

## The Parable of the Sower

*“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.”*

*—Ecclesiastes 11:6*

**THIS MONTH WE BEGIN** A new series of articles which will consider the parables of Jesus. When speaking to his disciples on one occasion, the Master told them, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63) Many who heard Jesus’ words “bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.” (Luke 4:22) Such statements as these provide much evidence to the sincere follower of Christ of the necessity to know and understand the words uttered by our great teacher.

Jesus conveyed many of his teachings and lessons by means of parables. Often, he introduced his parables with the statement, “The kingdom of heaven is like ...” Jesus explained some of his parables, but others he did not. Some of the parables relate to the preparatory work of the kingdom, and others to the actual functioning of the kingdom during the thousand years of its rulership over the earth. Some pertain to efforts that would be made by Satan to disrupt the preparatory work of the kingdom.

The disciples questioned Jesus about his use of parables when talking to the multitudes. They asked, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” (Matt. 13:10) To this Jesus replied, “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. ... Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.” (vss. 11,13) Jesus then quoted an Old Testament prophecy from the book of Isaiah which foretold that he would use this method of teaching because the people in general would not be in a proper condition of heart to receive a clearer message.—vss. 14,15; Isa. 6:9,10

It might seem strange to some that God would not want all the people of Jesus’ day, and since, to understand his plans and purposes. After all, his words were designated as “spirit” and “life.” The Scriptures reveal, however, that this is not the age for the general enlightenment of the people. The Bible assures us, though, that the time will come when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa. 11:9) Meanwhile, the deep truths of God pertaining to his plan for the redemption and recovery of mankind from sin and death are reserved for those to whom he elects to reveal them.

Jesus said to his disciples, “Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.” Then he explained, “Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.” (Matt. 13:16,17) There is a “due time” for every detail of God’s plan to be revealed and

accomplished, and it was not then the proper time for the “many prophets and righteous men” mentioned by Jesus to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

Still later in this chapter, the gospel writer Matthew draws the correct conclusion, and quotes another prophecy from the Old Testament. He states: “All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.”—vss. 34,35; Ps. 78:2

During the present Gospel Age, our Heavenly Father is selective in the matter of those to whom he gives the ability to understand the vital truths of his Word. Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) God prepares the hearts of those whom he draws to himself in order that they might receive the “seed” of truth. Just how his Spirit operates to accomplish this is beyond our comprehension. Solomon wrote, “As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.”—Eccles. 11:5

#### **PARABLE OF THE SOWER**

The parable of the sower is recorded in three of the four Gospel accounts, as follows: Matthew 13:3-8; Mark 4:3-8; and Luke 8:5-8. It is one of only two parables of Jesus following which he provides an interpretation of the meaning, the other being the parable of the wheat and tares. The Lord’s explanation of the parable of the sower is contained in Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:14-20; and Luke 8:11-15.

The Matthew account of the parable reads: “Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.”—Matt. 13:3-8

#### **RECEIVED BY THE WAYSIDE**

“The seed is the word of God,” Jesus explained. (Luke 8:11) “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.” (Matt. 13:19) In his explanation, Jesus spoke prophetically of how the message of the kingdom would generally be received. The “word of the kingdom” has been presented to millions throughout the age who have not understood it, and as Jesus foretold, “the wicked one” has quickly removed it from their hearts.

This would be a discouraging experience for the sowers had they not been forewarned what to expect. Even so, it is a difficult fact to accept. Those who proclaim the Truth often wonder if their failure to “get through” to others with the message is not due to their own inability to

present it plainly. It is proper that we present the Truth with as great clarity, and as much vigor, as possible. However, lest we be discouraged, let us remember that nearly two thousand years ago Jesus foretold that much of the seed that would be sown would fall by the wayside and be snatched away by the “fowls of the heaven.”—Ps. 104:12

This has been true, regardless of the sowing methods used. It was true in Jesus’ day. Compare the multitudes to whom he ministered from time to time with the few who actually became his devoted followers. It was true throughout the period of the Early Church. Paul stood on Mars’ hill and witnessed to a sizable audience, but when he had finished, what was the result? The record is, “Some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.”—Acts 17:32

In our own day, how the brethren have rejoiced to see a goodly number attend a public witness effort and apparently enjoy the message, only to discover that a short time later very few, if any, had sufficient interest to respond to a follow-up inquiry. This was not because the brethren had failed to present the message properly. It was simply that the Lord did not put it in the hearts of these people to deeply understand and appreciate what they heard. The message sounded good to them, but it was quickly forgotten, at least to the degree that they had no desire to respond further.

This does not mean that we are to cease giving witness to the Gospel message, or to stop having meetings designed especially for the public. Additionally, it does not imply that we should cease to make every effort we can along all lines to disseminate the Truth. Indeed, these opportunities in the present age of technology are greater than they have ever been—whether by radio, television, digital media, web sites, Internet advertising, the printed page, or by one-on-one encounters at county and state fair booths.

The fact that, for the most part, our witness efforts only get minimal outward results, simply means that in laying down our lives as witnesses of Jesus, we are to remember that this is not the age for the conversion of the world. At the present time, God is directing the message of truth primarily to those whom he is calling to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. These will be the only ones who will respond with true heart appreciation. As our opening text admonishes, however, we are to continue to sow the seed in recognition of the fact that we know not “whether [it] shall prosper.”

### **STONY GROUND, WITHOUT ROOT**

In the parable of the sower, some of the seed fell on stony ground. Jesus explained this, saying, “The same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.” (Matt. 13:20,21) Here, again, is a true picture of what has been observed throughout the age by the Lord’s people.

A good example of this is what takes place at times in connection with our diligent efforts to witness to others. There, on occasion, are those who, at the conclusion of our conversation with them concerning the plan of God, manifest genuine interest in what they have heard. They perhaps even linger in our midst to fellowship and talk further, asking questions, and showing evidence of having grasped a considerable measure of the Truth that has been presented. They

may even inquire as to when and where the local meetings are held, which information is gladly provided. Yet, when the time comes for the next meeting, or the one following, they are not there.

What has happened? Jesus foretold it. The “sun” of persecution rose upon them and they were “scorched.” Good people such as these really do enjoy the Truth when they hear it, and at times are even convinced of its verity in their own minds. However, when they find that it is not popular with their friends, their relatives, and particularly with their church associates, and that to truly embrace the Truth will oftentimes require the sacrifice of present earthly relationships, they decide that it is not for them. The message does not take “root” in their heart. If somehow they could enjoy the Truth and continue to be popular in their community, and in their church, they would like it very much. This, as we know, is not the Lord’s method for calling his people at the present time. The gospel of the kingdom is not popular, and will not be until it is established in the earth, when God will remove the “vail that is spread over all nations,” and take away “the rebuke of his people.”—Isa. 25:7,8

### **AMONG THORNS**

In the parable, some of the seed fell among thorns. Here was a somewhat more enduring response. Jesus described these hearers as those who, although seeming to take root at first, permit “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches” to “choke the word.” Thus they become “unfruitful” in the knowledge which they have received. (Matt. 13:22) These have a genuine interest in the Truth, but they love other things also. They permit the cares of this life to engross them too deeply, and they have very little or no time for the Lord and his service.

These also, as Jesus explains, permit “the deceitfulness of riches” to consume their time and attention. There have been many throughout the age who have resolved that they would serve the Lord eventually, but that first they would accumulate a reasonable amount of riches. Many have had this viewpoint with the sincere thought that they would use their hoped-for riches in the service of the Lord. They ignore Jesus’ warning that treasures laid up on earth are exposed to “moth and rust,” which lead to their deterioration and loss of value.—chap. 6:19

Those whose ambition in life is to lay up treasures on earth fail to realize that while they are spending time and energy to do this their heavenly “account” is being neglected. As the parable states it, they are not bringing forth the “fruit” for which the Lord is looking, and therefore will fail to qualify for an abundant entrance into the “everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (II Pet. 1:4-11) How unfortunate that anyone who hears and responds to the kingdom message should permit the trifling things of this world to turn him aside from running for “mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:14

### **GOOD GROUND**

Some of the seed of the parable fell on “good ground.” How much is not stated, and this is not important. Jesus explained the meaning of this, saying, “He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” (Matt. 13:23) We doubt if the multiples

here mentioned are of any particular significance, except to remind us that even among faithful, fruit-bearing followers of Christ, there can be varying amounts of fruitage brought forth.

Luke's account of the parable omits reference to the different multiples of fruit borne from seed which fell on the "good ground." He describes them rather as "they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."—Luke 8:15

Much patient endurance is required in order to bring forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The "good ground" followers of the Lord are subjected to the heat of persecution, and would be "scorched" even as the "stony ground" believers, except that their roots of faith lay hold more firmly upon the promises of God and thus they receive strength to endure. Likewise, those who experience the ridicule and scoffing of friends and associates in this world that would otherwise "choke" seed which had fallen among thorns, are able to choke the thorns of such opposition and scorn through their faith and trust in the Lord.

The "sower" in this parable represents all the Lord's faithful people, who, having themselves been blessed by the Truth, desire at the cost of self-sacrifice to pass it on to others. Jesus commissioned his followers to go into all the world to preach the Gospel, and this commission has never been withdrawn. What the Lord accomplishes by the spread of the Truth at the hands of his faithful people may vary. By his direction it is now accomplishing a harvest work.—Matt. 13:39; 28:19,20; Acts 1:8

In all our efforts to bear witness to the Truth, let us remember Jesus' introduction to this parable, in which he emphasizes that it is only those who have eyes and ears to hear that will respond to the Gospel of the kingdom. The only ones in this category are those whom the Lord is drawing. Remembering this, we will not be discouraged when the wayside hearers turn away, as they did with Paul, saying, "We will hear thee again" at another time. We will not be surprised when some who at first show appreciation for the message do not continue in the way of truth. We will regret that some allow the cares of this life to hold them back, but we will rejoice that one here and there responds, and with a good and honest heart brings forth fruit with patience.

# The Wheat and the Tares

*“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom their Father.”*

—*Matthew 13:43*

**THE PARABLE OF THE** wheat and the tares is recorded in Matthew 13:24-30,36-54. In it, even as in the parable of the sower, which we considered in last month’s issue of *The Dawn*, there is a sowing of seed. However, in the parable of the sower the seed is explained to be “the word of the kingdom,” whereas in the parable of the wheat and the tares the seed are said to be “the children of the kingdom.” (vss. 19,38) These “children of the kingdom” come into being through the power of the Word of God sown in their hearts, but in this parable they are themselves the seed. This is an important distinction to keep in mind as we examine the various details of our lesson.

In the wheat and tares parable there are two sowings. The wheat, or “good seed,” is first sown. Then, “while men slept,” an enemy sows tares, or imitation wheat, in the same field. The result of this is, as we would expect, that the tares threaten to choke out the wheat. The servants of the householder who sowed the good seed suggest that the tares be uprooted and destroyed, but the householder does not permit this, explaining that this might also destroy the wheat. He orders that both the wheat and the tares be permitted to grow together until the harvest, and that then the tares should be gathered into bundles to be burned, while the wheat is to be gathered into his barn.—vss. 24-30

Jesus’ explanation of this parable begins with verses 37 and 38, in which he explains that “the field is the world,” and that the one who sows the good seed is “the Son of Man.” Thus, the application of the parable is worldwide, and embraces the entire age, with a sowing by Jesus at the beginning of the age, and a harvest at the end of the age. It does not represent the work of the Lord’s people as sowers of seed throughout the age, as does the parable of the sower.

The sowing of the good seed by the Son of man evidently depicts the work of Jesus in the selection of his apostles and other faithful disciples who constituted the nucleus of the Early Church. These were the first of the “children of the kingdom,” as Jesus describes them in verse 38. How appropriate is this title, because these were attracted to Jesus by the “gospel of the kingdom” which he preached. (Matt. 4:23; 9:35) It was by the Spirit of this kingdom message that they were begotten, and devoted their lives to the service of the Master.

Their successors in each generation throughout the age were likewise those attracted by, and imbued with, the gospel—good news—of the kingdom. They are more than merely morally righteous people, but are those who are dedicated to the promotion of the good news of the coming kingdom of the Messiah. This is why Jesus calls them “the children of the kingdom.”

## **THE ENEMY**

Jesus further explained that “the tares are the children of the wicked one,” and that “the enemy that sowed them is the devil.” (Matt. 13:38,39) This is plain language, but a true prophecy of

what has actually occurred. It is stated in the parable that it was while “men slept” that the enemy sowed tares. (vs. 25) The “men” here referred to would seem to be the apostles, who watched over the interests of the Early Church so faithfully, but then “slept” in death until the time of the “first resurrection.” (Rev. 20:6) Concerning this time, Paul alerted the elders at Ephesus: “I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.” (Acts 20:29) Peter similarly forewarned: “There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.”—II Pet. 2:1,2

Not only did Jesus and the apostles warn the Early Church of the false teachers that would come among them, but history reveals that this is what actually occurred. Teachers of error are seldom limited to one falsehood, and this is true of those who began to instruct the church soon after the apostles fell asleep in death. Through the introduction of such doctrines as the trinity and the immortality of the soul, they, in effect, denied “the Lord that bought them.” Additionally, the loving God of the Bible was soon transformed into a torture demon by the blasphemous hell-fire doctrine.

The parable of the wheat and the tares highlights still another false doctrine set forth by the “tares,” sown by the great Adversary. This is the claim that Christ’s kingdom on earth was established by them through the uniting of church and state. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, the devil offered to give him all the kingdoms of this world on the condition of being subservient to him. Jesus rejected this offer. (Matt. 4:9,10) Later, however, the “children of the wicked one,” who were guided by Satan’s various God-dishonoring doctrines, were quite willing to accept this proposition. The result of this was the development of a counterfeit kingdom of Christ in the hands of the “tares.”

History corroborates this change of viewpoint. Beginning in the second century the hope of a coming kingdom on earth, to be established by the returned Christ, began gradually to be thrust into the background. Philosophical and theological speculation started to spread through the church, and as larger numbers came under the influence of this type of thinking, the hope of a future Messianic kingdom on the earth lost its significance and appeal. Thus the way was prepared for the establishment of a counterfeit kingdom in its place.

Although these changes came about gradually, by the end of the fourth century, the teaching of a future Messianic kingdom was banished from the “official” theology of the church. Of particular significance during this period was the growing idea of the political and civil—not just the religious—importance of the church’s role. This led finally to the teaching that the church itself was the kingdom of Christ. Therefore, it was an accomplished fact, rather than something to be looked for, as Jesus and the apostles had taught, at the time of his Second Advent.—Matt. 25:31-34; John 18:36; II Tim. 4:1

How clearly these events of history outlined the developments foretold by Jesus in the parable. By the fourth century the “tares,” or imitation wheat, had indeed just about completely taken over in the “field.” From that time forward, the true “children of the kingdom” held to their hopes and proclaimed them with increasing difficulty. However, as the parable foretold, the

wheat was not to be completely uprooted and destroyed. Rather, it was to remain and “grow together” with the tares until the end of the age, when there would be a harvest.

