

# **THY KINGDOM COME**

## **4. The Miracles of the Synoptic Gospels and the Parables of Jesus**

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**A Teaching Commentary  
of the New Testament**

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# 1. The Miracles of the Synoptic Gospels

We have considered the seven miracles in John, but John is certainly not the only Gospel to describe the miracles worked by Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) portray far more miracles than does the Gospel of John. Remember that John told us that Jesus did many more miracles than he could ever record (John 20:30). He selected these seven as a complete sample to portray the Lordship of Jesus.

The entire set of miracles performed by Jesus in his ministry is portrayed by the following chart:

**Table 1 - The Miracles of Jesus**

Miracle	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana				2:1-11
Casting a demon out of a man in the synagogue in Capernaum		1:21-27	4:33-35	
Healing a leper	8:1-4	1:40-42	5:12-13	
Healing a centurion's servant	8:5-13		7:1-10	4:46-54
Healing Peter's mother-in-law	8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39	
Healing and casting demons out of many	8:16, 9:35, 14:14, 14:34-36, 15:29-31	1:32-33, 6:5, 6:53-56	4:40-41, 5:15, 6:17-19, 7:21	
Miraculous catch of fish			5:4-7	
Calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee	8:23-27	4:35-41	8:22-25	
Healing the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda				5:1-18
Casting demons out of the Gadarene demoniacs	8:28-34	5:1-17	8:26-39	
Healing a paralytic in Capernaum	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:17-26	
Raising from the dead the daughter of a ruler	9:18-25	5:21-43	8:41-56	
Healing a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years	9:20-22	5:25-34	8:43-48	
Raising from the dead the son of the widow of Nain			7:11-15	
Healing two blind men	9:27-31			
Casting a demon out of a mute man	9:32-33		11:14	
Healing a man with a shriveled hand	12:9-14	3:1-5	6:6-10	
Casting a demon from a blind-mute man	12:22-23			
Feeding the five thousand	14:15-21	6:35-44	9:12-17	6:5-15
Walking on water	14:22-33	6:47-52		6:16-21
Healing the daughter of the Canaanite woman	15:21-28	7:24-30		
Healing of a deaf-mute		7:32-35		
Feeding the four thousand	15:32-38	8:1-9		
Healing a blind man		8:22-25		

Miracle	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Casting a demon out of a boy	17:14-18	9:14-27	9:37-42	
Healing a crippled woman			13:10-13	
Healing a man with dropsy			14:1-4	
Healing ten lepers			17:12-14	
Healing the man born blind				9:1-41
Raising Lazarus from the dead				11:1-45
Finding the temple tax in the mouth of a fish	17:24-27			
Healing the blind in Jericho	20:29-34	10:46-52	18:35-43	
Cursing the fig tree and having it wither	21:18-19	11:12-14, 20-21		
Healing the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest			22:51	
Resurrection	28:1-7	16:1-8	24:1-8	20:1-9
Miraculous catch of fish				21:6

It has taken me a very long time to arrive at the understanding that I now have of the miracles of Jesus. I used to assume that Jesus, being the Son of God, was endowed with power that he could use whenever and however he wished. If that were the case, it would be hard to understand why he would go to the Pool of Bethesda and heal just one person rather than all of those waiting there for healing. It would be hard to understand Mark 8:22-26:

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."

If Jesus was empowered on his own, why did he need to pray twice to get this man healed? Indeed, if he was empowered on his own, why did he need to pray at all?

There are several verses of Scripture that have helped me to alter my earlier conception to one that answers the questions above. The new understanding also helps me to understand miracles that take place today.

Philippians 2:5-8 says:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:  
Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death –  
even death on a cross!

When Jesus came to earth, he "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant." Without leaving his divinity behind, he left his divine nature behind. He took on all the limitations of every other man, even subjecting himself to physical death. That being the case, how was he able to heal? Luke 5:17 has an interesting observation:

One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.

The statement "the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick" only makes sense if there were times that it was not present. Jesus was endowed with the power to heal at certain times and he did not have that power at other times. That power came to him through the Holy Spirit – the same Spirit that was poured out on believers at Pentecost and which indwells us still today.

This is really important. Jesus came not only to be our sacrifice. He came to be our role model. Jesus ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit because he wanted us to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit. John 14:12 says "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." When Jesus went to be with the Father, the Holy Spirit was sent to us to nurture and empower us. Armed with that same power that Jesus had, we are to do what he had been doing. Jesus promised that we would be unleashed to do even greater things than he had done.

One might ask why few (if any) of us actually walk in victory when it comes to that promise. As best we can tell from Scripture, when Jesus prayed for a miracle, it happened. We typically do not have quite that good of a "batting average." The explanation for this is found in John 5:19, "Jesus gave them this answer: 'I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.'" Ah! There is the difference!

Jesus only did what the Father told him to do. Jesus only said what the Father said. Because he was always operating in complete cooperation with the will of the Father, then every time he prayed for a miracle it happened. The key to ministering in power is living in complete submission to the will of the Father. When we learn to hear his voice and when we become willing to do what he asks, then we, too, minister in power. The power of the Holy Spirit, which indwells all believers, is unleashed through obedience to the Father's will. The ability to hear the voice of the Father clearly is diminished by sin. Jesus overcame that problem; thus he could hear perfectly.

For us, the solution is evident. Step one is to flee from sin. Live an obedient life. Step two is to learn to recognize the voice of the Father. Step three is to do what he says. This is not necessarily easy, but it results in a life empowered for ministry. There is no other way.

One might ask why the miracles were important. John 14:11 says "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves." The miracles of Jesus were given to validate who he was. It set him apart from other men. The Gospels repeatedly say that people put their faith in him because of the miracles that he performed. He came to restore the Edenic relationship that man had with God. That was a day when man saw the power of God freely flow. Jesus came to bring that time again. His disciples should operate in the same power, as a sign to an unbelieving world that their message is true and their Lord is real. The Bible does caution, however, that false prophets will demonstrate the same sorts of signs. Matthew 24:24 says "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible." The signs are not enough. They testify to the messenger – that what he says

ought to be considered. But if the message of the messenger does not point to the Father, if it is not consistent with the revelation that we have in Scripture, then it is to be discounted.

