” Here, the phrase “mine ears hast thou opened” could also be rendered “mine ears hast thou digged.” King David was living in the dispensation of the Law when sacrifices and offerings were required according to the Law of Moses. Yet we see that God opened David’s spiritual ears to hear what He really wanted—a heart that delights to do His will (Ps. 40:8). The Lord had opened his ears to hear truths yet to be revealed in another dispensation.

The ability to hear and understand with our spiritual ears depends on the depth of our relationship with God and our obedience to Him. For example, it was Samuel, and not Eli, who heard from God. It was with Abraham, His friend, with whom He shared what would happen to Sodom and Gomorrah.

There are several ways we can look at the interpretation of this heart condition represented by the wayside. It can be likened to a path where people walk up and down on it; it is ground that has not been ploughed. This is a heart that has not been touched by God’s plough. In other words, the ground of that heart has not been broken up, and therefore, there is absolutely no possibility of seed being allowed to take root downward. Not only that, Satan comes and snatches away that which has been sown. This is a very solemn thing. The heart represented by the wayside had no preparation whatever, and therefore the enemy came to take the seed away from that person’s life.

It is so important that we have a prepared heart, especially when God is going to speak to us. For example, we want to prepare our hearts before going to a church service because God may want to speak and give a word of prophecy to us. However, if our hearts are not prepared, the word can be given but we will not understand it, and Satan can take it away. That can happen at any time in our lives.

We also want to prepare our hearts in prayer before God each day. Ezra, the great teacher of the Restoration Era, had a prepared heart: *“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments”* (Ezra 7:10). In contrast, we see in the life of King Rehoboam the result of not seeking the Lord: *“And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD”* (2 Chr. 12:14).

Another thought concerning the wayside is the condition of being on the outskirts or periphery of what God is doing. In a church we pastored at one time, there was a significant move of God. God brought in a number of young people and soundly converted them. However, it was interesting to see where they actually sat in the church. Some sat very near to the front, while others sat on the very back row. Some entered into every activity possible while others did very little.

I remember speaking to one of them, telling him to be very, very careful. God had saved him and baptized him with the Holy Ghost, and I encouraged him to get involved and enter

into the activities of the church. I warned him that Satan is very active among those who sit on the periphery.

Regrettably he did not listen, and just a little time later, Satan began to work. This young man accepted a job in another land. He met a girl there who was not a Christian, married her, and disaster followed. If he had only listened and become involved in the activities of the church, Satan would never have taken him away like that. There is a saying in Pentecost which is quite true: “Sit near to the spout where the glory comes out!” It is good to come up to the altar from time to time and to meet God because so often, the greatest power in the service is there.

Thus we see that to avoid the pitfalls of having a heart like the wayside, we must have a prepared heart, and we need to participate in all that God is doing. (This must, of course, be differentiated from “busy” church activities which are not a product of the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and which can use valuable time that could otherwise be spent in meeting with the Lord, doing necessary work, and simply resting in order to be fresh for services.)

The Stony Ground

Matthew 13:20 says, “*But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it.*” This describes the second heart condition, which is the stony heart. This piece of ground was filled with all sorts of stones. There was, consequently, very little depth of earth or room for the seed to fall.

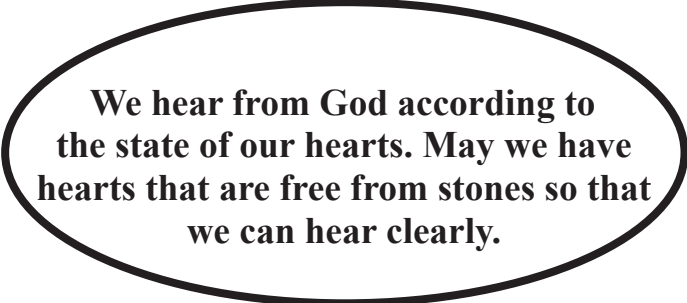
Basically, stones speak of rebellion. They speak of a hard heart, one that has not been broken up by God. Often in the Word of God, God says, "I will take away the stony heart and give you a heart of flesh." (See for example, Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26.) It is very important to cry out to God, "Lord, take away the stones. Take away those areas of rebellion." Areas of rebellion cannot produce fruit. Rebellion and disobedience are the spiritual interpretation of stones.

One area in which hardness of heart applies is in divorce and remarriage. When the Lord was asked, "Why did Moses give the Law, allowing for divorce?" He replied, "Because of the hardness of your heart" (Mt. 19:8-9). That is a terrible thing. God even changed His laws to a whole nation because of the hardness of their heart. He gave them a lower standard.

If we have a stony heart, then God will quite readily give us a lower standard than His perfect will for our lives. People often justify their actions by saying that God spoke to them and permitted them to do this or that. It is awesome to realize that God may well have done so, but He was meeting them according to the condition of their hearts.

We see an example of this in Ezekiel 14:7-10 where the Lord said: *"For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself: And I will set my face against*

that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him.”



We hear from God according to the state of our hearts. May we have hearts that are free from stones so that we can hear clearly.

We hear from God according to the state of our hearts. Therefore, before going to God, we want to make sure that the stones are removed from our hearts so that we can hear God's highest directives for our lives. In Palestine, the soil in many places is virtually rock. It is covered by barely a few inches of soil. There is just a superficial coating of earth there. This is a picture of the heart condition of a hard person, one who is superficial, whom the Word of God cannot penetrate. This is a person who has no real root in the Gospel, but just a superficial interest. He is attracted by the benefits of the Gospel.

However, Proverbs 23:23 says, *“Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.”* The price of truth is persecution and tribulation. There is no truth you receive that you will not be tested upon, that you will not have to pay a price for, irrespective of the depth of that truth. There is always an awesome price to pay for truth, and people whose spiritual lives are only superficial are not willing to pay the price.

They are very willing to receive salvation and be water baptized. Often they are willing to receive the Holy Spirit baptism. They are also very willing to receive healing, and actually rejoice in it. However, when persecution arises over some truth, they turn aside. I have learned through the years that we have to be so careful. Those who are most blessed and joyful at the beginning are often those for whom we need to have the most concern.

When we had a Bible School in Switzerland, one of the students was a young girl of about 18 years of age. During this time there was a real problem at the school in determining which direction to take, and we were all praying and fasting concerning this. Subsequently, the Lord gave this young girl a vision, and she had the key for the whole situation. We then knew exactly what to do.

One would have thought she was the most spiritual person in the whole school. But after a little while, because of trials and tribulations that came along after she had finished school, she left the faith and wandered into a way that was

not good. We have to be very careful of those who come in with such joy and enthusiasm. Sometimes their spiritual lives can be quite superficial. We must be willing to pay the price for truth.

The Thorny Ground

The third condition of the heart is given in Matthew 13:22: *“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.”* This is someone who has depth of character and an open spirit, but is not careful at pruning away the things that should not be in his life. The thorns are like parasites; they wind themselves around the plant so that the fruit cannot develop.

Luke 8:14 gives us a clearer picture of this situation: *“And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.”* These three things—the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life choke the Word of God and cause Christians to be unfruitful.

Cares

We have to be extremely careful in the ministry and in our personal lives that we are not overcome with cares. We will have responsibilities, but we have to learn to roll our cares upon the Lord, even as 1 Peter 5:7 says, *“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”* Cares come basically

because of needs and responsibilities. We must absolutely triumph over cares so that we do not become overwhelmed with the burden of them.

In Philippians 4:6, there is a clear commandment to be careful for nothing: *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”* In the natural realm, a prince born into a wealthy kingdom has no anxiety about where his next meal is coming from or what he will wear. He does not worry about his daily needs. That is the attitude God wants to develop in us. We need to know that we can come to the Lord as our Heavenly Father and ask in simple faith, saying, “Father, I am Your child, and You have everything I need. I know that if I just ask You for it and thank You, then You are going to meet that need.” It is important to remember that we are speaking about *needs*, and not *desires*.

As we mature, God will increase our responsibilities. A weight lifter will start off with perhaps a bar with 60 pounds, and then gradually increase the weight. He does not diminish it. Likewise, as we successfully handle small responsibilities, the Lord then increases the load until He brings us to our optimum strength. In a church, the pastor needs to know each person’s optimum ability or his highest potential, and develop him to that point. Everybody is different; thus it is important for us to know God’s optimum plan for each one.

I read of a certain Bishop Quayle, who was a leader in the Methodist church many years ago. He had a responsibility

for many pastors, and he could not go to sleep for worrying about them at night (Jeremiah, 2000, p.67):

“One night, the bishop worked into the early morning hours trying to finish his work and solve his various problems. It happened that the Bible on his desk was open to Psalm 121. At a moment of intense pressure, Quayle was feeling tired, and frustrated and annoyed. Suddenly his eye fell on the startling words that told him that God never slumbers, that our Lord watches over us on a twenty-four-hour vigil.

Here was Bishop Quayle burning the midnight oil, worrying over so many things—and God watching over him as he worried. Here was Bishop Quayle working for God rather than allowing God to work through him. It came home to the minister, with great impact, that such a life was exhausting, and ultimately a losing battle.

In his inner being, he heard the Lord say, “Quayle, there’s no need for both of us to stay up all night. I’m going to stay up anyway. You go to bed and get a good sleep.”

It is so reminiscent of the situation in which Dr Hudson Taylor experienced. He had sent missionary ladies two by two dressed in Chinese attire into areas where the Boxer riots were taking place. His English board wrote him, full of concern and wanted them withdrawn from those areas,

as did members of his team in China. In one account it said (Wiersbe, 2011),

“Reading a packet of letters that had reached the China Inland Mission Center in Chinkiang, J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the mission, learned of serious rioting in two cities where CIM stations were located. The news was not good, and Taylor related this to his co-worker George Nicholl, who had brought him the mail. He told Nicholl that help must be sent immediately. Then Taylor began to whistle his favorite hymn, “Jesus, Jesus, I am resting in the joy of what Thou art...”

“How can you whistle when our friends are in such danger?” Nicholl exclaimed.

“Would you have me be anxious and troubled?” asked Taylor. “That would not help them, and would certainly incapacitate me for my work. I have just to roll the burden on the Lord.” He did—and God worked!”

That peace of God not only enveloped the team but it gave them the assurance that God would care for the safety of those missionaries.

The union and communion that both Bishop Quayle and Dr Hudson Taylor had with the Lord gave them peace, and it will do so for every leader who has the responsibility for caring for others. May we seek, dear ones, to have that

blessed relationship with the Lord, so that we know He will be looking after those for whom we are responsible, and thereby enjoy the peace of God that passes understanding.

Whether the burden relates to our children, our relatives, a building program, our jobs, or the sheep in our churches, we have to learn to rejoice in the Lord and to tackle everything with the grace of God. Trusting God and receiving His grace to fulfil our responsibilities and to triumph in our trials must become a way of life for us, or the responsibilities and problems of life can destroy us.

In order to bear these responsibilities, we must also have the love of God, longsuffering, and faith developed in our lives. We have to be well-rounded. Some people allow God to perfect them in one area, for example in faith—but not in love, joy, or peace. These people can produce mighty acts, but they are often not very pleasant to live with. God wants to bring us into maturity not only in the works of Christ but also in the fruits of the Christ.

Each fruit is developed through its opposite quality. For example, the fruit of love is developed through hatred. The perfection of love is to love those who hate you. As our Lord said in Luke 6:27-28, “... *Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.*” God will bring us through situations in which we are literally hated in order to develop this fruit of love in our lives. We must pass through the land of the ‘Philistines’ where people are envious and jealous of

us, in order for love to be perfected in our lives. In these experiences, we need to be careful of our attitude toward the instruments that God uses to bring us to perfection.

When we were in Kenya once, I saw an iron cooking pot containing all kinds of ingredients. They were making stew on an outside fire. The people were throwing many faggots (small pieces of wood) on the fire to keep it going in order to heat the soup. There is no fire for the soup without the pieces of wood.

Wood speaks of humanity. God has to use a fire to mature His people, and the wood that He uses to fuel the fire is often other people. The fire makes of us a beautiful soup. We are not going to be transformed without situations that create fire. The soup could take the attitude of being very upset with those pieces of wood, but without the wood, it would not be good soup. We need to watch our attitude when we are under pressure.

There are two ways to look at our responsibilities. We can say, "I have all this work in front of me and it weighs me down," or we can say, "I have all this work to do, but it is putting me under pressure, so I will just go away and leave it." Neither is correct. We must tackle the work with the grace of God, and not let it overwhelm us. These things are the whole way of life. Responsibilities can either make or destroy us. There are pastors who die before their time because they let the cares destroy them. All the great leaders in history could sleep well because they learned to cast their

cares aside at specific times. We must do the same and major on Philippians 4:6.

As Christians, we should be able to sleep. Psalm 127:2 says, *“It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.”* Sometimes sleep is taken away for a purpose, so that we might pray, or because God wants to show us something. There are those exceptions. But we should be able to sleep and not lie awake worrying.

Riches

Now we want to consider the riches of this world. In order for God’s work to go forward, pastors often have a large cash flow going through their fingers into, for example, missions work and the building of churches. They might also be surrounded by people who have a very affluent lifestyle. As pastors, we must be careful that we are not caught up with desires for the lifestyle that some of our parishioners have. We have to guard our hearts from the love of money. While we may handle large sums of money in the ministry, we must make sure that we have ‘teflon-coated’ hands—in other words, the money passes right through our hands and into the work of God.

Pleasures of Life

The third area that can choke the Word of God in our lives concerns the pleasures of this life. We must be careful,

especially in the area of hobbies and sports. There must be a healthy balance.

We have had some sad experiences of seeing people in the ministry die before their time because they did not keep themselves fit. We must realize that we have a natural body as well as a spiritual one. We must keep our muscles, joints, and cardio-vascular system in order, eating properly and exercising well so that we will not fall short of God's purposes for our lives. Yet while it is important to keep fit, there must also be a balance. We must not place too much importance on sports, or on other pleasures of this life, whatever they might be. We have to be careful that the pleasures of this life do not choke the seed of the Word of God.

In a certain country God was about to give revival. Without consulting each other, eight pastors in the same fellowship had preached the same message to their congregation, "Behold, I will do a new thing." They came together to pray at one of the churches because God had called them to pray. After they prayed a while, they appointed a junior pastor to look after the prayer meeting, and the seven senior pastors went on a hunting trip. Sadly, what happened was that the seven pastors who went hunting ended up opposing the revival, and the junior pastor who continued praying received it.

This is very important in our day. In Luke 21:34, Jesus was speaking of the Last Days, the days before the Second Coming of Christ. He said: "*And take heed to yourselves,*

lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.” Here, the Lord warns us against surfeiting or overeating (or putting too much emphasis on food), against becoming intoxicated, and then again He warns against the cares of this life. We must watch that we do not continually overeat. That can cause us to miss the Second Coming. Drunkenness can also destroy a Christian’s walk.

We would do well to remember that this warning was addressed to Christians, and not unbelievers. An unbeliever is not going to read this warning and say, “I am going to quit drinking.” The Bible is not given to the unconverted, but the Christian.

In some areas of the world there is a custom of drinking alcoholic beverages. When I was very young, I heard a conversation among a group of young ministers who were discussing visions. One of them said, “Oh, I can have a vision whenever I want. After I have had my glass of wine, I can close my eyes and then I have a vision.” He was a Pentecostal pastor. One cannot help but wonder from what source the visions came.

The Good Ground

We now come to the fourth heart condition. Matthew 13:23 says, *“But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also*

beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” We must strive for good ground in our hearts, crying out to God to give us a good heart so that we can bring forth one hundredfold.

We need to understand what the Lord is saying here. When a friend of mine was meditating on this passage, the Lord said to him, “In reality, thirtyfold could read *minus seventyfold* and sixtyfold could read *minus fortyfold*.” We sometimes think, “Oh, perhaps I am a sixtyfold Christian, praise God!” But in reality if one receives 60 percent on a test, that means one has missed 40 percent of the questions. This is the accurate interpretation! We want to be like Isaac, who was a type of the hundredfold Christian (see Genesis 26:12). Our attitude should be that of seeking to attain one hundredfold fruitfulness. The danger is that many people are content with sixtyfold or even thirtyfold. Many churches and organizations reach a plateau and deliberately settle down comfortably on it, not wanting to go any farther.

As pastors, we will see all four heart conditions within our congregation. We will also see those with varying degrees of fruitfulness. We have to concentrate on the preparation of the hearts of those in our churches. The Lord said to His people in Jeremiah 4:3, “...*Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.*” It is so important to have prayer meetings and to ask the Lord to break up the ground of the hearts of the people in our churches so that when we preach, we can sow the Word in good ground.

2. The Wheat and the Tares (Mt. 13:24-30)

This parable is found in Matthew 13:24-30 where we read, *“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”*

First of all, we need an understanding of the time in which Jesus lived. This kind of vengeful dealing still occurs in the Middle East, Ireland, India and in many other countries. Here was a good man who had prepared his fields, ploughed his ground, and then sowed good seed in that ground. This man, however, had an enemy who knew how to injure the good man. He sowed darnel, a particular weed that looks just like wheat, into that ground. The wheat and the darnel began to grow, both looking very much the same until they reached a certain height. At that point of development, it became apparent that there were both wheat and tares growing in the field.

Unfortunately for the good man, he could not do anything about that field until harvest time, when he could separate the wheat from the tares without injuring the wheat. Some of the darnel had curled itself around the wheat, and he just had to let the two grow together. Pulling out the darnel before the harvest would ruin his own crop. This is the natural sense behind this parable.

Now we have the interpretation, which Jesus gave to His disciples in Matthew 13:36-43: *“Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”*

Good and Bad Seed

We see that the tares here refer to actual people. That is a solemn thought. The field is the world. The good seed are

the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked one. This is very serious indeed. Psalm 58:3 says, *“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”*

We must realize this truth that there are two kinds of seed. There are those who accept the Word of God, the good seed, and those who do not. God desires a godly seed. In Malachi 2:15, God clearly states, *“And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.”*

In 1 Corinthians 7:14, we are told that children are the by-products of their parents. *“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.”* There are children that are holy and clean and children that are not. Believing parents sanctify a child.

In a certain country, a pastor came to me to discuss a problem with a family in the church. One of the children could not sleep well at night, but awoke screaming every night. Neither the pastor nor the parents could find the key to the situation, and so they came to me to discover what God would show us. When the family came, the words that came out of my mouth were, “Is this your child?” As it turned out, he was their child by adoption, and the problem stemmed from his natural parents.

In one sense, we are all adopted. We have been adopted into the family of God. However, we need to see that there are two seeds in the Word of God—the godly and the ungodly. We have to be so careful. There are many Christians who want a child, but are unable to have any of their own. It is important for Christian couples to pray through on this issue and make sure that if they adopt any child, he or she is from good seed.

