

# SELECTED PARABLES OF JESUS

**"It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" Matthew 4:4**

*By*

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## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

As in my other Bible commentaries, I am writing from the viewpoint that the Bible is the true, God-breathed word of the living God in the original writings, and that the essence of those writings is preserved in the manuscripts existing today.

I urge every reader to put aside the preconceptions he/she has formed based on church doctrine, family tradition or any other sources except the overall message of the Bible, and be like the Bereans, who, after listening to no less an authority than the Apostle Paul, were "examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." Please do the same with this book, and with everything you hear from the pulpit, from Bible teachers, from preachers on television and radio. Rely on the Word of God, not the words of men. Men can mislead and be misled. As Jesus said about the Pharisees, **"BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN."** **Matthew 15:9**. Even with the best of intentions, men can get it wrong. Only the Bible can be trusted.

The parables are scattered throughout the Gospels, with no apparent pattern. Upon examination, however, they fall into three categories: salvation, discipleship and judgment. We will be looking at thirteen of them in that order. In the parables, Jesus uses everyday scenes and events to teach spiritual lessons.

When we think about God Himself coming to earth to pay the penalty for our sins, and consider the effort He put into teaching us what we need to know about the narrow way (Matthew 7:14) to eternity with the Holy Trinity, we should be overcome with awe at His great love for us. I know I am. We are blessed to have His words to guide us.

My prayer is that a look at His parables will strengthen your faith and light your path (Psalm 119:105) on your journey

Ed Nolan  
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## THE SALVATION PARABLES

### 1. The Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32

11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. 13 And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. 14 Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. 17 But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' 20 So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best

robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate.

25 “Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.’ 28 But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him.

29 But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’ 31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and was lost and has been found.’” [Words in italics in the NASB are not in the original Greek text, but are added for clarity.]

The context for this parable is given in Luke 15:1-2:

1 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the

Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

The parable is His answer to their complaint.

Now let us examine what happened in the parable. The younger son left his father's house and spend everything he had inherited from his father on riotous living. What does that represent? Could it represent living in the flesh? The Apostle Paul describes the danger of true followers of Christ leaving the narrow way of Matthew 7;14 and living in the flesh in Romans 8:1-6,12-14 and Galatians 5:16-21 and 6:7-8. The result is spiritual death, eternity in a place called "the lake of fire."

After suffering hardship trying to live "his way" in the flesh, the younger son came to his senses and returned to his father. There are several important things to notice in this touching reunion:

1. The son returned with true repentance and the intention of serving his father (v.19), confessing his sin against his father in v.21.

2. The father did not reject the son or even scold him. On the contrary, he ran to meet him as soon as he saw him coming and embraced him, and ordered "the best robe" and a ring and sandals to be put on him, symbolizing his full acceptance as the father's son. To celebrate, the father ordered the fatted calf, saved for a very special occasion, to be killed for a feast. In short, the father was overjoyed.

3. The reaction of the older son was the opposite. He came in from working in his father's field and was angry when he learned about the

celebration the father has commanded for the return of the younger son. He reminded the father that he has been serving his father for many years, while his younger brother has been off spending his father's wealth on riotous living. At the end, he was unwilling to join the celebration in the father's house.

But what is Jesus saying in the parable?

A parable has no meaning unless the reader discerns what the people and/or things in the parable represent. That is the key to understanding every parable. There are three significant people in this parable who must be thus identified.

a. The father. Assume for the moment that the father represents God Himself, our heavenly Father. We can start with this assumption because all of Jesus' parables teach spiritual lessons.

b. The younger (prodigal) son makes a choice to leave his father's care and protection. He can only be a human. We can observe several things about him:

1. He is born into his father's house. Since this parable is about spiritual things, that can only mean he is born spiritually into the kingdom, represented by the father's household.

2. He voluntarily takes his inheritance from the father and squanders it away "living in the flesh." Could his inheritance represent the eternal life he received when he was born into his father's house? If so, the father's house represents God's dwelling place, heaven, also called the new Jerusalem. He

chose to walk away from eternal life with God in the new Jerusalem. Theologians call this ability to choose to reject God "free will."

3. But he returns with true repentance, confession (1 John 1:9) and a willingness to serve his father, and God accepts him back into the kingdom (the house) with joy and celebration. He represents the repentant "sinners" eating with Jesus in v.2 that the Pharisees and scribes were complaining about.

4. The New King James Version gives a better translation of v.32: 'It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'

Notice that he "was dead" spiritually when he walked away from the father (God), and became "alive again" when he came back to God. In other words, he was a true follower of God before he left, died spiritually when he "walked away from God," and became spiritually "alive again" upon his return with confession and true repentance.

c. The elder son likewise makes a choice: to stay in his father's house, so it is reasonable to conclude he also represents a human. He chose to stay in the house, but his attitude toward God and his younger brother shows an inward hostility toward both, and at the end of the parable refuses to enter the house, raising the possibility he is now rejecting both God and eternal life in the kingdom. Who can he represent?



He clearly represents the complaining Pharisees and scribes to whom Jesus is telling the parable. His message is a direct warning: Outward obedience coupled with a heart of resentment toward God and unforgiveness toward others is not a good recipe for entrance into the kingdom.

Many people think the parable is about the prodigal son. It is not. It is about the elder son, representing the spiritually proud, self-righteous Pharisees and scribes.

But how does the parable apply to us? Here are some thoughts:

1. We should not be smug in our salvation. The younger son left his father (God) and the kingdom (the house) to indulge his fleshly desires and, according to verse 32, became spiritually dead and lost. See Galatians 5:16-21 and 6:7-8.

2. Even if we walk so far away from God that we become spiritually dead (lost), if we return to Him with confession and a true repentant heart and a desire to serve Him, He will restore us to our former state as a child of God and heir to life in the kingdom, unless we get so far away we cannot find our way back (Hebrews 6:4-6; 2 Peter 2:20-21).

3. If we return to God with a true repentant heart, He receives us joyfully back into the kingdom, since it is not His will that anyone should die spiritually. 1 Timothy 2:3-4.

4. Outward observance of God's laws may impress people, but when done with a resentful heart instead of love for God and total faith in God's gift of salvation through His Son's sacrifice and

payment for our sins on the cross, it will not gain entrance into the kingdom (salvation). See Psalm 40:6.

## 2. The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23 "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 And others fell on the good soil and \*yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear." "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 And others fell on the good soil and \*yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."

