

The Parables of our Lord Jesus Christ

Our Lord came to reveal our God to us and to detail a plan for our salvation and life with Him. In this process, in three short years, Jesus taught more of the truths of God to mere man than anyone else in the history of mankind. His teachings are used by many other organizations and religions as a standard of the moral code for man. In this teaching Jesus often choose to teach in parables. This way of teaching wasn't a new way nor is it one that ceased when He went back home with His Father. Though the Book of Acts contains no record of parables being spoken or repeated by any of the apostles, many preachers and speakers use this method today to help the listener understand the concept being presented.

What is a non-religious story you have heard that helped you understand a concept? _____

Definition:

To begin with, there are several stories in the Old Testament that could be classified as parables. These were mainly used by the prophets of God to convey God's message. Practically the entire Book of Proverbs could be classified as imagery that conveys truth.

What are some examples of parables in the Book of Proverbs? _____

The word used for a parable in the Old Testament is 'MASHAL'. The root of this word simply means 'to be like' and has the idea of using something that is understandable to explain something that is not. The unexplained is "like" something else that is easier to explain. In this way truth could be seen either face to face or in the mind in imagery that was common to the hearer or observer. Ezekiel often acted out the prophecies he was chosen to deliver to the men and women of Israel. In this way he was a living parable or 'Mashal'. The Greek word used in the New Testament is actually the word 'PARABOLE' and here means a symbolic narrative that conveys a moral truth. Jesus utilized things, occupations and even real people of the day to describe the indescribable aspects of the Kingdom and the principals of moral living God promotes.

Most of the parables our Lord spoke dealt with the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom was ushered in by Jesus and now resides in the heart of believers. In this way, each believer takes the 'kingdom' with them everywhere they go. Kingdom principals are the principals with which Almighty God holds to and therefore must be explained in a way mere mortal man can comprehend. Our finite minds could not contain the full understanding of the workings of the mind of God. Because of His infinity, God had to condescend to things we were familiar with. Jesus used imagery that we are familiar with to explain what we would need to know to function properly as members of this Kingdom. These explanations were shrouded in parables for another reason, to hide them from those not willing to be participants. It became a coded way for Jesus to reveal the truth to those who really needed to know and at the same time hide it from those who only followed Him to accuse Him and devalue the Kingdom He preached.

The parables of Jesus show us how the Kingdom operates, what is valuable to God, what God expects and where the true reward is for followers. As He taught He used a common thread, often using the

same image to convey the same character or aspect in each parable. In addition to using parables to comprehend complex issues in the spiritual realm, Jesus also used them to define spiritual core values such as faith, love and trust.

When studying the parables of our Lord, certain things must be considered. First, what do the characters in the story, whether live or inanimate, represent to the spiritual truth being taught? It may be found that some of these have no individual meaning, but are added to embellish on those that do. Second, what would be the natural conclusion of the story? Jesus often would ask His listeners what the natural response would be to the issue at hand in the story and then say that it would be applicable to the spiritual truth at hand.

What is your favorite parable Jesus taught? _____

Outline:

Our study will focus on seven general classes found in this outline, but may deviate to smaller issues as we go to help us understand the principals at hand. There are literally dozens of examples to be considered and we will only sample a smaller portion of them to help us have an understanding of their usage. The student of the bible is encouraged to take it upon themselves to dig into these on their own to gain a more complete understanding. The seven classes are...

1. **Concerning Certain Kingdom Aspects** (Fish and Fishers, Salt, Light, Moths and Thieves, Mote and the Beam, Dogs and Swine, Sheep and Wolves, Thorns and Thistles, Old Garments and Bottles)
2. **Concerning this Age** (The Sower, The Wheat and Tares, The Mustard Seed, The Leaven, The Treasure, The Pearl, The Dragnet, The Marriage Feast and Garment)
3. **Concerning Wealth and Foolishness** (The Talents, The Creditor and Two Debtors, The Seed and the Unprofitable Servant, The Rich Fool)
4. **Concerning Reward** (The Goats and Sheep, The Heir, The Vineyard)
5. **Concerning Crisis** (The House on the Rock)
6. **Concerning How We Treat Each Other** (The Prodigal Son, The Good Samaritan)
7. **Concerning Prayer** (The Friend at Midnight, The Unjust Judge)

Note: In cases where certain parables are repeated in other gospels with no further detail in that gospel, we will study the parable as it is found in the Book of Matthew. Some of the parables were delivered in the Sermon on the Mount which is repeated partially in Luke 6:20-26 for example, but with no further detail.

Breakdown of the sections is as follows. Some of the parables we will study deal with multiple concepts. We will try to focus our attention on the concept in our outline.