Once again, the pages of history bear this out. In an article from a noted encyclopedia, we find these words written: “It [the Messianic kingdom hope] still lived on, however, in the lower strata of Christian society; and in certain undercurrents of tradition it was transmitted from century to century. At various periods in the history of the middle ages we encounter sudden outbreaks of millenarianism, sometimes as the tenet of a small sect, sometimes as a far-reaching movement. And, since it had been suppressed ... by the political church of the hierarchy, we find that wherever chiliasm [hope of a future kingdom] appears in the middle ages it makes common cause with all enemies of the secularized Church. ... These were legitimate inferences from the ancient traditions ... of the Church.” These “ancient traditions” were none other than the teachings of our Lord and the apostles, later regarded as heresy by the great “tare” system.

The same article explains that while the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave for a time some consideration to the teaching of a future Messianic kingdom, they soon “took up the same ground” which the state church had occupied since the time of the fourth century. Essentially, all these early reformers did, in fact, join hands with civil governments, and applied to their organizations the misnomer of “Christendom.”

### **THEY GREW TOGETHER**

Returning to the parable, the householder instructed his servants to let the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest. (Matt. 13:30) What a true picture of this has been given to us by the pages of history. Those who held to the hope of Christ’s return and the establishment of his thousand-year kingdom were not crowded out of the “field” entirely, even though the “tares” held the dominating position. However, when the church was pronounced as Christ’s kingdom on earth, and later joined hands with the state, the wheat—“children of the kingdom”—became a highly persecuted minority, and were forced to carry on their activities largely “underground.” They were still there in the “field,” and kept the light of kingdom truth from becoming completely snuffed out. Thus, the wheat and tares continued to grow together until the end of the age, when it was time for the “harvest” to begin.

The tares as a group continued their disinterest in, and oftentimes opposition to, the hope of the coming Messianic kingdom on earth. Although there was, at times, rebellion on the part of many against certain of the evils of the church-state system of government, the idea of a man-made kingdom continued. Even today, various theologians hold to the opinion that the only thing God will ever do for the human race will be accomplished, not by the establishment of a powerful government in the hands of Christ, but by the moralistic teachings of denominational churches, and by the extent that they can influence governments to enact and enforce righteous laws. However, amidst all the cross currents of confusion brought about by conflicting reform movements and by the infiltration of higher criticism, evolution, and various theological factions, some “wheat” has survived. In every generation there were some “children of the kingdom,” who held to the basic doctrines as originally taught by Jesus and the apostles.

### **THE “ANGELS” AND THE “HARVEST”**



In the parable, the householder said, “In the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.” (vs. 30) Jesus’ explanation of this is, “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”—vss. 41,42

The Greek word in this passage which is translated “angels” more literally means “messengers.” The messengers of the Lord could be of numerous kinds. As devoted living servants of God, they could be the holy angels of heaven, or God’s consecrated people here on earth, or both. Certainly, when we note all the various things accomplished by these angels, or messengers, it would appear that a very wide variety of agencies must be used.

Looking back, we see that there was a harvest at the end of the Jewish Age, and Jesus at his First Advent sent forth disciples to be his messengers, or angels, in that work. He also asked them to pray to “the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.” (Matt. 9:38) These devoted followers of Jesus were to do their part in that harvest by preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, even as it was preached by Jesus.

In that harvest there was a burning of the “chaff.” John the Baptist foretold this, saying, “He [Jesus] will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matt. 3:11,12; Luke 3:16,17) We believe that this is a prophecy of the desolation pronounced upon the Jewish nation by Jesus just prior to his death, followed by the literal destruction which came upon them in A.D. 70-73. (Matt. 23:37-39; 24:1,2) The “messengers” largely responsible for this “fire” of destruction were the soldiers of Titus’ army.

This seems to be a revealing illustration of the two aspects of the “harvest” work at the close of the Gospel Age. Here, also, there is a harvesting of the “wheat.” In this latter harvest, we have “tares” which are gathered and burned, instead of “chaff.” The messengers used by the Lord for this purpose are evidently not his consecrated saints, but whatever agencies and influences he may choose to use to rid the “field” of “all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.”

The “wheat” are gathered into the Lord’s barn. Jesus’ explanation of this, as previously cited in our opening text, is: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” This explanation involves the exaltation of the “wheat” in the first resurrection to live and reign with Christ. These shine at the present time only as “candles.” (Matt. 5:14-16) However, until the kingdom is established in “power and great glory,” these “children of the kingdom” in the flesh constitute the only true light in this “present evil world.” (Matt. 24:30; Gal. 1:4) When they are brought forth in the first resurrection to reign with Christ, they will “shine forth as the sun.” Indeed, they will be a part of that “Sun of righteousness” foretold by Malachi.—Mal. 4:2

Clearly, to bring forth “the children of the kingdom” to the divine nature in the first resurrection requires the exercise of power through agencies beyond our ability to comprehend, and this work is included in the total accomplishments of messengers sent forth in this Gospel Age harvest. However, it is also true that an important part of this harvest work is accomplished

by “the children of the kingdom” themselves through their proclamation, as messengers, of the gospel of the kingdom, even as it was in the Jewish Age harvest.

### **THE HARVEST MESSAGE**

In his discourse relating to the time of his Second Presence and the end of the age, Jesus said that he would “send his angels [messengers] with a great sound of a trumpet,” and that they would “gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matt. 24:31) Here the messengers are clearly “the children of the kingdom,” as also are the “elect” who are gathered. This gathering is accomplished by the “sound of a trumpet,” which is symbolic of the proclamation of a message.

This is the kingdom message of present truth—the harvest message. John the revelator records that it is the “everlasting gospel” which was to be proclaimed to those “that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” at this end of the age. Some of the details of the message are also given by John: “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” (Rev. 14:6,7) It is, in fact, the same “gospel of the kingdom” and “present truth” message spoken by Jesus and reiterated by the apostles.—Matt. 24:14; II Pet. 1:12

### **THE CHIEF REAPER**

Jesus said that he would send forth his messengers to gather his elect. This implies that he would then be present in the “field” to assume the role of Chief Reaper. This is further pointed out in Revelation 14:14,15. We read: “I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

Later in this chapter we are told of “another angel” or messenger, who had “power over fire.” (vs. 18) This messenger is assigned the work of reaping the “clusters of the vine of the earth” and of casting it into the “great winepress of the wrath of God.” (vs. 19) While the metaphor here changes from “fire” to the “winepress of the wrath of God,” the symbolic reference to casting “clusters” of grapes into God’s winepress is remarkably similar to the gathering of “bundles” of tares “to burn them.” Thus we have a confirmation of the truths set forth in the parable of the wheat and the tares.

In Revelation 18:1, we read, “I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.” This seems clearly to be a reference to the return of our Lord, and the light of his glory which will eventually fill the earth. Concerning one of the first features of his work, we read: “He cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard

another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”—vss. 2-4

These Scriptures indicate that part of the message at the time of the return of our Lord and the period of his presence is the invitation to the “wheat,” who were to grow together with the “tares” until the harvest, now to separate themselves—“Come out of her, my people.” “Her” is a reference to Babylon, the great counterfeit “tare” system which held such great power over the nations for much of the Gospel Age. This, too, harmonizes with the testimony of Jesus in his parable, and in his great prophecy relative to the end of the age.

It should be noted that the revelator says Babylon is “fallen” at the time of our Lord’s Second Advent, and his call to come “out of her.” This does not imply Babylon’s immediate destruction, but rather a falling from her former position of church-state power held for so many centuries. The final destruction of Babylon is not spoken of until verse 21, where John records: “A mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.”

#### **NOW IN THE HARVEST**

Certain prophecies of the Bible—which we do not have space here to discuss—and the fulfillment, by way of documented events, of various “signs” contained therein, provide ample evidence that the Gospel Age harvest was due to begin in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, or about one hundred forty years ago. Are there any evidences to indicate that these prophecies have been correctly understood? We believe so. Remembering that the “harvest” has to do with both the “wheat” and the “tares,” we think the evidence is clear that there has been, and continues to be, a harvesting of the “wheat,” and a bundling of the “tares,” in preparation for their eventual burning.

Let us first consider the symbolic harvesting of the “wheat” of the parable—“the children of the kingdom.” There is evidence to show that around the time of the early 1870s, a little group of earnest students of the Bible began to understand clearly the glorious promises of the Bible pertaining to the time and manner of our Lord’s return. They also came to understand the purpose of his return—that he was first of all to be Lord of the harvest, and then, through the establishment of his kingdom, accomplish the “restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20-23

One of that number, whom many earnest followers of Christ have come to believe was “a faithful and wise servant,” was blessed by the Lord with certain abilities and means, and most importantly had the sacrificing zeal to publicize these truths far and wide. They were sent in printed form to ministers and Sunday School teachers throughout the entire United States. “The children of the kingdom” were no longer restrained as in past centuries. God had given them the message, and a way to proclaim it, and it began to sound forth.

This was not a work that was done in a corner, for in a few short years it became well-known throughout much of the Christian world. These relatively small groups of consecrated followers of Christ, a people separated from the traditional denominations of the past, worked “together” to proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom with increasing volume and clarity.

These were, indeed, “the children of the kingdom,” for they not only believed in the promises of the Bible relative to Christ’s coming kingdom, but its glorious prospect filled them with a self-sacrificing zeal that allowed nothing to prevent them from proclaiming, on every suitable occasion, the glorious harvest and kingdom message. They broadcast to all with a hearing ear the good news pertaining to the thousand-year kingdom of Christ, and the blessings of peace, health, and everlasting life that will reach the people through the administration of its laws of righteousness. To this day, in 2015, the witness given by the “gospel of the kingdom” message has not ceased. Indeed, Satan has endeavored to discourage, separate, and disrupt “the children of the kingdom” through his wily ways. However, they have always been able to regroup and continue trumpeting forth the harvest and kingdom message through the many means made available by God’s grace.

### **THE TARES**

The tares of the parable, Jesus explained, are “the children of the wicked one.” This does not mean that they are immoral people and professed servants of the devil. It simply means that their viewpoints and lives are governed by teachings pertaining to the kingdom of God which have been corrupted through the deceit of Satan. Many of them are among the world’s finest people, and hold sincerely to the concepts of the kingdom which are so prominent in the society of which they are a part.

The bundling and burning of the tares is explained by Jesus to mean their removal from the kingdom of which they profess to be a part. The “field” in which the wheat seed was originally sown was designed to be only a wheat field. The tare seeds were sown by an enemy, and did not belong with the wheat, so they are removed. The parable says they are “cast ... into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”—Matt. 13:42

We understand that the destroying of the tares should not be considered as having to do with individuals, but only as a symbolic class. This is indicated by the statement that even when the tares are cast into the “furnace of fire” there is “wailing and gnashing of teeth.” This is an expression used by Jesus to denote great disappointment and chagrin. How disconcerting and disappointing it will be to many when they learn that their long-taught conception of the kingdom of heaven is not in harmony with, nor part of, the Lord’s sowing. As a class, therefore, the tares are removed from the field.

The parable states, “Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them.” (vs. 30) It is not necessary to conclude from this that the bundling and burning of the tares is all completed before the harvesting of the wheat begins. In reality, we see that both the bundling of the tares as well as the gathering of the wheat have been taking place during the period of the harvest. Jesus simply refers to the gathering of the tares as “first” to separate that work from the other work going on—the gathering of the wheat.

It is reasonable to conclude that the “furnace of fire” in which the “tares” are burned will be the climax of the great “time of trouble” in which the “present evil world” is destroyed. (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21; Gal. 1:4) This will include all the various tare organizations, or “bundles.” When these things occur, the wheat will have all been gathered into the barn. In his explanation, Jesus

says, “Then [at that time when the tares are destroyed] shall the righteous [gathered wheat] shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”—Matt. 13:43

Following quickly, the real kingdom of Christ will begin to function for the blessing of the people. The wheat class—“children of the kingdom”—brought forth in the first resurrection, will shine “as the sun” for the enlightenment and healing of all nations. The rulership of Christ’s kingdom will destroy all the enemies of God and of righteousness, even death itself. (I Cor. 15:26) Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This work accomplished, the prayer, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” will be fully answered.—Phil. 2:10,11; Matt. 6:10

# The Kingdom of Heaven in Preparation

*“These things spake Jesus ... in parables; ... That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.”*  
—Matt. 13:34,35

**IN THE FIRST TWO LESSONS** of this article series on the Parables of Jesus, we considered “The Parable of the Sower” and “The Wheat and the Tares.” In those lessons, we noted extensive detail given by Jesus as he spoke to the multitudes assembled on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Additionally, the Master provided the interpretation of these parables to those gathered there so that they might be stirred to give further thought to his words.

By way of contrast to the foregoing, in this lesson we will consider five short parables, in which very little detail is provided. Only ten verses comprise all five of these parables. Our understanding of their meaning is also limited to some extent due to the fact that, in the case of the first four, Jesus did not provide any explanation. In the fifth parable, however, he does give a brief description of its meaning. The one common theme we observe is found in the phrase, “The kingdom of heaven is like ... ,” which appears in the opening words of all five parables. It is this theme that we will look to in order to assess the meaning of Jesus’ words.

## **PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED**

The account of the first of the five parables we will herein consider reads as follows: “Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”—Matt. 13:31,32

Because Jesus did not explain the parable of the mustard seed, in order to understand its lesson we must compare it with certain facts which the Scriptures reveal to us concerning “the kingdom of heaven.” One of these is that many of the Bible’s references to the kingdom pertain, not to the time when Christ is ruling “from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth,” but to the time when those who will constitute the rulers in the kingdom are being selected from the world of mankind and being proven worthy of the high position to which they are called.—Ps. 72:8

The Bible indicates that during this preparatory aspect of the kingdom the Lord’s true people, “the children of the kingdom,” would be a very small company. (Matt. 13:38) On another occasion, Jesus addressed these saying, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) The Scriptures also reveal that this “little flock” of disciples would be unrecognized by the world, and persecuted.—I John 3:1; Matt. 5:10-12

The parable of the mustard seed, on the other hand, suggests a large growth of the kingdom, from a very small beginning. It is likened to a literal mustard seed, which is very tiny, but grows

to be a giant herb, or tree, in which the “birds of the air” could find shelter. It is true that when the kingdom of Christ is established in power and great glory, its rulership will be extended throughout all the earth. However, the mustard seed parable hardly fits this situation, so we must seek its explanation along other lines.

We believe the clue is suggested by Jesus in his earlier parable of the wheat and the tares. As we saw in that study, Jesus indicated that the “tares” represented “things that offend, and them which do iniquity,” and that at the end of the age these were to be gathered “out of his kingdom.” (Matt. 13:41) The point is that during the preparatory period of the Gospel Age, prior to the work of the kingdom in power and glory, there have been iniquitous—sinful elements. This, we believe, suggests the proper explanation of the mustard seed parable.

