

Welcome to our final term and our series on 'Parables of the Kingdom'! The term parable is derived from a Greek word that literally means a story that is 'set' or 'cast' 'alongside' another. Jesus is the master communicator and he uses well-known examples from his day to illustrate what '...the kingdom of God is like'. His audience constantly shifts as does his application. Matthew and Luke take the time to document Jesus' explanation to his disciples. It is through this narrative that we can work together to discover **what** Jesus is saying to and **why** he is saying it. And, most importantly, **how** we should respond.

On the first page you will find a grid that outlines the many parables contained in Matthew, Mark and Luke. The parables chosen for our series can be divided into four categories: Parables of the Kingdom (Final Judgement); The Joy of Discovering the Kingdom; Parables of the Christian Life and the Parable of Warning and Preparedness. Many of these parables will be well-known, some not so. It is our prayer that you find them beneficial and edifying to your faith, as you seek to love and serve our Lord Jesus Christ. Blessings, Craig.

Some commentaries that you might find useful:

Matthew

Blomberg, Craig L. *Matthew*. Vol. 22. 39 vols. The New American Commentary. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1992.

Hagner, Donald A. *Matthew 1 - 13*. Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Lynn Allan Losie. Vol. 33A. 52 vols. Word Biblical Commentary. Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson, 2008.

Hagner, Donald A. *Matthew 14 - 28*. Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Lynn Allan Losie. Vol. 33B. 52 vols. Word Biblical Commentary. Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson, 2008.

Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to Matthew*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich. : Leicester, England: Eerdmans, 1992.

Luke

Bock, Darrell L. *Luke 1:1-9:50*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994.

Bock, Darrell L. *Luke 9:51-24:53*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994.

Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997.

Parables

Blomberg, Craig L. *Interpreting the Parables*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2012.

Longenecker, Richard N., ed. *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*. McMaster New Testament studies. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000.

The Parables of Jesus

<u>The Parables of Jesus</u>			
Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
The Purpose of the Parables	13:10–17	4:10–12	8:9–10
The Sower	13:1–9, 18–23	4:1–9, 13–20	8:4–8, 11–15
The Weeds	13:24–30, 36–43	4:26–29	
The Mustard Seed	13:31–32	4:30–32	13:18–19
The Leaven	13:33		13:20–21
The Hidden Treasure	13:44		
The Pearl of Great Value	13:45–46		
The Net	13:47–50		
The Lost Sheep	18:10–14		15:3–7
The Unforgiving Servant	18:23–35		
The Two Sons	21:28–32		
The Tenants	21:33–44	12:1–11	20:9–18
The Wedding Feast	22:1–14		14:16–24
The Ten Virgins	25:1–13		
The Talents	25:14–30		19:11–27
The Sheep and Goats	25:31–46		
The Good Samaritan			10:29–37
The Rich Fool			12:16–21
The Barren Fig Tree			13:6–9
The Wedding Feast			14:7–11
The Lost Coin			15:8–10
The Prodigal Son			15:11–32
The Dishonest Manager			16:1–9
The Rich Man and Lazarus			16:19–31
The Persistent Widow			18:1–8
The Pharisee and the Tax Collector			18:9–14

Parables of the Kingdom (Final Judgment)

The Sower (Matt 13:1-23)

If a child asked you to explain the kingdom of God, what would you say?

Read Matt 13:1-9

1. Who was Jesus' audience (v1-2)?
2. Jesus then introduces the first of his parables with 'the farmer'. What do we learn about him?
3. We would expect a seasoned farmer to be skilled in sowing and reaping. Yet, in Jesus' description, we read that that the farmer scatters seed across many soils. Only one produces lasting fruit. Surely he could have carefully sowed in the most receptive soil? Is his labour pointless? Discuss.

Read Isaiah 6:1-10 and Matt 13:11-23

4. Jesus' disciples ask him for an explanation. What is Jesus' response (v11-12)?
5. Jesus then quotes Isaiah 6. From this passage what do we learn about God's nature and man's heart? How does this apply to Matthew 13?

6. In v18-23 Jesus then interprets the parable. I think we can lament those who hear but do not understand the message (v19). We can witness those who respond joyfully then fall away (vv20-21). We can eagerly desire to be the fourth 'fruitful' soil (v23). However, the danger lies with the 'thorns' (v22). What are some 'thorns' that threaten to choke out your faith?