Part One: Parables about Kingdom Aspects

1. Fish and Fishers (Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17, Luke 5:1-10)
2. Salt (Matthew 5:13, Mark 9:50, Luke 14:34-35)
3. Light (Matthew 5:14-16)
4. Moths, Thieves and Rust (Matthew 6:19-20)
5. Mote and the Beam (Mathew 7:1-5)
6. Dogs and Swine (Matthew 7:6)
7. Sheep and Wolves (Matthew 7:15)
8. Thorns and Thistles (Matthew 7:16-20)
9. Old Garments and Bottles (Matthew 9:16-17)

Part Two: Parables about this Age

1. The Sower (Matthew 13:3-23)
2. The Wheat and Tares (Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43)
3. The Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32)
4. The Leaven (Matthew 13:33-35)
5. The Treasure (Matthew 13:44)
6. The Pearl (Matthew 13:45-46)
7. The Dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50)
8. The Marriage Feast and Garment (Matthew 22:1-14)

Part Three: Parables about Wealth and Foolishness

1. The Talents (Matthew 25:14-30, Mark 13:34-36)
2. The Creditor and Two Debtors (Luke 7:41-43, Matthew 18:23-35)
3. The Seed and the Unprofitable Servant (Luke 17:1-10)
4. The Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21)

Part Four: Parables about Reward

1. The Goats and Sheep (Matthew 25:31-46)
2. The Vineyard (Matthew 21:28-32)
3. The Heir (Matthew 21:33-46)

Part Five: Parables about Crisis

The House on the Rock (Matthew 7:21-28)

Part Six: Parables about How We Treat Each Other

1. The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)
2. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

Part Seven: Parables about Prayer

1. The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:1-10)
2. The Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8)

Part One: Parables about Kingdom Aspects

1. Fish and Fishers (Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17, Luke 5:1-10)

The parable of the fisherman and fish is interesting, for it has a twist. When fish are caught they immediately begin to die because they are out of their natural element, water. But Jesus is saying to these men that they will ‘catch’ men who are dead and once in the Gospel ‘net’ will begin to live. Let’s identify the elements of this parable:

Fishermen _____

Fish _____

Net _____

Large catch _____

By asking these men to leave their boats and follow Jesus, what all was He asking them to trust Him for? _____

How is fishing like spreading the Gospel? _____

2. Salt (Matthew 5:13, Mark 9:50, Luke 14:34-35)

The parable of salt deals primarily with our witness to the world and the influence we have as Christians in the world. There are several aspects of natural salt that lends to understanding this parable.

The elements of the parable are simple... the salt is the Christian and the earth is the world.

What are some natural aspects of salt that you can think of that apply here? _____

The Lord expects His own to function as moral influence in the world. Salt cannot remove corruption. It prevents it in the first place and can aid in stopping it from spreading. Salt can loose its savor or ‘tang’. Naturalists say that if savorless salt is thrown out into a field it will cause the field to become barren. In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot should have been the ‘salt’ in these towns. But the influence of the world around Lot made him barren. In other words, our witness looses its value and usefulness when not used and actually can inhibit growth.

What would keep our ‘savor’ strong while we are here on earth? _____

In what ways would your personal moral choices be influential? _____

3. Light (Matthew 5:14-16)

The parable of light, like salt, deals with our witness and influence in the world. Light, however, is a key identifier with Jesus Himself (John 14:6). The elements are again very simple... the light is the spiritual presence in you and I as believers and the place the light illuminates is the darkness of this age.

What are some natural aspects of light that you can think of that may apply here? _____

There are two figures of speech here our Lord uses to illustrate His point. A city set on a hill reveals the truth that we are to be seen over a large area and that we each have a corporate responsibility to shine the Light of Christ in all of our affairs... business, personal and otherwise. Our neighborhood should see His light in us.

What are some key moral principals that we must maintain in the business world and in our dealings with others that would show the Light of Jesus? _____

The lamp on the stand is another figure Jesus uses to show us another aspect of light that is like our required behavior. This light in the home or house shows forth the love and acceptance of Christ to all who enter our personal space. Given the chance, we should always see every encounter as an opportunity to share the love of Jesus, and thereby, the Light.

Of course in each case, the lamp or the city, something must be the light and someone must be the one who lights. The Holy Spirit indwelling the believer is the light and Jesus lights us with Him when we accept Him as our Lord and Savior.

What do you think Jesus means when He says we wouldn't hide a lamp under a basket? _____

4. Moths, Thieves and Rust (Matthew 6:19-20)

This parable has three illustrations in it that are distinct and different from each other and teach a separate truth. The three assailants are those things that corrupt a person's treasure. The treasure is what you hold dearest in your heart... your favorite. For many these things are temporal and earthly, such as possessions, money or even loved ones. But, Jesus is saying to store things in heaven because, there kept, they cannot be corrupted or diminished.