Throughout the present age there has been a counterfeit kingdom class, as well as the true. Indeed, from a very small beginning of evil shortly after the apostles fell asleep in death, there grew what the world called “Christendom,” or Christ’s kingdom. It embraced all the nations of Europe, and its influence spread to other countries. In the branches of this “tree” all classes of the world and the worldly found shelter. It became their abiding place, their home. (Luke 13:19) John the Revelator, when referring to this system as “Babylon the great,” used the same metaphor as the parable, and spoke of it as the dwelling place of “every unclean and hateful bird.”—Rev. 18:2

So well established and popular became this “tree” that it was an advantage from the standpoint of prestige and social standing to seek shelter in its branches. People were not invited to join its ranks on the grounds that it would offer them an opportunity to suffer and to die with Christ. Instead of persecution, suffering, and sacrifice, they were offered popularity. Instead of being a “little flock,” this kingdom class counted its members by the millions. Indeed, Christendom grew into a very imposing “tree.” The parable refers to it as the “greatest among herbs,” so the comparison is not between the sizes of trees in a forest, but between herbs in a garden. In this sense, the mustard tree’s size would dwarf that of all other herbs. Certainly the leaders of Christendom have long boasted of the great growth of that which they have planted.

## **PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN**

The second lesson for our consideration is the parable of the leaven. Jesus stated: “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.” (Matt. 13:33) The particular wording of this verse, as well as the fact that it immediately follows the mustard seed parable, suggests that it has a similar meaning, and also applies to the false kingdom of Christ rather than to the true.

This conclusion is reached from the fact that “leaven” is always used in the Bible as a symbol of sin—of that which is out of harmony with God. The use of leaven—or yeast—was strictly forbidden in all Israel’s offerings made to the Lord by fire. During the Passover feast, the Jews were commanded to remove every particle of leaven from their houses. (Exod. 12:15,19) The idea which the Bible associates with leaven is its corrupting influence. It is to this property of leaven that Jesus refers when he speaks of “the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” (Matt. 16:6) The apostle speaks of the “old leaven ... of malice and wickedness.”—I Cor. 5:7,8

The parable states that a “woman” hid leaven in three measures of meal. This would seem to picture the false church system to which the names “that woman Jezebel” and “the woman ... arrayed in purple and scarlet” are given in the Book of Revelation. (Rev. 2:20; 17:1-6) The fact that the woman “hid” the leaven in the meal suggests something which was not done openly. The meal, we believe, represents the spiritual food which the Lord provided for his people—the precious doctrines of God’s plan of redemption and restoration for the sin-cursed and dying race. The three measures of meal could be intended to emphasize three basic truths of God’s Word—namely, death as “the wages of sin,” the “redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” and the “restitution of all things” during Christ’s kingdom.—Rom. 6:23; 3:24; Acts 3:20,21

Associated with these basic truths are various other doctrines, which together comprise God’s plan of the ages. The “woman” of the parable mingled corrupting elements of false doctrine with these truths until they finally lost their purity in the minds of most believers. Eternal torture was substituted for death as the penalty for sin. The doctrine of the ransom was corrupted by the unscriptural theory of the trinity. The hope of resurrection, or restitution, was also no longer meaningful. Indeed, there could be no resurrection of the dead if no one were really dead, but possessed an immortal soul—another idea not supported by the Bible.

The parable states that as a result of the leaven hidden in the meal “the whole was leavened.” History reveals that this literally came true, for it is almost impossible to find a single doctrine of God’s plan of salvation properly set forth in the dogmas of Christendom. Thus, the parable of the leaven can also be considered a prophecy of the extent to which the counterfeit church system would corrupt the true teachings of the Word of God.

#### **HIDDEN TREASURE AND A PEARL**

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”—Matt. 13:44-46

In these three verses, we have the record of two more parables of the “kingdom of heaven” related by Jesus. The first pertains to a man who found treasure hidden in a field, and who sells all his possessions in order to raise funds to purchase the field, and thus obtain the treasure. The second tells of a merchant seeking valuable pearls, and upon finding one of great worth sold all that he had and purchased the pearl. Here again we find that Jesus offered no explanation of these parables. However, the general lesson taught by them is, we believe, quite obvious.

Both of these parables relate, not to the earthly blessings which will be made available to mankind through the agencies of the kingdom when it is established throughout the earth in power and great glory, but to the priceless opportunity that is offered to some during the present age of securing a position with Jesus in the heavenly rulership of his kingdom. It is somewhat akin to what Paul refers to as the privilege given to a few of running toward “the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:14



The pearl of great price and the hidden treasure are, according to the parables, of such high value that those finding them do not hesitate selling everything they have in order to obtain them. The nature of the “treasure” is not mentioned, but its great value is stressed. The man who finds the treasure “hideth [it], and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.” The thought seems to be that upon finding the hidden treasure, the man hides it in a safe place until he can raise the necessary funds to purchase the field.

In the second parable, the pearl is described as one of “great price.” Apparently the great value of the hidden treasure and of the pearl is one of the main points for consideration in both of these parables. The fact that a pearl is used rather than a ruby, diamond, or other precious gemstone would seem to be of no special significance, since they all require diligent searching in order to be found. These two parables are the same from the standpoint that, in both cases, the man who finds the treasure and the merchant who discovers the pearl sell all that they have in order to secure the purchase of them. In seeking the lessons of these parables, this similarity is an important clue to their meaning.

#### **LESSONS SHOWN**

Jesus said to the rich young ruler, “Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” (Matt. 19:21) When the disciples asked further concerning this, Jesus explained, “Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”—vs. 28

This is one of the Bible’s descriptions of the precious heavenly kingdom treasure to be obtained by the faithful followers of Jesus—those who are willing that it shall cost them all that they have and are. However, it should be remembered that Jesus was the first and chief one to gain this treasure, and that it is his perfect example of giving all that his dedicated followers must emulate if they are to share the treasure with him.

Jesus did indeed give all in order to obtain this treasure. He gave the glory which he had with the Heavenly Father “before the world was.” (John 17:5) He then gave his perfect humanity, his flesh, for the “life of the world.” (chap. 6:51) In point of fact, Jesus was the one who actually purchased the “field,” and obtained the right to the “treasure” which it contained. In addition to the treasure, he obtained of immortality, and that of attaining the high office of “King of kings, and Lord of lords,” Jesus will also have as a “treasure” his joint-heirs, who will be his “bride” in the heavenly phase of his kingdom.—John 5:26; II Tim. 1:10; Rev. 17:14; 21:9

The footstep followers of Jesus are to share his honor and glory with him on condition that they also give up all that they have. Paul wrote, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”—Phil. 3:7-11

## **ONE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE**

There is one important difference between the parables of the treasure and of the pearl. In the first one, the man seemingly finds the treasure hidden in a field without specially searching for it. In the second one, the pearl merchant was seeking “goodly pearls,” and then found one. Both of these situations could well illustrate that which is true of those whom God calls to joint heirship with Jesus.

It has been the testimony of some who receive a knowledge of God’s plan, and of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus, that they apparently “just happened” to come across it. They perhaps found a tract or booklet at a restaurant, or some other public place. They happened to tune in to a station on their radio, television, or the Internet, which was broadcasting the Gospel message of truth. Actually, however, we know that it is by the Lord’s overruling providence that anyone is drawn to the Truth and to a knowledge of the heavenly treasures.

On the other hand, there must be an earnest longing to know the Lord and to know his plans and purposes. This could be illustrated by the merchant seeking goodly pearls. “Seek, and ye shall find,” Jesus said. (Matt. 7:7) This is true if the seeking is in sincerity, and the Lord sees in the heart the true spirit of humility and dedication which leads to consecration. The Lord does not call the indifferent, but only those humbly searching after truth and righteousness.

The Psalmist David wrote, “I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.” (Ps. 40:1) This is the attitude of the seekers after the Lord and his ways. When the Lord “inclines” unto them, it often seems to have “just happened.” However, this is not really the case, for his providences overrule and direct in the lives of all those whom he calls, and this includes the manner in which the Truth is first brought to their attention. It is the Truth that reveals the heavenly treasures—the “pearl of great price.” Our part, shown in both parables, is our willingness to “sell” all we have in order to participate in the joys of the heavenly kingdom, as joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

It is not possible in any parable to find an application for every detail, and they are not designed for that purpose. It would be difficult, for example, to make a spiritual application of the fact that the man who found the treasure in the field hid it until he could buy the field. In keeping with the customs of the time, this apparently was a necessary procedure in order ultimately to become the legal possessor of the treasure.

The important thing is the man’s willingness that the treasure cost him all that he had. That is the chief lesson for us in both of these parables. If we have found the “treasure,” and if we have found the “pearl of great price,” are we giving up everything in order to make these our own? Are we, like Paul, counting all things else as loss that we may win Christ, and attain “the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?”

## **NET CAST INTO THE SEA**

The last of the five short parables to be considered in this lesson contains these words of Jesus: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good

into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world [age]: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”—Matt. 13:47-50

As in the foregoing parables of our lesson, “the kingdom of heaven” in this parable is not the kingdom established and reigning in the earth in power and glory, but the heavenly phase of that kingdom in preparation. When Jesus called his disciples into the ministry he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matt. 4:19) Fishing with nets is the illustration used in the parable, which was the principal method employed in Jesus’ day.

The apostles who had been fishermen would know that when a net is cast into the sea there is no way to control what sort of fish are caught in it, and that after the net is drawn ashore the fish must be sorted. They would therefore readily grasp the idea that as “fishers of men” some undesirables would find their way into the “net,” and that these likewise would need to be separated from the others.

Jesus presented this parable as covering the entire Gospel Age, and indicated that the sorting of the fish would take place at the end of the age. This applies, however, only in a very general way. It is not as though the early disciples cast the net into the sea, and that only at the end of the age the net is drawn ashore. Actually, each individual disciple of Christ throughout the age has likewise been a “fisher of men,” and has drawn his individual “net” ashore many times.

The general lesson of the parable, however, is to point out what the Lord would accomplish at the end of the Gospel Age. In this respect, the lesson is similar to the one taught by the parable of the wheat and the tares, considered previously, in which a separation is also pointed out. In that lesson, we saw that “tares” are counterfeit “wheat.” In this parable, however, nothing is said about the rejected fish in the net being counterfeits of the approved fish. We do not need to pass judgment on individuals to recognize that throughout the professed Christian world, and during this entire age, there have been millions of honorable people who have found their way into the “Gospel net.” Yet, in the true sense of the word, most have not been fully consecrated followers of the Master—recipients of the “high calling of God.”

The “angels” who are sent forth at the end of the age to sort the fish are the same servants of the Lord who did the fishing. This does not mean, however, that these “fishers of men” are any more qualified to judge the good, and separate the evil from the good, than were the Lord’s people throughout the age. It is the message they proclaim that does the separating. Those to whom the Lord gives ears to hear, understand, and appreciate the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” by their own choice, will separate themselves from those who have no ear for the Truth. Thus, it is the mighty power of the Gospel that does the separating work.

The reason that the accomplishing of this work is more particularly true in the end of the age than at earlier periods is that the pure Gospel message was largely hidden for many centuries by the false creeds of men. There were a few in every generation who held tenaciously to the main principles of the Bible, but there was almost no opportunity to make a public proclamation of its message. As a result, its influence among the great mass of professing Christians was negligible.

However, in his providence the Lord, in the end of the age, has made a dramatic change in this situation. With his blessing and by his grace, “the children of the kingdom” are able to give a wide witness to the Gospel message of the kingdom. This witness has stirred many to take a stand for it, and separate themselves from those who are believers only in name, who, realizing the unpopularity of the Truth, are quite willing to have it so.

### **THE FURNACE OF FIRE**

In this parable also, as in the parable of the wheat and the tares, those who are not the Lord’s true people, but merely associated with them for a time, are said to be “cast ... into the furnace of fire.” The further explanation is given by Jesus that “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

This is one of the texts seized upon by those who search the Bible for proof of the God-dishonoring doctrine of eternal torture. They reason that here is a mention of fire, and also a statement by Jesus which seemingly suggests that those in the fire are being tormented. What other reason could they have, it is argued, for the “wailing and gnashing of teeth?”

We are confident, however, that this is not the lesson of the parable. Jesus said to those who rejected him in his day, “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.” (Luke 13:28) The ancient faithful servants of the Lord are to be raised from the dead to be the earthly rulers in the Messianic kingdom. This was the position sought by many of Israel’s religious leaders in Jesus’ day. He simply pointed out to them how disappointed they would be, when raised from the dead, to see that those more worthy occupied the position they believed belonged to them.

This, we believe, is a good illustration of what is signified by the expression, “wailing and gnashing of teeth,” in the parable. It does not denote physical torment, nor is it to be taken literally. Rather, it is a symbol of keen disappointment, just as in the case of Jesus’ words to the leaders of his day. Thus it will be with those “fish” in the “net” who are not accepted as the true disciples of Christ to live and reign with him. They will be deeply saddened to have missed such a wonderful opportunity to be part of the heavenly phase of the kingdom.

The “fish” who are cast out are great in number. Through the deceptive teachings fostered by Satan, they have thought that a rule of righteousness could be set up throughout the earth by human efforts. However, the prophecies of the Bible reveal that all of man’s attempts to accomplish this will fail—that the organization of this present world will collapse in “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” (Dan. 12:1) It is this “time of trouble,” we believe, that is symbolized by “the furnace of fire” mentioned in the parable.

The casting of the “fish” into the furnace of fire does not denote the destruction of individuals, but merely the destruction of their identity as supposed followers of Jesus. As individuals, these, even as those who were once tares, will have an opportunity later to receive life-giving blessings on Earth as subjects of the kingdom of Christ. It is said of those who obediently follow the laws of that kingdom from the heart, that they “shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”—Rev. 21:7



# The Parable of the Virgins

*“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.”*

—*Matthew 25:1*

**THE PARABLE OF THE** virgins begins with the words of our opening text. It closes with the words, “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” (Matt. 25:13) The parable is part of Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ questions, “When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming [Greek: presence], and of the end of the world [Greek: age]?”—chap. 24:3

This parable emphasizes that Jesus’ disciples would not know the time of his return and subsequent presence in advance of its occurrence, hence the need of their being alert and continuing to watch. The faithful watchers could expect to know of the Master’s return once it had occurred, because they would be alert to the various signs given in the Scriptures which would begin to have fulfillment at that time. Thus they would rejoice in the evidences of his presence.

The parable of the virgins is not just a set of circumstances which Jesus put together in story form. Rather, it is a true reflection of the marriage custom of his day. Furthermore, in it we find a clear illustration of the essential point of the lesson Jesus desired to teach—that is, the importance of watching.

According to ancient Jewish custom, during the period between a betrothal and the wedding, the bride-to-be lived with her friends, and was not permitted to see her future husband, or have any communication with him. When the day and time arrived for the wedding ceremonial activities to begin, which was usually late in the evening, the bridegroom left his house, attended by his groomsmen. A band of musicians preceded them as they made their way to the home where the bride was waiting.

The bride and her companions anxiously awaited the coming of the bridegroom. When he arrived with his groomsmen, he led the combined group, including his bride-to-be, to his own or his father’s house, accompanied by many demonstrations of happiness. On their way to his home they would be joined by a party of maidens who were friends of the bride and the bridegroom. These had been waiting to join the procession as it passed by, and would now become a part of the entire group. Upon arrival at the bridegroom’s house, all would be invited to participate in the joys of the wedding, including the feast.