In Isaiah 6 we see the faithful character of God and the exposed heart of man. In Matthew 13 the Kingdom begins when the farmer (God) and his seed (Word) meets the soil (humanity). However, some seed dies while others are choked. While not all seed produces fruit.

At times our labour can often seem unfruitful. We are also met with discouragement when God's word is rejected. It is heart-wrenching to witness those that profess trust in Jesus only to make a wreckage of their faith and fall away. How can we avoid such discouragement?



Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43 (The Weeds)

Read Matt 4:1-9

Here, Matthew documents Jesus' encounter with the devil. How is the devil described?

Following the Parable of the Sower Jesus continues with another agrarian parable. The word translated as 'weed' appears only in Matthew's gospel. It most likely refers to a noxious weed called darnel (*Lolium Temulentum*). This weed starts its life like the surrounding wheat. It is almost indistinguishable!

Why does evil persist in a world that is supposed to be the kingdom of God? Discuss.

Read Matt 13:24-30

1. In v24 to whom does the field belong?
2. Where did the weeds come from?
3. What did the servants of "the man" who sowed the good seed suggest when they saw the weeds?
4. What reason does "the man" give for allowing them to grow?

Read Matt 13:36-43

5. According to Jesus who is the 'the man' of the parable?

6. What four things do we learn of those who belong to the kingdom?

7. By way of contrast how are the 'sons of the evil one' described?

8. As Christians we rightly uphold a doctrine of heaven. Yet, passages such as this also speak to a doctrine of hell. How can we take evil more seriously?

9. In what ways can this encourage us to share our faith?



The Joy of Discovering the Kingdom

Matthew 13:44-52 (The Hidden Treasure)

In these short verses we have 4 parables. Structurally the parables are introduced with 'the kingdom of heaven is like...' v44, 45, 47, 52.

What is the most precious thing you own? If you faced the prospect of parting with it, could you do so willingly? Why or why not?

Read Matthew 13:44-52

1. In verse 44 the message is Jesus' simile of the kingdom is straightforward. What is it?
2. A quick reading of the parable of the merchant and the pearl indicates a similar outcome to the treasure buried in the field. However, in verse 46 Jesus offers further explanation. What is significant about the merchants' response? Do we see the kingdom as that 'valuable'? (*Consider also Phil 3:1-8 and Hebrews 10:32-39*).
3. In verse 37 Jesus introduces the parable of the net (v47).¹ What do we learn of the fisherman's actions (v48)?
4. Then, in verses 49-50 Jesus' response comes as quite a shock. This parable shares similarities with the parable of the weeds (vv24-30, 36-43) and v50 is a repeat of v42. What does it mean that this 'dragnet' of the kingdom includes a mixture of good and evil? Given what we have learned about the kingdom, can this be applied to the church? Why or why not?

¹ The net mentioned is most likely a dragnet. It is one that usually had floats attached to the surface and weighted on the bottom. Like modern-day drift netting the impact is the same: the net is indiscriminate in what marine life it captures

5. To round out his four parables, Jesus asks his disciples a direct question. That question is also for us. 'Have you understood all these things?'

6. Finally, Jesus offers his final parable. What is his message?

7. What would you say to the question 'As a Christian, only the New Testament matters!' Discuss.



Parables of the Christian Life

Luke 15:1-32 (The Lost Son)

Prior to Jesus' famous parable in verses 11-32 he introduces two other parables. In verses 4-7 we have the parable of the lost sheep and in verses 8-10 the parable of the lost coin.

Read 15:1-10

In verses 1-2 Luke introduces the setting. Who is Jesus addressing? Why did you think he chose to eat with "tax collectors and sinners"?

According to Jesus when a sinner repents what is the result (v7, 10)?

Read 15:11-32

Jesus introduces his famous parable with the three characters; the father and his two sons.

This parable is often given the title the 'Parable of the prodigal (lost or wayward) son'. Can you suggest a better one? Discuss.