18 "Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no

firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

"The word of the kingdom" (v,19) is, of course, the gospel: the "good news" of God's gift of salvation so dearly purchased by God Himself, freely offered to all mankind (John 3;16: "For God so loved the world..."). This parable describes mankind's four responses to the gospel:

1. The seed sown beside the road represents outright rejection. The plant represents spiritual life in this parable. Here the heart is too hard to receive the gospel so absolutely no spiritual life results. See John 3:3.

2. The seed sown in the rocky soil does produce spiritual life. But contrary to what is taught in many churches today, that life is not guaranteed to endure. Here the word is received with joy, but the faith is shallow and puts down no roots. In other words, there is no commitment to God, to follow Christ, walk in the Spirit, and obey His commands. People in this category include those who think they have "bought the fire insurance," and can just ignore

or give only “lip service” to God, yet expect to spend eternity in the kingdom. Jesus shatters that illusion by telling us that the plant (spiritual life) that sprang up “withered away.”

In His explanation He says these people “fall away.” This is a translation of one Greek verb, *skandalizō*, which means “to cause a person to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust and obey.” We fall away at our peril. The spiritual life dies.

3. The seed sown among the thorns grows, indicating spiritual life. But, as Jesus points out in His explanation, these people are so focused on this world that they take their eyes off the eternal prize of eternity with God (Philippians 3:14).

The cares and temptations of this world are everywhere. We get caught up in our jobs, our family, or hobbies, etc. Many of these things are worthwhile and even laudatory from the world’s point of view, but are not what Christ expects of His followers (Luke 9:23).

We must remain focused on the eternal to assure our eternal destiny. Here the plants are “choked out” and they do not bear fruit. While the eternal destiny of people in this category is not as clear as in the first two groups, it seems unlikely that people in this group enter the kingdom. While not hostile toward God, neither are they dedicated to serving Him and bearing fruit. It is not certain they even know how.

4. The fourth group obviously represents those who will spend eternity with God in the new Jerusalem. Jesus identifies this group as (a) having heard the word (the gospel), (b) having understood it, and (c) having borne fruit for God. So here Jesus gives us the requirements for salvation that results in eternity in the kingdom:

#1 Hearing the gospel—not the superficial or twisted gospel sometimes taught on television, radio and in some churches, but the true gospel of the Bible; and

#2 Understanding the gospel—the true gospel encompassed in the whole breadth of Scripture. “The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

#3 Applying the true gospel, which results in bearing fruit for God.

Hearing the true gospel is no easy task. Beginning shortly after Christ’s ascension, men have been spreading false gospels. Both the Judaizers and the Gnostics apparently went to the first century churches teaching legalism and antinomianism, misleading many. The same thing has happened up to the present day, creating confusion and a false sense of eternal security for many attending church. We should all be like the Bereans described in Acts 17:11:

“Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”

The Bereans were receiving the gospel from the Apostle Paul, yet they did not just take his word

for it, but confirmed what he told them in the Scriptures. Should we do any less? Is there any other way to be sure the gospel we are hearing is the true gospel of the Bible?

Understanding the true gospel is only possible by spending time studying Scripture with the aid of the Holy Spirit. "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." --John 16:13. This applies to all true followers of Christ. See 1 John 2:27.

This takes dedication, time and effort. Most people who consider themselves Christians simply will not do it, and they only understand the gospel they are taught from the pulpit, their family, or television and radio preachers. They never even try to confirm what they are taught with Scripture. They are like the Laodiceans of Revelation 3, who thought they were secure in their salvation, but were spiritually destitute to the point that Jesus says in Revelation 3:16: "So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." Doesn't sound like a good recipe for eternal security.

Applying the true gospel is where the rubber meets the road. Note that what Jesus is interested in is the man who "bears fruit." It appears that He may be saying that the one who bears fruit for God is the only one assured an eternity with God, what we call "salvation." If so, all desiring that eternity, according to this parable, should be about finding out what

Scripture says about bearing fruit, and how to apply it in their lives. Sadly, we don't see or hear enough of that in today's churches.

So what instructions does the Bible give us about how to bear fruit for God?

A good starting place is John 15:1-8:

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

This passage gives us two truths that are crucial on the all-important issue of our salvation:

1. We cannot bear fruit unless we "abide in Christ."



2. Bearing fruit for God proves to Him that we are true followers of Christ, which appears to be God's standard for eternity in the kingdom.

The starting point for spending eternity in the new Jerusalem with God, after receiving Him as Lord and Savior, therefore appears to be "abiding in Christ." Only then can we bear fruit. This begs the question, how do we "abide in Christ?" The Apostle John tells us this in 1 John :5-6:

By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

But how can we meet this standard, weak as we are in the flesh?

The answer seems to be given in Romans 8. Here are a couple of the key passages:

1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on

the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace...

12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

These passages must be examined carefully to understand what the Apostle Paul is telling us. First he talks about “those who are in Christ Jesus.” Then he says the law of the Holy Spirit is “life in Christ Jesus.” He goes on to say that eternal life is dependent on walking according to the Spirit and being led by the Spirit. There appears to be no distinction between “abiding in Christ Jesus” and “walking according to the Spirit.” They are one and the same.

So now the question becomes, how do we walk according to the Spirit, or how can we be led by the Spirit? If we are being led by the Spirit, we are clearly doing God’s will; the Spirit is God. The Apostle Paul put it this way in Romans 12:1-2:

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of

God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

That transformation “by the renewing of your mind” can only take place when you are led by the Holy Spirit. Only then can you know and do God’s will.

But back to the critical question: How can we be led by the Spirit?

We know all who have genuinely put their trust for their salvation (eternity with God) in God’s plan of salvation through Christ’s redemptive work on the cross become spiritually alive and receive the indwelling Holy Spirit. He is in the hard drive. Now he has to be brought up on the monitor. Or, to put it another way, years ago there was a popular Christian bumper sticker saying, “God is my co-pilot.” It was soon followed by another bumper sticker: “If God is your co-pilot, you are in the wrong seat.”

When we put God in the driver’s seat of our life by consciously submitting our will to His will and asking the Spirit to lead us, we are closer to being led by the Spirit. Our desires of the flesh will always be there, trying to lure us away from submitting our will to God’s will. Perhaps that is why the Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 1 Thess. 5:17, **pray without ceasing.**

The good news is that, as Jesus pointed out in John 15, the vine, not the branches, actually

produces the fruit. It may look like we (the branches) are producing fruit, but all the ingredients in the grape actually come up from the roots and the vine. The branch just holds the fruit. The point? God produces the fruit through us when we abide in Him. See John 3:21.