The argument today is that if he has a good environment, the child will be good. The most perfect environment that ever existed was the Garden of Eden, yet Adam failed. Then there was Nazareth, a town considered to be one of the worst environments in which to raise a child. Nathaniel even asked if any good thing could come out of Nazareth (Jn. 1:46), and yet that was the environment of Jesus. Man failed in a perfect environment, and the Perfect Man, Jesus, came out of a bad environment and triumphed. The Galileans were hot-blooded, always ready for a fight, yet most of Jesus' disciples were Galileans. We cannot make “blanket” statements or generalizations.

In John 8:39-44, the Pharisees claimed to be the children of Abraham. Yet Jesus replied that they did the deeds of their father, the devil. They could all trace their lineage back to Abraham and Isaac, yet Jesus made it clear that God was not their Father.

There are two fathers. Adam, the son of God, came under the influence of Satan and produced Cain and Abel. One was

good and one was evil. We must realize this truth. When people from godly families make wrong choices and cross over a certain line, they become evil. On the other hand, when people from ungodly families make right choices, they cross over that line for good.

Ecclesiastes 11:3 says, “...*if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.*” The Word of God is very clear that as we die, so are we in all eternity. If a person who has been righteous all his life turns away from God’s path, becoming evil, his good works will not be remembered. In the same way, if a man has been wicked all his life and then repents, his evil will not be remembered (see Ezekiel 18:21-24.)

Once when we were on the East Coast of the United States, the Lord told us to leave immediately for the West Coast. We had to cancel weddings and a number of engagements. Upon asking God why He was moving us so quickly, He told us that someone was going to die and He wanted us to be there.

When we arrived, we found that a significant leader of the church was in the hospital. However, we were not allowed in to see him and he died three days later. Subsequently, we went to the funeral, where the Lord gave me a vision of this leader. He had been dabbling in business and had turned away from the path of God. God showed me that the path he was on led through a tremendous forest, eventually ending up in hell, and in His mercy, He had taken the man before he destroyed himself.

We must be very careful about mixing the two seeds. The Lord dealt with me strongly about this. At one time, I was counselling with a lot of Christians who had children of their own and had adopted other children as well. It was causing a lot of confusion and chaos in the home. The Lord said, “It is bringing a strange seed into your garden.” God knows who each person is.

There are actually people who are good people and those who are wicked. The good are sown by God, and the wicked are sown by the devil. This is something we may not fully understand until eternity. In a church, Satan will seek to bring in his own tares—his people. That is what Jude warns about: *“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Jude 1:4) The Early Church had to contend with Satan’s deliberately drawing his seed, the tares, into the Church to corrupt the Church.

We have to be extremely careful, for these tares enter the church and sow seed (ungodly doctrine) that is going to take root in the hearts of the people who are simple—those who do not examine doctrines. That is why we must absolutely guard our pulpits. We cannot let just anyone preach from our pulpits, because everyone who preaches is sowing. We want those whom God sends to sow the good seed so that our people have the good seed—the solid doctrines of the Word—planted in their hearts. But if we allow one of these

tares to come into our pulpits, we will have a problem in the church. The simple ones will receive these wrong doctrines (which will co-exist and grow up together with the true Word in their lives), and it will result in problems for years. It is very serious indeed. We must not be negligent and careless about who is sowing seed in our pulpit.

For example, communism is not just a political party; it is an evil seed. The origin of Communism is very clear. It came from Karl Marx, who was at one time a sincere Christian, and spoke of the sweetness of Jesus. He even wrote a religious essay entitled "*The Union of the Faithful with Christ*" (Adams, 1965. p.14).

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Then something happened; he became involved in spiritism and developed the theory of Communism, which is a devilish seed.

When Satan comes to a church, he tries to sow a seed that is much like the real. He does not come with an obviously false doctrine or work through out-and-out wicked people. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, "*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers*

of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."

When Satan came to Jesus during the temptation in the wilderness, he even quoted Scripture, but the motive behind it was wrong (Mt. 4:1-11). Some people are sincere and have a certain knowledge of Scripture, but when they push a doctrine or scripture too far, it becomes error. We need to have understanding and ask God to protect our fields from tares.

Balancing God's Sovereignty and Man's will

On the subject of the wheat and tares, there is a certain sense of the sovereignty of God that we must not ignore. For example, there are many scriptures in the Word of God that speak of the sovereignty of God such as John 15:16 where Jesus said, "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you..*" However, we must always balance the sovereignty of God with the free will of man.

We also have to balance man's free will with God's predestination of man. Predestination is based on the foreknowledge of God, as we read in Romans 8:29: "*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*" The foreknowledge of God precedes the predestination.

God knew everyone before the foundation of the world, and it is His desire that none should perish, but that all people

come to salvation (2 Pet. 3:9). God also knows what people will do with the truth that has been revealed to them—whether they will accept or reject the truth. Therefore, in His mercy, He does not reveal truth to everyone because they would come under greater judgment if they rejected the truth. We see this in 2 Peter 2:21, where Scripture declares: *“For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.”*

God, in His foreknowledge, knows who people are. He, therefore, calls people who would have the possibility or potential of entering in. But even within that group, not all will respond correctly in the trials and testings that He brings. Thus we see that the exclusion of certain people does not occur because of God’s desire, but it is the result of God’s foreknowledge of man’s choice, together with His mercy.

Born of the Will of God or Man

We have the two farmers—God and Satan. From the beginning, there were Cain and Abel, representing the two natures. John 1:12-13 tells us, *“But as many as received him [Jesus], to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

Let us look at the ways, listed in this verse, that children are born. Being “born of blood” basically means a normal

conception that came about without definite planning. “Born of the will of the flesh” means that people who are overcome with desire have sexual intercourse, resulting in the birth of a child. It was not their will, but the flesh overcame. Being “born of the will of man” occurs when a man and woman purpose to have a child. However, being “born of the will of God” occurs when a Christian couple know that God desires for them to have a child at a certain time, and they subsequently have that child.

We have to understand what happens in a pregnancy. Psalm 139:13-16 says, *“For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”* In God’s book is written all the members of our bodies before the foundation of the world. We are fashioned by Christ.

The question then arises concerning why some are born with a defect such as blindness or lameness. In Exodus 4:10, when Moses was being commissioned by God, he said, *“...O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.”* The Lord then declares, “...

Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?" (Ex. 4:11).

While we were in Switzerland we worked specifically with many blind people, one of whom was our director. One day she was very depressed and said, "Lord, if only I could see I could do my work much better." She let her fingers run along one of the volumes of the Braille Bible and came to the scripture in Exodus 4:11. She said, "Thank You, Lord. In Your sovereignty I am blind so I can empathize with those who are blind."

In John 9:1-3, Jesus said the man born blind was born that way for the glory of God; no one had sinned. Therefore, we come back to the womb, where the child is being created by God. In Jeremiah 1:5, the Lord said, "*Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.*" It is clearly stated that God formed Jeremiah in the womb and knew him as a person, not just as an embryo—so life clearly begins in the womb. The Lord also said that every hair on our head is numbered (Mt. 10:30). Physically we are created as God's plan intends us to be, to fulfil His good purpose.

I once had a prophecy in which God said, "Of all the millions that call upon My name, I carefully select My servants." Moses, for example, was carefully selected, because one thing he had to do was to stop God from executing judgment

on Israel (Num. 14:12-20). He had the heart of a spiritual father and a good shepherd, and he carried the people of Israel in his heart.

God also knew that the one He chose to lead Israel through the wilderness represented the Law, and therefore he could not enter the Promised Land. The reason is that we cannot inherit the promises of God through the law but only through grace (Heb. 8:6-7). Therefore God chose Moses who, in His foreknowledge, would lose his temper and forfeit the right to enter in at that time (Num. 20:7-12). However, Moses did finally enter in as he and Elijah stood at the right hand and left hand of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration in the Promised Land (Mt. 17:1-5).

**Christians who marry should pray
and ask God if it is His will for
them to have children.**

Where one is born outside the will of God, God in His absolute humility allows life and gives life in cases that are at times absolutely abhorrent to Him. In John 1:9 we read, *“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”* One cannot say that it is His will; it is often the will of man.

Christians who marry should pray and ask God, “What is Your will, Lord, do You want me to have children?” God

may clearly speak to some to not have children, because of His call on their lives. Others may pray and feel that in two or three years God wants to bless them with children. They take precautions until the right time.

It is the will of the flesh or the will of man that is carried out in the conception, but still God gives life. From before the foundation of the world, God knows that these babies are going to be born, and He forms them. We must see the absolute humility of God. God, in His humility, let His earth be overrun with sin. He knew the creation of earth would cost His Son His life, yet He chose to proceed with it. He goes ahead giving life to those He knows will ruin His creation. The humility of God is amazing.

We cannot automatically assume that because a baby dies, it goes to heaven. God in His awesome sovereignty knows exactly from which seed it comes, while we do not know. The best advice to give to any woman whose baby has just died is to encourage her to ask God about the situation. We must tell mothers that life and death are under the sovereignty of God. It is He alone who knows the answers, and He is extremely merciful and compassionate. We cannot give a blanket answer on this matter.

Abortion is murder; it is the taking of a life. Years ago we were in Geneva, before abortion was legalized in any country, and scarcely anyone had an abortion. We were in the back of a church there, when the pastor asked us to pray for a certain lady. She had had an abortion and could not get

peace. God did not give her any peace until she confessed and acknowledged that abortion is murder.

We must trust in the wisdom and foreknowledge of God. In France, there was a woman who had a baby son that was dying. She went to church and travailed and pleaded with God. She said, “Lord, I will not let go. Please heal him.” God saw her persistence and answered her prayer. However, when the boy had grown to manhood, he was executed at the age of 20 for murdering someone. In the mercy of God it would have been better if the mother had prayed, “Lord, not my will but Yours. Do You want me to intercede for this baby or do You want to take him?” It would have been far better for the boy to have died as a baby—better for the mother, the boy, and the one he killed.

We need to have the mind of God because He does answer our prayers. I have seen many people get into great difficulties because they persist in prayers that are not the will of God, and God gives them their desires. God often takes a child to save him from something bad that would come in his life if he lived, even as Isaiah 57:1 says, *“The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.”* On the other hand, many people who have been mightily used of God have nearly died at birth or in their childhood. It is almost as though the devil comes in and tries to take them. There are the two sides. We have to have the mind of God, and we must trust in the wisdom and sovereignty of God.

Protected from the Tares

There are many tares in the Church today. While they are growing up, we cannot tell the difference between the wheat and the tares. There were several such cases when I was in France. A woman whom I had never before met came up to me and said, "I know you." I replied to her, "And I know who you are. You are a spiritist medium." She was doing all the prophesying in the church!

In southern France we were in a church for a week of prayer. The first meeting was fine. Then I knelt to pray, and my eyes were opened. I saw an angel and a demon come into the church. They walked down the aisle together, then stopped. The angel motioned to the demon. The demon then went down the row and touched a certain lady. She began to pray, saying, "Oh, Lord, help our poor pastors." The demon came back to the angel, and they walked back out of the church. I told the pastor that the lady who prayed should meet with us in the office. When I told her that she was a spiritist medium, she exploded. Mercifully, the pastor agreed with me because someone else had told him the same thing. I then asked if she had prayer meetings and gathered the other ladies of the church together to pray for the pastor. She replied that she did. However, she was a spiritist medium, and she was trying to dominate the church by undermining the pastor. After she had been challenged openly, that medium did not come back.

I remember praying one time for someone who had a lot of spirits. We prayed and got them all out except for the

last one, who said, “I want to come out, but she will not let me.” It was a familiar spirit. Then another spirit came and strengthened him so he could stay. It was her will; she did not want deliverance. She told her friends afterwards that she could have had deliverance, but that she did not want it.

We must pray out the tares from the Church. Judas Iscariot was a tare; Jesus knew it but He did not remove him. People often sympathize with Judas and with Pilate, but both were very wicked men. Judas betrayed the Lord for money, while Pilate mingled the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices (Lk. 13:1). They both had wicked heritages; no one just falls into sin.

Nevertheless, we do not want to limit God. In His sovereignty and foreknowledge, He knows who is going to respond. Out of even a very wicked family can come a shining example of the grace of God. We must never give up hope, but we must work with God. We must cry out to Him for mercy, and He will respond.

We must ask God to protect our field from the tares. However, we must not attempt to separate the wheat from the tares in our own strength; it is the angels who do the separating. It is often difficult to discern, and sometimes, the “spirit of suspicion” can be at work rather than the spirit of discernment.

In a certain church in France there was a woman who got up every morning at 4:00 am to pray. She was quite

dominant in the church there, although her husband was not very spiritual. Then the Spirit of the Lord began to move. Everyone thought this woman would be used especially, but she was not. Her praying had actually taken a form of criticizing the pastor.

Two weeks before she died, I received knowledge from God that she would die, and then I left the area on a ministry trip. When I returned a number of weeks later, the people told me how she had died. She had left the church, telling her friends that she was finished with that church. A week or two later, she was driving her car, and some Christians were following her. They drove along beautiful boulevards with trees growing on either side. Then, it was as if an unseen hand reached down and wrapped that car around a tree. A Catholic priest driving by gave her the last rites.

In the natural realm, she appeared to be the most spiritual person in the church, but in the end she proved to be a tare. Let us be very careful and cry out to God for discernment.

3. The Grain of Mustard Seed (Mt. 13:31-32)

In Matthew 13:31-32, we read, *“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”*

We need to understand that the mustard seed of which He is speaking is very small. It is so fine that just one seed cannot be seen with the naked eye. There must be several grains together to see them clearly. Thus, a single mustard seed seems insignificant. In this parable, Jesus is saying that the Word of God can seem insignificant, even as the mustard seed. However, in the Middle East, if you plant that same small, insignificant mustard seed, it becomes a tree so large that literally flocks of birds can lodge in the branches, and a man and horse can shelter under it from the midday sun.

We must be careful that we do not despise what God is doing when it starts in a small way. Zechariah 4:10 speaks of this: *“For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.”* Historically, some of the greatest works in the church have been birthed from circumstances such as two ladies praying together, or from the efforts of a man who has been ordained by

**Be careful not
to despise what
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in a small way.**

God to do a work. One such example was Duncan Campbell, who was instrumental in starting the Hebrides revival. He just prayed through. Many churches have started with a small nucleus of people who have just prayed, and as a result, God birthed a church. In Job 8:7 there is this promise: *“Though*

thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase."

If a work is of God, it often starts very small. For example, the King of kings was born in a manger, and not in a luxurious hotel. Consider the insignificance of His birth, but look at His greatness! Then again, His kingdom started in an insignificant way with a band of 120 of His followers in the Upper Room. Furthermore, a small band of 300 men led by Gideon defeated a large, mighty Midianite army with only lamps and pitchers (Jdg. 7). Samson killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (Jdg. 15:15). David defeated the giant Goliath and put to flight the whole Philistine army with just a sling and a stone (1 Sam. 17).

We see that God, in order that He might have the glory, uses that which is insignificant. Many miss the move of God because they despise the day of small things. They look at something with the natural eye and say, "Oh, that is too small, or too weak; it will never work." However, God uses the mustard seeds to show forth His glory. We must realize that the grains of mustard seed have the potential to become mighty trees.

Perhaps we feel God has called us to do something, and we are hesitating, saying that God could not possibly use us. However, it is because we are small and insignificant that God wants to use us. In 1 Cor. 1:26-29, Paul said, "*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But*

God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

Samuel wanted to choose Eliab, the tall one, the handsome one, the majestic man; but God said that He looked on the heart, and He chose David, the little shepherd boy (1 Sam. 16:7). We must not miss God. He uses the mustard seeds.

4. The Three Measures of Meal with Leaven (Mt. 13:33)

“Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened”
(Mt. 13:33)

We want to look at leaven in its positive sense here. When the Israelite women made their bread, they would mix in a little of their older dough which contained the leaven, or friendly bacteria, that would condition the mixture of fresh flour, water, salt, and perhaps a little oil, to make it rise. (Evans, 1939). The natural fermentation process, which took about eight hours, would break down the bran to release minerals, as well as neutralize the phytic acid so that these minerals could be absorbed by the human body. The gluten

was also efficiently fermented in this process, thus releasing the complex carbohydrate, protein, and vitamin content.

As the process of fermentation proceeds, the bacteria produce carbon dioxide gas, which expands the dough and gives the bread a fine-grained, moist texture. The spread of the bacteria or “yeast” throughout the dough also produces a distinctive flavour and pleasant aroma during baking (Sircus, n.d).

Even as dough is kneaded, causing the yeast to permeate throughout, so the Holy Spirit works in our lives, kneading us so that the Word of God permeates our entire being.

The three measures of meal speak of the three parts of man—body, soul, and spirit. As we take the Word of God into our being, it starts to work. As did the yeast in the bread, God’s Word “ferments” and goes throughout the “dough,” so that it nourishes our body, soul, and spirit. We are enabled to receive nutrition from the Bread, just as in the natural realm, the body receives vitamins, minerals, proteins, and complex carbohydrates from the natural bread.

A woman in the Word of God often refers to the Church. The work of the Church is to hide or place the Word of God in a person’s life (see also Psalm 119:11). The Word will work sanctification in all three parts of our being (1 Th. 5:23). God hides His Word in us, but it works very slowly until it takes over everything in our lives. Mary hid the Word in her heart, and it produced the life of Jesus (Lk. 2:19). We must not limit the life of God in us. He specializes in

insignificant starts. He hides His Word, but after a time it completely takes over.

We now come to a break in the parables in Matthew 13:36. The first four parables were given to the multitude. Jesus then gave the interpretation privately to the disciples. However, the last three parables of the kingdom were given only to the disciples.

5. Treasure Hid in a Field (Mt. 13:44)

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” (Mt. 13:44).

To understand the interpretation of this parable we need to realize that the days of Jesus were days of great adversity and difficulty, days when foreign armies ranged all over the countryside. In order to protect his wealth, a rich man would often divide his riches into three parts. One part he would have in liquid assets—things he could market readily, so that he could carry on his business. A second part he converted to jewels that he could easily carry with him. The third part he would bury in a field.

The thought so often was that if a foreign army was coming, the owner could not possibly take all of his wealth with him. Thus he would bury some of it in a place unknown to anyone else, intending to return later to recover his treasure. If he was

waylaid on his journey, he would still have reserve wealth that was hidden for his return. Sadly, the buried treasure was sometimes stolen by a servant who knew its location, or the individual would die without ever returning to claim his treasure.

However, there were times when someone would be digging in a field and discover the buried treasure. He would then sell whatever assets he had, buy that particular field, and according to the law of that day, the treasure would be his. The treasure belonged to the owner of the field and not the finder.

