

Parables of Jesus

Understanding Christ's teaching stories

The Purpose of Parables

Matthew 13:10-17

[10] And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? [11] He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. [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. [13] Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. [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: [15] 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. [16] But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. [17] 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.

Mark 4:11-12

[11] 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: [12] 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.

Luke 8:10

And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

When the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke in parables, His answer was surprising: "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matthew 13:11). Parables both reveal and conceal truth.

To receptive hearts—those genuinely seeking God—parables illuminate spiritual realities. The stories stick in memory, the images provoke thought, and the Spirit opens understanding. But to hard hearts—those opposing Jesus or merely curious—parables obscure truth. They hear the story but miss the meaning.

This fulfills Isaiah's prophecy: "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive" (Matthew 13:14). Some people had so hardened their hearts that God gave them over to spiritual blindness. They could hear Jesus' words but not comprehend His message.

Yet Jesus blessed His disciples: "But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" (Matthew 13:16). God had graciously opened their understanding. They could see spiritual truth others missed.

Mark 4:11-12 adds another dimension: "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."

This seems harsh—parables prevent some from being converted? But remember, these are people who have repeatedly rejected clear teaching. God's judgment is to confirm them in their chosen rejection. For those who genuinely seek, parables are invitations to deeper understanding. For those who reject, parables become judgments confirming their blindness.

Luke 8:10 shows parables reveal "mysteries of the kingdom"—truths previously hidden but now disclosed. Through simple stories about seeds, sheep, coins, and sons, Jesus unveils profound realities about God's kingdom, salvation, judgment, grace, and human nature.

Understanding parables requires spiritual receptivity, careful attention to detail, knowledge of cultural context, and, most importantly, the Holy Spirit's illumination.

The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:3-9

[3] And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; [4] And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: [5] Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: [6] And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. [7] And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: [8] But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. [9] Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Matthew 13:18-23

[18] Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. [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. [20] But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; [21] 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. [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. [23] 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.

Mark 4:3-20

[3] Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: [4] And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. [5] And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: [6] But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. [7] And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no

fruit. [8] And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. [9] And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. [10] And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. [11] 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: [12] 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. [13] And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables? [14] The sower soweth the word. [15] And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. [16] And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; [17] And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. [18] And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, [19] And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. [20] And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

Luke 8:5-15

[5] A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. [6] And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. [7] And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. [8] And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. [9] And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? [10] And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. [11] Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. [12] Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. [13] They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word

with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. [14] 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. [15] But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

The parable of the sower is foundational—Jesus said if we don't understand this parable, we can't understand the others (Mark 4:13). It explains why people respond differently to the same Gospel message.

The sower scatters seed (God's word) broadly. It falls on four types of soil, representing four types of hearts. First, the wayside—hard-packed path. The seed can't penetrate, and birds devour it. Jesus explains: "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" (Matthew 13:19). Some hearts are so hard that God's word can't penetrate at all. Satan immediately steals it away.

Second, stony ground—thin soil over bedrock. The seed sprouts quickly but has no root depth. When sun (tribulation or persecution) comes, it withers. These are people who "receive the word with joy" but have no depth. When following Christ becomes costly, they fall away (Matthew 13:20-21). Their faith was superficial, emotional, untested.

Third, thorny ground—good soil contaminated with thorn roots. The seed grows but is choked by thorns. Jesus explains these thorns are "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Matthew 13:22). The word is suffocated by worldly concerns, material pursuits, and divided loyalties. These people might attend church, claim Christianity, but never bear fruit because worldly cares dominate their hearts.

Fourth, good ground—deep, clean, receptive soil. The seed grows, matures, and produces abundant fruit—"some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold" (Matthew 13:23). These are people who "hear the word, and understand it," and bear fruit. Not all bear the same amount, but all bear fruit. This is genuine conversion and discipleship.

The parable has sobering implications. Only one of four types of soil produces lasting fruit. Three-fourths of seed is ultimately wasted—devoured, withered, or choked. This matches church experience: many hear the Gospel, fewer genuinely believe, and fewer still persevere to bear fruit.

The parable also gives hope. Good soil exists. The word of God has inherent power to produce fruit when it finds receptive hearts. The sower's job is to sow broadly and faithfully; God's job is to prepare hearts and give growth.

For hearers, the question is: What kind of soil is my heart? Is it hard, shallow, crowded, or receptive?