These maidens are, symbolically speaking, the “ten virgins” referred to by Jesus. In the parable, the virgins went out to meet the bridegroom too early—in their estimation he had “tarried.” As they waited for him, “they all slumbered and slept.” At “midnight” they heard the announcement, “Behold, the bridegroom ... go ye out to meet him.” The virgins all arose and “trimmed” the wicks of their lamps.—Matt. 25:5-7

Five of these virgins are described as “wise” because of having a full supply of oil in their vessels—several translations say “flasks.” These flasks—full of oil—would be used to continuously replenish the lamps, so that they would keep shining at all times. The other five virgins are said to be “foolish” because they failed to provide the necessary supply of oil in their flasks. Although they had trimmed their wicks, as had the wise virgins, the lamps of the foolish virgins had “gone out,” because they ran out of oil. They asked the five wise virgins if they could have some of their oil, but the wise said, “Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you.” Thus the foolish virgins were not prepared to go into the wedding with the bridegroom.—vss. 2-4,8-10

#### **WATCH**

The admonition to “watch” has doubtless been a blessing to the Lord’s people in every part of the Gospel Age. They have all been encouraged by the belief that the return of Christ was near. Indeed, so far as individual experience is concerned, the return of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom have never been any farther away than the end of each one’s faithful walk in the narrow way of sacrifice. So far as consciousness of passing time is concerned, it is the next moment after death in which the faithful follower of Jesus is ushered into his reward on the other side of the veil.

While the parable of the virgins assuredly served to stimulate the “virgins” throughout the age to greater watchfulness, it has a special application at the end of the age. It teaches that no one would know in advance the specific time of the Lord’s return, but reveals that as the time of the Second Advent drew near, there would be some who thought they knew ahead of time. These would go out to “meet” him, but not having a sufficiency of oil, the light of truth they bore would begin to dim and go out as a result of their disappointment.

It is interesting to note that just such a thing did occur. Many who had become interested in the Second Advent, through the movement begun by William Miller during the first half of the nineteenth century, actually expected in advance the Lord’s return to occur at a certain time. The parable states that the bridegroom “tarried.” This seemingly expresses the viewpoint of the virgins. To them it seemed that he had tarried, but actually they had gone out too early to meet him. We know that every feature of God’s plan is carried out at exactly the proper time. Nothing in God’s plan ever tarries.

#### **A SIGN**

In addition to being an admonition to watchfulness, we may well consider this parable as calling attention to one of the “signs” of the Lord’s return and Second Presence. In answering his disciples’ questions pertaining to the signs of his presence, Jesus drew somewhat from the prophecies of the Old Testament. For example, he quoted from Daniel 12:1, which speaks of a “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation” and, referring to it as a time of “great tribulation,” offered it as one of the indications of his presence and of the end of the age.—Matt. 24:21,22

It seems reasonable that Jesus employed the parable of the virgins to illustrate the principle set forth in another prophecy relating to the time of his return found in Habakkuk 2:3. This text

reads, “The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”

The Apostle Paul quotes from this prophecy and applies it to the time of Christ’s return. (Heb. 10:35-38) Paul indicates that our “need of patience” is one of the important lessons of this prophecy. “For yet a little while,” he continues, “and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” As we have seen, it is only from the human viewpoint that the Lord would seem to tarry.

James also stressed the need of patience in connection with the return of Christ. He states: “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming [presence] of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming [presence] of the Lord draweth nigh.”—James 5:7,8

The thought of patience in these passages is “to endure.” It was lack of endurance on the part of the apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane that was responsible for their inability to remain awake and watch with their Master. Likewise at the end of the age, those who lack patient endurance cannot be alert and faithful watchers. They become spiritually drowsy and often fall “asleep.”

During the middle of the nineteenth century many of the Lord’s people became convinced that the return of Christ was imminent, and their enthusiasm was great. However, when it seemed that the Bridegroom had tarried, their zeal and interest was tested. For some, their faith waned and faded completely. Later, however, when the announcement went forth, “Behold the Bridegroom,” the interest of many was aroused and rekindled. They began to rejoice in the presence of their returned Lord, and with renewed zeal prepared themselves so as to be ready to join the Bridegroom when the time of the wedding would arrive.

According to the Jewish custom, when the maidens, or virgins, met the bridegroom and his party, who were traveling toward his home, they simply journeyed along with them. The length of time required for this journey would depend on how far distant the bridegroom’s home might be. While Jesus did not mention this point, we think that this background of the parable warrants us in extending its lesson of watchfulness throughout the entire harvest period of the Master’s presence.

In every part of the harvest it has been important for the virgin class to be alert and watchful. This is especially true due to the fact that the length of the harvest period has been significantly longer than was at first expected. Thus the quality of patient endurance has been greatly needed in order that the virgins not become spiritually lethargic or discouraged.

On the other hand, the fact that this seeming tarrying was foretold, should in itself be a great stimulus to our faith and zeal while we continue to watch and serve. As the harvest period has continued, the reassurance of the Lord’s presence has served in a similar manner. The announcement, “Behold the Bridegroom,” has been made continuously throughout the period since his return. While it is true that the seeming delay in the establishment of the kingdom is a



test upon our faith and patience, we should rejoice in the fact that the fulfillment of the “vision” does not, and cannot, actually tarry.

### **THE BRIDE CLASS**

It is seldom possible to make a specific application of all the details of any of our Lord’s parables, and this is true of the parable of the virgins. The wise virgins of the parable seem clearly to picture the members of the bride class living at the end of the age who continue faithful, even unto death. The foolish virgins, being less alert and watchful, would well represent those less faithful to their vows of consecration.

The parable was not given for the primary purpose of identifying the bride of Christ, but, as we have seen, to emphasize the need to watch. It so happens that the role of the maidens, or virgins, in the ancient Jewish wedding custom lent itself well to teach this lesson. Faithfulness on their part was revealed by their possession not only of oil in their lamps, but also an extra supply in their vessels.

### **OIL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The oil would represent what we need in order to be faithful watchers who are spiritually alert and prepared to go with our heavenly Bridegroom and to enter the wedding. In various instances in the Bible, oil is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It would seem that also in the lesson of this parable the possession and use of a large measure of the Holy Spirit is vital to be a faithful watcher.

The possession of the Holy Spirit implies the need of faithfulness along all lines of Christian endeavor. First, it calls for a full surrender of our hearts to the Lord, a complete denial of self, and a dedication of all that we have and are to the knowing and doing of our Heavenly Father’s will. We cannot expect to go our own way, or do our own will in life, and also be filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

The possession of the Holy Spirit by the consecrated also requires the study of the truths of God’s Word, and their application in the daily affairs of life. We need to accept and be exercised by the guidance of the Scriptures regardless of the difficulties of the way that is pointed out as the one pleasing to the Lord.

Possession of the Holy Spirit impels us to faithful activity in the Lord’s service. By so doing, we, in turn, receive God’s Spirit in an ever increasing measure. Jesus said that our Father was more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him than an earthly father is to give good gifts to his children. (Luke 11:13) Prayer, then, is another means of obtaining and of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Knowing the great importance of the Holy Spirit in our lives, it is not surprising that the wise virgins of the parable could not give their oil to the foolish virgins. They told them to go into the market place to obtain their own supply. (Matt. 25:9) Since the market place of experience involves time to live the consecrated life, time to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of

God, time to study, to serve and to pray, there is the danger of waiting until it is too late to do our “purchasing” of the oil of the Holy Spirit.

#### **LET US BE WISE**

The parable is not designed to illustrate what the rewards of the faithful followers of the Master will be. It simply emphasizes that the wise virgins are invited in to the wedding, and that the door of this opportunity is closed to the foolish virgins. The bridegroom addresses and treats these as strangers, and they are greatly disappointed. The two classes of virgins does not suggest the difference between the righteous and the wicked. After all, they were all virgins who, together, went out to meet the bridegroom and accompany him to his home. However, five of them were “wise” and the others were not.

The manner in which the wise virgins displayed their faithfulness, in contrast to the general lack of faithfulness on the part of the foolish virgins, is the vital lesson of the parable, and underlines its great importance to us. We are to be alert watchers in every aspect of our Christian walk. This is just as essential now as it was before our Lord returned, for while we are walking with the Bridegroom, we do not know when our individual journey will end.

A little spiritual drowsiness on our part might give us the impression that we have plenty of time for preparation when, as far as our walk is concerned, the time may indeed be “short.” If, as alert watchers, however, we are daily faithful in the use of all the means by which our “vessels” are kept filled with the Spirit, we will be ready at any time to hear the Bridegroom extend his invitation, “Enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”—Matt. 25:21

# Parables of Luke 15

## The Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost Son

*“I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”  
—Luke 15:10*

**THE THREE PARABLES** found in Luke chapter 15 are not recorded in any of the other gospel accounts. This, however, in no way diminishes their importance to us. They were addressed particularly to the scribes and the Pharisees, but within the hearing of “the publicans and sinners” who “drew near ... to hear” Jesus.—vss. 1-3

As they had done on previous occasions, the scribes and Pharisees murmured because Jesus associated himself with sinners, even eating with them. It was the attitude of vaunted self-righteousness of these Jewish religious leaders, and their resentment of the fact that Jesus showed interest in the publicans and sinners, which gave rise to the three parables of our lesson. Of equal importance is that Jesus also taught, by these parables, that upon the basis of true repentance, sinners could attain the favor of his Heavenly Father.

### **THE LOST SHEEP**

In the parable of the lost sheep, we are told of a shepherd who had a hundred sheep, ninety-nine of which were safely in the fold. However, one had gone astray and was lost. The parable shows that the shepherd under such circumstances would leave the ninety-nine, “and go after that which is lost, until he find it.”—vs. 4

As a rebuke to the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees, the application of this lesson is evident. These religious leaders of Israel considered themselves to be in harmony with God and therefore safe within the “sheepfold” of divine care. To them the publicans and sinners were outside the realm of God’s blessings, and were “lost.” Yet, they were doing little or nothing to find and rescue them, and murmured against Jesus when he showed an interest in them.

On another occasion, and for the same reason, the scribes and Pharisees questioned the propriety of Jesus’ eating with publicans and sinners. The account says, “When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Mark 2:17) The sinners being called to repentance in this lesson would correspond to the lost sheep of the parable.

Actually, the scribes and the Pharisees were as much “lost” as were the publicans and sinners. Outwardly they made professions of holiness, but inwardly they were “full of dead men’s bones,” and were hypocritical in most of their professions. (Matt. 23:16-33) However, the lesson of the parable was based upon the professions of this hypocritical class, not what they actually were. They claimed to be the shepherds of Israel, but showed little concern for those who had gone astray, and they resented it when Jesus displayed interest in these “lost” sheep.

The parable clearly sets forth the divine attitude toward those who are lost in sin and condemned to death. That attitude is one of sympathy and love which is reflected in that most precious text, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) This love was demonstrated toward us "while we were yet sinners." (Rom. 5:8) Paul wrote that "Jesus came into the world to save sinners."—I Tim. 1:15

Since this is the loving attitude of our Heavenly Father and of Jesus toward those not yet within the special fold of divine care, it should be ours also. We should shun the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees, and make ourselves available to assist the "lost" and needy ones in the world around us. This does not mean that we are to lose interest in our brethren who are safely within the fold in order to seek and help the lost. Rather, our love should be extended beyond those who love us and with whom we are closely associated.—Matt. 5:46-48

In applying this general lesson of the parable, we do not need to make a specific application of the proportion of those in the fold to the lost sheep, which is ninety-nine to one. The reverse of this has been more nearly true, for the vast majority of mankind in all ages have not been among those safe in the fold of special divine care. Even within the nation of Israel at the time of our Lord, the publicans and sinners doubtless outnumbered those who made serious professions of endeavoring to be pleasing to God.

The ratio of the professed righteous to the sinners, however, could have been the Master's way of driving this lesson home with greater force. The thought would be that even if it were true that there was only one lost sheep, those who really loved the Lord and desired to be guided by his spirit of love could not be content until that sheep was found and brought back to the fold. This is the principle which should guide all of the Lord's people.

There is also a possible further meaning of the parable, based on the fact that in many respects the nation of Israel was typical of all mankind. We might think of the lost sheep as representing God's entire human creation, while the ninety-nine sheep which did not go astray could represent the many orders of creation which remained in harmony with God. Among these are the holy angels, "principalities and powers," "thrones," and "dominions."—Eph. 3:10; Col. 1:16

In this view, Jesus would be the "good shepherd," the representative of the Heavenly Father, the even greater shepherd. (John 10:11; Ps. 23:1) The work of recovering the lost sheep began at our Lord's First Advent. Here Jesus left the "ninety and nine"—the various orders of heavenly hosts—and came to earth "to seek and to save" the lost sheep. (Luke 19:10) This required that he be made flesh, and that he give his flesh, his humanity, in sacrifice for the sins of the world. (Heb. 2:9,14; John 1:14; 6:51) This phase of Jesus' rescue mission has already been accomplished. The lost sheep—the fallen Adamic race—has been "found," so to speak, but is not yet restored to the fold of the Creator's favor and care.

When created perfect, man not only had the opportunity to live forever in what would have become a worldwide paradise, but he was also given dominion over all of God's lower earthly creatures. (Gen. 1:27,28) The return of the lost sheep to the fold implies the restoration of this dominion which was lost because of sin. Paul wrote, "We see not yet all things put under" man,

“but we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” (Heb. 2:8,9) In other words, the rescue work has begun, and eventually—at the end of the Messianic kingdom—the lost sheep will have been returned to the fold.

This work of rescuing the sin-cursed and dying race from death is made possible by the death of Jesus as man’s Redeemer. Paul wrote that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, ... and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” Because of this, “we are ambassadors for Christ.” (II Cor. 5:19,20) The followers of Jesus are associated with him in the work of reconciling the world to God. During the Gospel Age these are being prepared to be “kings and priests unto God” to assist in bringing back the lost sheep during the age to come.—Rev. 1:6

The parable states that when the shepherd returned home after rescuing the sheep, “he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.” To this, Jesus added, “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”—Luke 15:6,7

The fact that Jesus speaks of the joy in heaven that results from the shepherd’s return with the announcement that the lost sheep has been recovered, lends weight to the thought that there is a proper larger application of the parable to the entire human race as the lost sheep, and to the ninety and nine as representing the heavenly hosts. Certainly there will be joy among all God’s intelligent creatures on every plane of existence when sinful man has been reconciled to the Creator and restored to the fold of his loving favor and care.

In this we are also reminded that all who are filled and guided by God’s Holy Spirit are of necessity pained to realize that there are those who are alienated from him through sin and its effects. We can also be sure that even now, whenever a member of the Adamic race is led to repentance through the “word of reconciliation,” and surrenders himself fully to do God’s will, there is rejoicing in heaven. Indeed, there should also be gladness among all of the Lord’s people here on earth on such occasions.

## **THE LOST COIN**

The parable of the lost coin is similar in import to that of the lost sheep. Indeed, by comparing the introduction to each it becomes evident that Jesus intended one to supplement the other. (Luke 15:4,8) It was customary among Jewish women at that time to wear on the forehead a fringe of coin bangles. These might be of gold or silver, and sometimes represented her dowry. Therefore, the loss of one of these coins would be of greater significance than merely what was represented by its intrinsic value.