We must constantly be in communication with God, submitting our will to His. To paraphrase George McDonald, "To know God's will and obey is slavery; to know God's will and make it your will is freedom." And then you will have the "blessed assurance" Fanny Brice wrote about, because [t]herefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1.

### **3. The Rich Man and Lazarus: Luke 16:19-31**

19 "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20 And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and \*saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' 27 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the

Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.”

The first question raised by this passage is whether it is a parable, or is Jesus relating an actual event?

The first indication that this may not be a parable is that Jesus names the poor man: Lazarus. If this is a parable, it is the only recorded parable of Jesus in which a person is named.

The second thing to consider is that the significant events in the story all take place in Hades, the Greek word for the underworld, thought to be the abode of the dead, without regard for whether the dead were wicked or not. Later usage translated the word to Hell, which referred to the abode of the departed wicked or unsaved, but during Jesus' earthly ministry, it simply referred to the abode of the spirits of all the dead. All of the other parables (if this is a parable) of Jesus describe events and surroundings his listeners would all be familiar with, such as agricultural settings. They certainly had no actual knowledge of the abode of the spirits of the dead. But Jesus, being God from everlasting to everlasting, obviously did. It seems likely, but by no means certain, that the story tells of actual events that had previously taken place.

In either case, Jesus has a lesson for us in the story, and raises some interesting questions in our minds.

First question: What does "Abraham's bosom" mean? Some assume that this is another word for paradise, or heaven itself, but the context does not lend itself to that interpretation. The picture Jesus describes actually has Lazarus reclining and leaning against Abraham's bosom, or chest, much as the Apostle John leaned against Jesus as they were both in a reclining position at the last supper (John 13:23). Furthermore, Abraham and the rich man are within speaking distance, although there is a "great chasm" between the place of torment in Hades and the place where Abraham and Lazarus are and Abraham is "far away" from the rich man. We simply aren't told exactly where Abraham and Lazarus are.

Why does this matter? As recited in the Nicene creed and alluded to in Ephesians 4:9-10, apparently Jesus did not ascend to heaven after his death on the cross, but "descended into the lower parts of the earth." That would be Hades. Some think He descended into the place of torment to preach to the lost, the souls in torment, giving them one last chance for salvation, but the weight of Scripture does not support that conclusion: it contains nothing to suggest a "second chance" for repentance and salvation after death.

Jesus' words to the repentant thief on the cross were not, "See you in the place of torment." They were, as we all know, "Today you shall dwell with me in paradise," seeming to indicate He descended into paradise situated "in the lower parts of the earth."

Many think that the place in Hades, the underworld, that Jesus called paradise, was a place where the souls of the righteous (saved) resided after death until Jesus ascended into heaven, when He took those souls with Him, based on Ephesians 4:8:

Therefore it says,  
"WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,  
HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,  
AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." [Quoting Psalm 68:18]

The reasoning is that although they trusted in God and His plan of redemption, their sins were not actually paid for until Jesus died on the cross and God the Father accepted His death as full payment for the sins of the world. Under this line of reasoning, Abraham and Lazarus would be in that place in Hades that Jesus called "paradise" on the cross, and that He went there (while awaiting His resurrection) to be with the Old Testament saints. Since His ascension described in Ephesians 4:8, the souls of all true followers of Christ go immediately into God's presence in heaven (Phil. 1:23).

No definitive answer is given in Scripture, and this reasoning raises questions about Old Testament saints, such as Enoch and Elijah, who were taken up (presumably to heaven) and not down, and Moses who appeared with Elijah at the transfiguration.



But, while interesting, these questions do not affect the narrative and the lesson Jesus was teaching.

The first thing we learn (v.24) is that there is an actual place of fiery torment. Churches in America have soft-peddled and side-stepped this fact for decades, but Jesus leaves no room for doubt.

The second thing we see is that there are only two possible destinations upon death: heaven with God (Phil. 1:23) or this place of torment. No limbo, no nothingness, no "one with the universe," no reincarnation, no purgatory. And that destination is reached immediately after death: no soul-sleep, no second chances.

Then we get some insight into how the rich man ended up in the place of torment in verse 25. He received "good things" in his earthly life. Apparently he was focused on temporal pleasure and neglected his eternal destiny, much like the rich man in Luke 12:16-20.

Verse 26 tells us there is no way we can help deceased unbelievers, either in this life or the next. Praying for them is therefore futile.

In verses 27-31, the rich man pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his living brothers, but Abraham tells him that won't work. God has given mankind all it needs to know of the gospel in the Bible, and Abraham points out that if their hearts are so hard they won't believe

Scripture, they won't believe someone returning from the dead.

Jesus' point is clear: Those with a hard heart who reject God and His plan of salvation have the Scriptures, and if they reject them, they won't accept supernatural intervention either. Here he was clearly talking about Himself. He told them he came from above, and performed many miracles and gave them the Scriptures predicting His coming, and still they rejected Him. He was talking to and about the Pharisees, who were lovers of money and were scoffing at Him (Luke 16:14).

The warning to us is to be focused on the eternal, not on all the gifts God has given us in this world.

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## 4. The Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 And he went out about the third

hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; 4 and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went. 5 Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. 6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he \*said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?' 7 They \*said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He \*said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'

8 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard \*said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.' 9 When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. 10 When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, 12 saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.' 13 But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 15 Is it not lawful for

me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous? 16 So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

Those not familiar with agriculture might not understand the scene, but this arrangement is still used today. There is usually a place, known to all who employ day laborers, where workers can be hired. In historic times, before all the regulators came along, that was the town square or marketplace. Now, it is often behind the small-town general store, but it works the same. At the end of the day, the workers are paid in cash.

Our first clue to help us understand what this parable is about are the first seven words, “For the kingdom of heaven is like...” We see this same language, and references to it, in the parables in Matthew 25, where Jesus is explaining to His disciples His judgment separating the believing mortals who survived the “great tribulation” [Matt. 24:21] to determine who will be left alive to enter the millennial kingdom (true followers of Christ) and who will be killed (everyone who is not spiritually alive, who cannot enter the kingdom—John 3:3).

We see in these judgment parables that “the kingdom of heaven is like” means “the judgment determining who will enter the kingdom will be like.” So this parable is about those entering the kingdom of heaven.

Is there any doubt about who the landowner represents?

If the parable is about entering the kingdom of heaven, he can only represent God. But which member of the Trinity? Consider these passages:

John 5:22 "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son...."

John 5:25-29 "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; 27 and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, 29 and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment."