Do you believe Jesus is saying not to store anything thing here on earth, such as preparation for retirement or planning for vacation? Why or why not? _____

Moths are insects that eat cloth. In the Middle East they are ferocious and can devour entire wardrobes in days. Clothing is usually associated with wealth and prosperity in most cultures, including the one we live in. Even a costly garment, once eaten by moths can become useless. Any treasure we "lay up" on earth is subject to being diminished by time and wear. It cannot stand up to the natural forces that are bent on its destruction.

What are some worldly things that would be subject to this kind of damage? _____

Rust is the reaction water and air has on iron. It begins a degrading process that is difficult to arrest once started. If left unchecked, rust can completely destroy the iron or steel item once present and reduce it to a pile of orange dust. Our morals, if not grounded in the Word of God, can become degraded over time and eventually disappear altogether. Morals with an earthly base will soon give way and change. Morals anchored in Christ Jesus will never change and never fail the keeper.

What are things we 'lay up' on earth that might be affected by this 'rust'? _____

Thieves take that which doesn't belong to them. They often do this unnoticed by the owner either when he is not looking or away. Those who have been robbed experience a feeling of violation on their person. Theft is a personal attack on the owner. And thieves usually steal valuables. Things that the owner prizes and cherishes, most often, things that cannot be replaced. If our faith is grounded in heaven, then no matter what we 'lose' we haven't lost that which is valued most.

What are some treasures that you can 'lay up' in heaven? _____

5. Mote and the Beam (Mathew 7:1-5)

The parable about the mote and the beam is a classic word picture of the absurd. Jesus paints a picture of a man trying with all his might to sweep the dust out of a friend's eye while bobbing and weaving about because of the large and cumbersome pole that protrudes from his own eye. The point of the parable is that we should be aids to each other when it comes to helping one through a time of misdirection or straying. But if we do this before we take care of sin in our own life, we become severely limited in what we can do to help.

Who is hindered most when we fail to remove our mote? _____

What may be some examples of this parable in action? _____

6. Dogs and Swine (Matthew 7:6)

Truth is not to be forced upon those who clearly are rebellious against it. Two different things should be considered here... Casting what is "Holy" to "dogs" and what is the "pearl" to "swine".

Dogs are known to sometimes bite the hand that feeds them. They are meat eaters and your hand is, after all, meat. Most dogs of Jesus day and in this region of the world He lived in were wild. House pet dogs didn't exist yet. Wild dogs can be quite fierce. These dogs are those who hate the truth. That which is holy is God's truth. Some will not receive it and they will attack you if you try to deliver it to them. Truth cast on a resistive hearer does little to no good to that hearer and can harm the speaker.

In this parable, what would you say the pearls stand for? _____

Under Mosaic Law swine (or pigs) were considered to be unclean animals. While the dogs refer to a ferocious evil, the swine represent impurity. If you literally cast pearls into a pig sty, they will try to eat them and once discovering that the pearls are not food, pigs will simply trample them down with the rest of the mud and feces. A pig cannot appreciate the preciousness of pearls, thought to be the most precious in Jesus day of all gems. Those whose impure language and thoughts will not allow them to consider the priceless value of the Gospel will have a hard time receiving it and will become angry at this perception.

These illustrations are not to mean we are to see all those who are in the world as dogs and swine. Those who vigorously reject the truth are easy to spot. Even Jesus didn't spend much time on those who didn't want His truth. As he said, He didn't come to heal the well, but those willing to acknowledge they are sick.

7. Sheep and Wolves (Matthew 7:15-20)

Just prior to this parabolic illustration Jesus speaks of the wide way that leads to destruction and the narrow way that leads to righteousness. There is a connection to this and the Kingdom aspect parable of the sheep and wolves. The narrow way needs qualified guides to help us all find our way and stay on course. This parable warns us of counterfeit guides.

Where does this parable indicate these wolves come and what do they appear as? _____

A prophet or teacher may teach a perfectly correct biblical doctrine, but his lifestyle doesn't reflect his own teaching. He is a 'do as I say, not as I do' teacher and therefore a wolf in sheep's clothing. Having an appearance of light but denying the power of change in his life. Jesus encouraged His disciples to listen to the religious leaders, the Pharisee, but don't live they way they did because they were hypocrites. The Pharisees were wolves in sheep clothing.

What are some examples of these today? _____

8. Thorns and Thistles (Matthew 7:16-20)

The fruit here is the product of the works of men. It is what this work becomes for those around him. What are some common fruits of works in the world today? _____

If a tree is rotten or decayed at its core it is incapable of producing edible or good fruit; wrong thinking leads to wrong living; garbage in leads to garbage out. False teaching or falsehood in the teacher leads to teaching that cannot be followed by anyone. This was the sin of the Pharisees in that they taught that which they were unwilling to do and unwilling to help others do. Bad natured trees can be made into good fruit bearing trees by the Lord.