Parables of God's Grace

Luke 15:11-32

[11] And he said, A certain man had two sons: [12] 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. [13] 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. [14] And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. [15] And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. [16] And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. [17] 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! [18] I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, [19] And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. [20] 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. [21] 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. [22] 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: [23] And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: [24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. [25] Now his elder son was in the field: and as

he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. [26] And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. [27] 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. [28] And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. [29] 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: [30] But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. [31] And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. [32] 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.

Luke 15:3-7

[3] And he spake this parable unto them, saying, [4] 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? [5] And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. [6] 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. [7] 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.

Matthew 20:1-16

[1] 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. [2] And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. [3] And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, [4] And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. [5] Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. [6] 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? [7] 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. [8] 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. [9] And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they

received every man a penny. [10] But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. [11] And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, [12] 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. [13] But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? [14] Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. [15] Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? [16] So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

Jesus' parables often showcase God's radical, surprising, offensive-to-human-sensibility grace. The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is perhaps the greatest example. A rebellious son demands his inheritance early (essentially wishing his father dead), squanders it on riotous living, and returns home hoping only to be a servant.

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" (Luke 15:20). The father was watching, waiting, hoping. When he saw his son, he didn't wait for an approach or apology; he ran. In that culture, dignified patriarchs didn't run. But grace abandons dignity. The father embraced and kissed his son before the son even finished his rehearsed speech.

Then the father commanded 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" (Luke 15:22-24). Total restoration. Full sonship. Joyful celebration. This is God's heart toward repentant sinners.

The elder brother's response reveals religious self-righteousness. He's angry at the grace shown his brother, pointing to his own faithful service. The father's reply is gentle but firm: "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" (Luke 15:31-32).

The parable addresses two audiences: "sinners and publicans" who needed to know God's welcoming grace, and "Pharisees and scribes" who "murmured" about Jesus

receiving sinners (Luke 15:1-2). Both groups needed this message—one to receive grace, the other to rejoice when grace is given.

The lost sheep parable (Luke 15:3-7) makes the same point. The shepherd leaves ninety-nine to seek one lost sheep. When found, there's joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. God actively seeks the lost and rejoices at their return.

The laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) shows grace's "unfairness." Workers hired at different hours all receive the same pay. Those who worked all day complain. The landowner responds: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Matthew 20:15).

God's grace offends human merit-based thinking. He's generous beyond what's earned or deserved. Those who think they deserve God's favor will resent His grace to others. But those who know they deserve nothing will marvel at receiving anything.

These parables teach that God delights in showing mercy, actively seeks the lost, rejoices over repentant sinners, and gives grace abundantly—far beyond human notions of fairness.

Parables of the Kingdom

Matthew 13:24-30

[24] Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: [25] But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. [26] But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. [27] 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? [28] He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? [29] But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. [30] 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.

Matthew 13:31-32

[31] 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: [32] 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.

Matthew 13:44-46

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

Jesus frequently used parables to explain the nature of God's kingdom. The wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30) addresses a persistent question: Why does evil exist alongside good in the world?

A man sowed good seed, but an enemy sowed tares (weeds resembling wheat) among it. Servants wanted to pull up the tares immediately, but the owner said, "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest" (Matthew 13:29-30).

Jesus explains: the field is the world, good seed are children of the kingdom, tares are children of the wicked one, the enemy is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age (Matthew 13:37-39). God allows good and evil to coexist temporarily. Attempting to forcibly separate them now would harm the good. But at the final judgment, angels will "gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire" (Matthew 13:41-42). The wicked will be judged; the righteous will "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43).

This parable teaches patience with evil's temporary presence, caution about human attempts to judge who's truly saved, and certainty of final judgment.

The mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32) shows the kingdom's growth. The tiniest seed becomes a large tree. The kingdom started small—Jesus and twelve disciples—but

would grow to encompass people from every nation. What seems insignificant in its beginnings becomes great.

The hidden treasure and pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44-46) illustrate the kingdom's supreme value. A man finds treasure hidden in a field and "for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." A merchant seeking fine pearls finds one of great value and sells everything to buy it.

Both men recognize supreme value and sacrifice everything to obtain it. This is the proper response to the kingdom: recognizing its worth and abandoning everything else to possess it. The kingdom isn't just one good thing among many; it's the supreme treasure worth any sacrifice.

Notice the joy in the first parable—the man isn't begrudgingly giving up his possessions but joyfully doing so because he's found something far better. True Christianity isn't drudgery or loss; it's gaining something of incomparable worth.

These kingdom parables teach that God's kingdom operates differently than earthly kingdoms: it starts small but grows large, it includes both good and evil temporarily, it requires total commitment, and it's worth everything we have.