In Matthew 25, Jesus talks about how He will judge the mortals on earth after the tribulation, and in Revelation 20:11-15, He appears to be the one on the great white throne judging the dead. In both cases, the issue is where they will spend eternity. He is clearly presenting Himself as the landlord here.

But the issue here does not appear to be separating the sheep from the goats, true followers of Christ from everyone who is not. All receive the same reward, a denarius, one day's wage for a day laborer, even though the first group worked twelve

hours and the last group only one hour. Very confusing. Let's take a look at the context:

Matthew 19:27-30 "Then Peter said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" 28 And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last; and the last, first."

Apparently, the denarius represents the true believer's reward: entrance into the kingdom of heaven, what the Apostle Paul called "a crown of righteousness" in 2 Timothy 4:8. Note that the parable begins and ends with the same thought: **the first shall be last, and the last, first**. At face value, this is saying that a person who has spent his entire adult life faithfully serving God receives the same reward (entrance into heaven) as the person who has a sincere deathbed conversion. At first blush, that does not seem "fair" to us. And isn't one of the attributes of God absolute justice?

The answer to the dilemma appears to be the passage in Matthew 19 immediately preceding the parable. There, Jesus clearly makes the point that not everyone's reward and position in the kingdom will be the same. He talks about the ruling authority

of the twelve apostles, and then in verse 29 talks about those who have made great sacrifices and "will receive many times as much." He then mentions the many "who are first" but "will be last," and uses the parable to explain what he means.

His express point is that entrance into heaven is not based on "time served." God (Jesus) looks beyond that. An old saying is: "It is not the hours you put in the work, it is the work you put in the hours." Every employer knows this is true. Could this be what Jesus is teaching here? Those who make the greater sacrifices receive greater rewards, but if that is not the case, everyone who serves God, regardless of the length of service, enters the kingdom.

Another observation: The laborers hired later, all the way up to the eleventh hour, were not going to work later because they were slackers, but because no one hired them (v.7), although they had been there all day looking for work. They were ready to do the landlord's (God's) work from 6:00 a.m. on, but they were not called until later in the day.

John 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."

God knows the hearts of all mankind. He also knows everyone's circumstances, and when they will hear the true gospel and receive it and serve Him. He does not penalize those who receive His salvation by grace later in life. They receive all of His grace, the same as those who come early. The generosity

the master speaks of in v.25 also reminds us of God's great love and forbearance. 1 Timothy 2:3-4:

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Our God is a God of infinite love. He wants everyone His kingdom. All that come willing to serve Him, no matter how late in life, He rewards with the crown of righteousness, eternal life with Him. That is His message to us in this parable.



## 5. The Wedding Feast

Matthew 22:1-14 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. 3 And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. 4 Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.'" 5 But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, 6 and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. 7 But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. 8 Then he \*said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.' 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. 11 "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, 12 and he \*said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

Looking at the context, we see in verse 23 of the previous chapter that Jesus is talking to the chief priests and elders in the temple. As usual, when He is telling them a parable, it is usually about them.

And again, when He is beginning a parable with "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to," or "The kingdom of heaven is like", or "It [referring to the kingdom of heaven] is like", He means, "This parable is about getting into the kingdom of heaven." We see this phrase used in the parables in Matthew 25, where He describes His judgments determining which mortals alive at His return after the tribulation will enter the millennial kingdom.

Here He uses the analogy of a king giving a wedding feast for his son. The invited guests refuse to come, some even killing the king's slaves coming to tell them the feast is ready, so the king has his slaves go into the streets and round up guests to fill the wedding hall. But the king finds one man in the hall without the proper wedding clothes, and has him cast into the outer darkness.

Two puzzling questions arise: If the guests were rounded up in the streets and immediately brought in, where did they get their wedding clothes, and how, as the king asked, did the one man manage to get in without being properly dressed?

There can only be one possible answer to the first question: The king furnished the wedding clothes to the guests. We will see more on this later.

We are not told how the improperly dressed man got in the wedding hall, but we can surmise that he was not among those rounded up in the streets and highways, because if he had been, the king's slaves would have made sure he was properly dressed, as was everyone else in the hall. Therefore, he was not invited by the king's slaves; he was a party-crasher, who somehow managed to sneak into the banquet.

So what is Jesus saying to these members of the Sanhedrin in the parable? To understand the meaning, we first have to determine who the characters represent.

We know Jesus only talks in parables about spiritual things. In that realm, the king probably represents God. Since the king has a son, he may represent God the Father. Let us examine the parable with that supposition to see if it makes sense.

If the king is God the Father, the wedding feast referred to must be the marriage supper of the Lamb (the king's son) described in Revelation 19:9 **Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'"** This verse follows the announcement of the marriage of the Lamb (Christ) in verses 6-8. The banquet itself appears to take place on planet earth, centered in Jerusalem, according to Isaiah 25:6:

**The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain;**

A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow,  
And refined, aged wine.

In Revelation 19 and 20, the marriage of the Lamb is immediately followed by Christ's return at the battle of Armageddon and the millennial kingdom. Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus in John 3:3 that only those who were spiritually alive ("born again") could enter the kingdom of God, and therefore only such true followers of Christ could attend the marriage supper of the Lamb.

In Revelation 19:8, we are told that the bride of Christ (His church) will be clothed in "the righteous acts of the saints." (These "righteous acts" are actually the works God performs through us when we are "abiding in Christ," *i.e.*, being led by the Spirit. See Romans 8;1-8).

The Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:9 that he sought "the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." Why?

Because, as Isaiah 64:6 tells us, before God, all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment. Man's righteousness, based on his own works and "goodness," are worse than worthless before God. But Christ's followers are clothed with God's righteousness. We see a beautiful picture of this in Zechariah 3:1-4:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. 2 The LORD said to

Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" 3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. 4 He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Again he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes."

Our gate-crasher, therefore, can only represent someone who is spiritually dead, who has not been "washed in the blood of the Lamb," and is therefore not clothed with the righteousness of Christ. He is consequently left with only his own righteousness, which to the king (God) is **like a filthy garment**. He tried to enter the kingdom by another door other than Christ. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.**"

We have preachers in many churches in America today proclaiming from their pulpits that "there are many paths to heaven," "it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere," "all good people go to heaven," and other such nonsense. The Pharisees Jesus is talking to believed that following the Mosaic Law would get them into the kingdom.

They had forgotten that they needed a Redeemer, although that was always the way into the kingdom. (See, e.g., Job 19:25-27, Isaiah 49:6, Isaiah 53, Micah 7:7) They are the man without the

proper clothes. And like all who do not follow Christ, that man (and the Pharisees, if they persist in their rejection of Jesus the Messiah) is consigned to the outer darkness, a place that can only mean the place of eternal torment.