What are contrasts of fruit in your own life from the time you lived apart from the Lord and now that you live for Him? _____

9. Old Garments and Bottles (Matthew 9:16-17)

This parable was given to help the hearers understand how the Old Testament was connected to this new one Jesus had brought. So many today tend to discount the Old Testament as though it doesn't apply now. Yet Jesus taught a different way to view these two testaments, not as two but as one forever connected by Jesus Himself.

This pair of parables illustrates the incompatibility of the old with the new from two points of view first from that of the old; second from that of the new.

THE OLD IS SPOILED WHEN IT IS PATCHED WITH THE NEW. The new truth Jesus was teaching was revolutionary. The old is worn and it is best to cast it aside. It isn't that Jesus was telling us to discard the Old Testament. Just that to try and combine the Old and the New in some way would only make the Old torn and useless.

What is an example of an Old Testament law that cannot be joined with New Testament theology? _____

THE NEW IS LOST WHEN IT IS CONFINED BY THE OLD. Wine ferments and must expand. But the old wine-skins are hard and dry, and they are not strong enough to hold it as it expands. The old will always try to cramp and restrain the new. The fact is new ideas refuse to be limited by old thinking. New spiritual forces cannot be bottled up in antiquated customs.

What Old Testament thinking could not contain the new release of power Jesus brought to believers? __

Part Two: Parables about this Age

1. The Sower (Matthew 13:3-23, Mark 4:3-9, 14-26, Luke 8:4-15)

This particular parable has a difference in that our Lord takes time to define the elements and their relationship to the symbols and He also explains how it applies. In the text you should be able to easily identify the following:

- ▶ Seed _____
- ▶ Birds _____
- ▶ Soil _____
- ▶ Heat of the Sun _____
- ▶ Stony Places _____
- ▶ Thorns _____
- ▶ Crop of Different Sizes _____

The three main elements of this parable are the Sower, the seed and the soil. The Sower indicates a position rather than a specific person. The determination as to the produce from the seed wholly depended on the type of soil it fell on.

What is the central figure of this parable and what is Jesus conveying? _____

What do you think verses 11 through 15 mean? Why would God prevent people from seeing or hearing? _____

How do the different story elements (seed, soil, etc.) compare to your life? _____

What are some things that might be the “cares of this world” and the “deceitfulness of riches”? _____

As has been mentioned before, the parables of Jesus were and are meant to reveal the truth to those who desire truth and hide it from those who don't want it. In this, parables have a dual purpose... to bless the hearers and to condemn the deaf.

2. The Wheat and Tares (Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43)

This parable teaches a similar truth as the Sower parable with some variation. It shows us a different aspect of the ‘sowing’. The problem this parable introduces to the hearers is the influence of evil in the process of sowing. Here the soil the seed is sown into isn’t a consideration. Now, the dual sowing of seed and tares is to be revealed. Let us begin by trying to identify the elements of the parable:

- ▶ Good Seed _____
- ▶ His Field _____
- ▶ Sleeping Men _____
- ▶ His enemy _____
- ▶ Tares _____
- ▶ Wheat _____
- ▶ Barn _____

Just from the context of the parable, what is your understanding of why the man chose to wait until both the wheat and the tares grew together until they were separated? _____

What is the spiritual implication of the “reaping of wheat” and the “gathering of tares”? _____

In light of the age we presently live in, is it possible for the ‘tares’ to become ‘wheat’? _____

Read Luke 22:31 for a reference to this question.

3. The Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32)

Again, Jesus presents yet another aspect of the seed and its destiny. In this case there is no Sower and the soil isn’t a consideration. Rather, in this parable the concern seems to stem from what the seed produces in relevance to size and once grown, what comes to live in it. Look to the elements of the parable first to glean everything we can from it.

- ▶ Mustard Seed _____
- ▶ The Field _____
- ▶ Reference to the Least of all Seeds _____
- ▶ Growing into a Tree _____
- ▶ Birds _____
- ▶ Nesting in the Branches _____

As with the previous two parables, Jesus is describing conditions that will prevail in the Kingdom of God in the age we live in. They serve as a means for each of us to discern the times we live in and as a warning for us so to keep us safe from the wiles of our enemy.

In what ways does the enemy (the devil) ‘nest’ his emissaries into the Body of Christ to ‘foul’ up the works of God? _____

4. The Leaven (Matthew 13:33-35)

This is one of the short supporting parables Jesus often inserted to help define the Kingdom of God even further. With the Feast of Passover, yeast or leaven came to represent impurities. The Israelites were to eat unleavened bread for Passover to signify the holiness of their impending journey out of bondage. Yeast or leaven is a micro-organism that consumes part of the grain they are joined to and in the consumption, give off gas which in turn, makes the dough rise. Leaven has a fermenting affect on dough. Even though the presence of leaven in the sacrifices of God were forbidden because it was seen as symbolic of evil, here the symbol of leaven isn't considered. It is the permeating nature of leaven that is the point.