The fact is that miracles were part of Jesus' life and they are part of our lives because the Father wants it that way. He wants to break through the barrier of our sin and minister to us, touch our lives, heal our hurts, and restore relationships.

## **2. The Teachings of Jesus**

The Bible records the teachings of Jesus on many different subjects. Jesus taught through various means. Some of his best teaching occurred through parables. The use of parables gave people word pictures that related the truths of God to everyday situations in their lives. It was a masterful teaching technique.

Jesus also taught in the context of sermons. He taught in casual conversations with those he encountered. He taught through his actions and in the way he dealt with people.

In the next several sections we shall examine the teachings of Jesus in a topical format.

### ***2.1 Teachings Regarding Salvation, Judgment, and the Kingdom of God***

What is the Kingdom of God? Since the Kingdom of God is such a predominant theme in the Bible, one would think that it could be easily defined. In fact, books have been written arguing the meaning. There have been different viewpoints espoused and various biblical scholars do not necessarily agree on what the Kingdom encompasses.

My viewpoint is fairly simple. A kingdom is a domain which includes a ruler and his subjects. In the Kingdom of God, God is the ruler; he makes the rules. Those who follow him in faith are the subjects – the citizens of the Kingdom. It has been God's intent to have a Kingdom all along. Initially he chose the nation of Israel to be his subjects but they refused to follow. The invitation was ultimately extended to "whosoever believeth."

Is the Kingdom of God the same as the Church? This is another topic that divides scholars. In my opinion, the question is a bit of an attempt to split hairs. The answer is "no," because the Kingdom encompasses more than the Church. For example, the Church is the bride of Christ, and thus Christ is not part of the Church. Christ, however, is part of the Kingdom. The domain of the Kingdom is bigger than just the Church. But the Church is the manifestation of the Kingdom on the earth today. The Church is the set of Kingdom citizens on the earth. The Church is the eyes, ears, arms and legs of the Kingdom in the world in this present age. The Church lives in the present age, in a fallen and powerless world, but it lives in the future Kingdom age as well. The Church witnesses to the future coming glory of the Kingdom to the present age.

Jesus invaded the world with the Kingdom of God. Because of this, he spent a great deal of time teaching on the Kingdom. Many of the parables were parables about the Kingdom of God. Jesus wanted us to understand about this Kingdom since he came to make us citizens.

Another theme that runs throughout the teachings of Jesus is that of Salvation and Judgment. Salvation and judgment may seem like very different things, but in fact they are two edges of the same sword. If there were no judgment there would be no need for salvation. Salvation implies that we are being saved from something; that something is judgment.

Judgment was not a new concept in the first century. The message of judgment rings throughout the Old Testament. Indeed, salvation was not a new concept either. Jesus brought the concept to a new level. The promise of atonement for sin was given in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Those sacrifices, however, looked forward to a time when a perfect sacrifice would finally be made. Jesus was that perfect sacrifice.

Since he came as God's instrument of salvation, equipping us to become citizens of the Kingdom of God, it is fitting that he would teach about these things. The following parables reflect this teaching. This section begins with a series of seven parables found in Matthew 13, all dealing with the topic of the Kingdom of God. The parables are progressive, each building upon the concepts laid out in the previous ones.

### 2.1.1 The Parable of the Sower and the Seed

Matthew 13:1-23, Cross-reference Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear."

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see;  
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

For this people's heart has become callused;

they hardly hear with their ears,  
and they have closed their eyes.  
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their hearts  
and turn, and I would heal them.'

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among

the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

This parable occurs in each of the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew and Mark present it as Jesus' first parable. The narrative includes an explanation of the reason that Jesus taught in parables.

Jesus told of a farmer who cast out seed. Normally when we think of a farmer planting, we consider that he would first take time to prepare the field, i.e. clear the land, plow the soil, etc. In the first century, however, it was not uncommon for a farmer to simply go out and broadcast the seed as described in the parable. If it happened to fall on proper soil, it would grow.

In the parable, the seed fell in four different types of places:

- On the path. This would have been a well-worn road. The soil would have been pressed down hard from foot traffic. The seed was unable to penetrate this soil. Birds came and ate this seed. It never took root. Jesus explained that this represented one who heard the message of Jesus but did not understand it. The birds represent Satan, who comes and snatches the message away. It never had any impact on the hearer. The seed never penetrated.
- Rocky places, without much soil. This seed did initially take root, but those roots quickly hit rock. The plant was unable to sustain growth. It withered and died in the sun. Jesus indicated that this is someone who hears his message and has a superficial initial reaction to it. It is understood, but never really takes root in the life of the hearer. Any sort of trouble in the life of the individual can cause it to be lost. The seed was lost because of internal issues in the life of the hearer (specifically a shallowness of faith).
- Among thorns. Here, roots were formed. The plant grew. Unfortunately, at the point when the plant should have blossomed and produced fruit, instead it was choked out by the thorny brush around it. Jesus explained that this represents an individual who hears and understands the message. It takes root initially. Eventually, however, he lets the cares of life rob him of the benefit of the seed. It has no benefit in his life. The seed was lost because of external issues in the life of the hearer.
- Good soil. Here the plants took root, grew and produced a crop. Jesus indicated that this is the one who hears the message, receives it, and lets it bring benefit in his life. The evidence of the good soil was the fruit.

The disciples of Jesus asked him why he taught in parables. In his answer, Jesus quoted from the sixth chapter of Isaiah. That chapter describes the call of Isaiah. When God called Isaiah to the prophetic ministry, he told him that many people would hear but not receive his message. The same was true with Jesus.