Jesus was saying in this parable that there are many hidden treasures of truth in God's Word that require us to sell our all in order to obtain them. Revelation 2:17 says, "... *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna...*" A truth does not become ours until we have paid the price for it, as we read in Proverbs 23:23, "*Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.*" That price is often to pass through trials in order to give us the treasures of darkness (Isa. 45:3). It is during these times that God reveals and imparts truth to our spirits.

6. The Pearl of Great Price (Mt. 13:45-46)

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." (Mt. 13:45-46).

The sixth parable is different from the fifth parable. In the sixth parable the man is definitely seeking for the treasure, while in the case of the fifth parable on the buried treasure, we sometimes come upon truth unawares. We may not be seeking for it, but the Lord in His mercy just reveals it to us.

However, there are times when we are diligently seeking truth. This Parable on the Pearl of Great Price is speaking of a person who appreciates truth and already possesses some truth, but he wants more. When he finds another treasure of truth, he realizes that all he has at the moment has to be given to get that further truth. When God answers our prayers and gives us more truth, we sometimes have to give up all we have, our possessions and positions—in other words, everything—in order to move on into that new experience.

We were in a certain church in a university city, where virtually everyone in the church was either a graduate or an undergraduate of that university. After the service, I agreed to answer questions that they had and the topic of discussion was pearls. A question was asked, “What is the significance of pearls?”

I explained that pearls are formed through the suffering of a little oyster. When foreign matter gets into a little oyster, the oyster secretes juices, trying to provide protection from the roughness of the particle, and that is how the pearl is formed. Thus the significance of pearls is suffering. The gates of the New Jerusalem are made of pearls (Rev. 21:21). There are a lot of saints who will not be going into the New Jerusalem

(but will remain on the outskirts of heaven) because they have not allowed suffering to work in their lives.

Then the question was asked, “Why do some oysters produce pearls and some do not?” No one knew the answer, but one of the students was a marine biologist student, and she called her professor to ask him why. He was a very gracious man, and although he was awakened at 11:00 pm, he gave us the answer. This is what he said: “Generally speaking, the oyster settles at the bottom of the sea, opening its mouth to eat something that comes close by. But those oysters who are not content with where they are situated and who desire to move on to get more food, stir up everything around them in their effort to do so. It is those little oysters that pick up the sand and make the pearls.”

This is a picture of what happens if we choose to move on in Christ. If the cry of Philippians 3:10 is birthed in our spirit—*“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death”*—we will not be satisfied with “our place in the ocean,” so to speak.

Psalm 107:22-24 says, *“And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing. They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.”* Here we have the thought that those who go into the depths are going to see the greatness of God. But further on in verses 25-27, there is a revelation of what happens

when one is cast out into the fullness of the sea of God: *“For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end.”* As soon as God sees a little soul that wants to move on, He commands the storms. If we launch out deeper, we are going to see huge, mountainous waves. We will experience great storms of trouble. The question we need to ask ourselves is: “What kind of little oyster are we going to be? One that thrills the heart of the marine biologist and all the collectors of pearls, or one safely ensconced in the bottom of the sea?”

7. The Net (Mt. 13:47-50)

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 13:47-50).

Jesus said to His disciples, “I will make you fishers of men.” There are basically two ways to catch fish. We can either throw out the line and haul them in one by one, or we can throw out the net and haul in a net full of fish. The evangelist Philip was used in both ways. He had a mighty ministry in

Samaria, healing and delivering multitudes in the name of Jesus (Acts 8:5-8). However, in Acts 8:26, the Holy Spirit sent him to meet with the Ethiopian eunuch and lead him to Christ.

When we throw out the net, we get all kinds of fish. I believe that God wants a net ministry in these last days by which He will literally pull in all kinds of fish, the good and bad. During times of revival, we see the net ministry operating.

This happened in New Zealand. When we had a revival there, a church grew from 180 to 3,000 people. The crowds came, got saved and were filled with the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Ghost and the gifts were given to everyone, the just and the unjust—even to the rebellious, as Psalm 68:18 teaches us: *“Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.”* The morning service began at 6:00 am. The church was so full that we had to step over people to get to the pulpit. Then at 7:30 pm, the church really filled to capacity because the Baptist young people came over after their service ended.

There were the good and bad, including the hippies and drug addicts, among the regular church youth. Many of them did not stay, even though they had been filled by the Holy Ghost. There was one girl who had had a number of babies out of wedlock before she had been saved. She was doing very well, and then she got mixed up with someone else and became pregnant.

I also remember a lawyer and his girlfriend. She was divorced and her husband was a minister. She led this lawyer to the Lord and began living with him. They went all over the country, counselling with different pastors, and everyone told them they could get married. He was newly saved, and open to the Spirit. They came to me, and she said, "I know you. I do not want you to just quote from the Bible. I want you to ask God about our situation." When we prayed, God said to me, "I want you to hand them over to Me."

They came back three weeks later and asked if I had heard from God. I told them that God had told me to hand them over to Him. Their faces went white. God broke their hearts, and they no longer desired each other. I saw this lady a few months later. She had returned to her husband, her marriage was restored, and God subsequently gave her many worship choruses. The lawyer ended up becoming a pastor, and he married another girl.

We must have our doctrine straight when the net brings in all these fish. In the case of the lawyer and his girlfriend, my wife and I suffered terribly because we would not agree with their proposed marriage. We stood firmly for truth. Had we not done so, neither of them would be in the ministry today. If we choose to suffer for the sake of righteousness, we end up with the precious fruit of righteousness. The net ministry brings in all kinds of fish. We want to be faithful to all the fish that God brings into our churches during times of revival.

The net ministry can cover certain areas of a country or it can cover the entire country. When God put a net over Sweden in the early twentieth century, people in the farmhouses would walk miles, coming to churches in the middle of the night for salvation. When God sent revival in Wales, many taverns were closed, and one cinema owner gave his building to be used as a church, since it was the biggest building in town. Judges found that there was no crime to be dealt with. The chief of police directed the crowds to churches, and the policemen sang in quartets at the churches. There was nothing else for them to do. We believe that we will see the net ministry worldwide in these Last Days.

Seven Parables of the Kingdom Revealed Historically

These seven parables can be likened to Seven Churches in the various stages of church history.

1. *The Parable of the Sower:* This applies to the New Testament Church. Jesus was the sower who sowed the seed of the Word in the hearts of the apostles.

2. *The Parable of the Tares:* The tares among the wheat found fulfilment in the Church of the first century A.D. Nearly all the epistles written by the apostles in the New Testament were written because of problems in the Church due to tares (false prophets) having infiltrated the church. In

Philippians 3:2, Paul referred to them as “dogs.” Jude 1:4 speaks of men having crept in unawares. That was because tares came in immediately after the formation of the New Testament Church on the day of Pentecost.

3. *The Parable of the Mustard Seed:* The Grain of Mustard Seed symbolizes the Church during the time of the emperor Constantine. Christianity became a state religion, and all kinds of people and doctrines lodged there at that time. The purity of the Christian religion was completely marred by paganism.
4. *The Parable of the Leaven:* The Leaven in the Three Measures of Meal found fulfilment in the Middle Ages, also aptly called the “Dark Ages.” There are two women throughout the Word of God, the good and the bad. The woman stands as a type for the Church. In this parable we have a woman who hid leaven, which is also a type of sin when it is considered from a doctrinal viewpoint. Thus we have a woman who is sowing her leaven of sin everywhere. During the Middle Ages, the apostate church, the Roman Catholic Church, held the ascendancy.
5. *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure:* The treasure hidden in the field depicts Martin Luther’s discovery of truth and the birth of the Church of the Reformation Era. As in the case of the parable, where the treasure was stumbled upon, Martin

Luther had stumbled upon the doctrine of “salvation by faith.” He was not seeking truth; he thought he had it. He was actually going on his knees to Saint Peter’s Church when he heard a voice say, “The just shall live by faith” (Heb. 10:38). Christ had revealed this to him.

6. *The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price:* The Pearl of Great Price found fulfilment during the time of John Wesley and others who brought in the Holiness Movement. These people, unlike Luther who had stumbled upon truth, were actually seeking more truth and revelation from God, as they were not satisfied with their level of spirituality.
7. *The Parable of the Net:* The net ministry speaks of the restoration of the Pentecostal movement and the associated revival, but it also encompasses the last great revival which is still to take place. The great End Time Revival will usher the Church into Christ’s thousand year reign on earth (the Millennium) after His Second Coming. The Spirit of God will be poured on the nations, and whole nations shall be turned to the Lord in that day.

Seven Parables Paralleled to the Seven Feasts of the Lord

These seven parables can also be compared to the Seven Feasts of the Lord:

1. *The Parable of the Sower*: This parable can be likened to the Feast of Passover, which speaks of the salvation experience because salvation is the initial offering of the Word of God, much like the seed that the Sower sows. Some accept what is sowed, while others reject it; some bring forth fruit and others do not. So says the Parable of the Sower, and so it is with the salvation message—some accept the Word; others reject it. Some bring forth fruit, while others do not.
2. *The Parable of the Wheat and Tares*: There is a parallel between this parable and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Leaven speaks of false doctrine that is being sown beside the pure doctrine (the Unleavened Bread) of God's Word. This is exactly what happens when good teachers open up the Word of God, but false teachers either precede them or follow them to sow false doctrine into those congregations.
3. *The Parable of the Mustard Seed*: The tiny mustard seed that becomes a great tree can be linked to the Feast of Firstfruits which speaks of the Resurrection of Christ. Christ began as an insignificant babe and became the King of Kings with everyone sheltering in His cross.
4. *The Parable of the Leaven*: This parable finds a parallel with the Feast of Pentecost. On the day of

Pentecost there were two wave loaves which were baked with leaven, as we read in Leviticus 23:17, “*Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD.*” In the parable, the woman hides the leaven in the meal. Leaven is a type of sin, hypocrisy, and false doctrine. The Spirit of God is poured out on all flesh, as we saw in the charismatic movement when all kinds of people came into the church.

5. *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure:* This parable is connected to the Feast of Trumpets, which speaks of new beginnings. There comes the realization that God is going to move afresh, something beyond Pentecost. As in the case of the Parable of the Hidden treasure, the initiative does not come from us, but it is God who initiates it. His voice sounds again for us to move on. To our amazement, we learn that there is something beyond the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As the Apostle Paul wrote in Hebrews 6:1-3, “*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.*”

6. *The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price*: The corresponding feast for this parable is the Day of Atonement, which speaks of a time of suffering and affliction of our souls. The pearl, too, speaks of suffering. The Day of Atonement is the feast in which God deals with the sin in His people through that suffering as 1 Peter 4:1 tells us: *“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.”*

7. *The Parable of the Net*: The Feast of Tabernacles, which speaks of Last Day Revival, is linked to this parable. The revival will be characterized by:
 - a) Unity,
 - b) Restoration,
 - c) The glory of God,
 - d) The latter rain (speaking of the tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit),
 - e) The appearing of Christ,
 - f) Great joy, and
 - g) The ingathering or harvest of souls.

CHAPTER THREE

Parables from Matthew

The New Piece of Cloth (Mt. 9:16)

“No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse” (Mt. 9:16).

We could interpret this parable in the following way. If a pastor brings new doctrine into a traditional church setting, that doctrine will cause a split in the congregation. This happened time and again during the Charismatic Revival, as pastors were baptized in the Holy Spirit and tried to share further truth with their congregations. At that time many congregations were brought to a time of decision, as were the various denominational colleges, when some of the students and faculty members were filled with the Spirit.

The New Wine (Mt. 9:17)

“Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved” (Mt. 9:17).

In Bible times, animal skins were used for containing liquids. These containers became dried out, hard and brittle with age. When the new wine was poured into old wineskins, the

fermentation in that new wine would exert pressure on the brittle old wineskins, causing them to burst.

This parable reinforces the previous one and has a similar interpretation. The common Hebrew method of teaching was by repetition. A pastor needs to keep teaching his congregation good doctrine whereby the believers are little by little introduced to the new truths so that all the congregation can mature spiritually. Isaiah 28:10 says: *“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line; here a little, and there a little...”*

Another aspect of this parable is the need to be “new wineskins” to receive from God new truths. Often, very young and newly saved Christians are like new wineskins. They can with joy embrace a new truth such as the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. However, the danger for those who are already established in the church is that inflexibility, complacency, stagnation or failing to press on in their walk with the Lord can prevent them from being able to receive and contain newly revealed truth.

We know that some who were touched by God in a previous revival tend to reject the next revival and the new truths God reveals when He moves afresh. Many a church has been split by the revelation of new truth. For instance, many “old wineskin” denominations had trouble with their members who received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit when God moved in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Newly Spirit-baptized members of traditional churches ended up leaving those denominations,

preferring the “new wineskin” fellowships that were moving on in God.

So what can we do to make sure that we qualify to hold the new wine of the next revival? What can prevent our wineskins from becoming stiff and spiritually inflexible? The key to this situation is related to the principle of the talents from Matthew 25:29. *“For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”* We want to walk steadfastly in the truth that the Lord has revealed to us, allowing the Word to bear fruit in our lives, and asking Him to reveal even more treasures of His truth to us.

To remain “new wineskins,” we need to apprehend the truth of 2 Corinthians 5:17, *“Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”*

The key to being in Christ is found in Philippians 3:8-9: *“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”* Thus we need to pay the price of dying to self and entering into the crucified life, so that we may be found in Christ and flexible, new wineskins.

We can also glean further truths from the process of restoring old wineskins and making them new. The old brittle wineskins were first immersed in water so that moisture was restored. We, too, need to be washed continually by the water of the Word of God. They were then rubbed with oil so that they would be flexible, lasting and thus reusable. Oil speaks of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and we need to be anointed afresh with the Holy Spirit to become flexible new wineskins (Pierce and Sytsema, p. 64).

The Wicked Servant (Mt. 18:21-35)

“Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay

me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses” (Mt. 18:21-35).

This parable was given in answer to a question Peter asked on forgiving his brother. It is dealing with the relationship of Christians to one another. The Lord gives the method of discipline for the wicked servant who had no compassion—he was delivered to the tormentors. However, the Lord is also seeking for reconciliation. Thus this parable has the themes of reconciliation and restitution.

The king was very rich. His servant owed him 10,000 talents, which would amount to millions of dollars in today’s economy. That was an astonishing amount to forgive. He must have been a very rich, merciful king indeed to forgive that amount. Yet he was willing to do it.

Now let us consider the one who was forgiven that large amount. After he had been forgiven his debt, he met a fellow servant who owed him one hundred pence. We must realize that this was not just a few pennies. One pence was the average man's daily wage in those days, and so this amounted to over three months' salary. It was a large amount that he had to forgive. The fellow servant promised to pay him, but asked for time. Instead of being merciful, the man who had been forgiven a huge sum by the king had this poor fellow servant seized and put in prison. When the other servants of the king saw what had happened, they reported it to the king, who then had the unforgiving servant also shut up in prison.

If someone steps on a person's toe, the injured person can readily forgive him, because the pain ceases within a few moments. However, if someone is responsible for an accident that causes him to lose his foot, that is a different matter. It does not take much grace to say, "I forgive you" to someone who merely causes a little pain, but it takes a lot of grace to fully forgive someone who has caused the loss of a limb. Sometimes, the consequences of the original offence can last for years, or in some cases, one can be injured for life. Yet we must triumph in the area of forgiveness.

Jesus told Peter that he had to forgive his brother seventy-times-seven times, or in other words, 490 times in one day. Interestingly, Jesus did not just arbitrarily choose that number. The number 490 is mentioned in the book of Daniel, referring to the number of years needed to reconcile and bring Israel back to God. Jesus was, in effect, saying

that He was forgiving Israel. There was a gap of 2,000 years in which God was overlooking their offences. He was practicing this forgiveness, and so he could admonish Peter to do the same.

We must have victory over offences. We have seen so many people fail in their Christian lives and in the ministry because of their inability to forgive.

Offences will come, and we must have a healthy attitude toward them. We have to view everything in a positive way. Everything will either be an *ordeal* or an *opportunity*, depending upon our attitude. We have to really believe in our hearts the truth of Romans 8:28 that all things work together for the good of those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose. Our attitude will determine whether or not we triumph.

When offences come, and people do things against us, God wants us to use that opportunity to allow Him to develop mercy and forgiveness in us. The only way to develop mercy is to go through experiences in which we have to show mercy and forgiveness. The only way the fruit of mercy is developed in our lives is for us to be exposed to people who do us harm or who hate us without a cause. Then we have the opportunity to show them forgiveness and mercy.

Micah 7:18 says, *“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever;*

because he delighteth in mercy.” He is a God of mercy—He delights in showing mercy. He is a God of compassion, and He delights in those who are also merciful. Therefore, the ones who find favour with God must delight in mercy and forgiveness as well.



**The key to forgiveness is asking
God for a “Manasseh” or a
holy forgetfulness.**

The key to forgiveness is forgetfulness. In Genesis 41:51, Joseph named his firstborn son “Manasseh” meaning “forgetfulness” to indicate that he had forgiven his brothers for their betrayal and cruelty and that he had forgotten the offense. God not only forgives our sins, but He forgets them as well. We see this in Micah 7:19: *“He [the Lord] will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”*

When we were in Europe at one time, we had to do a great deal of counselling. We used to get problems that the pastors could not solve. People would come to the hotel where we were staying, and some of these problems literally took days to straighten out. People would have to confess all their sin. God is so gracious. He would give keys to the situations, and the people would go away rejoicing.

However, I found that I was under a tremendous cloud because I remembered everything they had said to me. This brought me into despondency. I told the Lord I could not go on like that. He then directed me to ask Him for a “Manasseh” or “holy forgetfulness.” Subsequently, after I counselled someone, I would go into my room, go through the motion of putting on a hat to represent my covering of “Manasseh,” and then I was able to keep the victory. I literally could not remember their problems anymore.

Sometimes we need to do a simple act like enacting the putting on of a hat to help us cover ourselves with “Manasseh.” There is a terrible danger in having “computer-like” minds, remembering everything that everyone has done against us. Forgiveness is rooted in forgetfulness. After Joseph had forgotten all the terrible results of his brothers’ betrayal and cruelty, and had forgiven them (naming his firstborn son “Manasseh”), he had Ephraim, his second born son, whose name means “fruitfulness.” We can only come into the purposes of God for our lives, into our appointed double portion, if we have truly forgotten all offences and have forgiven everyone their offences against us.

Consider God the Father. He has to forgive Israel for marring His Son. The scars from the cross will remain with Jesus throughout eternity. When God looks at His Son, He will always see those scars, yet He still loves Israel. When we consider the purpose of the prophets, the Great Tribulation, and the Second Coming, we see that God’s intent is mainly to bring Israel back to Himself. Oh, the mercy and forgiveness

of God! He spends so much time and places so much thought into reconciling unto Himself those who murdered His own Son. We must remember that God the Father suffered when His Son suffered. Those who are parents can understand that. In reality, the parents' suffering is often greater than that of their children.