How does the gospel of Jesus Christ have a permeating affect? _____

What might be the message here when Jesus says the woman "hid" it in the meal? _____

Do you see spiritual implications with the mention of 'three' measures? _____

5. The Treasure (Matthew 13:44)

The record of this parable shows us that it comes after Jesus has sent the crowds away and has only His closest disciples with Him. He explains the parable of the tares to them (see 3 above) and then adds the next three short parables joining them each with "again" at the end. With the word "again" Jesus tells his listeners that they are connected to the further details as to what the Kingdom of God is "like". This parable must also be taken together with the two following, the pearl and the dragnet.

The identity of some of the elements is self-explanatory. The Kingdom of Heaven is the "treasure" and the field is the world. But, what is done here is a topic of discussion and prayer. In a sense it shows us the tremendous value of the small treasure as compared to the vastness of the world. That this man would be willing to give all he has to possess the entire world to gain the knowledge of eternal life in God's Kingdom. ***This parable shows us that some happen upon the Good News almost by accident.*** The man wasn't looking for treasure when he found it.

How did you find Jesus, searching for Him or happening upon Him? _____

6. The Pearl (Matthew 13:45-46)

In this second connected parable we immediately see a difference in that this man is "seeking" something. ***This parable shows us that some find the Good News only when they search for it.*** In his case it is a pearl. Pearls were of tremendous value in ancient days in Palestine comparable to diamonds. The pearl in this parable reveals the depths of the value of God's intervention on our behalf. The purchase price of this pearl was the life of the very Son of God.

What do you think it means where it says the man "sold all that he had and bought it"? _____

7. The Dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50)

As Jesus started His string of parables with one about the wheat and the tares, He wraps up with another of similar understanding. More of the process of the separation of the good and bad is revealed here. The sea here represents the sea of humanity. The Gospel is cast to it as a whole and in the

process, a variety of “fish” caught. Recall Jesus’ encouragement to His disciples whom He had found fishing to come and abandon their nets because He was going to make them “fishers of men”?

Imagine throwing a large net into the sea where life is teeming. What kinds of things would you bring up to shore? _____

The main inference of these parables becomes clearer with this one. There will be a ‘separating’ of the saved from the lost, the sheep from the goats, and wheat from tares. And in that separation those who belong to God will go to be with the Father in heaven and those who don’t will be cast into fire. Jesus is speaking of a final reckoning to come.

The last few verses here speak of a good teacher’s practice to mix the old with the new in order that his students will be able to grasp it better.

8. The Marriage Feast and Garment (Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:16-24)

This parable concerns a wedding for the son of an important man. Jesus starts off by saying it was a “certain” man He was about to speak of perhaps indicating a person His hearers may have been familiar with. The story they were about to hear they had heard before. Just not in the context of the revelation of a spiritual truth. See if you can identify the spiritual elements in the story as they compare to their natural counterparts...

The Wedding: _____

The Son: _____ The Father: _____

The Servants: _____ Those who finally came to the wedding: _____

The man with a dirty garment: _____

The parable just preceding this one in chapter 21 dealt with a vineyard owner who had went away from his vineyard for a season and left the care of it to others. When he had tried to collect his harvest the overseers resisted and even killed the vineyard owner’s son whom he had sent. This thought is connected to this parable in a very specific way. Jesus was telling His disciples how the good news would be spread. Who do you think Jesus is saying both in this parable and the one in chapter 22 are the ones who killed the son of the vineyard owner and refused to come to the son’s wedding? _____

Notice in the parable the following and discuss what this means to you...

- The guests who came included the maimed, lame and blind (Luke 14:21) and the good and bad (Matthew 22:10).
- The father who had called the originally invited guests had them all killed and their towns burnt up.
- To attend the wedding you had to have a wedding garment.
- How do the excuses the invited guests use to refuse to answer the invitation in Luke 14:18-20 compare to the excuses people use today?

In the parable in Matthew 22, what significance is there that there were two distinct invitations... one to the original guests and one to whomever would be willing to come? _____

Part Three: Parables about Wealth and Foolishness

1. The Talents (Matthew 25:14-30 with the Parable of the Virgins preceding)

The parable just preceding this one is connected to it. Jesus connects them with the word ‘for’ at the opening of verse 14. The preceding parable is about ten virgins waiting for the call that the bridegroom is coming to fetch them for the wedding. All ten virgins have lamps, but only five of them make sure they have enough oil so that their lamps don’t go out before the bridegroom comes. Many have made it their duty to try and identify the virgins in the story. Were they the church collectively or the bride? But, the stories purpose isn’t to emphasis their identity. It was to foretell the foolishness of being unprepared for the coming of the Bridegroom, who we know to be Jesus himself. The parable of the talents is similar in that it speaks of preparation for the coming of the Son.

See if you can identify the elements of the story as they are linked to their spiritual counterpart...