The chief priests and elders could not miss their place in the parable. They knew that the history of Israel and Judah had been one long dark story, with only a few periods of light, where they walked in disobedience to God, either ignoring or persecuting and sometimes killing the prophets He sent them. Whether they recalled the message of Isaiah 64:6 is unknown, but they had to sense that Jesus was telling them that they were on the road to eternal damnation, and therefore continued trying to trap Him so they could have Him killed.

Everyone has to make a choice: Receive God's gift of salvation and serve Him (Lord and Savior), walking the narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:14), or spend eternity in fiery torment. No wishful thinking can change that fact.

# THE DISCIPLESHIP PARABLES

## 1. The Wicked Vine-Growers

Matthew 21:33-46 "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35 The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. 37 But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' 39 They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine growers?" 41 They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons." 42 Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?" 36 43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. 44 And he

who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

Jesus leaves nothing to interpretation here: he makes the audience, "the chief priests and elders" (v.23) condemn themselves in verse 41, and pronounces their sentence in verses 43 and 44.

Immediately following the parable, the next verse makes it clear that his audience knew He was talking about them.

As always in His parables, Jesus is talking about spiritual things. Since the Jewish religious leaders, the "chief priests and the elders" knew Jesus was portraying them as the tenants, the vine-growers, what then does the vineyard represent?

Can it represent anything but the Jews, the nations of Israel and Judah? Therefore, they have been entrusted with the spiritual welfare of God's chosen people, obviously by God, the landowner who prepared the vineyard as well as it could be prepared and rented it to the Jewish leaders to tend and produce fruit for the landowner on a sharecropper arrangement.

But they refused to produce any fruit for the landowner, and kept all the benefits of their position for themselves. The slaves are beaten and even killed when they come on behalf of the landowner. They can only represent the many prophets God sent to deliver God's message and bring the Jewish people back to Him.



Then it gets interesting. Jesus is predicting His own death at the hands of the Jewish leaders, representing Himself as the son in the parable.

Jesus then has them condemn themselves by asking for a verdict on the vine-growers' behavior, and they are forced to pronounce the vine-growers guilty and deserving the death penalty. They may not realize it at this point, but the death they are in line for is the second death, spiritual death.

He doesn't stop there but quotes Psalm 118:33-23 to them, and then pronounces His sentence: except for a faithful remnant (Romans 11:5), the entire Jewish people will have the kingdom of God taken away from them (See Romans 11:25) and given to Gentiles who will produce fruit for God (v.43 in the parable).

He finishes in verse 44 with a dire warning of their personal fate in eternity.

So what's the lesson for us? Here are a couple of thoughts: 1. God has richly blessed us for a purpose: to bear fruit for Him. 2. When we neglect or rebel against God and do not bear fruit for Him, the consequences can be severe, apparently up to the point of losing our opportunity to spend eternity with Him.

We must always be focused on the eternal, remembering who we are, who He is, and why we are here.

## 2. The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-16 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. 5 A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. 7 So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 11 "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, 15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life 39 for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, which are not of this

fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.”

As with so many of His parables, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees.

As always, He is using familiar situations to explain spiritual things. The abundant life He is speaking of in v.10 is spiritual life, not “wealth and prosperity” in this life. John 10:27-28:

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

In this analogy, we are all familiar with the concept that we are His sheep, although the Pharisees would certainly reject that application to themselves. But this parable tells us a great deal about who really are His sheep, and what that entails. It should cause us to examine our own lives.

We benefit greatly from the fact that Jesus explains His parable to the Pharisees, but first we need to examine first century shepherding. It helps to know that in that time, the sheep in the shepherd’s flock were usually owned by the shepherd or by his father, like the sheep King David shepherded in his youth. Therefore, he had a much more vested interest in the sheep than the hired hand.

Apparently at that time there were also sheepfolds where the shepherd could leave the sheep in the care of a hired doorkeeper, who was to guard the sheep while the shepherd had his downtime.

Jesus first makes the observation that anyone who enters the sheepfold by any other way by the door is a thief and a robber, who "comes only to steal and kill and destroy." (v10) They do not enter through the door because the doorkeeper is guarding the door.

In spiritual terms, aren't these the false teachers, including the Pharisees, teaching a dead-end road to destruction? (Matthew 7:13) Unfortunately, they have not gone away, and we must forever be on our guard against them.

The best way to do that is to be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11, who examined the Scriptures daily. Our failure to do that puts us in eternal danger of following a false gospel. 1 Timothy 4:16:

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

In the parable, unlike any of His other parables, Jesus is represented by two things: He is both the door and the good shepherd: "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." (v.9) "I am

the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. (v.11)

As the door, He is the entrance to the narrow way to salvation of Matthew 7:14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." John 14:6: Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

But the door is more than just an entrance in this parable. The person entering through Him "will go in and out and find pasture." This reminds us of David's 23rd Psalm. Not only does He provide for us ("lie down in green pastures" and "leads me beside the still waters") when we go out of the sheepfold, He also protects us when we, guided by the Spirit, are about His business in Satan's world: "I fear no evil, for You are with me."

As the good shepherd, He first of all owns His sheep. They are His property bought at the highest possible cost: His life. This tells us how much value He places on his sheep. We all like to think we are His sheep, but are we really? Look at how He knows which sheep are His (v.4): "When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them and the sheep follow him..."

Do you really follow Christ, or do you just talk the talk, "believe in your heart," and think that your ticket to heaven is guaranteed? Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." This is the

"narrow way that leads to life" in Matthew 7:14. And this is how Jesus defines His sheep: those who know His voice and follow Him.

Conversely, He says in v.5 that His sheep will not follow a stranger. Do you find yourself following your pastor, a television or radio preacher, or a particular author, and believing everything he or she says about spiritual matters? Are you checking your non-Biblical sources by examining the Scriptures? Be sure you are not following a stranger!

Jesus continues the analogy in verse 16, talking about the "other sheep" He "must bring into the fold" to "become one flock with one shepherd." This can only refer to us Gentiles, who are blessed to be part of the flock, or as the Apostle Paul put it, wild olive branches that, because of our faith, were grafted into the cultivated olive tree (with the faithful Jewish followers), as he describes in Romans 11:17-25:

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and

severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

The prophet Isaiah prophesied this inclusion of the Gentiles into the kingdom seven hundred years earlier in Isaiah 49:6: He [the Father] says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

### 3. The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37 And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" 27 And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 28 And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE." 29 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' 36 Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" 37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."