The search for the coin would mean that, instead of being abandoned as something of little consequence, it was considered of great importance. The neighbors, learning first of the loss, and then of the recovery, rejoiced greatly with the woman who suffered the loss. Jesus points out, as he concludes the parable, that it is another illustration of the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.—Luke 15:8,9

In addition to the larger application of this parable to the recovery of the human race from sin and death, it further impresses the principle of interest in, and consideration for, those who are in need of help. Even one human life is of great value to our Heavenly Father, and should likewise be to us. It is important that we manifest this interest in others in our daily lives.

In this regard, we should examine ourselves and pose certain questions as to our daily dealings with mankind. How do we manifest God's spirit of love toward our fellowmen? What are we doing from day to day that substantiates our professed interest in humanity in general? How are we showing our concern for neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family? How much are we doing to help others who are sincerely trying to find their way back to God? How much are we sacrificing of time and energy in seeking to find those who may be a "lost sheep" or "lost coin?"

We know, of course, that this is not the time in God's plan for the recovery of humanity as a whole from sin and death. However, if we are to be associated with Jesus in that great future rescue work, it is essential that we demonstrate our enthusiasm now by the spirit of love which will be the basis of that great kingdom work. This we can do only by diligently, and at whatever cost may be involved, doing all we can to bless those all about us. We should be happy to provide any and all who may have a hearing ear the knowledge of God and his loving provision to restore all who are lost back to the fold of his gracious care through the Good Shepherd.

#### **THE PRODIGAL SON**

The third parable of Jesus recorded in Luke chapter 15 is an interesting story, and one which might well have been true in the experience of many throughout the centuries. A certain man, apparently of means, had two sons who, in the ordinary course of events, would inherit their father's estate. The younger of these two sons said to his father, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." The father granted the son's request, and a short time later "the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living."—vss. 12,13

Not surprisingly, as the parable continues, difficulties then came to pass. "There arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." (vss. 14,15) However, this was far from satisfactory. "He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing."—vs. 16, *Contemporary English Version*

In this degrading situation of dire need this younger son finally "came to himself," in that he realized he had acted very foolishly, and became repentant. He reflected upon the contrasting situation at home, where even his father's hired servants had plenty to eat. (Luke 15:17) He was now so humbled that he decided he would be glad to return to his father as merely a servant, not feeling worthy to be called a son any longer.

Thus, with this repentant attitude, the younger son said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." He carried out this purpose, and upon arriving home offered himself to his father as a servant.—vss. 18-21

Then comes the important lesson of the parable. The father forgave his son, and received him back into his family. Indeed, a feast was arranged to celebrate the occasion of the prodigal son's return, including the killing of a "fatted calf." (vs. 23) The feast and its accompanying merrymaking were in progress when the elder son came in from the field. However, when he learned what had happened, he was not at all pleased.

The elder son refused to take part in the celebration. He complained to his father that although he had served him faithfully throughout the years that his brother had been wasting his life, no celebration had ever been arranged for him. For him no "fatted calf" had ever been killed and no opportunity given to make merry with his friends.—vss. 28-30

This parable plainly illustrates the sin of jealousy in connection with a matter of no less importance than life itself. Unlike the elder son, who was jealous of the favor which returned to his younger brother, the father looked upon the homecoming of his wayward son as though he had received him back from the dead. (vs. 24) His sin had not destroyed the father's love for him. In fact, the father seemed to have even greater love for him than before he went astray.

It is important to note that the prodigal son had repented of his wrongdoing, and had returned humbly to his father, not even asking to be reinstated as a son, but merely that he might become one of the servants. Here we have illustrated an important principle in God's dealings with all his intelligent creatures, whether angels or men, Jews or Gentiles, Pharisees or publicans. The humble realization of one's mistakes and true heart repentance are essential in order to receive God's forgiveness.

God's love for the sin-cursed and Satan-blinded human race motivated him to send his beloved Son to be man's Redeemer and Savior. Thus he made provision for the reconciliation of mankind. As individuals, however, no one receives any lasting benefit from this except upon the basis of repentance and humble dedication to do the Father's will. This fact points out to us that there are two aspects of a sinner's return to God. There is God's part in providing the atoning blood, and there is the sinner's part of repentance and consecration.

As for the scribes and Pharisees to whom the parable was addressed, they were very much like the elder son, who thought that he was entitled to special consideration because of his superior conduct. Nothing is said in the parable to indicate that the elder son had been hypocritically righteous, although Jesus had charged the scribes and Pharisees on other occasions with hypocrisy. Evidently the Master wanted us to know that even those who sincerely serve God, and to the best of their ability endeavor to be righteous, have no right to be jealous when sinners repent and are accepted with rejoicing into the favor of the Lord.

On the other hand, the lesson might also be that no matter how outwardly righteous one might appear, to take the attitude of the elder brother in the parable would itself indicate an impure heart condition. It would surely reveal a lack of true godlikeness. Our Heavenly Father stands ready to embrace all who return to him in humility and true repentance. This is illustrated in the brief parable Jesus gave on another occasion of the Pharisee and publican who went up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee thanked God that he was not like other debased men, especially the

publican. The publican, however, smote upon his breast, and asked God to be merciful to him, a sinner. He went away justified, but the Pharisee did not.—Luke 18:10-14

Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, “Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”—Matt. 23:13,23

From these denunciations it is obvious that the scribes and Pharisees had little or no compassion for those whom they considered at variance with their own standards of holiness. Justice and mercy, based on true faith in the divine arrangements of love, had little place in their viewpoints and attitudes.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the father spoke of having received him back from the dead. (Luke 15:24) To him it was as though the young man had really been dead. Certainly we can understand the heart rejoicing and sympathetic understanding of this loving father when he saw his son “when he was yet a great way off,” walking toward him.—vs. 20

Sadly, the father’s sentiments are not shared by many, even today. Most are not willing to believe that sinners who have gone into death will be restored to life, or can possibly receive any consideration from the Heavenly Father. How thankful we are to have learned that the love of God is broader than the measure of many human minds which have been distorted by erroneous views concerning him.

The important lesson of the parable to us is that we are to maintain a sympathetic and loving attitude toward mankind. We should also rejoice at any evidence of repentance and endeavors by fallen man to walk in the ways of the Lord more uprightly. Our attitude toward those who repent of their wrongdoing should be based upon what they are today, rather than on their erroneous conduct of yesterday. Only thus we will be like our loving and merciful Heavenly Father.



# Christian Stewardship

## The Pounds and Talents

*“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”*  
—*I Corinthians 4:1,2*

**A DEDICATED FOLLOWER** of the Master is one who has committed all that he has and is to the service of the Lord, to be used in keeping with the divine will. This includes time, strength, talents, influence, money—everything. The Lord does not take these away all at once, but leaves them in the custody of the giver to be used as indicated by his sanctified judgment until completely consumed on the altar of sacrifice. Thus every true disciple is a steward over his own assets.

However, our text is speaking of another phase of Christian stewardship. Paul explains that as “ministers of Christ” we are “stewards of the mysteries of God.” These “mysteries of God” are not what we give to the Lord, but what he gives to us. Briefly stated, these mysteries are the Truth as revealed to us by God’s Holy Spirit. Jesus also identifies these, using the expression, “mysteries of the kingdom of God.”—Luke 8:10

### TWO PARABLES

Jesus related two parables which illustrate our privileges and responsibilities as stewards of the truth. One is the parable of the pounds, found in Luke 19:11-27, and the other is the parable of the talents, recorded in Matthew 25:14-30. In the parable of the pounds, Jesus likens himself to a “nobleman,” and in the parable of the talents, to a “man.” In both lessons, after delivering to his servants the “pounds” and “his goods,” Jesus represents himself as going away and returning at a later time.

In the two parables, when the Master returns there is a reckoning with his servants based upon the use they have made of that which was entrusted to them. In the case of the pounds, only one is delivered to each servant, but rewards in differing amounts are administered to the faithful. In the other parable, varying numbers of talents are distributed to the servants, but at the time of reckoning, all the faithful receive the same reward.

It is evident that both parables refer to the work of the Lord in the earth throughout the Gospel Age, and to the fact that it is accomplished by servants who are faithful to their stewardship over that which is entrusted to them for this purpose. The differences in the two parables are not contradictory, but illustrative of two important facets of the manner in which the work of God throughout the present age is accomplished.

It is important to notice that in these two lessons, that which was distributed to the servants was not previously theirs. The “pounds” belonged to the “nobleman,” and the “talents” to the “man.” The parables related by Jesus are merely illustrations of truths which are elsewhere set forth in the Bible in straightforward language. Indeed, the Scriptures reveal just what it was that Jesus

gave to his disciples, his servants, at the beginning of the Gospel Age in order that they might be properly equipped to go forth in the divine service.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples before his ascension—his “going away” according to the parables—he said to them, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) Previously, he had promised to send the Holy Spirit, which, he said, would “guide” his disciples “into all truth.”—John 16:12-15

Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth,” and very properly so. We cannot receive the Truth contained in the Scriptures into our hearts and be guided and strengthened by it without the aid of the Holy Spirit, nor can we possess the Holy Spirit apart from the Truth. Thus, when the gift of the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost it enabled them to know the Truth—to understand the marvelous teachings of Jesus which previously they could not “bear.” It was through this gift of the Holy Spirit that the “mysteries of God” became theirs to know and to use as the Lord’s stewards.

There is a close relationship between the use of our own abilities in the Lord’s service and our stewardship of the mysteries of God. Indeed, it is the Spirit of the Truth, the Holy Spirit, which energizes, or quickens us to perform faithful and acceptable service as ambassadors of Christ. It is by faithfulness in the use of the Truth that the work of the Lord during the Gospel Age is carried forward.

#### **THE SAME TO ALL**

In the parable of the pounds—a pound being a sum of money—each servant received the same amount, which was one “pound.” This represents those blessings received from the Lord which are common to all his servants, and which enable them to render acceptable service in his cause.

It seems evident that the pound represents something which the Scriptures teach is actually furnished by the Lord to his people. First, we were drawn to the Lord and to the point of full consecration by the power of the Truth. After making a full consecration to do God’s will, we received the begetting and anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is the anointing of the Holy Spirit which, in particular, authorizes us to be partners in the work of the Lord. To assure us that our labors would be acceptable, despite the imperfections of our flesh, we also received the robe of Christ’s righteousness for our justification.

It is through the proclamation of the Truth that God’s work during the Gospel Age is accomplished in the earth. Paul wrote, concerning that work: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then [because of this] we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”—II Cor. 5:19,20

#### **THE TALENTS**

The parable of the talents presents a different viewpoint—another aspect of Christian stewardship. The number of talents given to each servant varied. Jesus said, “The kingdom of

heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.”—Matt. 25:14,15

The word “several” in verse 15 is translated from the Greek word *idios*, and has the meaning of “self” or “own.” In addition, the word “ability” in this passage, translated from the Greek word *dunamis*, means “force” or “miraculous power.” The *Emphatic Diaglott* literal translation of this portion of the verse reads, “... to each according to the own power.”

In the New Testament, this same Greek word, *dunamis*, is translated “miracles” eight times and “miracle” once. In many other usages, miraculous power or authority is implied. For example, Peter wrote concerning the Master’s followers that they are “kept by the power [*dunamis*] of God through faith unto salvation.” (I Pet. 1:5) Jesus said to his disciples, “Ye shall receive power [*dunamis*], after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you.”—Acts. 1:8

Based upon the general use of the Greek word *dunamis* in the New Testament, and the literal translation of the Greek in the *Diaglott*—“the own power”—we suggest that the expression, “according to” refers to the exercise of the power and authority of the “man” of the parable in the distribution of his own “goods,” rather than the power of the servants. This does not relieve the servants in the parable of the responsibility to use their own natural endowments in the service of the Master, but emphasizes that the “goods” distributed by the Lord quicken and energize these to make their use effective and acceptable in his sight.

This suggestion is in keeping with II Peter 1:2,3, which reads, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power [*dunamis*] hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” Here we are reminded that “all things” pertaining to our service for the Lord and our relationship with him are gifts distributed in accordance with, and by, divine power. This would include the “talents” of the parable.

This distribution of gifts to Jesus’ followers is said to be “through the knowledge” of the Lord—in other words, through the Truth. We receive this knowledge through the revealing power of the Holy Spirit. This is why the expression, “Spirit of truth,” is used by Jesus in promising the disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit.

From one standpoint, as illustrated in the parable of the pounds, the Lord’s consecrated people, through the Truth, receive a common endowment which enables them to render acceptable service to God. From another perspective, however, their opportunities and abilities to serve differ, and this is indicated by the parable of the talents.

In Ephesians 4:7,11,12, Paul explains what the impartation of the Holy Spirit means to the disciples of Jesus with respect to the work of the ministry. He wrote, “Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ”—in keeping with the manner in which, by divine authority, Christ distributes the “talents.” We read further, “He gave [or made] some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For

the perfecting [*Diaglott*: “complete qualification”] of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

In I Corinthians 12:4-11, Paul presents a similar thought: “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations [*Diaglott*: “services”], but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he [the Lord] will.”

The gifts of the Spirit referred to by Paul which were outwardly miraculous in nature were given only to the twelve apostles and certain other individuals in the Early Church to whom the apostles imparted some of these powers. Thus, these special “gifts” were only in operation for a limited period of time—until the apostles and those of that generation “fell asleep” in death.” However, there are many other “diversities of gifts” with which the true followers of the Master in every part of the Gospel Age have been endowed.

In Romans 12:3-8, we read, “I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Paul admonishes further in this account that in the use of these gifts “love” should “be without dissimulation,” that we should “abhor that which is evil,” and “cleave to that which is good.” “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.” To this he adds that we be “not slothful,” but “fervent in Spirit.” (Rom. 12:9-11) Possibly Paul had in mind the unfaithful servant in the parable who was described by Jesus as “wicked and slothful.”—Matt. 25:26

The Apostle Peter confirms Paul’s view of Christian stewardship, and also exhorts to faithfulness in the use of the gifts with which we have been endowed by the Holy Spirit. He wrote, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability [Greek: “forcefulness”] which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever.”—I Pet. 4:10,11

In this passage, the Greek word which is translated “manifold” means varied, or diversified. We are made stewards of the “diversified” grace of God, manifested in the many spiritual gifts by which we are qualified for the ministry. It is these many and varied gifts given by God, operating through our natural, but imperfect faculties, which seem to be represented by the talents of the parable.

On the other hand, as we have noted, those treasures of the Holy Spirit imparted through the Truth which are received in common by Jesus’ true followers may well be represented by the pounds of the other parable. We need both the pounds and the talents, and the spiritual guidance to use them properly, to be acceptable and efficient servants of the Lord.