1. In verse 12 what does Jesus have to say about the younger son?
2. Consider the gravity of v13-15 that begins "And not many days later..." What do we learn of the younger sons' experience?
3. Verses 17-19 reflects a change, literally '(the son) came to himself...' What does the younger son recognise?

4. When the younger son approaches, what is his father's reaction?

5. In verses 25-30 we read of the elder son's response. Is his anger and subsequent protest justified? Discuss.

6. Finally, the father's acceptance of vv22-24 is explained in vv31-32. What does this say of the younger brothers' plight?

7. Who do you identify with in the parable? The younger son or the elder brother? Why?

Read Eph 2:1-10

We were once lost and dead in our sin. Now we are found, made alive in Christ.

8. It is often difficult to witness unbelieving family, friends ***and*** the world recklessly squandering their lives. Consider again Jesus' statements in Luke 15:7, 10. Do they bring comfort?

9. How are you encouraged to respond to this parable today? Discuss.



Luke 16:1-15 (The Shrewd Manager)

Split up into groups and consider the following passages (1 Peter 4:1-11; 1 Thess 2:1-10; Rom 14:1-12). What contribution do these passages make to a Christian understanding of stewardship?

Unlike the three parables of chapter 15, this one is specifically directed to Jesus' disciples. Although the Pharisees were listening (see v14) it was parable directed specifically to Jesus' disciples. Money management and good stewardship of God-given gifts should spring from a response to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Read Luke 16:1-15

1. What do we learn about the 'master' and 'manager' (v1-2)?
2. In verses 3-4 we read of an internal dialogue of the manager. Up to this point in the story what do you make of his thinking?
3. The managers' thinking becomes action in vv5-7 as he approaches three debtors with revised contracts. Is this astute financial management, dishonest or something else? Discuss.
4. In the first half of verse 8 we read of the masters' response. What do we learn about the manager?
5. Then, in 8b Jesus offers comment on this parable. We learn two lessons. What are they?

6. Finally, in verses 9, 10-12 and 13 Jesus offers three further implications. According to Jesus what are the right responses?
7. It is easy to deride the Pharisees response. However, if we are honest, we too can fall into the same trap. In what ways can we encourage one another to be:
- a. Generous with our possessions
 - b. Faithful with our money and in our stewardship
 - c. Serve God, not money



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

This parable contrasts the nature of the dependent poor, the social outcasts, with the cold and pitiless rich. The warnings are two-fold: callous indulgence in this life will be met with an absence of blessing from God in the next. Indifference or rejection of Christ in this life will be met with eternal separation from God in the next.

Read Luke 16:19-31

As you read these verses please consider what sets this parable apart from the others we have studied to this point. Some general questions to consider:

- a. Does the content differ?
 - b. How are the characters portrayed?
 - c. What picture does this paint of the afterlife?
1. In verses 19-21 we are introduced to two men with vastly contrasting lifestyles. How are they portrayed?

Read Genesis 12:1-3 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

2. In verses 22-23 we are thrust forward to the future and learn that Lazarus and the rich man have died. How their fortunes have changed! Compare Lazarus' situation with that of the rich man.

Read Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11; Isaiah 66:22-24

3. Lazarus is afforded the same privilege (vv22-23) as the Old Testament saints of Enoch and Elijah, while the rich man faces torment. In light of this what can we make of the man's request (v24)?
4. 'Abraham's response is twofold (v25-26). What are they? What is significant about the 'chasm'?

5. To close out this section the man continues his dialogue with Abraham (v27-31). What does he ask Abraham to do (v27-28)? What is Abraham's response (v29)?

6. The man disagrees with father Abraham! What significance lies in Abraham's words (v31)?

This is a complex parable. But I believe the passage offers four possible questions:

- a) We are very 'rich' on the North Shore. How do we use our wealth?
- b) What would you say to someone that believes that 'everyone will get there (that is, heaven) in the end'?
- c) How do we love and care for the poor, the ill and those who are deemed 'different'?
- d) What would you say if you fielded the question: 'If only I saw your Jesus, then I would believe'?



Luke 18:1-8 (The Persistent Widow)

This parable draws attention to the coming of the Son of Man – the end of the age. The plea for justice in an unjust world links to the vindication of the saints described in the previous chapter (Luke 17:22-37).

What is your unfulfilled longing of the present time? What justice are you yearning for?