A little background information will help us better understand this parable. The man who was beaten was clearly understood to be Jewish. Otherwise, the point that he was cared for by the Samaritan would make no sense.

The road in question is a rough, rocky seventeen-mile long road with a 3,000 foot descent through an area notoriously beset at that time by thieves and danger, making the parable a very plausible event.

Finally, it helps to know that the Samaritans and the Jews had a great deal of animosity toward one another, with the Jews considering the Samaritans racially and morally inferior.

Now let us look at what happens in the parable. Note that Jesus is answering the question "and who is my neighbor" in the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. The one asking the question is actually a scribe, an expert on the Law of Moses, wishing to justify himself. He is part of the temple religious establishment, who believe themselves justified by legalistically following the letter of the Mosaic Law while ignoring its spirit, about whom Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." Matthew 23:27

Jesus drives this point home by making the first two to come upon the beaten man a priest and

then a Levite, members of the religious establishment. Both show no compassion and offer no aid, but a Samaritan, a heathen in the eyes of the scribe asking the question and part a race the scribe considers both hostile and inferior to the Jews, is the one who stops and renders aid.

But the Samaritan doesn't just "bind up his wounds." He goes the extra mile by taking him to an inn, caring for him overnight, and finally paying the innkeeper to take care of him until he is well. The message is not lost on the scribe, who is forced to correctly answer the question of who proved to be the man's neighbor, to which Jesus responded, "Go and do the same."

We are not told what impact this had on the scribe, but it is certainly a lesson for us:

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 1 John 3:17-18 47 4.

## 4. The Birds of the Air and Lilies of the Field

Matthew 6:24-34 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. 25 "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Though not strictly a parable, this well-known narrative contains some valuable thoughts on

discipleship. Verse 24 should give us pause for thought. We live in a society where everyone is focused on financial security. Jesus raises the question: How do we reconcile that with serving God? He says we have to choose: either serve wealth or serve God.

But exactly how does that work? Are we to sell all we have and give it to the poor and follow after Him? Isn't that what he told the rich man who asked Him how he could obtain eternal life? Mar 10:21: (also in Matt. 19:21 and Luke 18:22) **Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."**

Speaking of treasure in heaven, Jesus had this to say: Matthew 6:19-21: **"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."**

Can we truly be followers of Christ without selling all we have and then dedicating ourselves to following Him? Before we decide, we must examine Scripture as a whole. Job was a wealthy man who lost everything, including all his wealth. If he could only serve God by divesting himself of all his wealth, why did God restore more wealth to him than he had before?

Abraham was a wealthy man with so much livestock that he and Lot had to go their separate ways so their herds would have room and grass enough to graze. Yet God used and blessed him.

When Jacob left Laban and returned to Canaan, he was exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys. [Genesis 30:43] Yet God changed his name to Israel and made his descendants God's chosen people.

Joseph became ruler of all of Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh, and doubtless accumulated great wealth in that position, and yet served God faithfully and is even considered a type of Christ.

Daniel held a similar position in Babylon, and doubtless the position came with considerable wealth. Yet he was greatly used by God. The list could continue, but the point is made. God uses the rich as well as the poor to accomplish His will.

His point is that we are to be serving God first and foremost. That is where our heart must be. Failing to provide for our families and ourselves is not serving God. But putting our retirement plans, stock portfolios, etc. ahead of God is certainly not what He wants. Remember, **the LORD looks at the heart.** 1 Samuel 16:7

Jesus illustrates this principle with the birds of the air and lilies of the field to make the point that

we are to rely on God for our provision, not on our wealth. If we are relying on our wealth, we are worried about obtaining and preserving it. Instead of worrying, we are to rely on God: **But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.** [v.33]

Isn't He saying we are to be focused on the eternal, not this temporal existence, and relying on God's provision, not our own? It helps to remember that all we have and all we are come from God.

When we are worrying, are we really trusting God? And what good does worrying really do? Jesus put it well in verse 27: **"And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?"**

Here's what the Apostle Paul had to say about worrying: **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** Philippians 4:6-7.

Jesus ends the message with repetition: **"Do not worry about tomorrow."** (v.34) We are told to be always be trusting in God, not in ourselves, but only in what He can do through us. Failing to do that is manifested in worrying. By definition, that makes worrying a sin. As the Apostle John advises in 1 John 1:9, it should be confessed to God as we again turn to Him in all things: **"seek first His kingdom and His**

righteousness....” Isn’t that what Jesus is really saying here?

# THE JUDGMENT PARABLES

## 1. The Wicked Slave

Matthew 24:45-51 (Also in Luke 12:42-48)  
"Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. 47 Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 48 But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' 49 and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; 50 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, 51 and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Many interpret this parable as meaning there are two slaves, but the passage simply does not support that conclusion. Notice the "evil" slave is referred to as "that slave" in both verse 48 and verse 50. "That" can only be a reference to the only slave previously mentioned, who started out as **the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household**, but soon began mistreating his master's slaves and "hanging out" with drunkards.

Since Jesus' parables always have a spiritual meaning, we have to examine this one for the spiritual analogy also.



When we look at the context of this parable, we see that Jesus is beginning His description of the judgment of mortals living when He returns to rule at the end of what He called "a great tribulation" (the end of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, see Daniel 9:27), beginning with the battle of Armageddon, what many theologians call "the second coming of Christ:"

Matthew 24:29-30 "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

This judgment is for the purpose of removing (killing) all mortals who are not true followers of Christ, who are not "born again," (born spiritually), because only those can enter the kingdom Jesus will establish at His return:

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Identifying the characters in spiritual terms, the master must be Christ. The parable describes the master leaving and then returning at a time unknown to the slave, identical to Jesus' departure

at His ascension and His promised return at an unrevealed time.

The central character is described as the master's slave, leaving no doubt that he is a true follower of Christ, serving Him in faithful obedience at the beginning of the parable. He cannot be considered "an unbeliever" at the start of the parable. The statement in verses 46 and 47, make that clear, referring to his potential for heavenly rewards, as we see in the subsequent parable of the talents in Matthew 25.

But as the parable continues, in his master's absence the slave ceases to obey the master's command and begins to satisfy the baser desires of the flesh, beating his fellow slaves and eating and drinking with drunkards.

When the master (Jesus) returns, the slave is cut to pieces and condemned to a place where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," a description Jesus used to refer to eternal torment (See Matthew 25:30).