The Gospel – the good news brought by Jesus – would be scattered out among all men. Unfortunately only those who were “good soil” would ultimately benefit from it. It would only bring fruit in the lives of those who clung to it and cherished it dearly enough that no distraction – internal or external – could choke it out or cause it to wither.

The fact is that all of mankind is drowning in sin and judgment. A lifesaver has been tossed to each of us. Many people do not understand what a lifesaver is, so they push it away. They drown. Others know what it is, but figure they can tread water so they do not grab hold of it. They drown. Others know what it is and grab hold of it, but then think that it might cause a skin

abrasion if they hold on too tight. They let go. They drown. Others strap it on and hold on for dear life. When the rescue boat finally comes, they are the ones that will be saved.

## 2.1.2 The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

"The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

"'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

"'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

...

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

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

Satan likes to hang out where God is active. He likes to disrupt God's work. Any place the Spirit of God is active, the spirits of darkness will be hanging around, interfering however they might. Any assembling of God's elect will include some who pretend to belong to him but who do not.

This parable is interesting. The word translated "weed" above is not just any sort of weed. The word in Greek is actually translated "darnel," which is a particular family of grasses that look like wheat. When these plants are young, they cannot be distinguished from wheat. If the owner of the field had told the servants to try to uproot the darnel, they would have destroyed much good wheat in the process.

How does one ultimately tell the darnel from the wheat? Wheat produces fruit (grain) and darnel does not. Ultimately the grain of the wheat plant will cause it to be top-heavy and it will bow. Darnel does not bow. When the harvest time came, the plants which stood erect could be uprooted and burned. Those which bowed under the weight of their fruit could be harvested.

So it is in the Kingdom of God. Those who are legitimate sons of the Kingdom produce fruit. They bow before the King. Those who are sons of darkness do not produce fruit and their spirits do not bow before the King. Before harvest time approaches, however, it is difficult to tell them apart.

What message does this parable have for us? There are impostors in the church! Remember that going into a church does not make you a Christian any more than going into a barn makes you a cow. Some who take up ministerial credentials are not worthy of our trust. Some who might sit next to us in a pew are not in fact brothers in Christ. What indication do we have? Look for fruit in their lives.

What should we do if we see no fruit there? Leave the harvest to God. They are allowed to roam the church and fellowship with the elect. Remember that darnels look like wheat until the time of harvest approaches. It is prudent, however, to look for the fruit when putting people into leadership positions. This is supportable by other passages of Scripture (i.e. the Pastoral epistles). One must also be careful not to submit to the authority of a pastor who is a potential danel.

Although we have the responsibility to select our leaders carefully, we do not serve as judges about other people's relationships with God. When judgment day comes, God is not going to look to me for advice. Nobody's eternal destiny is going to depend on my opinion. Sifting is a job that belongs to God. Still, God wanted us to know that it is an event that will take place. He does not want us to be confused or misled when we see unrighteousness in the church. We are to be forearmed with the knowledge that impostors will hang out in our midst. While we are with them, we are not to be like them.

### **2.1.3 The Parable of the Mustard Seed**

Matthew 13:31-32, Cross-reference Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-19

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

Kingdoms of men are given birth by armies and machines of war. There is great pomp and fanfare as their kings are ushered in. The Kingdom of God was ushered in by a birth in a stable. The coronation ceremony of its King consisted of a journey on the back of a donkey.

A mustard seed is a tiny seed that grows into a sizable plant. It grows large and provides shelter and refuge. In like manner, the Kingdom of God started with humble beginnings. It has sprouted and filled the earth.

Note that the parable mentions that birds perch in the branches. There are two different ways to take this reference. In the parable of the sower and the seed, "birds" represented Satan. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus told us that there would be impostors in the church. In the parable of the mustard seed, the reference to the birds may affirm again that impostors or messengers of Satan will "hang out" in the church. Satan will always be among us to disrupt our ways and to try to deceive the elect. Whether or not that is the meaning in this particular parable it is still true and still taught in the parables of Jesus.

The reference here may be simpler, however. Birds find refuge in trees. They rest there. They take up residence there. In like manner, the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven should find rest

and refuge in that Kingdom. They should take up residence there. It should be a haven for them. As the mustard seed grew from the tiniest seed to the largest tree, so the Kingdom of Heaven would grow from a birth in a stable to a haven large enough to offer refuge and rest to everyone in the earth, to “whosoever believeth.” The followers of Jesus should expect his Kingdom to grow and to provide shelter to many. It was never intended to be a private club.

From a small beginning, the Kingdom of God would fill the earth. It would provide safety and shelter to “whosoever believeth.” Satan would try to disrupt it and distract the citizens of the Kingdom.

### **2.1.4 The Parable of the Yeast and the Dough**

Matthew 13:33, Cross-reference Luke 13:20-21

He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

This parable, like the parable of the mustard seed could be taken two ways. In the Bible, yeast is typically symbolic of sin. One explanation of this parable is that yeast – sin – will permeate the Kingdom of God. This, again could be a teaching of Jesus to be on guard against sin in the Church. This does not seem to be the best interpretation of this parable, however.

The parable does not talk about yeast IN the Kingdom. It says that the Kingdom is LIKE yeast. Even though yeast typically represents sin in the Bible (it is a fairly consistent analogy throughout Scripture), if we interpret it that way here it is saying that the Kingdom of God is sin. It does not seem to fit.

Anyone who has ever made bread has enjoyed watching the dough rise. It is an interesting phenomenon. One mixes a small amount of yeast into the flour and other ingredients. Then the dough is simply set aside for a time. The dough rises. The yeast multiplies and permeates the entire loaf. The baker does not need to do anything to make it happen. God has already figured it out. He created yeast to work this way. According to his plan and his provision, it happens.

The ministry of Jesus was like that yeast. The world is the loaf. According to God's plan and provision, the yeast would penetrate the entire loaf. The ministry of Jesus would fill the earth. The followers of Jesus were not responsible for the outcome. Although they had a part to play, they could not and did not need to make it happen. It was the work of God.