Read Luke 18:1-8

1. What do we learn from Luke's comment in v1?
2. Given Luke's introduction, Jesus introduces two characters. Who are they? How are they characterised?
3. On the one hand we have the unjust judge and on the other the persistent widow. Self-interest compared to single-mindedness. From the parable, is there a difference? Discuss.
4. Jesus then answers the parable in v6. How is God described?

Read Isaiah 35; Daniel 7:13-14

5. Given God's promises made in Isaiah 35 and the triumphant approach of the Son of Man in Daniel 7, can we trust His promise of ultimate vindication?

6. The widow pictures someone vulnerable and in dire need. How can this help us in our pursuit of social justice, care for the vulnerable, the persecuted believer/church et cetera?

7. Discouragement can damage the Christian faith. In the face of injustice and our own unfulfilled longings, in vv2-7 God is not indifferent to the prayers of his people. We should pray willingly and often! Despite the perceived delay, in what ways can we be encouraged to commit this uncertainty to prayer?



Luke 18:9-14 (The Pharisee and the Tax Collector)

This parable follows shortly after The Persistent Widow. The encouragement to pray is shared with the previous parable. However, the focus shifts from final judgment to a study of human nature and salvation. Before you begin, how would people believe that they may enter the kingdom of God?

Read Luke 18:9-14

1. If the previous parable was directed to the disciples, to whom is this addressed (v9)?
2. Contrast the Pharisee and the tax collector. What do you notice? Name as many as you can.
3. The Pharisee's 'sermon' seems to be a pretty commonly held point of view. After all we live in a very pluralist society. How would you respond to the following statements? "I am good. I love my wife. I care and provide for my family. I don't murder or steal. I might not be as good as some, but I am better than most".

Read Psalm 51

4. What can we learn from David's impassioned plea to God?
5. Now consider the tax collector's response. Any similarities?

6. Jesus offers his explanation in verse 14. The man 'went down...justified'. What does this mean?

Humility before God is what he finds acceptable. We must not fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to others. Nor should we assume God's blessing from our activities. Assurance is found in the sacrificial work of Jesus and grounded in God's grace and mercy. It cannot be found in our good works (see Rom 3:21-31; Eph 2:4-18).



Parable of Warning and Preparedness

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

Up to this point in Luke's narrative Jesus has not associated 'the Son of Man' with himself. However, as Jesus is responding directly to a question posed earlier as to what the 'sign' of his coming might look like (cf. Luke 24:3). The reference is unmistakable.

Split into groups and discuss each of these passages. Report back to the group with your findings.

(Son of Man) Matt 16:27; 24:30; 1 Thess 4:16; 2 Thess 1:8

(Judge and King) Matt 28:18; 1 Cor 15:25; Heb 12:2

(Role of angels) Matt 13:41:42; 24:31; 2 Thess 1:7-8 Rev 14:17-20

Now, read Matt 25:31:46

1. How is Jesus' appearing seen in light of the other passages mentioned (v31)?
2. 'All the nations...' What do you think Jesus means by this statement? That is all the nations such as Australia, New Zealand, Fiji et cetera or...something else? Discuss.
3. Again, a separation. This time between the 'sheep' and the 'goats'. Why the distinction?
4. What do you notice about the change in language (v34)? Is this significant? Discuss.

Read Isaiah 58:6-7

5. In light of Isaiah 58, do you think that the sheep duty bound? Why or why not?

6. Given the King's observations, why do you think that the righteous (sheep) are surprised (v37-39)?

7. Placing the surprise of the sheep into context, what is amazing about the King's answer (v40)?

8. If the King saves he can also judge. The separation alluded to in v34 is now made clear. What do we learn about this judgement (v41-45)?

9. Again, v46 is a stark reminder of the fate of those who respond in repentance and faith and those that ignore or reject Jesus.

Some concluding thoughts:

- a. How can you live in the light of the kingdom? (consider Matt 24:14-30; 1 Cor 3:10-15).
- b. There is no evidence in the New Testament that hell can ever bring about repentance.
- c. We can uphold an understanding of heaven and hell. However, it is how humanity chooses to respond to Jesus that will separate the sheep from the goats. It is the only response that matters!