There is a school of theological thought with a huge following that a person who truly "receives" Christ (John 1:12) is assured an eternity with Him in the heavenly Jerusalem and cannot lose his salvation, not matter what happens or how he lives following truly coming to Christ and accepting God's gift of salvation. It is a comforting thought, one we all would like to be the true gospel. Unfortunately,

many passages in Scripture, including this parable, tell us otherwise.

Although the people believing this doctrine of "once saved, always saved" seek to disregard Jesus' message in this parable by claiming there are two different slaves, the "faithful and sensible slave" and the "evil slave," no reasonable reading of the parable supports that position, as discussed above. In fact, such a reading renders the parable entirely pointless, which is their intent, because the clear meaning is that their doctrine contradicts Jesus' teaching:

A true follower of Christ can habitually live in the flesh and eventually lose his salvation. (Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.") That is exactly what happened to the slave in this parable.

The Apostle Paul stressed this truth repeatedly in his epistles. Here are just a few examples (A careful reading of his epistles and the teachings of Jesus will reveal many more.):

Galatians 5:16-21 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions,

factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [Emphasis added.] Note that Paul is writing to true followers of Christ, urging them to “walk by the Spirit.” (v.16)

Galatians 6:7-8 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. In Galatians 6:1 Paul writes that he is writing to “Brethren”, meaning Christ’s followers.

Romans 8:12-13 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. “Brethren” can only refer to true followers of Christ.

So what is the message of the parable? Jesus told it to His disciples in Matthew 24:2 right before He told them the parable:

“Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.”

Be on the alert for what? According to this parable, to be sure you are about doing the Master’s will and obeying His commands when you come before Him, either by death or His return; otherwise, according to this parable, if you have been living in

habitual sin, you risk eternal condemnation in torment.

## 2. The Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10 And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."

Again, Jesus is using common occurrences in this world as an analogy to teach a spiritual lesson. This parable follows the parable of the evil slave, and teaches the same lesson. It is included here because the same people who claim there are two different slaves Jesus is talking about in that parable also claim that the five foolish virgins are "unbelievers"

and the wise virgins represent “believers,” *i.e.*, true followers of Christ.

Let’s look at what actually happened in the parable:

1. The ten virgins were waiting to meet the bridegroom to enter the wedding feast (v.10). In the typical Jewish wedding at that time, the marriage ceremony took place at the house of the bride’s family. Later, the bridegroom and bride went to their new home, often the home of the bridegroom’s family, with perhaps a new bedroom added for the couple, and there the wedding feast took place.
2. The oil was running out in the lamps of the foolish virgins, while the wise virgins were prepared with extra oil.
3. The wise virgins got in the door to the wedding feast, but the foolish virgins were shut out and denied admittance, when the bridegroom says “**I do not know you.**”

Jesus begins the parable with “**Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to,**” meaning that the judgment for getting into the kingdom is comparable to, as discussed in the Parable of the Wedding Feast, above.

In this spiritual context, who do the characters represent? Remember, this parable is about Jesus’ judgment of mortals surviving the tribulation, separating “the sheep” from “the goats” (See

Matthew 25:31-46) to determine who will be killed and who will survive to enter the kingdom.

In the parable, the bridegroom makes the decision about who will enter the wedding feast. At His second coming, Jesus will make that decision (Matthew 25:31-46). The first major event that takes place in the millennial kingdom after those judgements is the marriage supper of the Lamb (See Revelation 19:9 and Isaiah 25:6). So this is an analogy based on an actual event that will take place on planet earth after Christ's return, and He is talking about Himself and His judgments.

As we examine the ten virgins, we see that (1) they are all awaiting the bridegroom to gain entrance to the wedding feast, and (2) they all have oil in their lamps initially.

Symbolically in Scripture, oil usually represents the Holy Spirit. We see this with the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3-6. And that is what the oil in the lamps appear to represent here. If so, then all ten virgins arrive indwelt by the Holy Spirit, indicating they are true followers of Christ. If they were not His followers, it is unlikely they would be waiting for Him to come and let them into the wedding feast.

But something happens while they wait: the oil burns low in the lamps and the foolish virgins have none to replace it. They have not "endured to the end:"



Matthew 10:22 "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved."

This message about Christ's followers needing endurance in the faith is found throughout Scripture, and that is the point of this parable. Notice when the foolish virgins return, they are too late. When you meet Christ, there are no second chances, whether you meet Him at His second coming or at death. They were not prepared when He came, and are therefore forever shut out of the kingdom.

Notice that the bridegroom says "I do not know you." Some theologians say these virgins represent people who never truly came to Christ, "professing Christians." But that is not what Christ says when confronting those unbelievers. Look at what he says he will tell them in Matthew 7:21-23:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" [Emphasis added].

Notice the difference? He doesn't tell the foolish virgins "I never knew you," but "I do not know you." This supports the earlier conclusion that they originally arrived to wait for the bridegroom

with oil (representing the Holy Spirit), which can only mean that at that time they were true followers of Christ, but wandered away. He knew them then, but not at the end when it counted.

The warning to us is clear: **How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?** (Hebrews 2:3). We cannot be complacent, thinking that our salvation is secure, no matter how we live and ignore God.

Even the Apostle Paul knew there was no “retirement” from serving the God of our salvation. In Philippians 3: he wrote **Not that I have already obtained it** (“the resurrection from the dead,” meaning salvation) **or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (salvation). 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, (spiritually mature) have this attitude; [Emphasis added.]**

That is why Jesus closes the parable with this: **“Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.”** We cannot relax our vigilance in worshipping and serving the living God.

Hebrews 12:1b: **[L]et us run with endurance the race which is set before us.**

### 3. The Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30 "For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. 16 Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. 17 In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. 18 But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 "Now after a long time the master of those slaves \*came and \*settled accounts with them. 20 The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

22 "Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

24 "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. 25 And I

was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.'

26 "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. 27 Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. 28 Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.'

29 "For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. 30 Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus told His disciples this parable immediately after the parable of the ten virgins. The theme is the same: how He will judge the mortals living at His return to determine who enters the kingdom. In that parable, He made it clear that when He appeared, time was up. All those who had strayed from the faith and lost the indwelling Holy Spirit were doomed, shut out of the kingdom. Any attempt to come back to the faith and again be filled with the Holy Spirit after His return would not work. Too late.

The difference here is that Jesus gives us insight into the basis for this all-important judgment, which applies to every person (with the possible exceptions of those who have not reached what God considers the age necessary to decide whether to

choose to accept or reject Him (See Romans 7:9) and those the mentally deficient who are never able to make that choice).

Again, the master in the parable represents Jesus, who will soon depart and not return for a long time, and will judge all mortals at His return. The three slaves are obviously mortals alive at His return, and the parable describes how Jesus judges them to determine who enters the kingdom.