The Kingdom of God would fill the earth. It was the plan and provision of God.

### **2.1.5 The Parable of the Hidden Treasure**

Matthew 13:44

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

In this parable, a man discovers a treasure hidden in a field. He sells all that he has – gives up every tangible asset – so that he can buy the field. The end result is that he has a treasure much more valuable than the one with which he started. He is better off financially than before, but he had to give up all of his old possessions in order to gain the new.

Thus it is with the Kingdom of God. In order to obtain this treasure, we must give up all of our old spiritual possessions. In Galatians 3:20, Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Becoming a citizen of the Kingdom involves dying to self – giving up citizenship in the old kingdom. But when we do so, when we are willing to let go of the old and grab hold of the new, we end up with a treasure which far exceeds in value what we had before. We are better off for having made the transaction. It is the difference between life and death.

The Kingdom of God is a treasure that overshadows anything else the world can offer.

### **2.1.6 The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price**

Matthew 13:45-46

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

This parable is similar to the last. In Matthew, it follows the previous parable and elaborates on the theme.

It is interesting that the subject in the story had to give up all of his other pearls in order to gain the one. There is a message there. The man in the story was a merchant who made his living buying and selling pearls. When he found this one, he sold everything he had – which implies that he gave up his inventory, his means of support, to obtain and retain this one. One cannot obtain the Kingdom of God and still hold onto other kingdoms. Christianity is not one of many ways to get to God. When one comes to Christ, he leaves all other gods behind.

Citizenship in the Kingdom is purchased at the expense of all other treasures.

### **2.1.7 The Parable of the Fish in the Net**

Matthew 13:47-52

"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked.

"Yes," they replied.

He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

The meaning of this parable is extremely straightforward. A judgment day is coming. God will separate the righteous from the unrighteous. The righteous will dwell with him. The unrighteous will be cast into eternal punishment, a place described as a fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It will not be pleasant.

This should concern each of us, since none of us has any inherent righteousness. If none of us is righteous, then will we all face the eternal damnation? God has taken care of that as well. Romans 3:21-22 says: "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." We are to clothe ourselves in the righteousness provided for us in the sacrificial death of Jesus.

The statement at the end of the parable indicates that the teachings of Jesus are a new treasure which is to stand alongside the old. Jesus' ministry did not supplant the teachings of the Old Testament. They complete those teachings. The church today has a tendency to forget about "those other thirty-nine books." Jesus never intended for his followers to relegate Genesis through Malachi to a second-class status.

### **2.1.8 The Parable of the Growth of the Kingdom**

Mark 4:26-29

He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

Kingdoms of the world are built by men. They are controlled by men. Through the military exploits of men, the kingdoms of men expand or shrink, rise or fall. This is not true with the Kingdom of God.

Just as men lack the ability to make seed sprout into grain, men cannot cause the Kingdom of God to grow, nor can they prevent its growth. It is nurtured by God and God alone. Men can scatter seed, through evangelism, but men lack the ability to make that evangelism bear fruit. When the Word of God is preached, it is the role of the Holy Spirit to bring about conviction and conversion in the hearer. It has nothing to do with the eloquence of the speaker. The Holy Spirit causes the seed to sprout and the Holy Spirit gathers the harvest when the time is right.

The Kingdom of God is a gracious provision of God. We get to belong. We do not get to control. We take no credit for its success.

God grows his Kingdom as he will.

### **2.1.9 The Parable of 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 men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

"About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went.

“He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

“‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

“The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

“But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

In order to understand this parable fully, its context must be taken into account. Immediately prior to these verses one finds Matthew 19:27-30:

Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Jesus tells his disciples that they will have a special place in the Kingdom, sitting on thrones and judging the twelve tribes of Israel. He says that anyone who has sacrificed for the Kingdom will receive a reward a hundred times that which was sacrificed. Then he moves into the parable of the workers in the vineyard, which seems to indicate that everyone gets the same reward in heaven. What gives? How does one put these together in a manner that makes sense?

Jesus laid a foundation saying that there will be rewards given in heaven. He concluded that thought by saying “**BUT** many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.” The parable was given in explanation of that last statement.

Jesus said that there are rewards in heaven, but people are not necessarily going to get everything that they expect. The point of the parable was not so much the reward that was given, but the fact that the workers had expectations about the reward that was given.

When it came time to pay the workers, the landowner dealt with them as he saw fit. When the workers who had arrived late were paid a full day’s wages, the other workers did not simply rejoice at the good fortune of these men. Instead they set their own expectations to be paid even more than had been promised. Then when they were paid the amount originally promised, they were disappointed.

The point is that God will reward as he decides to reward. If we ever begin to feel that we deserve a given reward or that God is somehow obliged to treat us better than someone else, then we are way out of line. God will give to all of those who are faithful exactly what he promised. We will be saved. We will be citizens in the Kingdom. We will be adopted sons and daughters and joint heirs with Jesus. Beyond that, God's administration to each of us will be according to his grace and his judgment. We do not make the rules. We are not in a position to question his actions.

Citizens in the Kingdom will be rewarded at the discretion of the King.

### **2.1.10 The Parable of the Obedient and Disobedient Sons**

Matthew 21:28-32

"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

"I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

This parable was delivered to the chief priests and elders right after they had challenged the authority of Jesus. They had asked where he got the authority to do the things he was doing. He told them that he would answer their question only if they would tell him whether or not John the Baptist's ministry was from God. An argument broke out among the priests and elders about John. Then Jesus told them this parable. When Jesus said that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of "you" he was referring to the chief priests and elders.

Many of the chief priests and elders had publicly endorsed John's ministry, but they had ignored his message to repent. Many tax collectors, prostitutes, etc. had heard John's message and had indeed repented. The son who said "yes" but did not go work in the vineyard represented the chief priests and elders. The son who initially said "no" but then went to work anyway were the tax collectors and prostitutes who repented in response to John's message.