We must major on mercy and forgiveness. If we want God to delight in us, then we must delight in mercy. Matthew 5:7 says, *"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."* To forgive and forget is the whole foundation of His creation. We exist only because we have a God who delights in mercy.

The Labourers in the Vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16)

"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and

whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.”

This parable is based on a question that Peter asked the Lord after the rich young ruler had gone away “*sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*” That question was: “... *Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?*” (Mt. 19:27). Jesus later told this parable to emphasize to the disciples the thought of the first being last, and the last first. He wanted the disciples to give with the right attitude, not with the thought of receiving, but with the attitude of blessing someone else and pleasing the Lord.

In this parable there is a good, wealthy man who owned many vineyards. In the early morning he hired workers for his

vineyard at a specified wage. Later, at the sixth hour (noon), he hired more workers; still later (at the ninth hour, around three pm) he hired others; and finally at the eleventh hour (around five pm, just before sunset) he hired the final group. To each of the later ones, he mentioned no set wage, but only said he would give what was right. He gave them all equal pay, and the workers who had been hired first complained that they should have received more pay compared to those who had not worked as long. However, the owner had not slighted them; he gave them their just, fair wage. Out of his generous heart, he had given the others what they had not really deserved.

We want to consider the eleventh-hour workers. Here were people willing to work, but they lacked opportunity. But when the opportunity came, they responded. That is important. This can apply to people in their later years of life. When we were on a certain missions committee, there was a seventy-year-old lady who wanted to go to Africa. She had been saved in her later years and had had no opportunity to serve the Lord when she was younger. We felt a witness to her desires, and were the only ones on the mission committee who did. We had to persuade all the other members to let her go.

When this lady arrived in Africa, she opened a reading room. She had a library on one side and a reading table on the other, and she hired African helpers. People came to read, and they took their books over to the table. The African helpers were able to talk to them, and to lead many of them to the Lord.

Five hundred souls were saved through this eleventh-hour worker.

Billy Sunday led a seventy-four-year old man to the Lord. By the age of 94, this man had led 2,000 souls to the Lord. We must not ignore the older people in our congregation. To many of them, salvation was not revealed when they were younger, and they lacked opportunity to serve the Lord. The call was not there, but when the call came, they responded. Some mission boards will no longer send a first-time missionary to the field if that person is over 38; some will not do so once they reach 40. We want to make sure that our rules line up with the rules of the kingdom.

Basically this parable is saying that the eleventh-hour people lacked opportunity, or they would have started at the beginning. God judges and rewards accordingly, because He judges based on His knowledge. He knows what a person would have done *if* he had an opportunity.

Consider Matthew 11:21-24 where the Lord Jesus said, *“Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it*

shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee."

Sodom and Gomorrah were not given the opportunity to repent. However, in the judgment God says it would be more tolerable for them than for Capernaum, because Sodom would have repented. Therefore, we have the degrees of judgment and the degrees of hell. Chorazin, who seemed to be upright people, but who absolutely disregarded the miracles of Jesus and rejected His ministry, will receive a much more severe judgment than that of Sodom.

However, we have to balance that with the thought that Sodom and Gomorrah did not receive the opportunity because they were not found worthy to receive a second chance. They had Lot, who was a righteous man, living among them, but their lifestyle was so evil that they were not worthy of an 'Elijah' to give them a second chance. Chorazin was able to experience the ministry of the Lord Jesus, but they rejected Him. They should have responded, but did not.

A certain pastor had a dream in which he saw the death of a good friend of his who was not saved. In this dream the angels came and took this dead man down to hell. The pastor started crying out to the Lord, saying, "You did not give him a chance." The Lord said to the angels, "Bring him here." So the angels turned around and started bringing this man back up. As the angels got closer and closer to heaven, this man began to struggle and push until finally he pushed away from the angels and dived into hell.

Later the pastor realized that this was not just a dream; his friend had died that very same hour. The Lord had actually opened his eyes and showed him what had happened. The amazing thing is that some people choose hell rather than heaven. Heaven is filled with the light of God's presence. When people choose darkness rather than light on earth, in eternity they prefer the darkness of hell to the overwhelming light of God's presence, because they have loved evil. This is confirmed in Scripture: *"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil"* (Jn. 3:19).

We want to look at this from another angle. Moses had a ministry of 40 years; Hosea's ministry lasted roughly 70 years; Daniel also had a ministry of nearly 70 years; Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all had long years of ministry. Yet Jesus said that there was no greater prophet than John the Baptist; his ministry lasted only about 18 months.

Judgment and rewards are both based upon the response to opportunity. The vineyard workers were all rewarded because they responded to the opportunity of working in the vineyard. The owner of the vineyard graciously gave the last workers the wages for a full day, just as he gave the agreed amount to the first group. God keeps the best wine until last. We have the privilege of being a part of this "best wine." We must keep the right attitude, one of humility and openness. We also have to guard our attitudes. In particular, we must ask ourselves, "Why are we serving the Lord?" Why did the first labourers go to the field? They wanted their pay.

Some people seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit for many years. There was a certain lady who was a sincere Christian. However, her husband was a real reprobate. For many years she sought the baptism and prayed for her husband. When he got converted and got the baptism of the Holy Spirit before his wife did, the wife was furious. She went to the Lord and gave Him all the reasons why her husband should not have gotten the baptism of the Holy Spirit, while she should have. The pastor had to soothe her and tell her that the Lord was answering her prayers for her husband. We must watch our hearts and rejoice at the victories of the eleventh-hour Christians. We want to root out any envy and jealousy.

Our motive for serving the Lord should be pure love and not covetousness.

In this parable, the Lord is continuing to deal with the heart. What is in our hearts? Are we coveting positions or rewards for faithful service to Him? Do we have a love of money? We need to let the truth of this parable permeate our spirits. Pure love for the Lord is the motive He desires us to have in serving Him.

The Two Sons (Mt. 21:28-32)

“But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my

vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him” (Mt. 21:28-32).

Here again we have two basic groups of people listening to Jesus—the scribes and the Pharisees. One could hardly have had worse people; they knew what was right, but refused to do it. Outwardly, they were seeking righteousness, but when John the Baptist gave them the counsel of the Lord, they declined to walk in the ways of God. It was the harlots and publicans who went into the kingdom of God. This is the essence of the parable.

Let us consider times of revival. People pray for revival, yet when it comes, so many times they reject the very revival they prayed for, because it did not come in the way they expected. Finney said he wept at times when God told him to go to a church, because he knew that two things would happen. Firstly, many people in the church, when confronted with the doorway of righteousness, would reject it and leave the church. Secondly, there would be a revival, and many people of all kinds would rush into the church.

That is actually true. Often the people who come into revival are those who have never before darkened a church door. In a revival, we see the nucleus of the old believers who enter in, and then we see the new converts. Joshua and Caleb were the only ones of the old generation who went into Canaan with the new generation.

In the natural realm, when one watches the waves at the seashore, one sees the old wave begin to recede before the new one comes in. Part of the old wave resists the new wave, and part of it is swept in with the new wave. That is what happens in revival; and that is what Jesus was explaining here. Some of the scribes and Pharisees came to the baptism of John, but as a whole the scribes and Pharisees resisted the ministry of Christ. The scribes and Pharisees should have been the ones who flocked to Jesus; instead they stood against His teaching.

There is also another application of this parable. There may be people in the church who have a missionary call. Initially, they may refuse to go, but later in life, they repent and go to the field. There will be others who run to the altar when a missionary call is given and say they will go, but they never follow through with it.

God alone knows the hearts; He knows the end from the beginning. We must be careful about judging people's hearts, and giving up on them. We must remember Jeremiah 18:4: *“And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good*

to the potter to make it.” Sometimes God works in people’s hearts and makes them willing to follow Him, when before they were not willing. We must have a heart that is open to these changes. We must not conclude that a person’s decision is final until he either dies or the Lord reveals sovereignly that that person will not change.

The heart of the pastor has to be like water, which can be turned to flow in another direction because people do change, and we have to accept it. The minister must watch his heart with all diligence, because he can get upset when people do not respond, and he then has to accept them back when they finally change. The congregation follows the lead of the pastor as he responds to a person or situation. We must have an open heart, tender and forgiving to the “younger sons” in our congregations.

The Parable of the Householder (Mt. 21:33-46)

“Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will

reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet" (Mt. 21:33-46).

This parable is speaking of the Lord Jesus. The vineyard is Israel. The servants are the prophets; virtually all the prophets were martyrs. The Son is Christ. However, you cannot build doctrine on every part of this parable, for it would suggest that Israel was certain that Jesus was the Christ. This was not so, as Paul states definitely in 1 Corinthians 2:8, "*Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*"

Verse 42 is a direct quotation from Psalm 118:22, *“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”* The builders were the religious leaders, but they rejected the cornerstone, Christ. He was the very One from which all measurements were to be taken. He asked them what the nobleman should do to the men for slaying his son. They said, “He will destroy them.” They spoke their own judgment.

The parable brings out that they crucified the Lord through envy. They saw Jesus as a threat to their position. The arrangement they had with the Romans was that they were to be allowed to continue their religious ceremonies. They were concerned that everyone would believe on Jesus and they would lose their position and the privileges the Romans had given them.

Pilate tried to release Jesus because he knew the rulers of the Jews wanted Him dead out of envy (Mt. 27:18). It was because of this that the kingdom of God was taken from them and given to a peculiar nation, the Gentiles, who then became the predominant members of the congregation. First Peter 2:5-9 says of the Church, *“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the*

praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

The stone is Christ. He told Peter in Matthew 16:18, “*And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*” Throughout the Word, the rock or stone always refers to Christ. “Upon this rock” indicated upon the declaration that Peter made that Christ was the Son of God, He would build His Church. If we fall upon Christ the Stone, and humble ourselves before Him, our spirits will be broken. However, if the stone falls on us in judgment, we will be destroyed.

Treasures Old and New (Mt. 13:52)

“Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Mt. 13:52).

A householder, speaking of a minister, must bring forth things both old and new. People either usually opt for one or the other. However, in order to have a well-balanced church, we must have both.

First Corinthians 2:9 says, “*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*” This verse can be interpreted to say that in the human

heart we have no understanding of what God has for us, but these truths are revealed to us by His Spirit.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is searching—presently and continuously. The Holy Spirit is constantly searching the deep things of God. John 16:13-14 says, *“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.”* This was speaking of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age.

God tells us throughout His Word that there is so much He has for us, and we cannot comprehend it. We need the anointing—the Spirit of Revelation—to reveal it to us. The Holy Spirit should be bringing new revelation to our spirit. This is the reason why we must always be bringing out new things.

The older one gets in the ways of the Lord, the more one realizes how much there is to know and how little one knows. There is so much for us to learn in the Word of God! Therefore, we must cry out to God for the Spirit of Revelation. We need a holy dependency upon God.

Daniel 12:4 says, *“...even to the time of the end, many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.”* We have seen a vast increase in knowledge, in the natural world, and especially in the field of science and medicine. Scientists and

medical researchers are constantly having breakthroughs. The circle of knowledge just gets bigger and bigger. That is the way it should be in the revelation of God's Word. While we do not discard the old, our circle of knowledge of His Word, including the end-time events, should be getting larger and larger. God has His dispensations for revealing particular truths. We must, therefore, be seeking God for fresh truths.

On the other hand, we should also indeed keep presenting the old, foundational truths. New truths do not destroy the old. Before his martyrdom, Peter wrote that he would not be negligent to put the church in mind of the old truth (2 Pet. 1:12). Repetition is one of the keys of learning. We must constantly have a retrieval system working in our memory, bringing back things we have learned previously. In Luke 5:36-39, we are told that people prefer the old wine to the new. We must bring forth both the old and the new.

CHAPTER FOUR

Parables from Mark and Luke

The Seed Growing by Itself (Mk. 4:26-29)

“And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come” (Mk. 4:26-29).

There is a principle of life given in this parable that is very important for us to understand. There is much that is a mystery to us in creation, much that God has not deemed to show us. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, *“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”* The secret things belong unto the Lord, and included in those secret things is the phenomenon of birth and growth.

In the book of Job, God challenged Job with some serious questions, for which he had no answer:

“Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me” (Job 38:1-3).

“Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? or canst thou mark when the hinds do calve?” (Job 39:1).

“Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich? Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust” (Job 39:13-14)

“Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? the glory of his nostrils is terrible” (Job 39:19-20).

“Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south?” (Job 39:26).

We were in Greece a number of years ago when Greece was still fairly primitive, with sheep and cattle walking down the middle of the street. A pastor friend of ours who was also there was walking down one of the streets, when he noticed the disparity between the cattle and the sheep. The cattle, especially the ones with the big horns, were big and strong, while the sheep were small and seemingly defenceless.

The Lord spoke to him, “You know that sheep, cattle and horses all eat grass. Grass gives horses and cattle tremendous strength, causing them to be profitable for labour and transportation. On the other hand, sheep are smaller and not as strong, and the same grass that they feed on causes them to produce an abundance of wool. It is all done by My

wisdom.” It is very interesting. Although they all eat the same food, some species are significantly larger and stronger than others. This is the wisdom of God in creation.

Genesis 1:11 says, “*And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.*” God commanded the earth to bring forth grass, and the grass just appeared; it did not come from seed. God commanded the fruit trees to come forth, and they did. However, they reproduce through the seed that they contain in themselves. All of God’s creation has its own seed in itself, which reproduces and brings forth after its kind. That is what this parable is about.

John 3:8 says, “*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*” In the same way that we cannot understand how the seed grows, neither can we understand some of the things of the Holy Spirit. We just have to accept a lot of things by faith.

One important thing about the Parable of the Seed Growing by Itself is that the earth brings forth the blade, the ear, and then the full ear. (This parable serves as an example, demonstrating that the kingdom of heaven is in many cases governed by the number three.) Sometimes a seed just produces a blade. The end product that the farmer is looking for is the full corn on the ear. As ministers we must think like

farmers. There can be no satisfaction to a farmer if his fields only produce the blade of a crop, or just the stem, or even the immature “ear” that does not mature and ripen; he must have the “full corn on the ear,” or the mature fruit of the crop. A farmer is ruined if there is anything less than maturity. As ministers, we must preach maturity. We must not be satisfied with anything less.

In the Philippines I saw a woman whose boy was nine years old, yet he was still a baby, unable to feed himself or do any of the basic things for himself. When the boy was born, it was the mother’s delight to feed and dress him; he brought joy. But that joy turned to sorrow. God looks at His Church in the same way. He wants us to grow.

The elementary doctrines are just milk. We need to go on in our Christian life and teach our people to go on. Some churches do not want to progress any farther. Many large churches and denominations are founded on elementary doctrines, and that is what is preached over and over again. In the natural realm, if a mother has a baby, she feeds him a diet of milk. However, she does not feed only milk to her older children and her husband; she provides appropriate food for them all. She does not give all of them milk from a baby bottle! Yet that is what many churches do. We should recognise the wisdom of the Lord that is portrayed in principles of natural life.

If we plant a seed in the ground, it will naturally grow if it gets the right amount of rain and sun. The Word of God is likened to the seed. Jesus is saying that the Word of God

planted in our hearts will take root down and will bring forth fruit. We do not know how this happens, but it does. Therefore, we must have a certain trust, a certain confidence, that when the seed of God's Word is planted it will bring forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). We have to make sure that the Word is planted in our hearts and in the hearts of our children.

Psalm 127:1-2 says, *“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.”* We have a very solemn thought here. The farmer does not worry about his seed, because he knows that the cycle of growth will take place. He knows that there are appointed stages of growth. There is a progression throughout the growing season and the life of the plant. Some trees take a tremendous time to come to maturity; others grow very quickly.

This is also true of certain truths in the Word of God. There are certain seeds, such as salvation, that spring up immediately. There are other truths—such as holiness, righteousness, mercy, and love—that take a long time to develop. However, if we work on the ground (making sure it is prepared and keeping the weeds of sin out of our hearts), then the Word will bring forth fruit. We need to enter into a certain rest concerning God's work in our lives and in the lives of our flock. We can be assured that the Lord will bring us to maturity as we walk with Him in obedience and trust.

James 5:7 says, *“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.”* A farmer must have patience until his crop reaches maturity. In like manner, we must have patience with God, the Husbandman, concerning the work He is doing in our lives. In our culture, we are accustomed to having instant results—instant coffee, micro-waved food, and many other things that are “ready to eat” in our cupboards and refrigerators. However, in the kingdom of God, there is not instant growth, or instant maturity. Christians are not born into the Kingdom ready to teach and minister. They must grow in the grace and knowledge of God, and study the Scriptures as they mature in the faith.

There is also the necessity for the visitations of the Holy Spirit, as the early and latter rain, upon the seed. There must be visitations of God to bring it to maturity. When God speaks certain things to our hearts, we must give heed to what He says, because that will cause the seed to grow. During the Charismatic movement, people who had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit were often counselled to return to the churches from which they had come, to be a light there, and a witness of what God was doing. The Lord told us to tell them differently. He said, “The place where My people are planted will determine whether they grow.” Therefore, we must direct people to where the river of God is flowing. Many Christians would grow much better if they changed churches.

When considering the cycle of summer, autumn, winter, and spring, we realize that there is a specific season for harvesting. Jesus cannot come now because the harvest of the earth is not yet ripe; His people are not yet mature. There must be the full ear of corn before the Divine Farmer harvests His fields.

Parable of the Two Debtors (Lk. 7:36-50)

“And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner; when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace” (Lk. 7:36-50).

We must not hesitate to stretch forth our hands to the vilest of sinners, for they will be the most thankful when their sins are forgiven. We must receive them with open arms.

When I was a Bible school student, I was a member of a church filled with former alcoholics and sinners. They were a joyous crowd, always waiting to testify of their past sins forgiven, and of enjoying His so great salvation.

In this parable, Jesus deals with primarily two people—Simon the Pharisee, who had invited Him for a meal but had not treated Him courteously, and a woman known to be a great sinner who followed Jesus, crying and weeping because of her sins. Then reprimanding Simon for his lack of

courtesy in not greeting Him with a kiss or washing His feet, He pronounces the following Parable of the Two Debtors. One debtor owed his master much more than the other. Both were forgiven, and the question was posed to Simon as to who would be the most grateful.

Simon answered correctly saying, “The one who was forgiven the most.” Jesus replied, “This woman, whose sins are many, is forgiven much and will be the most grateful.” He sent her forth in peace, and told her that her faith had saved her.

The key then to this parable is that the faith even of the most blatant sinners will save them, and that they, like the publicans and the harlots during the time of Christ, will experience great joy when their sins are forgiven.

The Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37)

“And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed,

he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise” (Lk. 10:30-37).