Parables of Judgment

Matthew 25:14-30

[14] For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. [15] 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. [16] Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. [17] And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. [18] But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. [19] After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. [20] 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. [21] 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. [22] 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. [23] 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. [24] 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 strawed: [25] And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. [26] 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 strawed: [27] Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. [28] Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. [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. [30] And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 25:31-46

[31] 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: [32] 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: [33] And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. [34] 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: [35] For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: [36] Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. [37] Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? [38] When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? [39] Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? [40] 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. [41] 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: [42] For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: [43] 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. [44] Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? [45] 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. [46] And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Luke 16:19-31

[19] There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: [20] And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, [21] And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. [22] 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; [23] And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. [24] 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. [25] 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. [26] 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. [27] Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: [28] For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. [29] Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. [30] And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. [31] And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Jesus' parables include sobering warnings about judgment. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) teaches accountability for what God has entrusted to us. A man traveling gave servants different amounts (talents) "to every man according to his several ability" (Matthew 25:15).

Two servants invested and doubled their talents. The master commended both

identically: "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" (Matthew 25:21, 23). Notice the reward isn't proportionate to amount but to faithfulness. Both receive the same commendation and enter the same joy.

But the servant given one talent buried it in fear. He blamed the master for being harsh and demanding. The master's response was severe: "Thou wicked and slothful servant" (Matthew 25:26). The master took his talent and gave it to the one with ten, then cast the unfaithful servant "into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:30).

The parable teaches several truths: God gives different abilities and opportunities to different people; He expects us to use what we're given; faithfulness, not spectacular results, is what He commends; fear and laziness are inexcusable; those who use their gifts gain more, while those who don't lose what they have; and there's severe judgment for unfaithfulness.

The sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46) describes final judgment. When Christ returns, He'll separate people "as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:32). To the sheep (righteous): "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). They fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed strangers, clothed the naked, visited the sick and imprisoned. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

To the goats (cursed): "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). They failed to serve Christ by failing to serve others in need.

This doesn't teach salvation by works, but it shows genuine faith produces works of love. Those who truly know Christ will serve Him by serving others.

The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) warns about wealth, neglect of the poor, and eternal consequences. The rich man lived luxuriously while Lazarus begged at his gate. Both died. Lazarus went to "Abraham's bosom" (paradise), while the rich man went to hell, in torment. He begged Abraham to send Lazarus with water, but

Abraham explained the great gulf fixed between them—no crossing is possible after death.

These judgment parables teach that how we live now has eternal consequences, there's a final reckoning for everyone, opportunity to respond ends at death, and the stakes couldn't be higher.

Parables of Prayer and Persistence

Luke 18:1-8

[1] And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; [2] Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: [3] And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. [4] And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; [5] Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. [6] And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. [7] And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? [8] I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

Luke 11:5-13

[5] 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; [6] For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? [7] 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. [8] 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. [9] 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. [10] For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. [11] If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? [12] Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? [13] If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your

children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Luke 18:9-14

[9] And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: [10] Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. [11] 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. [12] I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. [13] 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. [14] 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.

Jesus used parables to teach about prayer. The unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8) is introduced with the point: "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). A widow kept coming to an unjust judge seeking justice from her adversary. He didn't fear God or regard man, but eventually granted her request just to stop her persistence: "Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me" (Luke 18:5).

Jesus' application is an argument from lesser to greater: if an unjust judge eventually grants justice due to persistence, how much more will a just God grant justice to His elect who cry to Him day and night? God won't delay long—He'll "avenge them speedily" (Luke 18:8).

The parable teaches persistent, persevering prayer. Don't give up. Keep asking. God isn't like the unjust judge—He's not reluctant or indifferent. But like the widow, we should persistently bring our requests before Him.

The friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-13) reinforces this. A man goes to his friend at midnight needing bread for an unexpected guest. The friend initially refuses—it's late, his children are asleep, he's in bed. But the man's persistence wins: "Because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth" (Luke 11:8).

Jesus applies this: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and

it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9). The verbs are present tense—keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. Persistence in prayer is commended.

Then Jesus gives another lesser-to-greater argument: If earthly fathers give good gifts to their children (not stones or scorpions when they ask for bread or fish), "how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13). God is a better Father than any earthly father. He gives good gifts to those who ask.

The Pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) teaches about the right heart attitude in prayer. The Pharisee stood and prayed "with himself" (telling, since true prayer is to God), thanking God he wasn't like other sinful people, and recounting his religious practices. The tax collector "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

Jesus' verdict: "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" (Luke 18:14).