### **FAITHFULNESS**

Faithfulness to our stewardship of the mysteries of God calls for the dedication and use of all our natural endowments. These we have given to the Lord, and he allows us to keep them to use for him, sacrificing them in the faithful discharge of our stewardship. Our natural abilities play a part in the work of the ministry, and without doubt are taken into consideration by the Lord. However, some of Jesus’ own apostles were ignorant and unlearned men according to the standards of this world, yet through the power of the Holy Spirit they were used mightily in the divine service. By contrast, Paul was well equipped with natural talents, and he used them faithfully, sacrificing them in the interests of his stewardship. He wrote, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.”—Phil. 3:7

Though highly talented in many ways, when Paul’s vision became impaired, which no doubt hindered him to a degree in his ministry, the Lord did not deem it best to restore his eyesight. In humility, he wrote, “Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations [with which God had blessed him], there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me. ... For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power [*dunamis*] of Christ may rest upon me.”—II Cor. 12:7-9

The power of the Holy Spirit could operate in and through Paul regardless of his infirmities. This is true of all the Lord’s consecrated people. In order for it to be a reality for us, however, we must yield up our all for his use. Only thus can we be faithful in our stewardship of “the mysteries of God.”

### **THE INCREASE**

According to both parables, faithfulness resulted in the increase of the “goods” which were delivered to the servants. The one who was given five talents gained five more, and the one who was given two talents gained an additional two. Each of the servants in the parable of the pounds was given a pound. One gained ten pounds, and another five.

In considering what is represented by these increases, we should at first remember that we cannot expect a parable to fit the intended lesson in every detail. The evident principal purpose of the two parables under consideration was to encourage zeal on the part of the Lord’s people

throughout the Gospel Age. They teach that the Lord Jesus was going away, and that he would return to reckon with his servants. The parables further show that to render acceptable service the Lord's servants would be endowed with gifts from him, and that they would be rewarded for their faithfulness.

These two parables illustrate the partnership of Jesus and his footstep followers in carrying out the divine will. We know that according to God's plan, his work throughout the earth during the Gospel Age has been that of calling and preparing a "people for his name" to live and reign with Christ. (Acts 15:14) To begin with, these people are of the sin-cursed and dying world. Through the ministry of those who are endowed with the Truth and its Spirit, these are reached and reconciled to God through their belief in Christ and their full consecration to do the Lord's will. It is thus that they receive the Spirit of sonship, and are authorized to serve as "ambassadors for Christ" in the work of the ministry, conducted through the use of the "word of reconciliation."

The Bible assures us that as a result of the reign of Christ the earth will be filled with a "knowledge of the LORD." (Isa. 11:9) This does not mean that it will be written across the skies. It simply means that the hearts and minds of the people will be filled with that knowledge. Concerning those of the Gospel Age who are endowed with God's Holy Spirit, to the extent that their faithful service contributes to the implanting of the same Spirit of the Truth in the minds and hearts of others, this could be considered an increase.

This thought seems to be further borne out by noting the rewards administered to the faithful ones of the parables. In the parable of the pounds, the one who gained ten pounds was given authority over ten cities, and the one who gained five pounds was given authority over five cities. The rewards given in the parable are those of rulership.

In the parable of the talents, the promise to all the faithful is twofold—they were to be made rulers over many things, and were bidden to enter into "the joy" of the Lord. Thus both rulership and rejoicing are assured to those who faithfully use their talents.

With these rewards in mind, let us note what Paul wrote in his letter to the brethren at Philippi. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights; ... Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." (Phil. 2:14-16) Thus Paul indicated that if the brethren at Philippi remained faithful they would be a proof "in the day of Christ" that he had "not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." This, he explained, would lead to his rejoicing in that day, his "joy of the Lord" promised in the parable.—Matt. 25:21,23

Even more pointed in this connection is Paul's statement to the Thessalonian brethren. To them he wrote, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." (I Thess. 2:19,20) Here Paul explains that both his "crown"—representing rulership—and his rejoicing when reckoned with by Jesus at his return would be his because of these faithful brethren to whom he had ministered the Truth. They would be part of the increase, having been endowed with the Spirit of the Truth and proven faithful to their stewardship.

Along the same line, Paul wrote to the brethren at Corinth, “Ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (II Cor. 1:14) Peter, Apollos, and others had also labored in Corinth, and thereby assisted in establishing the Corinthian brethren in the Truth and in the Lord. Likewise, the brethren in Corinth had contributed to some extent to Paul’s own upbuilding in the faith. It was concerning the Lord’s work there that Paul wrote, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man [the gifts pertaining to the ministry]? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.”—I Cor. 3:5-8

Thus the increase resulting from our faithful use of the Lord’s goods seems clearly indicated. It is also encouraging to realize that the cooperative efforts of the brethren are also mentioned by Paul in connection with the increase with which the Lord blesses their efforts. There are some who might feel disappointed that the Lord has never used them individually to interest others in the Truth and bring them to the point of full consecration. Yet, it is also true that there are probably few instances in which an interested one has been found and brought to a knowledge of the Truth, except by the cooperation of many of “like precious faith.”

It is because all of his servants work together that the Lord’s work prospers. In this way, all can have a share in it. Not all have received the gift of prophecy—public speaking. Not all are teachers. However, all have, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, been endowed with some talent which can be used in the general ministry of the Truth, the ministry of reconciliation. As quoted earlier, Paul explains that our gifts differ “according to the grace that is given unto us.” All the Lord’s consecrated people have been given the privilege of “ministry” as one of the gifts of the Spirit. Ministry simply means service, and there are many ways in which we can serve the Lord, the Truth, one another, and all those with whom we come in contact.

Paul also mentions “he that giveth [impart or share],” and “he that sheweth mercy.” (Rom. 12:8) One who is filled with the Spirit would be specially qualified to show mercy, and thus contribute to the building up of those who need to be helped along this line. What a blessing to others are those who are able to “impart” love and sympathy for the comfort of the Lord’s people!

The Holy Spirit energizes those who receive it. Paul says that God has not given us the “spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound [disciplined] mind.” (II Tim. 1:7) The Holy Spirit gives strength to the timid and fearful, enabling them to serve in ways and to an extent that would not be possible if they depended only upon their natural abilities.

The Lord has also given us the Spirit “of love.” Paul wrote that the “love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.” How worthless would be our ministry if it were not motivated by love. It would be nothing more than “sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”—Rom. 5:5; I Cor. 13:1

Through the gift of the Spirit we are also enabled to have a “sound,” or disciplined, mind. Such a mind is one that is endowed and regulated by the truth of God’s plan and his character. This gift also is vital to an acceptable and effective service to the Lord. How futile would be our efforts as ministers of reconciliation apart from having the Spirit of a disciplined mind.

#### **THE “WICKED” AND “SLOTHFUL”**

The servant who was given one talent and buried it in the ground is described as “wicked and slothful,” and the servant who wrapped his pound in a napkin is described as “wicked.” The practical lesson of both parables is the importance of faithfulness in our stewardship, regardless of how much of the Master’s “goods” he may have entrusted to us. The Scriptures indicate that those who are faithful or unfaithful in things which are “least” will likewise be faithful or unfaithful in “much.”—Luke 16:10

Speaking of his servants, Jesus said, “Ye are the light of the world,” and he admonished them not to put their light under a “bushel.” (Matt. 5:14-16) In the parables, the wrapping of the pound in a napkin and the burying of the talent in the earth seem to suggest the same idea of permitting the Truth to be hidden from others through our unfaithfulness.

The unfaithful servant in both parables speaks of the hardness of their master. This seems to be but an excuse. Jesus explains that if this is what the servants really believed, it should have spurred them on to faithfulness, rather than otherwise. Here we are reminded that the human heart is very deceitful. Let us be watchful lest we be found making excuses for unfaithfulness.

Let us keep before our minds the practical lesson of both parables, which is that “it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.” We have been made “stewards of the mysteries of God.” In whatever way, or ways, we have been endowed by the Holy Spirit to minister the Truth and its blessings to others, let us do so with diligence, for this is the great project upon which we have embarked. With the Lord’s blessing, we know that his eternal purpose can and will succeed. God’s work will be accomplished, and through our own faithfulness we can share in his joy.



# Rebukes to Israel's Religious Leaders

## The Good Samaritan and The Unjust Steward

*“Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”*  
—Luke 10:21

**MANY OF THE RICH TREASURES** of truth revealed by Jesus were set forth by him in response to controversial questions asked by the religious leaders of his day. Having the ability to read their hearts, he also drew important lessons from their hypocritical practices. The Master did not respond to the Jewish religious leaders simply to level criticism against them. Rather, he did so to point out to the people that in order for them to follow the God of their forefathers, they must think and act very differently from those who at that time were sitting “in Moses’ seat.” (Matt. 23:2) The two parables of our lesson—The Good Samaritan and The Unjust Steward—are both examples of Jesus’ teachings in this regard. They also convey lessons which are important for consecrated footstep followers of Jesus at the present time.

The parable of the good samaritan, as well as the circumstances surrounding it, are recorded in Luke 10:25-37. Beginning with verse 25, the account states that “a certain lawyer”—probably a Levite—“stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Here the “temptation” was to induce Jesus to say something that could be misconstrued as being against the Law given to Israel by Moses.

### **JESUS’ RESPONSE TO THE LAWYER**

Jesus, however, turned the question back to the lawyer, asking him what the Law said. (vs. 26) The lawyer was well acquainted with the Law, and he quoted Moses’ own summation of it—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.” (vs. 27; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18) Jesus replied to the lawyer, “Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”—Luke 10:28; Lev. 18:5

Jesus knew that God had promised life to anyone who could keep the Law inviolate. By answering the lawyer’s question in this way, the religious rulers could not accuse him of setting aside the teachings of Moses. Jesus knew, of course, that the lawyer could not actually gain eternal life by his attempts to keep the Law. This was not the fault of the Law, but was due to the imperfection of the people—including the religious leaders—resulting from original sin. As Paul explained, the Law was designed to give life, but failed only because of the inability of fallen humans to measure up to its requirements.—Rom. 7:10-14

### **SIMILAR ENCOUNTER WITH YOUNG RULER**

Jesus, reading the lawyer’s heart, knew that he was not sincerely inquiring the way of life. Had he been, doubtless the Master would have directed his mind beyond the Law as a source of life. He did do this in the case of the rich young ruler who asked him essentially the same question as

did the lawyer. (Matt. 19:16-26; Luke 18:18-30) In answer to the young man's question, Jesus said, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."—Matt. 19:17

Then the young man asked, "Which?" Jesus quoted some of the Ten Commandments, and also the one, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The young man claimed that he had been keeping these commandments, and evidently he had been sincerely trying to do so. (vss. 18-20) Mark's account informs us that Jesus loved this young man, and replying to him said, "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me."—Mark 10:21

Because this young man was earnestly seeking the way of life, Jesus showed his love by introducing him to the only way that would be open during the Gospel Age. It was to be a costly, narrow, and difficult way. It was a way to life that would lead into sacrificial death, as symbolized by the cross. The young man, having great possessions, did not find it in his heart to make such a great sacrifice as outlined by the Master, so he went away sorrowful. However, Jesus did present the opportunity to him, and even emphasized the heavenly nature of the life the young man would receive if he accepted the Master's invitation and proved faithful unto death. "Thou shalt have treasure in heaven," Jesus said.—Matt. 19:21

#### **"WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?"**

In the case of the lawyer who asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life, he could find no fault with the reply. Indeed, the Master had confirmed his "reading" of the Law, and he was of those who professed great loyalty to its teachings. However, wishing perhaps to justify himself even further in the sight of his friends, he asked Jesus for a clarification of the commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," and asked, "Who is my neighbour?"—Luke 10:29

It was in response to this question that Jesus related the parable of the good samaritan. In this parable, a "certain man" traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho "fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead." (vs. 30) Then a "certain priest," traveling the same route, noticed the robbed and wounded man, but instead of stopping to assist the unfortunate one, "passed by on the other side." "Likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side."—vss. 31,32

Here were two people who, according to their standing as religious servants, should have shown compassion for the robbed and beaten man, regardless of who he may have been, but they did not. They "passed by on the other side," as though to ease their conscience by not getting too close a look at the suffering man.

#### **THE SAMARITAN'S EXAMPLE**

Continuing in the parable, there was "a certain Samaritan" who, "as he journeyed," also came across the man who had been robbed and nearly killed. The Israelites despised the Samaritans, who, so far as they were concerned, were not God's people at all. This made the lesson of the parable all the more pointed to those to whom it was first addressed, for this despised Samaritan did show compassion for the man lying almost dead by the roadside. He bound up the man's

wounds, “pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” He even arranged for the innkeeper to continue caring for the man, promising to pay any balance of the bill when he returned that way.—Luke 10:33-35

After relating the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer which one of these three men was a “neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves.” There was only one answer the lawyer could give, which was the man who showed mercy—he was the real neighbor. Then Jesus said to the lawyer, “Go, and do thou likewise.” In other words, Jesus told the lawyer that if he manifested the same spirit of compassion and helpfulness toward those in need, as the Samaritan did, he would be fulfilling the commandment to love his neighbor as himself.—vss. 36,37

### **HOW TO GAIN LIFE**

When the lawyer quoted the Law correctly, Jesus said to him, “This do, and thou shalt live.” (vs. 28) Jesus did not imply by this that the lawyer could gain eternal life apart from the provisions of the ransom. It was simply that he did not consider it the due time to explain the divine plan further to this man who was merely seeking to find something against him.

No one can gain life, either in this age or in the age to come, apart from faith in the shed blood of the Redeemer. However, as James wrote, “Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:17,20,26) This means that one’s life must be brought into conformity with faith in the ransom through obedience to divine law. As we have seen, in the present age it is God’s will that believers lay down their lives in sacrifice, following in the footsteps of Jesus. It is thus that they demonstrate their faith.

The great principles of the Law given by Moses are binding upon these, and in addition Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” (John 13:34; 15:12,17) Jesus’ love for his disciples, and indeed for the whole world, led him to lay down his life in sacrifice on their behalf, and his faithful followers are “planted together in the likeness of his death.” (Rom. 6:5) In this way they demonstrate their wholehearted love for the Heavenly Father, and for Christ Jesus.

As we have noted, to the rich young ruler whom Jesus invited to give up all that he had in sacrifice, Jesus said he would receive “treasure in heaven.” The “call” of the present age is a heavenly one. (Heb. 3:1) Those who meet the conditions of this call by being faithful unto death will attain “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) They will be made like Jesus and share with him the place which he went away to prepare.—John 14:1-3; I John 3:1,2

### **ATTAINING LIFE IN THE NEXT AGE**

During the next age—the time of Christ’s Messianic kingdom—those who attain eternal life will also need to accept the provision of life made for them through the redemptive work of Jesus. They will also have to conform to the laws of God as they will be expressed through the agencies of the kingdom. God’s Law, in principle, never changes, so during the Messianic kingdom it will be essential for all who attain life eternal to love the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and also to love their neighbors as themselves, even as set forth by Moses, and reaffirmed by the Master.