The point of the parable is simple. If one pretends to submit to God but in fact does not, then it is of no value to him.

The revelation of God in the Old Testament is like the request of the father in the parable. Some, like the chief priests and elders, had made a positive ostentatious response to the invitation. They put on religious robes and set themselves up as righteous leaders. When it actually came time to submit, however, they failed to enter the Kingdom. Publicly they said "yes" to the invitation, but they would not come to the feast.

Others – people like the tax collectors and prostitutes – had responded negatively to the invitation at first. These are people who had chosen a lifestyle contrary to the revelation of God in the Old Testament. There was no pretense to their lives. They were up front about who they were and the choices that they had made. When the Kingdom of God was realized in Jesus, however, they abandoned their earlier choices and followed God.

In the end, it was not the initial verbal response that counted. It was the actual lifestyle response to the Kingdom of God that mattered.

This is an important truth, even today. The invitation is still extended. There are still tax collectors and prostitutes among us. There are also chief priests and elders. Hanging out in a church, serving on church committees, going to seminary, or even pastoring a congregation will not bring a person into the Kingdom of God. Likewise having been a prostitute, a drug dealer, or anything else does not disqualify one from entering the Kingdom of God. As long as one has life then the invitation to the Kingdom remains. Ultimately whether or not one is willing to submit to Jesus and trust him for salvation determines his citizenship in the Kingdom.

Citizenship in the Kingdom of God is not obtained by hollow promises, but by a lifestyle of obedience.

### **2.1.11 The Parable of the Landlord and the Tenants**

Matthew 21:33-44, Cross-reference Mark 12:1-11, Luke 20:9-18

“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

“The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

“But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“‘The stone the builders rejected  
has become the capstone;  
the Lord has done this,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?

“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”

This parable comes right after the Parable of the Obedient and Disobedient Sons in the Gospel of Matthew. The audience is still the chief priests and elders. The message is obvious and would have angered the listeners.

The vineyard is God's Kingdom on earth. He entrusted it originally to the Jews. They have been unfaithful tenants. He sent prophets, who brought messages intended to bring reconciliation. They had no tolerance for the prophets and did not respond to their message. Thus God sent his Son. Predicting his own death, Jesus said that the tenants killed the Son.

Presented with the scenario, the chief priests and elders indicated that the Lord of the vineyard would surely tear it away from the hands of the unfaithful tenants and give it over to those who would administer it faithfully. In saying this, they were pronouncing their own fate.

God sent his Son to beckon the Jews to become citizens of the Kingdom. The leaders of the Jews killed the Son, and thus as a whole the nation rejected the Son. Many individual Jews embraced Jesus, but as a whole the nation chose not to become the Kingdom of God. Thus the invitation has been extended to the Gentiles to become Kingdom citizens. Those who responded have joined the faithful Jews to become the manifestation of God's Kingdom on earth.

### **2.1.12 The Parable of the Talents**

Matthew 25:14-30, Cross-reference Luke 19:11-27

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

“Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

This parable is part of Jesus’ eschatological discourse in Matthew 24-25. The theme is the final judgment, which is another aspect of the Kingdom that we must understand. The fact is that we will be held accountable for the way we use the resources given to us.

What is represented by the “talents” in the parable? In the story, a talent is a unit of money. It seems to be symbolic of resources in general. Thus the “talent” in the parable could be:

- money
- time
- abilities (talents)
- relationships
- knowledge

or any other provision of God in our lives.

Why was it that one man was given five talents, another two, and another only one? It is significant that the talents were distributed to “each according to his ability.” The resources that God gives us in a given area are proportional to our demonstrated ability to administer those resources wisely.

The man with five talents and the man with two talents put their resources to work and brought a profit for their master. They used the things that they had been given in a wise manner which honored their master. When it came time to review their progress, they were anxious and excited to give back to their master. The master was glorified by the faithfulness of these servants. As a result, they received what may be the greatest Kingdom reward, the words “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Furthermore the master entrusted them with more (the amount they received was proportional to their demonstrated ability to administer the resources wisely.)

The other servant had an attitude of distrust and hatred towards the master. I do not believe that the issue was that the other servant did not make a profit. If he had said, “Master, I invested your talent but the investment went bad and I lost it all,” I believe the master would have said, “Well done for trying. Let’s see what we can learn from this and then let’s try again.” The issue was not that he was unable to turn a profit like the others. The issue was that he was not willing to try. He feared and distrusted the master and would not do anything to benefit the man that he perceived to be an evil lord.

Thus the master took his talent away and gave it to one of the more faithful servants. The evil servant was removed from his place of service.

So what is the lesson of this parable? God has entrusted each of us with a certain volume of resources. Among those resources is a revelation of his character and his standards. (Odds are that we seldom think of our revelation of God as a resource available to us, but it is one of the most precious things that we have been given.) We will be held accountable for how we utilize these resources. If we administer them in a way that brings glory to God, then we will be rewarded and given more resources. If we turn away from God, then we will lose our resources and ultimately our citizenship in his Kingdom. Those servants who are deemed worthless will be assigned to the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Whether or not you love the King determines whether or not you become a Kingdom citizen. How you administer Kingdom resources determines what sort of Kingdom resources you will be given to administer.

### **2.1.13 The Parable of the Patch and the Wineskins**

Matthew 9:16-17, Cross-reference Luke 5:36-39

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.

Jesus said this after he was asked why he and his disciples did not fast like the Pharisees and the disciples of John. His response indicates that Jesus did not come to put a patch on an old, worn-out garment.

The fasting rituals being referenced were Pharisaical traditions. They were motivated out of false piety and not out of devotion to God. These tired traditions of the Jews were like old garments. They did not need to be patched; they needed to be replaced. Jesus came to bring a new garment and to clothe people in a new relationship with God.