In order to better understand this parable, we need to consider its background. A lawyer stood up to tempt Jesus; he wanted to justify himself because he knew he had not been fulfilling the Law. The answer Jesus gave him was not a new command. The whole law was summed up very carefully in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the New Testament God did not change, for He had already said in Leviticus 19:18, “...*thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself...*” Jesus declared, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” several times. It is recorded in Matthew 19:19, Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, and James 2:8, as well as here in Luke 10:27. This is a very important commandment.

We reap what we sow. If we sow acts of love and kindness, we will reap the same. Matthew 7:12 is known as the Golden Rule. It says, “*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*” Luke 6:38 says, “*Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*” This passage carries the same

thought—that what we sow, we reap. (However, that does not necessarily mean that what we sow in one place, we will reap in the very same place.) The lawyer was caught by his own words; he knew he had not been a good neighbour, yet he was hoping to justify himself.

Now let us look at the parable itself. The traveller was in a lamentable position. He was unable to help himself. The two people who should have helped him (the priest and the Levite) passed by on the other side. We have to be extremely careful in our Christian life that we do not become so involved in our church life that we are not concerned with those outside our church.

There was once a certain fellow going for a job interview. He was driving along the interstate highway and only had a limited time to get to his interview. It was a job he desperately wanted. As he was driving along, he noticed a lady trying to change a tire. She waved to cars going along, but they all passed by. He looked at his watch and realized that if he did not continue, he would be late for his interview. But he looked at this lady and felt sorry for her; so he pulled over and took the time to change the tire for her. He then drove off, looked at his watch, and realized he was late for the interview. “Well, there goes that job,” he said to himself.

Nevertheless, he went for his appointment and found a waiting room full of people who were applying for the same job. They all went into the office, one at a time; then his turn came. To his amazement, the one doing the interviewing was

the lady whose tire he had changed. Needless to say, he got the job. We cannot always guarantee that something like that will happen, but God honours those who keep His Word.

We must realize that the Samaritans are those who are outside the kingdom. In Romans 2:13, Paul declared, *“For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.”* Paul was saying that the ones who will be justified are not those who merely *hear* the Law, but those who *do* it. The Jews had the Law, but did not obey it, whereas some Gentiles obeyed the Law (even though they did not know it) because their consciences told them what was right. The Samaritan was technically out of covenant fellowship with Israel and God. Yet he was the one who did the Law of God, having compassion upon the man and taking care of him. Jesus said we were to do likewise.

James 3:17 says, *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”* True wisdom is full of mercy and good fruits. Mercy is not just an attitude; it is full of good works. Good works are inseparable from mercy. Our preaching will not save us; our faith together with our acts will. We need to have a Samaritan ministry, reaching out to help the poor and those in need.

Once there was an alcoholic lying on the street of a certain city. He was helped into a rescue mission, where he sat down in a chair. Then a young evangelist came in. The alcoholic

said to the young man, “You should be very grateful to us those of us who get drunk. We form your first congregations, where you can practise preaching.” It is true that rescue missions are where ministers generally go at the beginning of their ministry. There they develop their compassion for those in need, their passion for winning souls, and their preaching abilities. This parable teaches us that mercy is expressed by good works, and that is what we want to develop in our lives.

Our preaching will not save us; our faith together with our acts will.

The Friend at Midnight (Lk. 11:5-9)

“And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Lk. 11:5-9).

The theme of this parable is the importance of importunity in prayer. In the Middle East at that time, the children slept in the same bed as the parents; thus this man did not want to be disturbed, because all the children would also be disturbed. The man would not get up because of their friendship, but because of the friend's persistence, he decided to give him what he was asking for. In some cases in prayer, we have to keep knocking until we get our answer. This thought is also recorded in Matthew 7:7, "*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*" We see here the sense of perseverance. We have to keep knocking until the Lord grants our petition.

The Rich Fool (Lk. 12:13-20)

"And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Lk. 12:13-20).

The background to this parable is rather interesting. Someone came to the Lord asking Him to intervene in the inheritance settlement between brothers. There is a tendency in us to meddle in situations, trying to solve everybody's problems, but note Jesus' reply. If anyone could have given the proper advice, it was He. He could have said, "I have been appointed Judge over the whole universe. What is your problem?" But He did not.

We must be careful about presumptuously trying to solve other people's problems. We do not want to make other people dependent upon us. We do not want our people leaning on the pastor for every little decision. This trend was erroneously emphasized in the discipleship movement, and is still prevalent in much of the church world today.

We need to seek counsel on major decisions, such as confirmation of marriage, purchase of a house, and so on. However, the Lord wants us to have a balance of *independence from* and *dependence on* the ministry. The Lord had not been appointed to deal with the man's inheritance. There is such a tendency in the church world today to call upon the pastor and ask his advice on any little decision, and in fact, some people will not make any small decision until they have checked with the pastor. The Lord does not teach us to do that.

In Canada, there were two pastors who got together to pray and they covenanted together that they were not going to do anything until they heard the Lord speak and tell them to do it. They were going to be totally dependent on Him. So they

prayed from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm, at which time the Lord spoke and said to them, “Do according to the wisdom I have given to you. You know what to do. Now do it.”

There is a fine line here. There is also a common sense factor of knowing what we are to do each day—get up and go to work, cook meals for the children, go to school, and so on. We do not have to have a revelation all the time. However, we are not to take this to the other extreme. There should always be that holy dependence upon the Lord, that sense of having the same attitude as the Lord Jesus did in John 5:19: “... *The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.*”

The Lord spoke to my wife, saying, “I want you to be *childlike* in faith, but not *childish* in your attitude. I want you to become mature.” Little children run to their parents to ask if they may go outside, or play at a friend’s house, or have a cookie from the cookie jar. That is what they should do at a young age. However, we would think it strange if our children did that when they were twenty-year old. We need the balance between dependence and independence. We need to realize that as pastors we can only handle things within the church. We are not responsible for dealing with issues that the Lord has not appointed us to handle. Thus we must be careful not to get mixed up in things we should not be dealing with.

Jesus told this young man to beware of covetousness. That is something we cannot over emphasize. There is a terrible

tendency, even in the ministry, to try to “keep up with the neighbours.” The natural tendency of man is to accumulate things—to get houses, lands, jewels, and other possessions. That is true even in Christian circles; but the teaching of Jesus is just the opposite. Psalm 49:6,12 says, *“They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches... Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names.”* Jesus gives heaven’s viewpoint in Matthew 6:19-21: *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*

King Solomon, however, lived according to Psalm 49:6,12. In fact, he said, *“And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour”* (Eccl. 2:10). He had royal projects, houses, lands, vineyards, silver, gold, servants, and whatever he wanted, but it brought no satisfaction. We must learn to be content with whatever the Lord provides. We must not get into debt in order to try to make a good impression on people. We must not be covetous. Through the years, I have seen so many pastors get into problems through covetousness, even to the extent of falling into adultery and immorality.

We will find, even as the Apostle Paul did, that at times in our lives we will have abundance, and at other times we will be in want. The key is to learn to be content in whatever state God has appointed for us at the time (Phil. 4:11). As Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:6, “*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*” We need to embrace the process of having God stretch and develop us. It is important to triumph in every place and situation.

One time my wife and I were in a certain place where we were going to pastor for a while. When a church elder and I were looking around for an apartment, I saw a place, and said, “I think we will choose this little apartment.” It was only \$10.00 a week, so it was not extravagant even for that time. The elder said, “That is far too much for the church. You and your wife can live in the back of the church.”

Well, the church was a brick building but the back of the church was a little wooden shack with gaping holes through which people could see us as they walked by. Those holes also let in flies and mosquitoes. When we prayed, the Lord said, “Submit,” and so we did. When the time came to leave that place, we were thanking God that the trial was over, and that He had allowed us to triumph. Then the roof of this little building opened up, and I found myself in heaven, looking down at the house from heaven—and that viewpoint transformed everything. It was worth it all! Sometimes God desires us to submit and go to places that are very undesirable, but the end is always for our good.

John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote many other books. He also spent many years in prison. God gave him dreams and showed him wonderful things. One thing God showed him was this—there was a certain grocer who had a shop, and was very diligent in his business. Whenever another shopkeeper came by, he would bring him into his shop and ask him for advice about making his business better. Thus he developed a very fine business. Then one night he had a dream about eternity. He had spent all his life building up his business with great diligence, but he was going to lose it all and go to hell because he should have been seeking God. The cry then came from his heart, “Oh, I should have been applying myself with great diligence to seeking God!” That is what should be occupying our life.

This “rich fool,” like the one Christ mentioned in a parable, had obviously been very diligent and blessed in his business, but he had not sought God. He had no true riches. At the end of his life, when he thought he could take it easy, God gave him a glimpse of eternal realities, and he realized that he had been a fool in this life.

Man does not know when his life will end. There is a time for a man to be born and a time for him to die, but he does not know when that time will be. Many people labour, storing up security for their retirement. Generally speaking, the church that has lost its progressive vision has instituted a “retirement plan” for its ministers. How can a minister retire? He must keep pressing on. The most amazing visions given to Daniel, John, and Isaiah occurred when they were past the age of

retirement. A fellowship of churches should look after its labourers, but that is different from a retirement plan that entitles one to a certain salary when one retires. Rather, we should employ the faith principle. The faith of God should provide for the needs.

The Christian life is a race. The nearer we get to the finishing line, the faster we have to go. The best retirement plan is given in the following scriptures:

“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty” (Prov.11:24).

“But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand” (Isa. 32:8).

“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days” (Eccl. 11:1).

If we give, it shall be given unto us. However, we must not be presumptuous or give with the wrong motives. One pastor noticed that his suit was worn out, and so he purposed to give it away in order to be given a better one. When he gave it away, he received another one, but it was not as nice as the one he had given away—so he was sorry. Some people actually give away their homes with the idea that God will give them an even better house. We want to be sure that we give out of pure motives, not expecting anything in return. We must have a close relationship with

the Lord, so we can hear from Him, and give as He desires us to give.

The theme of this parable is the true riches. This man was rich in the things of this world, but was poverty-stricken in eternal riches. Unfortunately, we are living in the time of the Laodicean church, mentioned in Revelation 3:17:

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked...”

We are living in a time of great affluence. The Church

as a whole does not have a lot of material needs. However, that has produced the same situation as the Laodicean church had, a lukewarmness in God’s people.

The Christian life is a race. The nearer we get to the finishing line, the faster we have to go.

The city of Laodicea was one of the richest cities in the whole of the Roman Empire. They were renowned for their goat’s hair clothing, and were a great centre of commerce. They had a medical centre where they manufactured a certain eye salve which healed certain eye diseases. They were very rich indeed. When the Roman army destroyed the whole city, Rome, in compassion, sent couriers to ask how they could help in the rebuilding. The city replied to Rome that they needed nothing, and they rebuilt the city entirely from

their own funds. They were indeed a very wealthy city in the natural realm.

However, in verse 18, they were told by the Lord, *“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”* They needed to have gold that had been tried in the fire, speaking of the trial of their faith. Our faith is far greater than earthly riches—so we have to cry out to God for faith. First Peter 1:7 says, *“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:”*

They also needed white raiment, speaking of the righteousness of Christ (Rev. 19:8) and not the works of the law. They needed to anoint their eyes with eye salve. Psalm 119:18 says, *“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”* God admonishes us in Jeremiah 33:3, *“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”*

We need to pray, “Lord, develop faith in my heart. Grant me the crown of righteousness. Open my eyes that I might see the things You have for me in Your Word.” Those things are the true treasures.

We have to be careful of worldly riches. Matthew 19:23 says, *“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto*

you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.” As I travel around, I am often surprised at the number of people, even in the ministry, who build up huge bank accounts and glorious places for themselves. However, at the end of their lives, these same people are often accounted as poor in faith.

First Timothy 6:17 gives us this instruction: *“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”* The question is—where do we place our trust? Mark 10:24 tells us, *“And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!”*

Why did Jesus make this point about trusting in riches? It is simply that if one has wealth, there is a danger that one will not realize the need for trusting in God, because of that sense of security from the riches. We are to be rich in faith, and not in things. However, we must also keep 1 Timothy 6:10 in mind: *“For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”* Even very poor people can have a *love* for money, and can covet riches.

Thus we have to make a choice—will we trust in riches, or trust in the Lord? If we lean on or trust in riches, then our faith is diminished. God, in His goodness, constantly puts before us certain challenges of faith—things beyond our own

ability to accomplish—so that our faith can be developed in greater measure. Therefore, we want to major on faith and not riches.

The Barren Fig Tree (Lk. 13:6-9)

“He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down” (Lk. 13:6-9).

A fig tree can represent two things—the nation of Israel and sweetness. We see this from Judges 9:11, *“But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?”*

This parable is given in the context of judgment. Pilate had mingled the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices. The Lord asked the disciples if they thought these particular Galileans were more wicked than any others. Then he gave a parable to illustrate His point.

In this parable, a man had a fig tree. For three years, he came to the tree, expecting to find fruit but it was barren. One truth we learn in the ministry and in life is that certain people

are slow starters. We have to learn patience and wait for them. When some Christians come into the church, they get saved, water baptized, and baptized in the Holy Spirit, and then seemingly do nothing else. They are there “warming the pews,” but they take little active part in the church. With these, we need to have the longsuffering of Christ.

Isaiah 30:18 says, “*And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.*” There are two aspects of waiting—the Lord waits on us, and we wait on the Lord. There is a sense in this parable that we must not move too quickly into a situation. If we move too quickly, we might disregard or remove someone who, given further opportunity, might have brought forth fruit. Sometimes we may have to wait a very long time, but we must never give up on people unless God sovereignly speaks.

There was a certain girl in Switzerland who had a call of God on her life, but regrettably, she got engaged to someone who did not have the same call. She wanted to get out of the engagement, but her fiancée said, “No, you have made a promise to me, and you must keep your vow.” I think a good pastor would have advised her not to marry, because the loss was going to be eternal.

She actually married this man who was an unbeliever. Consequently, she did not have a Christian home, and she could not fulfil her call to the mission field. However, she did

what she could in a particular city, and brought forth a lot of fruit. She had a good name, but her husband was unconverted. She prayed for him for 50 years, and three months before he died of cancer, he turned to the Lord. If she had given up, there would have been one less soul in heaven.

For those people are very slow starters, we must have God's love, which never fails, flowing through us. We have to be patient with those who do not bear fruit, because they might do so if they are given more opportunity.

Another thing we must keep in mind is that, as pastors, we create part of the environment in which the little fig trees grow. We determine, to some degree, the growth of the people in the church. If little Christians are planted where the river of God is flowing, they will flourish, and perhaps many bondages will be broken that could not otherwise be broken in a dry church. Jesus said to the city of Capernaum that Sodom and Gomorrah would actually have repented if they had the miracles done in them that Capernaum had witnessed (Mt. 11:23). It is important for pastors to create the right atmosphere for growth.

We must keep in mind that the Lord is looking for fruitfulness. Although He gives a period of grace, as is noted in this parable, He ultimately removes those who do not bear fruit. The whole hallmark of nature is fruit-bearing. Every tree produces fruit of some kind or another. In the spiritual realm, when we consider fruit, we must see two aspects of the fruit-bearing process—character and productivity.

Character is defined by the fruit of the Spirit, as listed in Galatians 5:22-23. Productivity is achieved by accomplishing in our lives the works that God has foreordained us to do (Eph. 2:10). In churches, we must give our people the opportunity to do things, but there must be a balance between character and productivity. So often, churches go one way or the other. They either over emphasize character and do not have outreach, or they emphasize soul-winning and do not teach on maturity. We want both quality and quantity. The Lord wants fruitfulness in His Church, but He is patient until it is produced.

The Great Supper (Lk. 14:16-24)

“Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. 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 hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel

them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper” (Lk. 14:16-24).

This parable must be clearly distinguished from the parable in Matthew 22:14, the Parable of the Marriage Supper. This is definitely a different parable and has a different interpretation.

Jesus gave this parable in reference to the custom of the time in which rich people invited other rich people to their feasts, expecting to get invited back. Jesus showed them a more hospitable, blessed way. The danger of inviting only those who will invite us back is that we will get recompensed in this life and not in the world to come.

The people who were originally invited to this feast must all have been rich people. These rich people declined the invitation because of various responsibilities. They all gave reasons for not coming, and were very courteous in their refusals—one needed to look at some newly-acquired real estate; one had to test his newly acquired farming equipment; another had just gotten married.

The key to this whole parable is found in the phrase: “... *that my house might be filled.*” The Lord wants His house to be filled. It is so important that when we build a church, we make sure that we get the measurements right, and that we seek God concerning the size of the building. The glory of God is to fill His house. There is a relationship between

the size of the building and the people. The Lord gave me a vision one day of heaven as a vast estate, where every position was filled. God's glory is a full house.

There was a very small Pentecostal church in Auckland, New Zealand. As one walked in the door of the church, there was a picture of the town hall with Jesus on the top, which someone had painted long ago. Revival started, and this little church became too small for the growing congregation. The pastor and his flock asked the Lord what they should do. The Lord said, "I have painted the picture for you already."

The town hall was the largest hall in Auckland at that time, and the church obtained permission to have services there Sunday after Sunday. They enjoyed favour and priority with the queen and the governor general. The Governor General even came to one of the services, and left with tears streaming down his cheeks.

When they first began in the town hall, the church just filled a portion in the hall downstairs. However, the Lord spoke that it was His glory to fill His house, and they believed that He had given them such a large place in order to fill it for His glory. First the hall downstairs was filled, and then the balconies, until the entire hall was filled with about 3,000 people worshipping the Lord. God's glory is a full house!

There are three other important points we want to bring out in relation to this parable. First of all, the message "Come, for all things are ready" was given to the bidden ones, the

ones with the invitations. They were told to come, but they made excuses and did not come. This group may be likened in a certain sense to the Jews. They declined the invitation of Jesus—and thus the Gentiles were allowed into the kingdom of God.

Secondly, when the bidden ones refused to come, the invitation then went to those in the streets and the lanes of the city. The invitation went to those on the outside, all those in distress. God's call goes out to the most undesirable people. Often they will respond when those who are more sociably acceptable will not. God's call reaches into every class of society, the rich and poor, the "*crème de la crème*," and the outcast.

Thirdly, when some had responded to the invitation, but the house was not yet filled, the servants went out and compelled, or forced, others to come in. This is what God is and will be doing to Israel. He will be compelling them to come in, by creating great difficulties with the Great Tribulation, and later through the siege of Jerusalem.

When I was younger, we went out evangelizing from a certain church. We would go out after the service at about 7:30 pm. While we could not make the people go in, we would just gather around them in a circle so that they naturally moved with us. In that way we got them into the church.

Evangeline Booth, the daughter of General William Booth, got so filled with the Spirit at times when she was

preaching—and no one was moving—she literally pulled men to the altar and made sure they got saved! That is evangelism. If a child were unknowingly headed to the edge of a steep cliff, you would call to him, snatch him back, and compel him to come away from the danger; you would not stand still and watch him fall off. We need more of this urgency in our gospel.