There is disagreement among theologians about what the talents represent. Some think they represent abilities (“talents”) given to us by God, which we are to use to serve Him.

Romans 12:6a **Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly...**

Others think they represent faith given to us by God:

Ephesians 2:8 **For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;**

Romans 12:3 **For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. [Emphasis added].**

An examination of what happened in the parable may reveal which view more closely aligns with Scripture.

Before the master departed, he “**called his own slaves**” (v.14). “His own slaves” can only be true followers of Jesus, the master, since that is the position held only by Christ’s true followers. All others are slaves to sin. (Romans 6:16).

Romans 6:22 [NKJV] **But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.**

After calling them, the master gives a number of talents to each differing “**according to his ability**” (v.15). Although not explicitly stated, it is obvious from the narrative that the slaves were entrusted with the money to invest it for the master. They were to “grow” the talents.

A talent (Gr. *Talanton*) was a measure of gold or silver by weight, usually about 75 pounds. At today’s silver prices, a talent of silver would be worth about \$32,400, and a talent of gold about \$2,280,000. Either way, a sizeable investment portfolio.

We all know the story: One slave was given five talents to invest, one two talents, and the other one talent. The first two invested and doubled their talents, while the third, instead of following his master’s instructions, out of fear of and disrespect

for his master, hid it in the ground and gave it back to the master at his return. The first two were rewarded equally by the master:

**'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'** (vs.21 and 23).

The third slave was cast **into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**, revealing the spiritual meaning of the parable. The first two slaves (followers of Christ) trusted the master (Jesus) and obeyed his instruction, receiving as their reward eternity with God and apparently a place of authority in the kingdom. The third slave was condemned to eternal torment separated from God.

So do the talents represent abilities given to us by God, or faith given to us by God?

If they represent abilities (talent) given to us by God, which we are to apply in serving Him, doesn't that say we are saved by works, not faith? Yet the whole Bible tells us that our works in the flesh are worthless to God, and that our only hope of eternity in the new Jerusalem with God is through faith in Christ's redemptive work on the cross to pay for our sins, and for the sins of all mankind:

**1 John 2:2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.**

Ephesians 2:8 and many, many other passages in Scripture tell us that we are saved by Christ's great sacrifice on the cross, which results in our salvation through faith, not by our works. The talents can only represent faith.

In this parable Jesus gives us the crucial thing we need to know about the faith God gives us: we are not to receive the faith God gives us and then do nothing with it. We are to apply that faith in our lives to grow it for God's use and glory.

The Apostle James wrote about the necessity of applying our faith in James 2:14-26:

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

18 But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was



perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. [Emphasis added] (See also John 5:28-29, Romans 2:5-8, Galatians 6:7-10.)

All three started out as slaves to God, *i.e.*, "His true followers." All were given enough faith to be saved, and given instructions to apply the faith given to them, but the third failed to do so. You might think the problem was that the third slave simply wasn't given enough faith to be saved. Consider the interchange between the third slave and the master in verses 24-27:

24 "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.'

26 "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. 27 Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest.'

Notice the attitude of this third slave: he distrusts and disrespects his master. Because of this attitude, he does not follow his master's instructions and does not invest the talent, which represents the faith God originally gave him. Remember, this man started out as God's slave, a true follower of Christ. By burying the faith God gave him in the ground, somewhere along the line he lost his trust (faith) and respect for his master, and consequently disobeyed his command to invest the talent.

But it is the reaction of the master that gives the answer. He is angry with the slave for his distrust of the master and his failure to invest the talent as instructed. If the slave was not given enough faith to be "saved," the master would have no reason to be angry. And how do we explain the fact that the man was originally the master's slave, a true follower of Christ? Moreover, not giving someone enough faith to be saved would be contrary to the will of God: **This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.** 1 Timothy 2:3-4

So how do we demonstrate our faith by obedience to His commands [John 14:15 **"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."**]? We do this by being led by the Holy Spirit:

**Romans 8:12-14 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to**

death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

If we don't have the faith we like to think we have, we will not be obedient to do God's will. This is what happened to the third slave. He knew the master wanted and expected him to invest the talent, and he expected the master to return (he kept the talent), yet he did nothing. A couple of verses come to mind:

Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter."

James 2:20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

This parable warns us that God expects His true followers to obey His commandments, and failure to do so and becoming complacent in our faith can have eternal consequences.

## 4. The Wheat and the Tares

Matthew 13:24-30 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away.

26 But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves \*said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 But he \*said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

Matthew 13:36-43 Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." 37 And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send forth His angels,

and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then **THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN** in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

We cannot misinterpret what the people and plants represent in the parable, because Matthew recounts the full explanation Jesus gave to His disciples. However, there are still things we can learn from this parable.

To fully understand the parable, it helps to know that tares are a weed that looks very much like wheat until the wheat puts on a head and produces grain. That is why the landowner tells the slaves in verse 29 not to take the tares out of the field prematurely for fear of uprooting some of the wheat. What does this say to us?

Could it be that Jesus is saying that we are not judged prematurely, as at the moment of conversion, but at the moment of death or His return to rule, whichever comes first? Remember, Jesus says this is about the harvest at **"the end of the age,"** which would be when He returns to set up the kingdom on earth, what we call **"the millennial kingdom,"** Christ's future 1000 year reign mentioned in Revelation 20:4-6.

At that time, all who are not **"sons of the kingdom"** must be removed, and in fact they are, as

Jesus explains in verse 42, cast into "the furnace of fire," the place of torment. They are in fact killed, and their bodies are burned to ashes:

Malachi 4:1-3 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." 2 "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. 3 You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts.[Emphasis added.]

Notice that there are only two kinds of plants in the field: the wheat and the tares. **Sons of the kingdom**, and **sons of the evil one**. There is no middle ground, no neutral position, no third category.

You either serve God or you serve Satan. You are either in the kingdom or you are burned with fire. This parable tells you Jesus makes that determination when we appear before Him, either at death or at His return to set up the kingdom. He waits until the last moment to make that judgment, giving everyone the maximum opportunity to repent. Would a God of infinite love do otherwise?

That is why Jesus gave us so many warnings to "be on the alert (e.g., Matthew 24:42: "Therefore be

on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.”) Toward the end of his life, the Apostle Paul described his own walk this way:

2 Timothy 4:6-8: For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Jesus' lesson to us in this parable is clear: we must be about our Master's business, holding fast to the faith (I Corinthians 15:1-2), being led by the Spirit and doing His will:

Hebrews 10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Hebrews 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.