The man traveling to a far country: _____ The servants: _____

The goods measured in ‘talents’, a form of weight: _____

Investing the goods as two servants did in comparison to burying the goods as one servant did: _____

How do you interpret verse 26? _____

From this parable, what do you believe our Lord is saying what is ‘profitable’? _____

In Mark 13:34-36 we see a short description of different roles and postures we should all take as we wait for the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What is the ‘authority’ Jesus is speaking of here? _____

2. The Creditor and Two Debtors (Luke 7:41-43, Matthew 18:23-35)

This parable is one of the most popular for Christians partly because the roles and spiritual truths contained therein are fairly clear for anyone to be able to see. The truth in Luke combines with the story in Matthew to give us a clearer picture of how God perceives debt and our forgiveness of it. Let’s begin by identifying the players in both scenes...

The King in Matthew or the Creditor in Luke: _____

The Servants in Matthew or the Debtors in Luke: _____

The Money Owed: _____ Differing amounts: _____

In Luke, the question is “which one of the debtors loved the creditor more?” In Matthew the issue is failure of the indebted servant to replicate the mercy that was shown to him. The parable is about forgiveness and mercy. It goes well with the Matthew 13:12. Look this verse up and discuss why: _____

3. The Seed and the Unprofitable Servant (Luke 17:1-10)

This parable is omitted from many commentaries as one even worthy of its study. But the reason for its exclusion could very well be that the content of it is something we do not like to consider... the least of what is expected of us. Here we will take time to consider a frequent occurrence to the parables Jesus spoke... that they came often times because of a question or event that preceded them. In this case the discussion or verses 1 through 6 lead to the parable in verses 7 through 10. Before we proceed, let's discuss how these two groups of verses might be connected: _____

The picture is one of offense and what is our duty in the face of it. Jesus doesn't mince any words as to our suffering. We will suffer for His Name in this life. But, this is only what is expected. Again, take time to identify the players, though it may be obvious:

Your position in this parable: _____ The servant who is commanded to serve: _____

The commands to serve: _____ The duty of the servant: _____

The truth here isn't one we like to hear. God doesn't see a profit when we only do what He has asked us to do. It is our duty to serve Him.

What works we do for God might be considered worthy of gaining profit for the Lord? _____

4. The Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21)

This parable like many we have looked at is peculiar to Luke, yet a favorite of many. It has the power of affecting a life permanently. An often heard expression that most likely came out of this parable is "you can't take it with you". Once again, it came as the answer to a question asked of Jesus. In this case He was asked to command a man to divide an inheritance with his brother. With this response, Jesus declares the folly of placing ones lifelong ambition for gain as the highest priority.

What is the plentiful crop? _____ What is the sin of the man? _____

Who is the One who is taking his life? _____ Who is gaining from his crop: _____

How can one be "rich towards God"? _____

This echoes the lament of Jesus in the Book of Revelation to the church in Laodicea. Read this in Revelation 3:14-22 and discuss: _____

The foolish man in this parable made three critical mistakes common to man. First, he misunderstood the purpose of life thinking it was in the abundance of his possessions. Second, he mistook the right purpose of those possessions thinking they were there only for his pleasure and will, discounting God's will. And third, his most glaring mistake was his foolish preparation for the future. He thought it would be in bigger barns, thinking he would live long. Greed had blinded him to the most important consideration... that of his eternal destiny.

Part Four: Parables about Reward

1. The Goats and Sheep (Matthew 25:31-46)

This parable is a favorite of those who study prophecy for it is concerning the end of the age we live in. The disciples had asked Jesus to fill them in with details of His return as King of glory. Chapter 24 through 26 is His answer. These are only found in the Book of Matthew.

While some would not include this in a collection of parables because it doesn't describe the present age and its issues as others do, it certainly is filled with imagery that would qualify it as a parable. Let's take a moment to identify some of the players and occasions.

The Nations: _____ Sheep: _____ Goats: _____

The 'brethren': _____ Eternal punishment: _____ Eternal life: _____

The issue here is the way we serve each other. It is a disputer of all those who claim one of these 'isn't their ministry'. Jesus tells us that how we respond to the *least of these* will determine our eternal fate. As we serve one another, we serve Christ. Short of actually going to jails and prisons and to hospitals, what ways can we fulfill this requirement of our faith? _____

2. The Vineyard (Matthew 21:28-32)

The next two parables in this chapter form a detailed expansion to a parabolic story the hearers were familiar with from the Book of Isaiah Chapter 5:1-7. This was made into a song that was sung in the synagogue of Jesus' day. Read this before proceeding and discuss its subject.

The rulers of the day had challenged the authority Jesus spoke with. Perhaps because of jealousy of the perception Jesus had come to take their authority away, the Pharisees in particular had come after Jesus time and again trying to find something to accuse Him of. The 45th verse speaks of the result as the "perceived that He spoke of them" in these parables. This was the only thing they rightly understood, sadly.