In Auckland, we first had worship, then preaching, and then came the altar service. At that time we would have healing and miracles, and then the Spirit of God would move in salvation. We sought God before the service until He showed us the number of people who would get saved, and we would wait until that number responded. It was amazing. We need more “compelling” in the Church of Jesus Christ.

We are living on the edge of the great End Time Revival. God wants our churches filled; it is His glory to have a full house. Often the churches God wants to fill refuse the increase because of the kind of people God sends in from the highways and byways. We want to have an open attitude toward all that God sends, and compel them to come into His house for His glory.

Building a Tower (Lk. 14:28-30)

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish” (Lk. 14:28-30).

This parable is one of the simplest, and yet most profound, of all the parables. It simply states that one should not construct a tower or a building, or begin any other project unless one has the financial resources to do so. We are to count the cost. Yet so many pastors have embarked upon building projects without having the necessary resources. The result is a financial disaster, and so often the church collapses under the burden of a debt that should not have been incurred. The pastor loses credibility; on occasion, he has to leave the church in disgrace, his ministry ruined for years to come.

So the motto is: “We must count the cost before we buy.” We must not be afraid to reverse a decision when we realize that the church does not have the money to go ahead.

Going to War (Lk. 14:31-33)

“Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassador, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk. 14:31-33).

These two verses are filled with the prudence of life. You do not attack a superior army that has a force greater than yours.

You quickly make peace. Likewise, to be a disciple of Jesus, we have to forsake the world, the flesh, and the devil in order to be at peace with our blessed Lord.

The Lost Sheep (Lk. 15:1-7)

“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” (Lk. 15:1-7).

First of all we want to consider who is meant by the term “publicans” and “sinners.” Throughout the New Testament, the word “publican” refers to those who become rich through fraud. The word “sinner” indicates someone who habitually sins. It is not someone who, for example, commits adultery once, but someone who is in the habit of committing adultery. It is not someone who steals once, but one who habitually steals. A sinner is someone who habitually walks in the way of evil.

In verse 2, the Pharisees and scribes (the religious people who tried to earn their way into heaven by good works) complained about Jesus. They themselves were very careful to make a distinction between the sinners and the righteous. They refused to eat with the publicans, thus ostracizing them and trying to make them feel guilt or remorse for their sinfulness. Jesus, however, ate with the publicans and sinners.

We must not ally ourselves with sinners. Yet we cannot set ourselves up as “holier than thou.”

We must be careful on this point. We must not ally ourselves with the sinners, but we must go to them to get them saved. We do not want to be partakers of their sins, but we cannot set ourselves up as “holier than thou,” as did the Pharisees. This is the background for the three parables contained in Luke 15, beginning with the parable of the lost sheep.

In this parable of the lost sheep, we are concerned with the sinners. We want to believe God to send sinners into our churches. We want them to be converted and grow in maturity and in the knowledge of God. It is so important to seek out the lost. There is such joy—not only on earth but also in heaven—when a sinner is converted.

It is important to note that Jesus likened us to sheep. The dominant thing about a sheep, in contrast to a horse or dog, is that it has no homing instinct. Sheep easily go astray. They need a shepherd to bring them home. A sheep cannot look after itself. Isaiah 53:6 says, *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*

When the sheep goes astray, the shepherd goes to find it. If someone does not turn up for church service when he should, the shepherd-pastor should go to him and find out the problem. He should not wait for the sheep to come to him, because often little sheep do not come back, and little sheep can have many problems when they are “on their own.”

Psalm 43:5 says, *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul...”* In Old English, the phrase “cast down” was an expression used by shepherds. It described a sheep that had somehow rolled over on its back, and was unable to get up. Sometimes a sheep cannot right itself. Then it has a terrible problem. Unless the shepherd comes, it is lost. It is easy prey for its enemies, especially if it utters sounds of distress. Moreover, acids in its stomach begin to work while it is on its back, and it can develop “bloat.” It cannot roll over on its own and will eventually suffocate.

It is imperative for the shepherd to go out to seek the sheep. When a sheep has been on its back for very long, the shepherd must get the sheep back in an upright position, put it between his legs so that he can massage it, while speaking gently to

it. He must not scold, or he will frighten the sheep and then the sheep will not respond correctly. If a shepherd scolds a sheep or is harsh with it, the sheep remembers, and will keep its distance from the shepherd.

As pastors, we must not scold the sheep that have rolled over through discouragement, or have perhaps been caught in a thicket, ensnared by the wicked one, and are unable to escape. To get our “stray sheep” back, we must offer them the nourishment that they love and have missed while they were away from the flock, re-establish their sense of safety and peace, speak gently to them, and demonstrate how much they are loved. We must get them back so they are walking straight again, and have lost their urge to stray. It is a real art.

In John 17:12, Jesus said, *“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.”* As pastors, we have a responsibility to the Lord for the sheep He has given us. We cannot just shrug our shoulders and say, “Oh, they did not have the victory,” or “They did not have the desire to go on.” A lot of sheep do not at first seem to have a desire for the Lord, but they are chosen by Him.

Let us consider a natural example. Someone is hired by a farmer to take care of his flock of 100 sheep. At the end of a day, the farmer comes and asks “How are my sheep?” The farmer would not be too happy if the shepherd responded,

“Oh, 99 of them are fine. I do not know where the other one is. He has an attitude problem.” No, the farmer wants all of the sheep; he wants his profits.

We need to look at the sheep in our congregation in the right way. They are not our sheep; they belong to God. He is going to say to us, “What happened to My sheep?” Would we just reply, “Well, he got offended at something I said and so I just gave up on him.” We need to realize that we are the under-shepherds, and that God has given a certain number of sheep into our hands. If all are not in the fold at the end, we will be held accountable to God. Our attitude must be one of seeking the lost.

The Lost Coin (Lk. 15:8-10)

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Lk. 15:8-10).

In this parable there is the woman, who we can take to represent the Church. It is through the negligence of the woman that the coin is lost. This parable is different than that of the lost sheep, although in a certain sense, the theme of “seeking the lost” is the same. The sheep went astray of its own volition, but a coin cannot do that; the coin was lost through negligence.

We must be very careful that we do not lose those whom God entrusts to our care through default or negligence. We want to be diligent caretakers of God's inheritance. As the Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 5:2-4, *"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."*

The Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32)

"And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And

he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found” (Lk. 15:11-32).

Here is another parable concerning someone who was lost. The younger son took his inheritance, left home, wasted it on extravagant living, and then was reduced to taking care of pigs, hoping to eat some of their food. Luke 15:17 says, “...*he came to himself.*” In other words, there was a dawning light in the intellect or mind, which led him to acknowledge the truth of his situation and responsibility.

In Luke 15:19, we see the humility of someone who truly repents. The younger son said to his father, “...*I am not worthy.*” A repentant person realizes that he has no right to expect to be restored to his original place. This is very important. When Absalom rose against David, and David had to flee for his life, Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God from its resting place in Zion. David sent them back with it, saying that if it were God’s will, he would return to the ark. David was truly humble; he was willing to lose everything (2 Sam. 15:25-26). True repentance willingly accepts the judgment of God, not looking for a restoration of position or privilege. That after all is in the sovereignty of God.

The father of the prodigal freely forgave him. He brought out the best robe, a goodly ring, shoes for his feet, and he killed the fatted calf. The prodigal’s desperate circumstances made him willing to return to his father. When we pray for people who have gone astray, and then adverse circumstances come upon them, we often do all that we can to change those circumstances, to make life easier for them. But it is often God who has caused those very difficult circumstances to bring the prodigal back to Himself, in answer to our prayers.

Let us consider King Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33. We want to develop the thought of the longsuffering of God that leads us to repentance. Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, came to the throne when he was twelve years old. In 2 Chronicles 33:2, we are told that he “...*did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.*” Manasseh really destroyed God’s inheritance. He ruined hundreds of years of work and planning on God’s part, and it was such a heartbreak for God to have someone like Manasseh on the throne.

The account continues in verse 9: “*So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.*”

**True
repentance
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God.**

Manasseh was a terribly wicked man. Yet, we see the heart of God—His compassion and longsuffering. The soul of Manasseh was so precious to God, possibly because of his mother and father, that God went to great lengths to redeem him.

God sent the king of Babylon to afflict Manasseh, and “... *when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and*

heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God” (2 Chr. 33:12-13). God brought back Manasseh to Himself in the end.

God is not blasé over souls, and we should not be either. Manasseh was a very wicked king who defiled and destroyed God’s inheritance. The Lord had warned him through the prophets to repent, but he would not. He then sent Babylon to afflict him. God will go to great lengths to win a soul. We must never give up unless He sovereignly tells us there is no hope. Manasseh, like the prodigal son in this parable, had his salvation, his ministry, and his position restored.

However, we want to consider another aspect of this situation. Manasseh was forgiven and restored, but the fruit of his rebellion and reign were everlasting. We read in 2 Kings 24:3, *“Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did.”* This was written after Manasseh had repented. In His longsuffering and goodness, God brought Manasseh back and restored him, but the fruit of his disobedience lasted for successive reigns, even past the revival of good King Josiah, and brought the ultimate downfall of Jerusalem.

One can be restored, but one’s sins bring forth the fruit of God’s judgment. The prodigal son had his salvation, ministry, and position restored, but it was the elder son to whom the Father said, “All that I have is thine.”

Faithfulness is the quality one must have in order to receive the inheritance. This is very important. We must understand God's ways. We want to see the prodigal son restored, but we must realize that he does not get back the inheritance he lost.

It is the same in Ezekiel with the Levites and the sons of Zadok. In Ezekiel 44:10-15, we read, *“And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house: they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister unto them.*

Because they ministered unto them before their idols, and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity; therefore have I lifted up mine hand against them, saith the Lord GOD, and they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall not come near unto me, to do the office of a priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy place: but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed. But I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof, and for all that shall be done therein.

But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto

me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord GOD."

The Levites were allowed to make sacrifices for the people, but they could not come near to God because they had offered up incense to idols during Israel's apostasy. Only Zadok's descendants had remained faithful. While the Levites had been restored to ministry in the house of God, they did not get the privilege of ministering to the Lord as faithful Zadok did. We want to go after the prodigals. However, we want to be sure we are never prodigals ourselves.

The Unjust Steward (Lk. 16:1-12)

"And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?"

And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said,

An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" (Lk. 16:1-12).

In summary, this parable tells the story of a bad steward. His master probably lived in another part of the country and had put him in charge of all his properties and goods in that vicinity. His master trusted him. However, the steward was not a righteous man, and he was not faithful in dealing with his master's goods.

When his master, having heard the report that this steward had wasted his goods, called him to give an account of his stewardship, he knew he was in trouble; his dishonesty and laxness would be verified. Therefore, he called the lord's various debtors to him and had them give him a certain percentage of what they owed, after which he marked their accounts as "paid in full." In this way, he reasoned

that when he was turned out by his master, he would have friends—people who owed him favours, and perhaps they would then receive him into their homes with gratitude. The unjust steward acted with shrewdness in two ways. First, he collected some of his lord's debt back; at least his lord got something. Second, he was preparing for himself a measure of security for the future.

While the unjust steward's master commended his servant for his worldly wisdom, the Lord did not condone what the man did. The man was unrighteous, so he could only act unrighteously. Christ simply drew attention to the steward's shrewdness in making provision for the future. It was not righteous, but it was a prudent thing for him to do according to the unrighteous standards in his generation. We cannot stretch the interpretation of this story.

The parable says, in essence, "If you fail in the Christian life, make sure you have a place to go in eternity." This is really a very solemn parable. There are varying degrees in hell. We do not want to get into too much detail in this study, but Isaiah 14:18 makes an interesting statement in regard to positions in hell: "*All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house.*" This scripture is speaking of kings who have died and have been sent to hell. When people leave their bodies, as is told in the story of the rich man and Lazarus which follows next, they go either to heaven or hell. (However, sometimes if they have not lived righteous lives, they just leave their bodies and wander around for a while on earth, as part of their judgment.) There

have been numerous accounts of those who have been very wicked feeling themselves being pulled into hell just before they die.

Isaiah 14:18, and the Lord's reference to hell in this parable, are both speaking about the different levels in hell. People who have not deliberately hurt other people will not be on the same level as those who were very unkind to other people during their lifetime. We do not want to major on this, but we have to understand this parable. We must not tell sinners that it does not matter how they live, since they are going to hell anyway. It does matter; it will determine their position in hell and their eternal judgment. We must warn people about their attitudes toward others.

There are also various positions and levels in heaven. If we study the Word of God, we will find the little phrase "*... and was gathered to his people*" a number of times. (See Genesis 25:8, 17; Genesis 35:29; 49:29; Numbers 20:26; 27:3; Judges 3:10.)

I had just considered it a Hebraic expression until I saw in a vision someone die. The man in the vision, upon his death, was met by the head of the organization to which he had belonged in life. Then the Lord said, "The house to which you belong on earth will be the house to which you will be in eternity."

We must be careful of our alliances here on earth, for they will be with us throughout eternity. We must realize

the importance of our alliances—whether it be the local church to which we belong or our denomination (or church organization). In heaven, it will make a difference.

In summary, let us review the truths found in this parable. First, the children of this world who look to the future are wiser than the children of light who have no thought of preparing for eternity. Second, we are to make friends; we do not want to make enemies because we are going to meet them again in eternity.

Having pointed out the wisdom of preparing for one's eternal future, the Lord then follows up immediately with the theme of faithfulness, including:

- 1) Being faithful in small things (“that which is least”),
- 2) Being faithful in “unrighteous mammon” (money),
- 3) Being faithful in that which belongs to another.

He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful in that which is great. If we take care of the little things, then we qualify for larger things.

If we look after the natural things, we qualify ourselves for spiritual things. God is watching how we look after the natural things. We must be very careful in our attitude toward handling money. The Lord will not entrust us with the true riches of the kingdom if we have not been faithful in finances.

We are also to be faithful in another man's work. It is important for an assistant pastor to undergird the pastor. We must never take an attitude like that of Absalom (when he betrayed King David and sought power and position for himself), or we will disqualify ourselves. In contrast, David was faithful in the house of Saul. When Saul's jealousy arose to such an extent that he threatened David's life, then God moved David out.

We must be faithful. That includes being faithful to our parents; we must honour them even after they have died. In short, we want to look to the future, make friends, and be faithful in the little things, in the area of money, and in another man's work. This will qualify us to go on into God's purposes for our lives.

The Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31)

(Note: Although the Rich Man and Lazarus is a story with spiritual application, it is not a parable in the strictest sense of the word because it was a true story. However, we have included the benefit of this teaching for the sake of completeness as it is a continuation of the theme of eternity in Luke 16.)

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up

his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And 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 thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Lk. 16:19-31).

Here we have the story of the rich man and a poor man. Luke 6:24 says, "*But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.*" The Lord makes a difference between the rich and the poor. He makes it very clear that the rich receive their compensation in this world and the poor receive theirs in the world to come.

However, we must be careful. We cannot just divide people between the rich and the poor. We cannot say this person is poor; therefore, he goes into heaven. This person is rich;

therefore, he cannot go into heaven. Some very poor people are poor because of their attitudes. A person can be very poor and still have a strong love of money. Abraham was an exceedingly rich man. He was not only rich in this world's goods, but he was also rich in faith (Rom. 4:12). David was an extremely wealthy man. Obviously, however, they did not trust in their riches. Jehoshaphat was also a very wealthy king. God prospered him because of his righteous stand. Therefore, we must be balanced in this area.

We also have to determine how to define a rich person. After all, riches are a matter of relativity. According to the standards of some countries, one would be considered rich if one owned a house and had more than one change of clothing. Many people are born, live their lives, and die on one piece of pavement in Calcutta. In many third world countries, one would be considered rich if one ate three meals a day.

We should interpret this story to mean that they who trust in riches and love money will not enter the kingdom. But certainly we will not take this world's goods into eternity. In Matthew 16:24-26, the Lord said, "*...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*"

In Matthew 19:24, Jesus said, "*And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for*

a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” The disciples were very impressed by this statement of Jesus. We often think of them only as poor fisherman, but in actuality they were fairly well off. Some of them owned their own boats; they had a certain level of affluence. They were probably in the middle class. Matthew, for example, would certainly have been well-off. We would think the disciples would have clearly understood and seconded this statement of Jesus; instead, they were amazed.

We are not to trust in our bank account or in riches, but we must live as modestly as we can, realizing that riches are only entrusted to us in order for them to be channelled into God’s purposes. In this story, the rich man lived sumptuously and selfishly, surrounded by all that his heart could desire. In other words he lived with every conceivable luxury that existed at the time, and was totally self-centred. He had “everything.”

Abraham lived in tents, although scripture tells us that he was very wealthy (Gen. 13:2 and 24:1). David put aside his wealth to build the house of God. Solomon, on the other hand, spent his money on himself and heavily taxed his people. He bought peacocks (a symbol of pride), apes (a symbol of lust), and in one year he received 666 talents of gold, which symbolized the number of Antichrist (1 Ki. 10:14, 22; Rev. 13:18). We must be careful of how we live, spending money wisely and living contentedly.

Lazarus, on the other hand, was very poor. In the very rich houses in the Middle East, there was a covered walkway

outside, with benches on either side. Lazarus was placed on a porch such as this. The rich man passed Lazarus each time he went into and came out of his house. He even knew Lazarus by name, yet he did nothing in all his affluence to alleviate Lazarus' suffering.

As a church, we must make sure we take care of the poor, the widows and the unmarried mothers in our congregation, giving food, clothing, and shelter for those in need. We are not to be like this rich man. He did nothing for the poor man Lazarus or other poor around him.

Lazarus, apparently, was one who loved the Lord, for he was taken by the angels to the bosom of Abraham or Paradise. (After the Resurrection of Christ, believers enter directly into heaven.)

There will be a certain place where one can look from hell into heaven, and vice versa, even as the rich man looked from hell into Paradise, the place of "Abraham's bosom." The prophet Isaiah said, "*And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh*" (Isa. 66:23-24). This scripture is speaking of the Millennium when every Sabbath day, there will be an opening where people will be able to look into the pit and see the eternal torment of souls.

Returning to the story, we see that the rich man could not pass over from hell to Abraham's bosom. The Scripture makes it very clear that the rich man could not go to Lazarus, nor could Lazarus go to him. When the rich man finds that Lazarus is unable to meet his needs (to cool his tongue in his torments), his thoughts turn toward his brothers. He is genuinely concerned about them, and does not want them to share his fate. He then pleads for Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth, to warn his brothers about the danger and reality of being cast into hell. He seems to think that they would know who Lazarus was and that they would believe his story.

This is what Abraham said in response: "*...If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead*" (Lk.16:31). It would seem that if someone rose from the dead and described hell, people would repent. But they will not.