The Pharisaical hierarchy was a kingdom of men. The Kingdom of God would supplant this kingdom of men. If Jesus tried to amend their practices, it would be like putting an unshrunk patch on this old garment. Eventually the patch would tear the garment and both would be useless. His new wine was not intended to be infused into the old wineskins. If he did that, the skins would burst and all would be lost.

Kingdom of God was not an extension of the traditions of men. It supplants traditions of men.

### **2.1.14 The Parable of the Foundation**

Luke 6:39-49

He also told them this parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the

torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

This parable (or group of parables) is about leadership. Every one of us is engaged in a game of “follow the leader,” and it matters which leader we choose to follow. At times we lead and it matters how we lead.

The reference to the blind leading the blind should be fairly obvious. When we seek leadership, we should look to people who know more than we do. On the other side of the coin, we should not pretend to lead when we do not know where we are going.

In the spiritual realm this applies to manner in which we submit to spiritual authority. There is a hierarchy in the Kingdom. Christ is the head of the church, but he has appointed pastors and elders and others to administer and to guide. We must be careful not to put spiritually blind people into places of authority. We must be careful not to let ourselves be put into positions where we do not know how to lead. In the context of the parable, this was aimed at the Pharisees, who assumed to be leaders, and the people who followed them. They were the blind leading the blind.

Moving to the next part of the parable, we must not try to give spiritual leadership in areas where our own lives are out of control. It is incumbent upon us to clean up our own acts before we pretend to show others how to do the same. Likewise, we should not put people into positions of spiritual authority who are still trying to get the planks out of their own eyes.

The next part of the parable tells us how to recognize those with the maturity to warrant making them leaders. It is by the fruit of their lives. The good or evil in a man’s heart will be evidenced by the fruit that comes out in his actions and his words. Spiritual authority is not granted on the basis of degrees or certificates or years of experience. It is given based on fruit.

The last part of the parable brings us back to the foundation of our faith. Ultimately our leader is Jesus. Our lives must be built on his truth. Any other foundation will crumble when stress sets in.

Leaders in the Kingdom must be submitted to the authority of the King. All citizens in the Kingdom should have lives built on the sure foundation of his truth.

### **2.1.15 The Parable of the Good Samaritan**

Luke 10:25-37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

There are two messages that ring over and over again throughout the Old Testament.

- God cares how we relate to him.
- God cares how we relate to one another.

A scribe, wishing to test Jesus, asked what the most important commandment is. Jesus replied that both of the above commandments are priority with God. When told, "Love your neighbor as yourself," the scribe legalistically asked Jesus who his neighbor is.

Jesus replied with the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan. The figures in the parable are significant. Note that a priest and a Levite, two men who are by race supposed to be servants among the Jews, turned their heads and left the man to die. It was a hated Samaritan who came to his aid. The Samaritans were considered unclean, unworthy, and socially unacceptable.

The point of the parable is fairly simple. When someone is in need, he is your neighbor. God cares how we take care of one another. He also cares how we relate to him.

Citizens of the Kingdom should be submitted in service both to God and to neighbor.

### **2.1.16 The Parable of the Place of Honor**

Luke 14:7-11

When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Kingdom of God is a place where some are honored at various times. It is also a place where NONE of us deserves to be based on our own merit. We are only able to enter the Kingdom because Jesus opened the door for us. Thus we must enter with humility, not seeking

glory or honor for ourselves. Once there, God may choose to honor us and there will be joy if that happens. But if we seek to honor ourselves, God may also bring us down from our own thrones, which would be humiliating.

It is important to bring this parable into the “now.” This is not talking about some future banquet in heaven. The Kingdom of God is now. Now God honors those whom he will and he humbles those who need to be humbled. We all have roles to play in the Kingdom – jobs to do. Do not seek the positions of high visibility or influence. Do not seek the adoration of men in what you do. Seek the place of a servant. God may well choose to elevate you to a place of visibility or influence, but it will only be so if you are submitted in service to him.

Citizens of the Kingdom should be humbled servants.

### **2.1.17 The Parable of Counting the Cost**

Luke 14:25-35

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

The message of this parable is similar to that of the Parable of the Hidden Treasure or the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price, but the language is much more pointed. Some explanation is in order.

The first issue is that of hating one’s father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and one’s own life. Did Jesus come preaching a message of hatred? Did he expect his disciples to hate everyone and everything but him? Literally speaking, no. Relatively speaking, yes.

The Greek word used for “hate” is “miseo.” Its literal meaning is indeed “hate” as we normally think of the word. Contextually, however, it can mean “to love less.” That seems to be the appropriate interpretation here. The Bible is a message of love – love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. For Kingdom citizens, the love of the Lord must supersede any other devotions.

Submission to Jesus overrides submission to parents. Loyalty to Jesus is stronger than loyalty to spouse or child. Willingness to sacrifice for Jesus must be even stronger than self-preservation instincts. The cost is indeed dear.

The cost of discipleship is the point of the message. Jesus admonishes people to fully consider the cost of following him. If they are unwilling to pay the price, then they should not “sign up for the journey.” In the natural, it would be unwise to begin construction of a building without first figuring out how much it would cost. If one began the project and then had to abandon it mid-stream, it would be much more costly and humiliating than simply never starting it to begin with. In like manner, a king would not go to war without first calculating whether or not he had the strength to prevail. Otherwise he would likely be overpowered and defeated, ultimately putting him in a position that was much worse than the one he had when he started.

Jesus then said in no uncertain terms: “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” The cost of Kingdom citizenship is EVERYTHING. The man who found the treasure in the field sold EVERYTHING to obtain the treasure. The merchant sold EVERYTHING to buy the pearl of great price.

The text then shifts to “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness...” At first reading, this would almost seem to be a completely disjoint thought, having no relationship to what came before. In the Greek, however, the sentence is introduced with “Therefore.” “Therefore, salt is good, ...” This conjunction ties the thought to what came before. Jesus said, “In light of what I have just said, salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness...” And when you study them together and consider what “salt” represents in the teachings of Jesus, it all makes sense.