All of this is implied in Jesus' statement to the lawyer to the effect that if he kept God's Law as it had been expressed by the great lawgiver, Moses, he would have "eternal life." Jesus did not then explain that a truly favorable opportunity to do this would not be offered until the Messianic age, during the "times of restitution." (Acts 3:21) The lawyer was not then ready to receive further truths than Jesus imparted to him. We can now rejoice, however, to realize that all will be given an opportunity and the needed assistance, when the due time comes, to practice the divine law of love. All who will live forever on the earth will become true neighbors to one another in a worldwide paradise.

### **THE UNJUST STEWARD**

The parable of the unjust steward is recorded in Luke 16:1-12. It conveys an important lesson to all who are endeavoring to please God rather than men. In it, Jesus tells of a certain rich man who had received a report that his steward was unfaithful in the handling of his financial affairs. The rich man informed the unfaithful steward that his services were to be terminated, although he was allowed to continue temporarily—perhaps until another man could be trained for the position.

All stewards of that time had full authority to do with their master's goods as they chose and deemed wise. This arrangement was predicated on the assumption that they were honest and trustworthy, and would in no way misuse the wealth of which they were given such complete charge. This is expressed by Paul when he wrote, "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."—I Cor. 4:2

The record states that the steward of the parable was unable to work, and too proud to beg, so he devised a scheme which he believed would afford him some degree of security after his stewardship was terminated. He called in one after another of the rich man's debtors and authorized them to make drastic reductions in the amounts they owed. Thus he used his position of authority to promote his own interests, for he believed his action would cause his master's debtors to feel very friendly toward him, so that when he was finally removed from his stewardship they would take him into their houses and care for his needs.

In the preceding chapter of Luke, there are three other parables recorded, all of which were addressed to the scribes and Pharisees (see May 2015 issue). The introduction to this parable reads, "He said also unto his disciples" (Luke 16:1), indicating that at least certain parts of it were to have a special meaning for them, consequently for all his true followers. In examining the details of the parable we will endeavor to distinguish between the lessons intended for the scribes and Pharisees and those which applied to the disciples.

### **LESSONS FOR SCRIBES AND PHARISEES**

The unjust steward of the parable would seem to represent the scribes and the Pharisees as the religious leaders of Israel, since like them, he was about to lose his stewardship. They sat in Moses' seat, and until they were cast off served as God's stewards in handling the religious interests of the nation. At the time the parable was given, the scribes and Pharisees were in much the same position as the unjust steward. Jesus had served notice that they were to be replaced,

although they were continuing to serve. “The law and the prophets were until John,” Jesus explained, “since that time the kingdom of God is preached.”—vs. 16

While John the Baptist was the last of the prophets, the age of the Law and the prophets was continuing through a transition period, so Jesus still recognized the position of the scribes and Pharisees. They were not fully aware of the great change that was soon to occur, although they seemed to sense that Jesus directed the parable against them. The record states, “The Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.”—vs. 14

Then Jesus impressed the lesson upon the Pharisees, saying, “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” (vs. 15) In reducing the amounts owed by his master’s debtors, the unjust steward endeavored to make himself “highly esteemed among men.” Jesus told Israel’s religious leaders that was what they were endeavoring to do, thus identifying them as being represented by the unjust steward.

#### **“CHILDREN OF LIGHT”**

In relating the parable, Jesus said that “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” (vs. 8) It was the course taken by the unjust steward that Jesus is using here to illustrate the wisdom of the “children of this world.” This would indicate that the scribes and Pharisees, as the religious leaders of Israel and supposedly “children of light,” while selfishly endeavoring to justify themselves before men, were not as wise as this steward. Indeed, until Jesus came on the scene to begin the work of a new age, these religious leaders, as God’s representatives, were to be his light-bearers in the world.

The parable states that the “lord,”—that is, the rich man—commended the action of the unjust steward. The Greek word here translated “commended” would be better translated “applauded.” (vs. 8, *Emphatic Diaglott*) This simply means that the rich man recognized the shrewdness of his steward in thus taking care of his own interests while he still had an opportunity to do so. The moral aspect of what he did is not here under consideration.

#### **CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD WISER**

The unjust steward in his shrewdness was like “the children of this world,” and so far as his own interests were concerned he acted more wisely than the scribes and Pharisees were doing. Of them Jesus said, “The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.”—Matt. 23:2-4

This indicates that in this respect the scribes and Pharisees were pursuing a course quite opposite to that of the unjust steward. Instead of lightening the burdens of the people, they were increasing them. They desired the plaudits of men, just as Jesus had explained, but were not using even ordinary worldly wisdom to obtain them.

“All their works,” Jesus said, “they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ.”—vss.5-8

The unjust steward of the parable realized that he could not gain the favor of men by using his master’s wealth for himself. The scribes and Pharisees did use their position of trust to impress the people with their greatness, but by increasing their burdens and making gain for themselves as a result, they did not gain the respect of the common people. It is no wonder that Jesus indicated the unjust steward was wiser than “the children of light.”

### **LESSONS FOR THE DISCIPLES**

Having pointed out to the scribes and Pharisees their lack of wisdom in view of the position in which they would soon find themselves. Jesus turned to his disciples, and according to the *King James Version*, said, “I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail [*Strongs*: cease or die], they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”—Luke 16:9

New Creatures in Christ Jesus are not to use their stewardship to make friends for themselves from among their fellowmen. They are to sacrifice every self-interest so that the Lord’s name might be glorified. We have given our “all” to the Lord, and he has made us stewards over it to use in his service. In verse 9, the phrase “they may receive you into everlasting habitations” seems to refer to the Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus, who will receive us at the end of our earthly course, if we are faithful, to “an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”—II Cor. 5:1

The phrase in verse 9 in which Jesus instructs his disciples to “make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness” does not seem to fit the promise of being received into “everlasting habitations” if faithful in so doing. However, by looking at verses 10 and 11 we get an insight as to what the Lord meant. These verses read: “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?”—Luke 16:10,11

### **UNRIGHTEOUS MAMMON AND TRUE RICHES**

The “least” and the “much” referred to in verse 10 are described in verse 11 as “the unrighteous mammon” and the “true riches.” “Who will commit to your trust the true riches?” Jesus asked, if you have been unfaithful in the use of the “least,” “the unrighteous mammon.”

The “unrighteous mammon” would represent all the things we once called our own, but have now dedicated to the Lord. While they are “unrighteous,” imperfect, they are acceptable to God through Christ Jesus. Having devoted our all to the Lord, he has made us stewards of what now belongs to him, to be used in the furtherance of his cause, not our own. Based on this understanding, Jesus’ instruction in verse 9 that we make “friends of the mammon of

unrighteousness” simply means that we are to be faithful in our stewardship over earthly goods, the “least” of true value, just as we should be over spiritual treasures of eternal worth.

These “least” things may vary in value, as illustrated by the widow’s mite on the one hand, to considerable wealth on the other—from small abilities to outstanding talents along one or more lines. However, in any case they are still “least” as compared with the “true riches,” “the mysteries of God,” the truth, over which we have also been made stewards. (I Cor. 4:1) These “true riches” are the “much” entrusted to the Lord’s people, and over which we are admonished to be faithful.

Unlike the “least” things which we have dedicated to the Lord, “the mysteries of God” never did belong to us. The Truth belongs to the Lord, and is entrusted to us for our sanctification and to use in furthering the interests of his cause in the earth. Of what greater worth are these true riches than the meager offering we make to the Lord when we give him our all. How important it is that we be faithful in discharging the responsibilities of our stewardship over the Truth.

Our stewardship of the “least” and the “much”—the “unrighteous mammon” and the “true riches”—runs more or less concurrently. When responding to the call of God we dedicate our all to his service. This answer of a good conscience is a demonstration of our appreciation of the Truth, the “true riches.” As, day by day, we use faithfully the “least” things, the “unrighteous mammon” which we have given to the Lord, our appreciation of the “true riches” increases, and we become better qualified to exercise our stewardship over them. On the other hand, unfaithfulness in the “least” things could lead to the loss of the “true riches” entirely.

To have our stewardship of the “true riches” withdrawn would lead to a great loss in the future. Jesus explains this: “If ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?” (Luke 16:12) “The mysteries of the kingdom” over which we have been made stewards belong to the Lord, not to us. However, if we are faithful stewards, we will receive rewards which will be our “own.”

## **BE FAITHFUL STEWARDS**

Jesus promised, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10) We will not be made stewards over the crown of life. This priceless reward will be our “own” if we are found faithful to receive it. “Glory and honour and immortality” will be the actual possession of those who are faithful stewards over the Truth, the “true riches,” and over the “unrighteous mammon” which they have given to the Lord, and which he now permits them to use in his service.—Rom. 2:7

Thus we see that the parable of the unjust steward conveys a very heart-searching lesson to the followers of Jesus, and at the same time is a condemning depiction of the hypocrisy and injustices of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day who, as a class, were about to lose their stewardship. We have been entrusted with the promotion of the Truth. Let us not betray this trust by endeavoring to gain anything for ourselves from our stewardship.

Only the reasonable necessities of life are to be taken from what we have dedicated to the Lord. This is the teaching and example of Jesus and his apostles. We are not to be “wise” like the

unjust steward, and use the “mammon of unrighteousness” to promote our own selfish interests in life. However, we are to be faithful in our stewardship over these temporal things and direct their use toward the development of our New Creature. To the world in general this view and way of life may seem foolish. The treasures we are laying up in heaven, however, are of far greater value than any advantages we could secure by misusing the perishable “mammon of unrighteousness.”

Paul wrote, “Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.” (I Cor. 4:11-13) Thus does the beloved Paul set forth the cost of faithful stewardship over the mysteries of God.



# The Parable of the Penny

*“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.”*  
—Matthew 20:1,2

**IN THE PARABLE OF THE** penny, recorded in Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus tells us of a householder who left his home early in the morning to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. As indicated in our opening Scripture, he agreed with these to pay them a penny [Greek: *Denarius*] for a day’s work. Three hours later, while at the marketplace, the householder saw other potential laborers “standing idle,” and he said to them, “Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you.” They agreed, and went to labor in the vineyard.—vss. 3,4

At the sixth and ninth hours the householder similarly hired additional workers. At the eleventh hour he found still others who were idle, and said to them, “Go ye also into the vineyard.” (vss. 5-7) Here the *King James Version* adds, “And whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive,” as in the case of those hired at the third hour. However, this phrase is omitted in most other translations with respect to the eleventh-hour workers. At the close of the day, all the laborers received the same pay, which was the penny agreed upon by the householder when he hired the first workers in the morning.—vss. 8-10

In the parable, these “first” ones to be hired are said to complain because they did not receive more than those who worked fewer hours. (vss. 10-12) The householder’s reply to this complaint is in the form of a simple question: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” (vs. 15) An important prerogative of our Heavenly Father is thus set forth, upon which the Apostle Paul enlarged.

Paul said, “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. . . . Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” (Rom. 9:16-21) A more understandable rendering of verse 21 is found in the *Contemporary English Version*, which reads, “Doesn’t a potter have the right to make a fancy bowl and a plain bowl out of the same lump of clay?”

It would seem that one of the important lessons of the parable of the penny is that none of God’s servants has the right to criticize him for the manner in which he bestows his benefactions. Certainly any “wages” he may pay are actually unearned, hence manifestations of divine grace. Paul wrote, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”—Eph. 2:8

## THE SETTING

The setting of the “penny” parable throws much light on its purpose and meaning. In the previous chapter of Matthew’s gospel, it is recorded that a young man had approached Jesus and asked him what he could do to inherit eternal life. Jesus’ ultimate answer to this man was, “Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”—Matt. 19:16-21; Luke 18:18-22

The account states that “when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.” (Matt. 19:22) Puzzled by this, the disciples asked, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus replied, “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.” (vss. 25,26) Then Peter, evidently having in mind the invitation to the young man to give up all his possessions and follow Jesus, brashly said, “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?”—vs. 27

Jesus’ reply to Peter’s question was: “Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.”—vss. 28-30

The Master’s answer to Peter is his introduction to the parable of the penny. This fact is obscured somewhat by the chapter division made by the translators. However, this is overcome to some extent in some translations by the placement of a paragraph sign at the beginning of verse 27, in chapter 19, and indicating the continuance of the same subject through verse 16 in chapter 20.

This continuance of the lesson from chapter 19 to chapter 20 of Matthew is indicated by Jesus’ opening words to the parable—“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto. . .” Also, at the close of the parable, Jesus makes this statement: “So the last shall be first, and the first last.” (Matt. 20:16) These words repeat what he had said at the end of chapter 19. In other words, Jesus, at the end of the parable, is simply noting that the parable is the explanation of how “the first shall be last” and “the last shall be first,” as stated in verse 30 of the preceding chapter.

Prior to Pentecost, before the apostles received the Holy Spirit and were able to discern the true meaning of the promises pertaining to their heavenly inheritance, they displayed some anxiety over what their reward for following the Master would really turn out to be. In a vague sort of way they believed that they would share in the honors of his kingdom, but with this they were not entirely satisfied. Some wanted to be greatest in the kingdom. James and John wanted to sit, one on the right hand and the other on the left hand of Jesus in the kingdom.

Now circumstances had again reminded them of what they might expect to receive, hence the question, “What shall we have therefore?” Jesus had explained to the young rich man that if he would give up all that he had and become his follower, he would have treasures in heaven. It is doubtful if the apostles at that time understood what this meant. They did not expect a heavenly reward. They expected to be co-rulers with Jesus in an earthly kingdom centered in Jerusalem, but now he had mentioned treasures in heaven. What did he mean?

This question was of vital concern to them because they had done exactly what Jesus suggested to the rich young ruler—they had given up all they had, and had become his followers. If this rich man could buy treasures in heaven with his riches, to what would they be entitled for the giving up of their all, which was doubtless much less?

In addition, the apostles had been following Jesus for some time—from nearly the beginning of his ministry. Would any consideration be given to this? There is no evidence that they were complaining, but they surely were concerned—indeed, overly concerned—as to what they would receive in return for giving up all that they had. This, of course, is understandable, because they were still natural men, and had not yet received the begetting of God’s Holy Spirit.

### **THE BOUNTIFUL REWARD**

Jesus had reassured his disciples in a marvelous manner that, if faithful in following him, they would receive a far greater reward than anything to which they were entitled. In the time of the “regeneration”—the Messianic Age of restitution—when he would sit on the “throne of his glory,” they also would be enthroned, to share with him in the work of judging Israel and the whole world of mankind. In addition to this, they were to inherit eternal life—immortality—as was later revealed to them.

There is no real comparison between this “prize of the high calling” and the few earthly possessions that Jesus’ followers gave up to be his disciples. There is also no real comparison between the eternal years of joy with the Lord on the other side of the veil, and the few short years of imperfect service amid trial and suffering which the followers of Christ render now. The disciples, however, had not yet grasped this larger viewpoint of their relationship to the Master.

When the apostles were arguing over which one of them would be greatest in the kingdom, Jesus gave them a lesson in humility by calling attention to the humbleness of a child and stated that they should be as a little child. (Matt. 18:1-3; Mark 9:35,36) So now, seeing that they were too concerned over how much they would receive in return for following him, he related the parable of the penny to help them see that all his faithful followers would receive a just and bountiful reward, greater than anything of which they were worthy.