It is a story of a man with two sons. It is a contrast parable. Immediately His hearers by now knew that one of these was to be the right one and one the wrong one. They had heard Him use this contrasting dialog before. The first son is told to go and work in the vineyard. He tells his father he will not go. But, later regrets his disrespectful response and goes and works. Because the first son had said initially he would not go, the father goes to the second and asks the same question. He respectfully responds 'I will go', but never does. Jesus begs an answer to a simple question... which one did the work of the father? Obviously, the one who had initially said he would not.

What does this tell you about God's desire that you go and your reluctance to obey? _____

What is the lesson for us all when it comes to obeying God's command? _____

3. The Heir (Matthew 21:33-46)

Jesus makes no mistake in telling His hearers in this parable that it is in fact a parable. There may have been a touch of sarcasm in His statement too, as the preceding parable dealt with the errors of the Pharisees who were present listening. With His selection of words we see Him connecting the previous verses to it. This parable was no doubt aimed at the arrogant Pharisees like an arrow to a bull's eye. See if you can identify the players in light of this:

The Certain Landowner: _____ The Vineyard: _____ The Hedge: _____

The Tower: _____ The Vinedressers: _____ His departure: _____

The 'Vintage Time': _____ His Servants: _____

The Landowner's Son: _____ The Rejected Stone: _____ The Fruit: _____

The religious leaders had a responsibility to both preserve and teach the laws of Scripture.

Instead they had steeped the law so deep into their own selfish and prideful traditions that they had misrepresented it and did so to look more righteous than their followers. The sin of hypocrisy and the blindness it brings is at issue here and the warning is stark. Let Jesus be the 'stone' you fall upon for mercy and life or He will become the 'stone' that falls on you and grinds you to powder. What principal is here for those of us who belong to His Kingdom? _____

Part Five: Parables about Crisis

The House on the Rock (Matthew 7:21-28)

This parable shows Jesus referring to His deity, something not seen often in His discourses. He says quite frankly and plainly, **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord...'"** revealing His Supreme authority. While Jesus taught on crisis several times, this parable of the house gives His hearers a picture of the results of how we build. Several points should be considered here. What your house appears to be is not as important as what it is built on. This is a basic principal of good engineering practice. Expensive house can be built on unstable ground, and in time they will be fractured and made useless as that ground shifts and sways.

Another very important point here is that doing the works of God nets little for the doer if he has neglected to develop a relationship with God. This one is vital to our fulfillment of God's bigger desire for us. Addressing Jesus as Lord will get nothing for you. Embracing Him as Lord will give you everything. Why do you think Jesus says that those who did the wonderful works of God without knowing God were 'practicing lawlessness'? _____

What things would you include in the makeup of the 'house' here referred to? _____

What would be considered to be a 'foundation of sand'? _____

Why was the fall of the house built on sand considered by Christ to be 'great'? _____

It is never too late to tear down your magnificent structure and rebuild it on the Rock. Doing so is much better than to foolishly think the rain and storms will never come.

Part Six: Parables about How We Treat Each Other

1. The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

This is another favorite of many, myself included. It is a colorful story with several twists and turns that could be discussed for months in this class. To begin, let's identify the primary characters and items as they relate to the truth:

The Certain Man (father): _____ The Sons: _____ The Goods: _____

Prodigal Living: _____ The Famine: _____

His hunger in the pig sty: _____

One of the many lessons this parable shows us is the process of true repentance, for that is what the younger son does. What would be the three steps to proper repentance according to this parable?: _____

Did you notice that what brought this son to the realization he needed to change was his natural urge for self preservation... he was starving and was hungry. He came back to the father not for some deep spiritual reason, but for a somewhat superficial reason. What does this tell you about God's desire to see the return of His prodigal children? _____

What is the imagery you see when you read that this father *ran to the son* when he saw him returning and kissed him on his neck? _____

The items the father restores to his son have particular meanings also. What would you say is the spiritual truth about the restoration of the robe? _____, the ring? _____, the sandals? _____

The father also calls for a celebration for the return of his son. Is there a truth Jesus is trying to convey here? _____

Notice the selection of words the father uses to describe his son, both before his return and after. Before his return his father considered him to be "dead and lost". After his return he was "alive and found". What, if anything, does this teach us about our surety of entering heaven once we give our lives to Jesus? _____

Then, there is the other older son to consider. By adding him to the story and his reaction to the younger son's return we have another truth to digest. After considering this reaction, what would be the truth Jesus is trying to teach us all? _____

The contempt the older son experienced and his failure to join in the joy of the reunion of his father and his brother teaches us the need for forgiveness within the Body of Christ and the necessity of unity at all times, even after one has strayed away. One person has put us like this... ' All the excesses of the

prodigal son did not shut him out of heaven for he came repenting to his father; but all the virtues of the older son will not let him into heaven because he cherished pride in his heart and cast down his relationship with his father because he overlooked their worth”.

2. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

The way to Jericho was well known to those Jesus was speaking to. It had a reputation for thieves and robbers along the way being filled with hiding places in the rocks. In fact, this parable was probably centered around an actual occurrence some in the crowd were familiar with. It involves some unique and well defined characters that are not typical of Jesus’ usual “a certain man”. Let’s take time to look at each of these before we start to understand the truth Jesus is teaching.

The Thieves: _____

The Samaritan: _____

The Priest: _____

The Levite: _____

The Innkeeper: _____

This parable came as answer to a question a well meaning person had asked. Perhaps this lawyer had at first sought to justify himself. But now, he earnestly wanted to know who Jesus was saying to love as he loved himself. The label ‘neighbor’ wasn’t clear enough for him. Jesus cleared up any mysteries as to the identification of this person with this story.

What imagery or truths do you see in the things the Samaritan did for the stranger?

- Bandages for his wounds: _____
- Oil and Wine for his wounds: _____
- Allowing him to ride his animal: _____
- Paying the Innkeeper: _____
- Paying the balance when he returned: _____

Our neighbor becomes then, according to this parable, anyone in need. Most likely the needy person in this story was a Jew and it was so very forceful a teaching that Jesus choose a Samaritan as his only benefactor. Those the Jewish people would have expected to help, the priest and the Levite, had left the wounded stranger to die. The last person they would have thought would help, other than a Roman soldier, would have been a dreaded and hated Samaritan.

Part Seven: Parables about Prayer

1. The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:1-10)

Part of this parable may be most familiar to you as what is called “the Lord’s Prayer”. In fact the entire 11th chapter of Luke is largely devoted to the subject of prayer. As we have seen previously, often parables were used by our Lord to better explain a concept to a person who had asked something, in this case one of His disciples asked Jesus to teach him how to pray. Jesus is trying to drive home the method for asking... persistently. Let’s look at the principal characters:

- The friend: _____
- The bread: _____
- The inconvenience: _____
- The friend’s response: _____

We have here a man who has had the unscheduled visit of a friend late at night, perhaps around midnight. All of his bread, or food had already been eaten and he had nothing to satisfy the hunger of his tired guest. In the culture of Jesus it would have been unthinkable to make this traveler go to bed in your house hungry. This drives him to go to another friend, wake him up and roust him from his bed to receive bread for his guest. The point of the story is in the persistence of the man and with comparing that with our attitude of prayer with God our Father. Verse 9 is said to be an ‘accelerating’ verse. This means each repeating segment intensifies the effort. Asking is more than silence, knocking is greater in effort to asking and seeking is even greater. Jesus is saying to remain persistent in every step.

What does this tell you about your prayers? _____

Of course Jesus is also, in comparing the sleeping friend who is being roused from his sleep to our God, saying that if this man who only gets up to supply his neighbor’s need so that he can get back to sleeping, how much more will God our Father, who never sleeps and promises to supply all of our need respond if we pray consistently and persistently? _____

2. The Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8)

This parable, though most likely spoken some time later, again speaks to our persistence in praying. Jesus sets to compare a man and his reaction to God and His action. Of course in this there is no comparison for God always does what He does because He is true to His Word and because He loves us, whereas man may do good for you only because it is beneficial and convenient to him.

Let’s look at the characters in the parable:

- The Judge: _____
- The Widow: _____
- Her Adversary: _____
- The Judge’s action: _____

In the other parable in Luke 11, Jesus makes the point that persistence in prayer must be in the face of what may be perceived as inconvenience to God. In this case, it is the case of our persistence though it may seem that God disregards our situation. In spite of the callousness and unrighteousness of this judge, he did as the widow requested only because he feared her continual asking and begging, not because he feared the one she sought revenge of nor of God.

What is our natural reaction sometimes to God perceived ‘delay’ in answering our prayers? _____

What does this parable tell you about the importance of your request to God? _____

BONUS STUDY:

- The Sinner and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14)

In this parable the righteous person may have seemed obvious at first to be the one who had obeyed in fasting and giving tithes. But, Jesus turns the table by stating the opposite.

What are some 'outward' righteous acts that may or may not determine true righteousness? _____

What are some ways we can exalt ourselves that would detract from His righteousness in us? _____

- The Shepherd and His Sheep (John 10:1-5)

In this parable the imagery is very vivid. At least it would have been to a shepherd. Jesus no doubt was addressing several when He used this to describe how one enters the Kingdom He was preaching of. Let's look at the first five verses and see if we can identify the principal parts and characters.

The sheepfold: _____ The thief or robber: _____

The Door: _____ The sheep: _____

Now, read Luke 10:6-18 and see if your matches above are correct. Jesus mentions a new character in these verses, the 'hireling'. Who do you think is meant here? _____

How is Jesus like the shepherd of sheep? _____

How are you and I like sheep sometimes? _____