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus told his followers “You are the salt of the earth.” It was a fitting metaphor. Salt has two functions. It flavors and it preserves. When salt is sprinkled on meat, it flavors the meat. The meat does not flavor the salt. And salt, when used properly, was a common preservative in the days before refrigeration (and is still used today for that purpose). Kingdom citizens should have both functions as well. We should flavor the world around us. We should not be flavored by the world around us. Our environments should be more like Jesus because we are there. And if we are faithful to carry out that role, we will act as a preservative. Our environments will experience more of God’s favor and protection because we are there than they would without us.

If we step up to the task of being salt, but over time begin to take on the flavor of the world, then we lose our saltiness. If the day comes when we realize that Jesus really meant “give up EVERYTHING” and we decide that we do not want to pay the price, then we lose our saltiness. We become worthless for soil or manure pile. And we will be thrown out. We are worse off than if we had never tasted of the sweetness of the Kingdom.

Some people hold a “once saved, always saved” theology, but it is hard to reconcile such a stance with this passage. There are several places in Scripture (see the parable of the seed and the sower) that indicate that one can enter the Kingdom and later choose to fall away. God will never drive us out, but we can choose to leave.

The cost of staying is tremendous. We must give up everything. We must surrender our resources, our relationships, our wills, and even our very lives. But there is a miraculous and mysterious transaction that takes place when we do so. Only when you “hate” mother, father, spouse, child, brother and sister for the sake of Jesus will he give you back those relationships, perfected in love. Only when you give up your life and die to self will Jesus give you back abundant life. Only when you surrender your will and give up frantic attempts to control your environment will Jesus give you back an environment, perfected in order. And only when you

stop worrying about how to give yourself your daily bread will Jesus give you a free flow of manna.

Only when you give up everything your way can you have everything his way. Still, even with the benefits staring us right in the face, the cost is often difficult to pay.

Kingdom citizens should weigh the cost. There is a price to be paid for citizenship.

### **2.1.18 The Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin**

Luke 15:3-10

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

God grieves over everyone who is lost. God (and all of heaven with him) rejoices when one who was lost is found and brought back into the Kingdom.

The Kingdom is built of those who were lost. There is joy in heaven over every new citizen.

### **2.1.19 The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus**

Luke 16:19-31

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

“No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

While in this life, Lazarus was a Kingdom citizen and the rich man was not. The rich man’s life was not in line with God’s standards. We know this because he is callused towards the state of Lazarus, who is living in misery in the rich man’s shadow. God’s word has a great deal to say about taking care of the needy. The rich man had no concern for his fellow man.

Both died. Lazarus, as a citizen of the Kingdom went to the place of comfort. The rich man went to the place of torment. There is a heaven and there is a hell and people go one place or the other based on the choices they have made in their lives.

This raises an interesting and an age-old question. The Kingdom starts in this life. Why does it seem that we have to wait until the afterlife to reap its rewards?

There is a two-pronged answer to that, spiritual and physical. First of all, the spiritual rewards of citizenship begin now. We have a tendency to measure our well being in the physical, but that is only one aspect of life. Even before he died, Lazarus had the comfort of his relationship with the Father. He had a peace that the rich man could never know.

On the physical level, however, Lazarus’ suffering was real. Why did he, as a citizen of the Kingdom, have to suffer? The reason is that he lived in a fallen world.

God put enough resources in the world to take care of everyone. But he also gave man a free will. The rich man, along with many other people in the community, had it totally within their power to provide for the needs of Lazarus. They failed the test. Bad choices that we make affect our fellow man. The suffering of one is often directly attributable to the greed of another. This may or may not be much comfort to the one who is suffering. But it is reality. We have no guarantee that things will be better until that time when all are living in submission to God’s will.

But there are several important points to this parable:

- There is a heaven and there is a hell.
- There is an unbridgeable gap between heaven and hell.
- Heaven is a place of comfort and hell is a place of torment.
- Your Kingdom citizenship determines which place you go.
- The way you treat your fellow man is a sure indication of your Kingdom citizenship.

Kingdom citizens must make choices that have eternal significance rather than those seeking gratification now.

### **2.1.20 The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector**

Luke 18:9-14

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

This parable is similar to the Parable of the Place of Honor. The meaning is not hidden. The only way to approach God is in total humility. There is no place for arrogance before him. Isaiah 64:6 says “All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” Psalm 5:5 says “The arrogant cannot stand in your presence.”

Citizens of the Kingdom approach the King on bended knee. It is the grace of the King that lifts them up.

### **2.1.21 The Parable of the Forgiven Debt**

Matthew 18:23-35

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

This parable illustrates the theme of “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” God is freely willing to forgive us if we come to him in repentance and ask for forgiveness. The man in the parable asked for forgiveness, but he was not repentant. He still harbored unforgiveness towards his fellow man, which is a sin. Because he was unwilling to give forgiveness, he was unable to receive it.

God sees our actions, but he knows our hearts. He is not impressed with a phony show of humility. Salvation is for those who are genuinely repentant. Judgment is for those who harbor sin.

## **2.1.22 The Parable of the Wedding Banquet**

Matthew 22:1-14, Cross-reference Luke 14:16-24

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

“But they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.

“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

A few years ago I attended a Maundy Thursday service at my church. The central point of that service was an observance of the Lord’s Supper. Whoever had prepared the room for the service had decorated it beautifully. There were tables set out for the communion. The tables had on them very royal-looking tablecloths. They contained trays of the bread and the wine. Each table also had a menorah with candles burning brightly.

The menorah began as a religious symbol in the tabernacle. The lampstand was a fixture in the tabernacle and later in the temple. It illuminated the table of shewbread. The table of shewbread always had twelve loaves of bread on it – one for each of the tribes of Israel. The lampstand illuminated the bread, symbolic of the fact that God was always watchful over the people of Israel and that his glory always shined in their presence.