Pride nullifies prayer. Humility enables it. The self-righteous Pharisee gained nothing; the humble, repentant tax collector received justification. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

These parables teach to pray persistently, expectantly (trusting God to give good gifts), humbly (recognizing our unworthiness), and sincerely (from the heart, not for show).

Parables of Readiness

Matthew 25:1-13

[1] Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. [2] And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. [3] They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: [4] But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. [5] While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. [6] And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. [7] Then all

those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. [8] And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. [9] 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. [10] 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. [11] Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. [12] But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. [13] Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Luke 12:35-40

[35] Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; [36] And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. [37] Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. [38] And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. [39] And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. [40] Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

Mark 13:33-37

[33] Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. [34] For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. [35] Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: [36] Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. [37] And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

Several parables emphasize readiness for Christ's return. The ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) illustrates this vividly. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps to meet the bridegroom. Five were wise, taking extra oil; five were foolish, taking no extra oil.

When the bridegroom delayed, all slept. At midnight, the cry came: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Matthew 25:6). The wise virgins' lamps

were ready, but the foolish virgins' lamps were going out. They asked for oil from the wise, but the wise refused—not enough for all. While the foolish went to buy oil, the bridegroom came. Those ready went with him to the wedding, and "the door was shut" (Matthew 25:10).

When the foolish virgins arrived and knocked, the bridegroom responded, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Matthew 25:12). Jesus' application: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 25:13).

The parable teaches several truths: Christ's return may be delayed longer than expected; outward appearance (all had lamps) doesn't guarantee readiness; true readiness requires genuine preparation (oil—representing the Holy Spirit, genuine faith, or spiritual life); once Christ comes, opportunity ends—the door shuts; claiming to be His follower isn't enough if the reality is lacking; and we must watch and be ready since the timing is unknown.

The parable of the servants waiting for their lord (Luke 12:35-40) commands, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord" (Luke 12:35-36). Be dressed for action, with lamps burning, ready to open the door immediately when the master knocks.

Jesus pronounces blessing on servants found watching when the master returns. He warns that the master will come at an unexpected hour: "Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:40).

Mark 13:33-37 repeats this urgency: "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is" (Mark 13:33). Jesus compares it to a man leaving servants in charge of his house, each with specific work. The doorkeeper must watch because the master might return at evening, midnight, cockcrow, or morning. Jesus concludes: "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:37).

These parables teach that Christ's return is certain but the timing uncertain; we must maintain constant readiness, not presuming we have time; true readiness is internal spiritual reality, not external religious activity; and there are eternal consequences for being ready or unprepared when He comes.

Understanding and Applying Parables

Matthew 13:51-52

[51] Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. [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.

Mark 4:24-25

[24] And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. [25] For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

Luke 8:18

Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

After teaching parables, Jesus asked His disciples, "Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord" (Matthew 13:51). Then He said, "Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matthew 13:52).

Understanding parables isn't the end goal; applying and teaching them is. Like a householder bringing out treasures both new and old, disciples should share truth—combining new revelation Jesus brings with old truths from Scripture.

Jesus warned about how we hear: "Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath" (Mark 4:24-25).

How we hear matters. If we hear carefully, thoughtfully, receptively, more will be given. Understanding builds on understanding. But if we hear carelessly, critically, or indifferently, even what little understanding we have will be taken away. Spiritual truth operates on a use-it-or-lose-it principle.

Luke 8:18 adds: "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." How we hear—our attitude, receptivity, intention to obey—determines whether we gain or lose understanding.

To properly understand and apply parables:

1. Ask the Holy Spirit for illumination. Spiritual truth requires spiritual insight.
2. Consider the context. Who is Jesus addressing? What prompted the parable?
3. Identify the main point. Most parables have one central truth, not multiple detailed correspondences.
4. Look for Jesus' own interpretation. He often explains His parables to the disciples.
5. Note cultural details. Understanding first-century agriculture, economics, and customs helps interpretation.
6. Compare with other Scripture. Parables must harmonize with clear biblical teaching.
7. Apply personally. Don't just understand intellectually; ask how this truth should change your life.
8. Teach others. Share the treasures you've received.

Jesus taught in parables not to confuse but to clarify, not to hide truth from seekers but to reveal it to receptive hearts. Those who truly want to understand will seek, ask, and find. Those who casually hear without serious engagement will miss the meaning.

The question is: Are we hearing to understand, obey, and share? Or are we hearing carelessly, risking the loss of even what little we think we have?