An example of this is found in the Book of Revelation. At this time, many terrible plagues come upon the earth, and people have seen many of their friends die from the judgments of God. Although they have been eyewitnesses of the awful judgments of God, yet they remain unrepentant and continue to blaspheme God as we read in Revelation 16:10-11: "*And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.*" Thus, we see that witnessing judgment or signs and wonders does not guarantee that men will repent.

Heaven and hell are more real to people than we realize. There are even greeting cards showing people at parties, saying, "I want to go to hell. That is where all my friends are going." If we stop people on the street and ask them where they are going, many of them shrug their shoulders and say, "Oh, to hell, I guess."

We were staying in a hotel in Nigeria at Christmas time one year. Nearly everybody in Nigeria at that time believed in the Second Coming of Christ. The manager of a certain newspaper was a born-again Christian. The whole of the paper on Christmas Eve was dedicated to the Second Coming. We asked various people, all of them Christians, what they thought about the Second Coming of Christ. They were sure He was coming, but many did not want Him to come yet because there were things they still wanted to do (and then repent of) before Jesus came again. Some wanted to enjoy themselves in sin. They were hoping He was not coming that Christmas time, because they needed time to repent! Some of them did not want Him to come for years. We must realize the reality of heaven and hell, and by the grace of God, we want to bring many into the kingdom of heaven.

The Unprofitable Servant (Lk. 17:7-10)

"But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward

thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Lk. 17:7-10).

In order to understand this parable we must look at the preface, the reason it was given. In Luke 17:1-3, Jesus is talking to His disciples about offences. There is an awful judgment pronounced upon those who offend others and cause them to be turned out of the way. The warning, “Take heed to yourselves,” is given to the righteous, not to the wicked. When the wicked repent, they are absolved. However, when the righteous cannot forgive them, they then separate themselves from God. We must cry out for a forgiving heart.

After this discussion on offences, the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith. He told them if they had faith as a mustard seed, they could cause a sycamore tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea. Jesus then told the parable of the unprofitable servant. If we look at this progression of thought superficially, it is difficult to correlate the two sequential thoughts; they seem disconnected. However, Jesus was stressing the fact that faith and an obedient life flow together. If we have the attitude of a servant, faith will flow.

If we consider the story of the centurion, related in Matthew 8, we can better understand this parable about the master

and his servant. When the centurion came to Jesus to have his servant healed, he told Jesus that he considered himself unworthy for his Lord to come to his house. But he added that if the Lord only spoke the Word, the servant would be healed. The centurion explained that he was a man of authority, accustomed to being obeyed by his servants. He was also a man under authority who understood authority. Our duty is to serve and obey our Lord in simple faith. The way to increase our faith is to acknowledge within ourselves that we are truly unprofitable servants.

Many people today are seeking their inheritance in Christ. There has been much teaching on claiming our inheritance, finding what it is, and so on. There is a certain truth there, but we want to temper it with this parable. Our attitude should be that we are here to do the will of God, and as servants, we do not expect any reward or inheritance. If the Lord gives it, that is wonderful, but we should not demand it as our right. We should have the attitude of: "Lord, You told me to do this; it is nothing. I am only doing what You told me to do." Humility, faith, and obedience flow together.

The Unjust Judge (Lk. 18:1-8)

"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear

not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Lk. 18:1-8).

In verse one, Jesus clearly states the purpose of this parable, which is to encourage men to continue to pray and not to faint. We are to persevere in asking, praying, and in exercising our faith. The thought of the unjust judge is very clear indeed—we have to keep praying until the answer comes.

The whole purpose of prayer is to communicate with our Father. Prayer is not merely an exercise. We do not simply pray about things; we pray to receive the wisdom of God and understanding of His will, and to receive answers to the petitions we bring before Him concerning our daily bread and other needs. This truth must be worked out in our lives if we are going to be successful in the ministry or on the mission field.

For example, Mother Theresa wanted a certain building. However, she had to have a water pipe laid to that building before she could use it, and she could not get the pipe because she did not have a permit. In her country, they had a governor to whom anyone could come with his grievances. Mother Theresa went to this governor time after time; she persevered until she got her water pipe. It was the only way.

She could have bribed the officials, but bribery is not right. God controls everything. Proverbs 25:15 tells us, *“By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.”* Sometimes we have to continue going to people until we receive what we need.

God allows this to develop faith and meekness in our lives. Faith is developed in the wilderness (the hard times in our lives) by answers to prayers. Song of Solomon 3:6 says, *“Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?”* Frankincense and myrrh speak of faith and meekness.

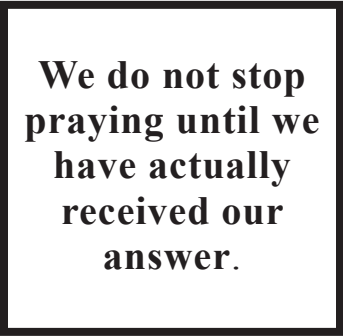
Jesus ended the parable by speaking on faith. At first glance, it does not seem to flow with the theme. In actuality, it is that very perseverance that develops faith. Many people give up before their prayers are answered. Then when God comes on the scene, faith has not been built up. God delays His answers to our prayer to develop faith in our hearts, and also to reveal the hearts of the wicked, as we will see in the parable of the faithful and wise servant (Mt. 24:45-51). We cannot quit praying until He comes on the scene.

In 1 John 5:14-15 the Lord says, *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”* If we ask according to His will, He hears us. Prayer should be directed by the Holy Spirit. We should

have the mind of God when we do pray. If God directs us to ask for a certain thing, we should pray until we get it; we must not stop, because we glorify God by receiving what He wants us to have. We must not be content until we get what we ask for. We cannot be satisfied with just the asking.

This is the difference between the Holy Spirit and the religious spirit. The religious spirit goes through the form, not really expecting an answer to be forthcoming or persevering in prayer to meet with God and receive His answer of peace. The religious spirit delights in form. In contrast, the Holy Spirit prays with the thought of bringing into being the things that God wants to accomplish.

At one time, when my wife and I were praying for a car, a certain pastor said, "Someone in my church feels that she should give you a car." We said, "Thank you!" and stopped praying. A little later we wondered when the car was coming. When we finally asked the pastor about it, he said, "Oh, I am sorry. The lady felt to give that car to someone else." That taught us a lesson. We do not stop praying until we have actually received our answer.



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Matthew 11:12 says, "*And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the*

violent take it by force.” There must be that violence—that storming, as it were, the gates of heaven. In Genesis 32:24-30, Jacob wrestled with God and prevailed. Jacob refused to let God go until He blessed him. There must be that sense of perseverance, of prevailing in prayer. Daniel prayed for 21 days until he got the answer. We must keep calling on God. We must not give up. Jacob produced Naphtali, whose name means “wrestling.” We must have the nature of a wrestler who does not give up until he has pinned his opponent. We want to persevere.

The Pharisee and the Publican (Lk. 18:9-14)

“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Lk. 18:9-14).

The theme of this parable is a warning against self-righteousness. This is very important indeed, as this attitude permeates the Christian world. So many Christians, and even

whole churches, despise others, thinking they themselves are so much better. We knew of one church that was actually picketing another church of the same denomination, in the same city. We must guard our hearts. We have to come to the place where we esteem others better than ourselves; that is true humility. We have to be careful that we do not despise others.

When we consider the life of the Pharisee in this parable, we must realize that he was speaking the absolute truth. He was a very righteous man. He tithed and fasted regularly. He obeyed the letter of the Law. However, by so doing he was putting confidence in the flesh.

In Philippians 3:3 Paul declared, *“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”* In this chapter, Paul was looking at the Law through the eyes of a converted Pharisee. If anyone could have had confidence in his attainments through the flesh, Paul could have. But he had grasped a very important truth contained in Isaiah 64:6, *“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”*

Paul knew that he was living in the dispensation of grace, *“That no flesh should glory in his presence”* (1 Cor. 1:29). God has determined that no flesh shall glory in His presence. Therefore the whole of our salvation is by faith and by faith alone. Romans 4:1-5 says, *“What shall we say then that*

Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” It is very important that we understand this. There is a terrible danger into which many Christians fall. They discount other Christians, setting themselves up as better than others.

There are two themes we want to recognize in this parable. First, by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. It is very important to grasp this so that we do not fall into self-righteousness, like the Pharisee did. We also do not want to fall into the pit of judging someone else as he did. We want to be sure that we are cleansed from all self-righteousness. Second, we need to focus on mercy. The publican just prayed for God to be merciful to him. The sure path to being preserved is to be merciful to others and to hope continually in the mercy of God. Matthew 5:7 says, *“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.”* We need mercy.

There was a certain minister from Australia, who left his wife in Australia and went to South Africa. While he was in South Africa, he told everyone he was not married, and began having affairs. Yet God was blessing him in an extraordinary way in miracles and healing. Every time he would fall into

immorality, he would ask God to be merciful, and God would deal mercifully with him.

Then news came from Australia that he had a wife. As a result, someone challenged him about this newly revealed fact; but he denied it and said, "If that is true, let God dry up my tongue, so that I die." Well, a day or two later, a tsetse fly bit him on the tongue. It poisoned his tongue, his tongue dried up, and he died.

Now as long as he clung to the mercy of God, the Lord showed him mercy in amazing ways. But once he stood on his own and challenged God, he received the judgment from God that he himself had decreed. We have to major on mercy. We, obviously, do not want to follow this man's example; however, we need to see just how merciful God is. The Pharisee in the parable was righteous, but he was not justified. The publican was justified because he relied on and trusted completely in the mercy of God. We want to be merciful and to cling to the mercy of God.

As pastors, the attitude we adopt is so important. Generally speaking, the flock will adopt the same attitude as the pastor. If the pastor is merciful, the flock will be merciful. It is also true that churches are much more compassionate and show far more mercy to those in the world than they do to people in other churches. We want to have the attitude of humility and mercy. We want to major on mercy in our own lives and in our churches.

CHAPTER FIVE

Parables from John

The Door of the Sheep (Jn. 10:1-9)

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (Jn. 10:1-9).

This parable could be read alongside the prayer of Moses in which he asked the Lord to appoint a shepherd in his place to care for Israel (Num. 27:16-17).

In both these portions of Scripture, we see the absolute dependence of the sheep upon their shepherd. The door of the Heavenly Sheepfold, where God's saints reside, is Christ, and it is His people who go through this Door. They who do not come through this Door, submitting themselves to Christ, are robbers and thieves. The duty of a shepherd is to go out before his sheep, seeking fresh pasture. After finding it, the shepherd returns to the sheepfold and leads the sheep to fresh grazing. Without the shepherd's guidance, the sheep will go astray.

Another related passage of scripture is also found in John's Gospel, where Christ says, "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me*" (Jn 14:6).

Dear pastors, let us stress from our pulpits as often as we can that there is only one Door into heaven—which is Christ, and there is only One whom we should follow, namely the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Parable of the Vine and the Branches (Jn. 15:1-16)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (Jn. 15:1-16).

In this parable, the Lord speaks of a very well known part of the agricultural life of Israel—the vine—which all Israel would have understood, because vineyards formed one of

the main sources of employment and sustenance for the country.

We must realize that this was the Lord's last opportunity to commune with His disciples before He was betrayed at Gethsemane. Therefore, He was teaching truths that were of the utmost importance for the disciples and all Christians to understand. He was opening the depths of His heart to His true disciples and companions.

The parable is very simple, and the interpretation is easy to understand. Nonetheless, in its simplicity, this parable contains awesome and eternal truths and warnings for the believer and non-believer alike.

Briefly, Jesus says that He is the Vine, His Father is the Husbandman (or farmer), and the believers are the branches. However, the branches that do not produce fruit are taken off the vine and cast into the fire. I once pastored a church in which a number of the members were orchardists. One man took me through his orchard and proceeded to walk between the rows of trees, breaking off branches that he considered unprofitable and not fruit-bearing. He tossed these branches upon the ground to be gathered later and burnt.

Thus, Jesus gives a solemn warning to Christians: that if we do not bring forth the works of righteousness and the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Gal. 5:22-23)—we risk being thrown into the fires of hell. This teaching

absolutely denies the erroneous doctrine of “once saved, always saved.” After all, for a branch to be taken away, it has to be on the vine in the first place.

Then in verse two, Jesus said, *“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”* This simply means that many of the things that we do, even for the Church, while good in themselves, may take up time that could be more fruitfully employed in pursuing the primary calling that God has placed upon our individual lives.

The Lord also speaks of being washed and made clean through obedience to the Word that He has spoken. We must always remember that daily reading of the Holy Scriptures and obeying what we read therein will continually wash our minds and our hearts.

Then, our blessed Lord speaks of the necessity of abiding in Him, even as the branch must abide in the vine in order to receive the life of the vine. Branches cannot produce fruit by themselves. The key to abiding in Christ is given to us in verse ten, where we are told that if we keep His commandments, we shall abide in Him and in His love.

However, it is not sufficient for a branch to be physically joined to the vine. This branch also has to receive the life-giving sap from the vine. We need to have the words of Christ abiding in us, as we read in John 15:7, *“If ye abide*

in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” Jesus declared, when confronting the Devil, “...*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” (Mt. 4:4). We, therefore, have to hear continually from the Lord through reading the quickened word of scripture and from giving heed to Him when He speaks to our hearts. In this way, we will produce a progression of: fruit, more fruit, and much fruit. There are degrees of fruitfulness. By His grace, we want to be mightily fruitful.

The key to this life of fruitfulness is to keep the Ten Commandments and to have daily union and communion with our blessed Lord. In fact, the Lord ends this parable by saying that He has told us these things in order that His joy might remain in us, and that our joy might be full. That is what we shall experience in heaven—joy unspeakable and full of glory—for He has ordained us to bring forth fruit. What joy we shall have in heaven as we lay that fruit before Him. So, dear ones, let us be fruitful branches to glorify Him, for he that brings forth much fruit glorifies the Heavenly Father.



**The key to abiding in
Christ is to obey Him.**

CHAPTER SIX

Parables Relating to the End-Times

A number of parables Jesus spoke relate almost exclusively to the end of the Church Age, the time of His Second Coming and eternal judgment. We would now like to examine these.

The Pounds (Lk. 19:11-28)

“And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.

And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord,

thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.

And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.)

For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.

And when he had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem” (Lk. 19:11-28).

Jesus, the “nobleman” of this parable, entrusted various riches to His servants, and then went away to heaven; but He will return again as King of kings and Lord of lords to rule with a rod of iron. We know that the time of the end will be the “time of Jacob’s trouble,” with very difficult days for the nation of

Israel. However, not only in Israel, but throughout the world, the climate will grow increasingly hostile to the servants of the Lord whom the world has rejected. Obviously historically, Israel rejected Jesus, but in this parable there is the sense that all nations (the citizens of the world He created) will reject Christ as it says, “... *his citizens hated him.*”

In this parable, the Lord returned. When Christ returns, He will receive the kingdom from His Father. There is no doubt about that at all. He will receive it in two ways. First of all, He will reign over His servants—the kingdom of priests who have become a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9). Secondly, He will reign over and judge the world (Rev. 20:4). We see both of these aspects in this parable.

Let us consider His return to His servants. The nobleman called His servants to give an account of the pounds He had entrusted to them. The first one came saying that His pound had earned ten pounds. The Lord highly commended him and told him he could rule over ten cities. This has reference to Christ’s Second Coming followed by His millennial reign on earth, during which this servant would reign over ten cities. Our position, authority, and responsibility in the Millennium will depend upon what we do with what God has given us here on earth. In a very real sense our works are important, as we see in Revelation 14:13, “...*And their works do follow them.*”

The nobleman called in His second servant. He had gained five pounds with the pound which had been given him. The Lord likewise commended this servant and said he could rule over

five cities. Our position in the Millennium is not a mystery. It is dependent upon what we do with our opportunities here. According to this parable, we each have equal opportunity to live our lives serving the Lord, in whatever manner He calls us. Moreover, each of us is given 24 hours each day to spend in a wise manner. We are responsible for how we spend the days and hours that the Lord gives us.

Finally, the nobleman called in the third servant. This one came in with excuses, declaring that his Lord was a severe man, expecting an increase where He has not even sown. He retrieved his pound from where he had hidden it away, and that was all he gave to his Master. The Lord expects an abundant return on the opportunities He gives us. This servant had misjudged his master, and had missed the opportunity to be fruitful in his kingdom. Therefore, they took from him the pound he had and gave it to the one with ten pounds. Here we see again the thought found in Matthew 13:12: *“For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.”* We must develop what the Lord has placed within us, because that determines what we are going to receive.

If we are faithful with the gift of healing that the Lord has given us, we will have healing. If we major on wisdom, we will have wisdom. The theme is that we need to utilize every opportunity. We must go through every open door, use every opportunity, and break through in areas of our

life which are not productive. If we begin to pray more, we will develop a ministry of prayer. Not only that, but a fruitful prayer life will help release the spirit of prophecy so that we will pray more and more in the will of God. To the one who prays, God will give the spirit of prayer. To the one who seeks to prophesy, even just a few words, there will come a flow of prophecy, and even the word of knowledge. This truth also applies in the natural realm. Those who have money make more money by putting their funds in a bank or investment company, where it will earn interest. We need to *use* the gifts God has given us in order to *receive* more gifts to be used for His glory.

Concerning the aspect of judgment and the Second Coming, Christ comes to the Church first. His own servants have to give an account of what they have done. Then He judges the world, those who would not have Him reign over them. We have to concentrate on “occupying” until He comes; we have to focus on being productive. The world (those who oppose Him) will also be dealt with when He returns. We must be clear about this because when He returns, it will not be a question of His judging only those nations around Israel, or just the Jews who opposed Him; He will be challenging each one of us concerning how we spent the time and energy that He entrusted to us. First Peter 4:17 says, *“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?”* Each one of us, saint and sinner, will have to give an account of ourselves before God.

The Marriage Supper (Mt. 22:1-14)

“And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there

shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen” (Mt. 22:1-14).

This parable basically concerns the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, but we must be careful that we do not try to make a spiritual application of every point. In the culture of Jesus’ day, a wedding invitation, along with a wedding garment, was issued ahead of time. However, no specific time was mentioned. So it is with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. We know it is going to take place, but we are not certain when.

Those that were bidden refused to come. There is a difference between this parable and the parable of the Great Supper which we studied earlier. Here, they not only did not come, but they also killed the servants who issued the invitations. The king became very angry and destroyed the wicked men and their cities. It was not just a simple judgment, but a total destruction. There are going to be many martyrs, and they will be killed primarily by religious leaders, those who were bidden to the Supper. The king burned up their city, which in this parable refers to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was destroyed completely in 70 A.D., and it will come under siege again in the Last Days.