My mind began to mix the image of God’s presence in the temple with the regal setting in the room and the solemnity of the occasion. Before me was a beautiful table, an appropriate setting for a feast. On it was the lampstand – the symbol of God’s watchfulness over his people, his lighthouse, beckoning people to safety. Instead of illuminating the symbol of his people resting in the safety of his presence (the shewbread), it illuminated the symbol of the sacrifice made for their rebellion (the communion elements). I began to weep. I was impressed as never before over the rejection that God had received from his people. Throughout history he had been

preparing a feast for his people. When the time for the banquet arrived, the people would not come.

In the parable, the invited wedding guests are the Jews. God sent his servants (the prophets and other faithful servants) to call the people but the people rejected the servants, at times even killing them. Thus God sent judgment on those whom he had originally called.

His servants were sent out to invite others to the feast. A “whosoever will” invitation was issued. The Gentiles were brought into the kingdom. They were given the privilege of enjoying all that the King had prepared for his chosen.

When the King entered the banquet room, he noticed a man who was not wearing the wedding clothes. That man was cast out and thrown to judgment. What does this represent?

It would be easy to misunderstand this passage and arrive at a “salvation by works” conclusion. This conclusion is avoided, however, if one understands that according to the customs of the time, the king would have provided clothes for the people to wear to the feast. For people to come to the banquet, they needed to clothe themselves with the provisions given to them by the king. In the Kingdom of God, we enter by clothing ourselves with the righteousness provided to us by the sacrifice of Jesus. The man in the parable attempted to enter the banquet on his own terms, refusing to wear the clothes provided by the king. He was not allowed to participate. In the Kingdom of God, one cannot enter on his own terms. He must clothe himself with righteousness that can only come through faith in Jesus. If he does so, he can enjoy the feast and fellowship with the King. If he is unwilling to do so, he faces “darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.” God beckons everyone to the feast. The only ones who get to participate, however, are those who come on his terms.

### **2.1.23 The Parable of the Bigger Barn**

Luke 12:16-34, Cross-reference Matthew 6:19-34

And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’”

“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’”

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’”

“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?”

“Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The message of this parable is plain. God gives us our daily bread. We are not to look to ourselves as our providers. When our attention begins to be focused on what we can get rather than on the one who gives, then our lives are out of order.

As happened in the parable, our lives may be demanded of us at any time. Some people spend a great deal of time worrying about the Second Coming, the timing of the rapture, etc. The fact is that most of us will receive an individual “recall notice” rather than participate in the big event. We are to live in a state of preparedness. The next time we get on a freeway could always be our last.

As we look around at the world and the provisions that God has made for his creatures, we should be reassured that he will take care of us. If we will seek God and his Kingdom then we will have no need to worry about the mundane issues of life. What a relief!

Spend your time and resources building treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth. Use your “stuff” obediently. Take care of the poor. Invest your resources in the Kingdom.

The closing statement is very telling. We have the distinct ability to delude ourselves into believing all kinds of things. Particularly in spiritual matters, we can always convince ourselves that we are righteous. We can make ourselves believe that our hearts are in the right places. But the fact is, where your treasure is your heart will be. It should be incumbent upon each of us to periodically check to see where our treasures are. How you spend your money is a good barometer of what your priorities really are. Are you seeking the Kingdom or are you satisfying the flesh? If your checkbook is not submitted to God, neither is your life.

It matters. For each of us, that day is coming when we receive judgment. What God judges is the heart, but that means that indirectly he is judging where our treasures have been. So choose. Your choice has eternal consequences.

### **2.1.24 The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree**

Luke 13:6-9

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

In this short parable, we see several aspects of God's character portrayed. God The Creator planted a vineyard. The trees in the vineyard represent the people whom God created. The purpose of the trees is to produce fruit. There is a tree in the vineyard that has failed to produce fruit for three years. God The Judge declares that the tree has consumed vineyard resources long enough and that it should be destroyed.

God The Intercessor has been caring for the vineyard. In particular, he has been trying to nurture the tree to fruitfulness. He asks God The Judge for a bit more time to care for the tree. In the end, God The Judge allows the tree yet another season, but promises destruction if the tree does not become fruitful.

God created us for a purpose. If we fail to live up to that purpose, we will eventually face condemnation. Still, as Matthew 18:14 says, "In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost." God demands a price for sin, but he does not desire that any of those that he created should have to pay that price. He is judge yet merciful intercessor at the same time.

Ultimately he is judge. The day is coming when the vineyard will be cleaned and the fruitless vines purged. You get to choose whether or not you will be fruitful. Your choice has eternal consequences.

### **2.1.25 The Parable of the Shrewd Manager**

Luke 16:1-13

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

"The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg – I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

"So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

"'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'

"Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

"'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been

trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

This is a bit of a puzzling parable because the central character is such a scoundrel. If one does not carefully read the parable, it seems to suggest that we should be like this man, who is blatantly dishonest. And in fact, the parable does suggest that we should share one of this man's characteristics.

The meaning is clarified by the one sentence "For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light." The man in the parable is a "person of this world." We are "people of the light." We are not supposed to be dishonest like the man in the parable, but we are supposed to be wise in our use of resources.

The shrewd manager used the resources that were available to him to plan for his future. He knew that he was going to be without a job soon and so he made sure that there were people out there who owed him favors. He could expect those people to take care of him when he was in a time of need. What he did was dishonest and Jesus made no suggestion that it was right. He did suggest, however, that in a worldly way the man had foresight.

Then the parable turns. If dishonest people are smart enough to plan for the future, then Kingdom people should have enough foresight to do so as well. The way that they plan for the future, however, is very different. Rather than putting people in our debt through dishonest means, we should store up for ourselves rewards in heaven. We should use our time and resources to ensure that we have a home in heaven. We should submit our resources to the Kingdom of God.

This parable has much in common with the Parable of the Bigger Barn. You cannot serve both God and money. You submit to one or the other, but you cannot submit to both. Your choice has eternal consequences.

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