The king then sent his servants to gather as many people as they could find, both the bad and the good, similar to the situation in the Parable of the Net. We find that when man fails, God still continues His plan—and that plan will come to pass. For example, God’s plan is fulfilled by replacing “Barnabas” with a “Silas,” or by taking a son or grandson of someone who has

rebelled against Him and fulfilling that person's call through another generation. In the case of the children of Israel, He took a younger generation across the Jordan River into the Promised Land in the place of their unbelieving parents. God's plan is not thwarted. In the beginning of this parable, it looked as if all were lost. None of those who had been bidden came to the wedding feast. But the king continued His original purpose. The guests who were first invited refused, but the wedding still continued, filled with other guests.

We want to consider the man who came in without a wedding garment. Obviously, at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in heaven there will not be people who do not belong there, who have to be thrown out. The overriding thought is that many are called but few are chosen (Mt. 22:14).

Jude 1:4,12 says, *“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.... These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.”* The New Testament Church had “love feasts.” All the saints would meet together, eat, and fellowship. Scripture says that if their eyes had been opened at one of these love feasts, they would have seen that there were some among them who had no wedding garment on, not being clothed with the robe of righteousness.

People may be called but not chosen. One is often surprised at how many people have actually felt a call to the ministry or the mission field but have not responded. Actually they have not been chosen. One is chosen in the furnace of affliction as Isaiah 48:10 tells us, *“Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.”* After we have been called, our attitude toward our trials determines whether or not we are chosen.



**Our attitude towards our
trials determines whether we
will be chosen.**

This is seen in the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. All of the children of Israel were called as a nation. Their coming out of Egypt was a type or picture of salvation through the cross. All of them were saved from Pharaoh and his army. They all came to Mount Sinai, which is a type of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In revival, nearly everybody comes into the baptism of the Holy Spirit very quickly, but after this comes the problem area. While Moses was on the mount for 40 days and nights getting the instructions of the Law, there were those who went after idols. They committed fornication and many other sins in the wilderness. The wilderness is a land of pits, and it siphons off those who will not walk uprightly. The wilderness is the area where one is chosen through the

trials. In the case of the children of Israel, Joshua and Caleb were the only ones from their generation who were allowed, or chosen, to go into the Promised Land.

Revelation 19:9 says, *“And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”* Indeed, the Lord pours out His blessings, and graciously extends His call to many people. However, it is up to the individual as to what he does with those blessings and that gracious call. How many will treasure the call of God, as did Jacob? Esau certainly did not. Unfortunately, many of those who are called to the Marriage Supper fail to be chosen, and they drop out along the way.

In the parable, the first who were invited, speaking of Israel, refused to come. Sadly, in the End Time Church, a large portion of the Church will not be flowing in the purposes of God. There will be some among them who will not have on the robe of righteousness. Some will not even know they are not righteous.

From Matthew 7:21-23, we see that *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”* If these individuals prophesied,

then they had the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They may have even been used in tremendous revivals. Yet they are not in the kingdom because Jesus said to them, “Depart from Me.” Many are indeed called but few are chosen. May we ask God for grace to be among those chosen and privileged to be at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

The Fig Tree (Mt. 24:32-33)

“Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors” (Mt. 24:32-33).

This parable is a part of the Mount of Olives discourse. This is very important because the Mount of Olives is the place of His Second Coming. In this discourse He was asked three things:

- When shall these things be?
- What shall be the sign of Thy coming?
- What is the sign of the end of the world?

Very clearly, the Lord takes up these questions and answers certain points very specifically throughout this chapter.

Jesus said that there would be wars and that iniquity would abound. There will be the two cups manifested—the cup of blessing and the cup of iniquity at its fullness, culminating with the appearance of the Antichrist. That iniquity is going

to be very strong, and many will fall under the influence of the man of sin.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Paul says, *“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.”* That falling away must apply to the world as well as the Church, because there is going to be a falling away from all moral standards. Isaiah 24:5 says, *“The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.”*

The governments of this world have changed their laws and broken the laws of God in their ordinance books. For example, homosexuality is no longer a crime in many countries of the world. In fact, some countries have passed laws to recognize homosexual marriages. Divorce and remarriage is now acceptable everywhere. In England, there is a place called Ascot, where they have horse racing. At that racetrack, there is a box reserved for the Queen. In past times, there was a standard rule that no divorced and remarried people were allowed in the Queen’s box. The queen herself held that standard. Now three of her children are divorced, and one is remarried.

Adultery and witchcraft were severely dealt with in the early days of the United States. Now, witchcraft is protected under “freedom of religion,” and adultery is looked upon as a private matter. In fact, a witch in Massachusetts was appointed to

a government office. Whole church denominations are in turmoil because of the acceptance of immoral people into the ministry. No longer does an elder or even a pastor have to be “the husband of one wife” (in other words, not divorced and remarried) in many church organizations. Churches are welcoming those who commit adultery with open arms, but are no longer saying, “Go and sin no more.” Furthermore, the media has made much of the turmoil over homosexuals being ordained in various church organizations. Thus, there is a falling away of moral standards in both the world and the church.

In Matthew 24:15-16, Jesus specifically mentions the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, and gives instructions for those in Jerusalem to flee when that future event takes place. According to the Lord’s instructions, the danger will be so imminent that those in the fields should not even return to their houses to take their clothes, for this event is the precursor to the Great Tribulation, which will last for three and one half years (1,260 days).

The Lord’s discourse in Matthew 24 and other scriptures make it very clear that there are certain events that have to be fulfilled before His Second Coming. These include, for example:

- The Ten Kings that will arise around the Mediterranean Sea (Dan. 7:24, Rev. 17:12), followed by
- The appearance of the Antichrist who must come up from the underworld (Rev. 17:8).

- The two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, have to prophesy (Rev. 11:3).
- There are also many judgments such as earthquakes, famines, and the like that must smite the earth (Mt. 24:7).
- There must also be the abomination of desolation set up in the Holy Place.
- Immediately after that comes the Great Tribulation, which will last approximately three and a half years.

None of these things have taken place yet, so there can be no question of His returning tonight or tomorrow. It cannot be until these things have all come to pass.

Matthew 24:29-30 says, *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”*

**Only God the
Father knows
the exact time of
Christ's return.**

Throughout the Word of God, whenever the Second Coming is mentioned, it is always depicted with clouds of great

glory. Then the last trumpet sounds, as mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:52. This clearly happens at the very end of the age.

Then Jesus relates the Parable of the Fig Tree. From the preceding verses, we now have the setting for this parable. The fig tree is a sign that heralds the coming of summer. When one sees the fig tree beginning to put forth its leaves, one knows without a doubt that summer is on the way. Jesus said in essence, “When you see all these signs come to pass, which I have just given you (in Matthew 24:29-33), then you will know that My coming is near.” Thus if we follow these signs sequentially as they unfold, it will be like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle falling into place, and there can be no doubt whatever about the Second Coming.

We must not say that the Second Coming is on a certain day, as Jesus makes it very clear that only the Father knows the exact time of His coming. Also, the fact that He encourages us to pray that the Great Tribulation does not occur in winter or on the Sabbath day indicates that it could start at any time in any season.

The whole purpose of this parable is to emphasize that just as one can tell when summer is coming because of the fig tree, so one can tell when Christ’s coming is near because of the signs He has just revealed to His disciples.

It is important, too, that the Lord mentions those in Judea (and not in other cities such as Rome, Alexandria, or

Athens) were to flee to the hills. This indicates that there will be certain places that will not be touched by the Great Tribulation. It will be centred primarily in Jerusalem, and the surrounding areas of Judea. The Lord would not encourage the people to flee to the hills unless the hills were places of safety.

This Scripture is clear cut. We must adopt an attitude of simply taking these scriptures at face value, and then things fall in place. When all the signs He has mentioned preceding this parable come to pass, then we can know His Second Coming is at hand. Jesus cannot come tomorrow because, at this point, these signs have yet to be fulfilled. The Lord is a “Husbandman” or Farmer; and He waits until His harvest is ripe.

The Faithful and Wise Servant (Mt. 24:45-51)

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 24:45-51).

This parable is also a part of the Mount of Olive Discourse. We must view it in the context of verse 42, *“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”*

Prior to the Second Coming, there is obviously a certain normalcy in life. People will be eating, drinking, and marrying, just as they did in the days of Noah. The Scriptures make that clear. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, but he did not know the exact day God was going to send the flood. He waited until God told him to go into the ark. These parables indicate an uncertainty as to the timing.

It is clear that after the Great Tribulation comes in, there will be approximately three and a half years, but there must also be a little uncertainty as to the timing, or this parable and some of the succeeding ones would not be necessary. For example, Matthew 24:43-44 says, *“But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”* The word “watch” obviously refers to a small segment of time. We can know the season, which we see from the parable of the fig tree; but this parable gives us a clear indication that we cannot know the exact time. The day and the hour cannot be predicted. Thus this parable has the theme of readiness. The admonition is to be prepared, and the reward is rulership.

Actually, this parable is directed to those in the ministry or those in posts of authority, who have been appointed to look

after the Lord's flock for Him. Here, we see the difference in response between the good servant and the evil servant. While they were both expecting the lord of the household to come, and were both aware that it was the season of his return, the evil servant was prone to consider that his lord was delaying his coming. Those who are not pure in heart will relapse into their wicked ways, if they think they have a period of time before their Lord's return.

The problem lies in our heart. We must humble ourselves and ask the Lord to speak and to reveal to us the true condition of our hearts. We must also ask Him to create within us a pure heart. People follow after false doctrine (including false teaching concerning the coming of the Lord) because their hearts are not right. Ezekiel 20:24-25 is a solemn scripture: *"Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live."* God sends strong delusions to those who are not upright. The good servant did not know the time, but he continued to walk uprightly. In contrast, the evil servant began to abuse the flock when he thought there was a delay in the lord's coming, because his heart was not right.

There are two basic reasons the Lord delays His coming. First, He wants to reveal the hearts of the people. Second, He desires to be gracious. Isaiah 30:18 says, *"And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon*

you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.” When Christ returns, there will be no more opportunity to put things right; things will be final. In His mercy, He waits for some to repent, so that He can then come to them in mercy and not in judgment.

Matthew 5:19 says, *“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”* This parable is directed to the leaders. Pastors have a tremendous impact from the pulpit. As leaders we must be sure that our hearts are pure. We must be careful about our doctrine concerning the Second Coming. The Lord holds us accountable for the flock He has placed in our care. Therefore we want to be faithful and wise servants.

The Ten Virgins (Mt. 25:1-13)

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the

wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Mt. 25:1-13)

This parable is also given in relation to Matthew 24 and the Second Coming of Christ. The theme of this parable is that the Bridegroom was expected but He delayed His coming.

I am sure that at some point in our Christian experience, we have wanted something very special from the Lord. We have figured it all out, and have decided when He should do it. But the Lord does not fit in with our timetable. It is almost an infallible dictum. Even though we have made it very clear to Him when we expect it to be done, and have stated it clearly in our prayers, He does not line up with our expectations.

God does not run on a “railway timetable.” Often, He may be late according to our ideas and plans. Thus we have a tendency to give up or become discouraged. Abraham and Sarah had a certain time period in which they thought Isaac would be born. When time went by and nothing happened, they gave up on waiting for God to give them the promised son, and attempted

to “help God,” resulting in the birth of Ishmael. This is the theme of this parable. The Bridegroom delayed His coming; He did not come when the virgins expected Him.

To better understand what this means, we need to consider the customs of those days. A Jewish young man (or his parents) chose a girl to be his bride, after which an agreement was made between the families. The young man would then leave the girl with her family, and begin to prepare the house they were going to live in as husband and wife. This usually took about a year. They would agree upon a certain day for their marriage.

On the agreed day, she would array herself in bridal garments, and get ready for the coming of her bridegroom. She would wait, usually until 6:00 pm or shortly after, at which time the bridegroom would come with his friends to get her. There was a period of waiting; she knew he was coming so she would wait. There was a company of virgins (girls selected by the bride) who would accompany the bridegroom. They would escort him with lights to the girl’s house, where the marriage ceremony was to take place. In this particular parable, the bridegroom was quite late in coming. The virgins all became tired and fell asleep.

In this parable, a cry was made at midnight that the bridegroom was coming. This is similar to the trumpet sound that we have in other scriptures concerning the Second Coming. Now there was nothing wrong with their sleeping, since nearly everyone is asleep at midnight. The problem was that

when the cry was made, not all of them had prepared to have enough oil for their lamps. As a result, their lights had gone out. When they returned from buying more oil, it was too late. The door was closed, and they could not get into the wedding feast.

This parable speaks of our inner life, our union and communion with the Lord Jesus. The virgins are a select group—they were chaste, pure, perfect, holy and undefiled. But the oil of five of them had run out.

Their lamps were no longer burning, speaking of those whose hearts were no longer on fire for God, having left their first love (see Revelation 2:1-7). The importance of being on fire is seen in Revelation 3:15 when the Lord rebuked the Laodicean Church, saying, *“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.”* The five virgins who were without enough oil were expecting the Lord, but their relationship with Him had suffered because their love for Him had waned.

In Bible times, olive oil was used to produce light, and so oil in the Word of God speaks of light. Oil also represents the peace and the anointing of the Holy Spirit (see Psalm 133:1 where the oil is associated with unity and the anointing). These blessings are the result of an intimate relationship with the Lord.

The foolish virgins could not get this oil from anyone else (including the other virgins). They had to buy the truth

themselves by entering into a restoration of that relationship, but it was too late.

The ten virgins were all aware that the Lord was coming. Had He come at the expected time, they would all have been ready. The terrible thing was that He came later than expected, and their love had grown cold. Charles Finney preached in meeting after meeting, but he often took days off to get the flame back, burning brightly in his own life. We can stand in the pulpit and preach while the light may be out in our own heart. That is where the light, speaking of our love for Jesus, must burn and have a continuous supply of oil.

While He tarries is the time when we have the opportunity to buy fresh oil—to rekindle and strengthen our love for Him. When He returns, it will be too late. We want to be amongst the five wise virgins whose lamps were burning brightly, and who entered into the wedding with their Lord. We must keep our love and communion with the Lord alive and burning in our hearts. We do not want to be those whose lamps go out, and who miss going into the wedding feast as a result.

The Talents (Mt. 25:14-30)

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with

the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strowed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strowed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For

unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 25:14-30).

This parable is similar to that of the Parable of the Pounds, which we studied earlier. The theme is that we must be fruitful. Just as the Parable of the Ten Virgins speak of our inner life and communion with the Lord, this parable speaks of our outward service, our ability, and our productivity.

There must be a concentration and narrowing of our endeavours so that our strength goes into that which is profitable. One such example is found in Acts 6:2, where we read, *“Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”*

There was a real problem in the Early Church. The Greeks accused the Jews of being unfair in the treatment of the Greek widows, and so the Church leadership chose seven deacons to oversee the distribution of food and clothing for the poor among them. Prior to this time, Peter, John, and the other disciples had obviously been working men. Many of the disciples had been fishermen. They knew how to work

with their hands and to see to tables. But Peter realized that at that point he should no longer be doing those things. He had to concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the Word.

This is not to say that we should refuse to do menial tasks because we feel that we are too spiritual. However, there are times when God narrows us down, and wants to develop certain things in us for His glory. There are other times when He wants us to do whatever our hand finds to do. Also, some people are given more ministry gifts than others, and He wants these gifts to be developed. The man who received the two talents was faithful to double his talents, even as the one who received five talents doubled his.

We have to realize from this parable that what we do here on earth with what God gives us, will determine our eternal ministry. We must endeavour to give opportunities to everyone to develop. Husbands should see that their wives develop their ministries, whatever they may be.

We will all have to give an account of whether or not we have been faithful in that which God has given us. If God has given us the gift of prophecy, we must wait on that ministry and develop it. If God has given us the gift of healing, we must wait on that ministry and develop it. We are going to give an account of what we have done with God's gifts to us; we want to do it with joy, not grief.

Now we want to consider the man who received one talent. Because he was afraid, he hid his talent. Fear is one of the

things we have to overcome. It so often hinders us in the ministry, and is one of the primary obstacles to using and developing the spiritual gifts. Even the Apostle Paul had to remind Timothy: *“Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.) For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”* (2 Tim. 1:6-7). We have to have victory over fear.

We must overcome the hindrance of fear which obstructs us from using and developing our spiritual gifts.

When we were pastoring in the southern hemisphere at one time, the Lord said that the Church must start to prophesy. Up to that time, most of the prophecies were being given from the pulpit or platform. So we covenanted with God for the spirit of prophecy to come over the congregation. We had a large congregation of about a thousand people, and so we knew there would be risks. We could end up getting all kinds of prophetic words.

When one young girl began to prophesy, she became overwhelmed by the crowd, and shortly after she began, her voice just trailed off. Then we said, “Look, we are all one family here, all brothers and sisters. We will just wait until the Spirit comes upon you, and you can finish.” We

waited, and then she was able to continue her prophecy. That released the whole church; the church became a prophesying church, with prophecy flowing from all over the building. As pastors, we must not only develop our own ministry, but that of our congregation as well.

We must realize the importance of faithfulness in what God has entrusted to us. We are going to have to give an account to God for the gifts He has given us. We want to wait on our gifts, to develop our ministries, and to hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

The Sheep and the Goats - Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee

in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Mt. 25:31-36).

This parable deals with the judgment of nations, not that of individuals. The sheep nations look after the poor. As one travels, it is easy to distinguish the sheep nations from the goat nations.

In one nation, as we were driving by in a taxi, we saw beside the road a man who had been hit by a car, lying in a pool of blood. When we asked the driver why no one was helping

the man, he said, “We wait for the relatives; it is up to them to care for their own.”

Years ago, we were in a certain country in Africa. During a civil disturbance, the army took all the men from one village to prison. The next morning, as I looked out the window, I saw a large group of women marching up the hill, carrying pots and pans. They were the wives of the prisoners. No food was provided in prison, and so they had to go to prison to cook their husbands’ food. The government did not care for the prisoners’ well-being.

The nations who look after the poor and the needy will be commended by the Lord. They are the sheep nations. Therefore for us personally, the application is clear. When we see the sick or dying, we should stretch out our hand in compassion to alleviate their suffering. For the poor, we must do what we can to ensure that they have their needs met, to the extent that we are able to provide. At times, it means that churches have to get together, since one church may not have the adequate funds to meet some of these needs.

Really, it comes down to this—do we have a heart of compassion for those who are in need? We cannot always meet those needs but it is our attitude that is noted by heaven above.

EPILOGUE

In concluding our exposition of the Parables, we recognize that they are all rich in meaning, and can impart unto the young and old alike, discernment and understanding of the mysteries of the Kingdom. We recommend that they be read, re-read, and taught often from the pulpits of our churches, thus imparting wisdom to the members of our congregations.

May God richly bless you in the study and the teaching of these very valuable truths.

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