Of even greater importance then, and throughout the age, is the need to have full confidence in Jesus and in his Heavenly Father. With that should come the recognition that they have the right to reward their servants in any way they desire, and that whatever rewards they mete out are unmerited. This has been an important lesson for all of the Lord’s people. It is by grace that we attain unto the “great salvation,” and not by any meritorious works of our own.—Heb. 2:3

That the amount of work done by the followers of the Master has no specific bearing on the reward received, is emphasized in the parable by the statement that the first became last and the last became first. This is simply an exchange of positions. The initial workers hired put in more hours, but then the “last” ones employed were paid the same as the “first.” Similarly, the original “first” ones were paid the same as “last.” All the laborers received the “penny,” emphasizing that the number of hours worked did not enter into the amount of wages paid.

Jesus taught that “wonderful works” would not earn his favor. He stated, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done wonderful works?” Jesus explained that he would say to these, “I never knew you.”—Matt. 7:22,23

This does not mean that the Lord’s people are not expected to sacrifice and serve. Those in the parable were hired to work. However, it is the matter of faithfulness in service that is important. This is indicated by the statement at the end of the parable, “Many be called, but few chosen.” (Matt. 20:16) Those who ultimately will be enthroned with Jesus are described in Revelation 17:14 as those who not only are “called,” but are also “chosen, and faithful.” Faithfulness, however, is not determined by the length of time served, nor by the amount of sacrifice, but whether or not the service is rendered in a way pleasing to the Lord.

The motive for serving the Lord is one of the vital considerations from this lesson. Paul wrote that even though he gave all that he had to feed the poor—as Jesus had suggested to the rich young ruler—and did not have love, it would profit him nothing. One might even give his body to be burned, but it would be to no profit so far as treasures in heaven are concerned, if it were done from any other motive than unselfish love.—I Cor. 13:3

There is only one sense in which the amount we give of “goods” or “time” enters into acceptable service to the Lord. That is, it must be our all. This “all” of the disciples of Christ in every part of the age includes time, talents, strength, and goods. In the parable these are all illustrated by the element of time. Those who were hired early in the morning had to spend the entire day working in the vineyard in order to obtain the “penny.” Those hired at the eleventh hour had to be faithful during the one hour remaining of the day, for this was their all.

In Jesus’ day, the “all” of the apostles who had been fishermen would be different from the “all” of Matthew, the tax collector. However, regardless of how little or how much our all may be, if we give it freely and with love, we will receive the “penny.” What a wonderful arrangement this is! It is encouraging to the widow with her “mite,” and it is a reminder to others who may have much. Each has a great responsibility with their “all” in connection with the work of the vineyard. The test of worthiness in all cases is the spirit with which the sacrifice is laid upon the altar, and kept there until it is consumed.

#### **A PARABLE**

What beautiful truths concerning the Christian life are illustrated by the parable of the penny when viewed in the light of the Master’s own introduction to it. In any parable, the thing said is never the same as the thing meant. None of the details of this parable have ever had a literal fulfillment, and never will. For example, mention is made of five periods of the day in which servants are hired to work in a vineyard. There is nothing in the Bible, nor in the history of the Gospel Age, to indicate that at five different times throughout the centuries anything remotely resembling this has ever happened.

The parable illustrates the simple basis upon which the called ones, all during the Gospel Age, may prove worthy of living and reigning with Christ. They must give their all, regardless of how little or how much that may be, unto death. In relating the parable, Jesus anticipated that there

might be some who, when learning of this arrangement, would not be satisfied with it. Thus, he takes these into account and shows how wrong such an attitude would be—that, in effect, it would be calling in question the justice and wisdom of God.

Another important point to remember is that the parable was not given to reveal what will happen when the saints pass beyond the veil. Rather, it is to teach the importance of a proper appreciation of God's abounding grace, and respect for his decisions, while we are still on this side of the veil. How impressively the parable teaches these vital lessons!

The Bible clearly reveals, through this parable and otherwise, that the disciple who faithfully follows the Master for fifty or more years will receive the same reward in the kingdom—that of glory, honor, and immortality—as the one who has been faithful for a very short period of time. The brethren in the Early Church knew this, and we know it today. This is not a truth which will be discovered by some only after they pass beyond the veil.

Upon the basis of God's promises, we have already received assurance of our reward—if we prove faithful. In prayer, Jesus said of his disciples, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them." (John 17:22) At that time Jesus had received this glory only by promise, and he had given it to his disciples only by promise. However, the promises of our Heavenly Father, and of our Lord Jesus, are sure, and it remains only for us to be faithful to the conditions attached to them for the glories promised actually to become ours.

Jesus did, by promise, give his disciples the glory which his Father had given to him. When Peter asked what they would receive in return for the "all" which they had given up to follow him, he said, "When the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones." Over and over again the Lord, through his Word, gives this reward to us by promise. Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne."—Rev. 3:21

Whether our reward be thought of as a promise now, or as a reality beyond the veil, it is entirely a gift of God's grace. No one can work long enough to earn it, nor has anyone sufficient "goods" to purchase it. This priceless "penny" is given to those who demonstrate their faithfulness by giving their all, regardless of how much that might be. In the parable, Jesus emphasizes how wrong it would be for any of us, when we understand the matter properly, to question God's goodness and justice in making this gracious arrangement. Thanks be to the Heavenly Father for his unerring wisdom and boundless mercy!

# Importuning in Prayer

*“He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”*  
—Luke 18:1

**LUKE RECORDS TWO PARABLES** of Jesus which emphasize the importance of importunity—that is, perseverance—in prayer. In the first of these parables, recorded in chapter 11:5-10, the Lord describes a man who makes a request for bread to a “friend.” In the second parable, found in chapter 18:1-8, a widow asks an “unjust judge” to avenge her of an adversary. Luke suggests that the main lesson of the latter parable, as stated in our opening scripture, is that his footstep followers should continually take advantage of the benefits derived from prayer, and not to “faint” from that privilege. Indeed, this lesson is contained in both parables.

This is a beautiful and important teaching from the Master. It serves as a reminder to us that, as consecrated believers, we are in continuous need of divine grace and assistance. We are confronted with many temptations, difficulties, obstacles, discouragements, and other potentially unhappy situations. Apart from God’s overruling providences in our lives, and his willingness and ability to help us in our every time of need, we would be sure to “faint” by the wayside and perhaps even drop out of the ranks of those who serve the Lord.

In the dedicated lives of those striving to serve God during the present age, prayer can make the difference between fainting and continuing courageously on in the narrow way. Therefore, as Luke indicates, when the various difficult situations of life confront us, instead of fainting, we should pray. Additionally, such experiences when rightly appreciated provide us with the assurance that prayers offered in great times of need will be heard and answered. The Lord’s answer may seem to be delayed, but this is no reason to refrain from earnestly seeking what would be his will for us.

## **MODEL FOR PRAYER**

The parable in the 11th chapter, in which one petitions for bread from a friend, immediately follows what is often referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer.” Jesus provided this outline to his disciples in response to their request, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” (vs. 1) In this model prayer we are reminded of the importance of proper reverence in approaching the throne of heavenly grace—“Hallowed be thy name.” We are also to remember to pray for God’s kingdom, which is the divine arrangement for the blessing of all the families of the earth. Our Heavenly Father wants us to be interested in others—all whom he has promised to bless, and for whom Christ died.—vs. 2

We are to ask for our daily bread, keeping in mind that our spiritual needs are by far the most important. We are also to seek the forgiveness of our sins, and in connection with the prayer are reminded that the Lord’s favorable answer to petitions along this line depends upon our willingness to forgive those who trespass against us.—vss. 3,4

## **GIVING THE PARABLE**

Jesus followed his outline of prayer with the parable, saying: “Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”—vss. 5-10

Here, unmistakably, the lesson is perseverance in prayer. James wrote of those who ask, and receive not, because they “ask amiss.” (James 4:3) This point, however, is not involved in the parables under consideration. Jesus had just provided the outline of his model prayer, and in the parable, as he stresses the importance of continuing to ask in order to receive the blessings which we need, he is speaking of the things which the Heavenly Father is pleased to give us, and which are in harmony with the model just given.

Prayer is communion with God, and Jesus would have us remember that we need this communion. Hence, we should not suppose that the blessings he is pleased to give us need be requested only once at the beginning of our Christian life, or even at the beginning of each day. Think of the request, “Thy kingdom come.” How many times this petition has gone up to our Heavenly Father since the beginning of the Gospel Age! Indeed, this prayer is still in the hearts and on the lips of God’s consecrated people. Although his will is not yet being done in earth as it is in heaven, it is still very proper to continue to pray earnestly for that kingdom to come.

In the morning when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we cannot expect that this petition will suffice for weeks to come. We may find it appropriate to repeat this request even before the day is over. The Lord knows what our daily needs are, but he wants us to realize those needs, especially those of a spiritual nature. We are to become more and more conscious of our source of supply by the habit of praying often for those things which our Heavenly Father has promised to provide for our spiritual growth and development.

#### **THE FATHER’S CARE**

Immediately following the parable Jesus raises the question, “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”—Luke 11:11-13

This is an encouraging lesson, and evidently based upon the parable. In the parable, the man of whom bread is requested displays a measure of indifference, in that he does not wish to inconvenience himself to get up in the night and give bread to a friend who requests it, and is in need. This is not a wicked man. It is just that his own comfort seems more important than his friend’s need. However, even this man, “being evil” or imperfect, though he is, does finally bestir himself to answer his friend’s repeated petition.

“How much more,” Jesus said, “shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Our Heavenly Father is not moved in any sense by self interest, nor is he indifferent. He is wholly unselfish, and is interested only in that which is the very best for his consecrated children. We can never go to God in prayer at a time that is inopportune to him. He never sleeps; he is never weary. If it seems that he does not grant our petitions immediately, it is because in his wisdom he knows that a delay is best for us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, and he wants us the more earnestly to seek the blessings which he has promised.

In this lesson, the Holy Spirit is referred to especially as being a needed gift from God. Perhaps, by using this example, Jesus is reminding us that all our needs as New Creatures are of a spiritual sort. They encompass blessings which come to us through the Word of God and our understanding of the precious truths of his divine plan, which are revealed to us through his Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul speaks of the love of God being “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.” (Rom. 5:5) This means that if we have the Holy Spirit we have the love of God filling and blessing our lives. God’s love is manifested in providing for all our needs, and we can always be sure that those needs will be supplied, according to the “abundance of grace” in Christ Jesus our Lord.—vs. 17

#### **SECOND PARABLE—ADVERSARIES AVENGED**

The parable of the importunate widow also emphasizes the need of continuance and perseverance in prayer. It reads: “There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?”—Luke 18:2-7

Here the petition of the widow is not presented to a friend, as in the first parable, but to a “judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man.” If the “friend” of the first parable could be spoken of as “evil,” certainly this judge could be considered more so. Thus the contrast is the greater, in that if such a judge would grant the widow’s request because of her importuning, how much more would the Heavenly Father grant the requests of his faithful people whom he loves and for whom he has promised to care.

That which was sought by the widow is somewhat different from the bread requested in the former parable. She wished to be avenged of her adversary. Like the widow, the true followers of the Master live in a hostile world where Satan, the Devil, is the prince. Jesus warned his disciples that in the world they would have tribulation, but encouraged them by saying, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—John 16:33

Because of the blinding influences of Satan, our great Adversary, many in the world may be unkind and unjust to those who are following in the footsteps of the Master. However, it is not for us to retaliate or seek to punish them. This is to be left in the hands of the Lord. Jesus is our



great example along this line. Peter wrote of Jesus that he was one “who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself [his cause] to him that judgeth righteously.”—I Pet. 2:23

From the standpoint of our limited perspective of time in the divine plan, it could well seem, apart from faith, that God is doing little or nothing about the sufferings of his people in this present evil world. Throughout the age they have been praying for deliverance, and yet the great Adversary is still able to stir up opposition. They are still reviled, persecuted, and spoken evil of falsely. (Matt. 5:11) However, the Lord wants us to continue praying that our adversaries will be avenged by him, in his own due time and way. As individuals, the saints throughout the age have continued thus to pray, but have finished their course in death without seeing their prayers answered.

In Revelation 6:9,10 we are given a general picture which reminds us of this. Here those who faithfully laid down their lives giving testimony to the Truth are represented as crying out from “under the altar.” They say, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” These, without doubt, even before they completed their course in death, still petitioned the Lord for the establishment of his kingdom, and through its agencies subdue all the powers of evil. This petition continues even today.

The concluding words of the second parable of our lesson are in keeping with this. Jesus said, “I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8) This indicates that the full answer to the petition of the “widow” class to be avenged takes place at the end of the age, when the Lord returns for the purpose of bringing to an end this “present evil world” and establishing his kingdom. For many of the saints this has seemed to be a long wait for the answer to prayer.

Even now, when our Lord is present and engaged in work preparatory to the establishment of his Messianic kingdom, we still must wait. We are still not to revile those who revile us, nor in any way to seek our own vengeance against them. It is still true that vengeance belongs only to God, and that we are to wait for his due time to vindicate himself and his people.—Deut. 32:35; Ps. 94:1; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30

Thus, as Jesus indicated in our opening Scripture, we are to continue praying, and not to faint, regardless of how unfriendly the world may be. Let us continually look to the Lord, praying for his kingdom to come, and for his will to be done in his own due time and way.

# The Church's Reliance on Christ

*“Without me ye can do nothing.”  
—John 15:5*

**IN THE CLOSING MONTHS** and days of Jesus' earthly ministry, he sought especially to prepare his disciples for the impending fact that he would soon depart from their presence. At the same time, he taught them that, although he would be leaving them, they would still need to rely on him—more so, in fact, than when he had been with them in person. To more fully explain this to the disciples and his footstep followers throughout the Gospel Age, Jesus gave two important parables—The good shepherd and his sheep, and the vine and the branches.

## **THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

The parable of the good shepherd is recorded in John 10:1-16, and was most likely given by Jesus three to six months prior to his crucifixion. Unlike many of his earlier parables, there is no particular story line given in this account. Rather, Jesus uses commonly known circumstances and practices of his day to illustrate the intended lessons for his disciples. Indeed, the symbolisms of a shepherd and sheep, as used in the Bible, go back to Old Testament times.

Sheep, as spoken of symbolically in the Scriptures, generally are used to depict and emphasize certain characteristics of God's chosen people, and their relationship to him. Not all the qualities of sheep enter into this symbolism, but some do. A sheep is a docile animal, and readily led by a shepherd with whom it is acquainted. It is also very dependent upon the care of the shepherd. This was particularly true of sheep in the Middle East during Bible times.

David, who had been a shepherd, recognized the beauty and power of this symbolism. In the 23rd Psalm, he referred to the Lord, the God of Israel, as “my shepherd.” Because the Lord was his “shepherd,” David knew that he would be bountifully cared for in the “green pastures” of God's love. This was true of all the faithful of the nation of Israel. Together they were the Lord's flock, daily experiencing the tender care of their heavenly Shepherd.

It is proper, then to think of Almighty God as the great, Chief Shepherd of his people. When he sent his only begotten Son, Jesus, into the world at his First Advent, God represented him as the Good Shepherd. However, there were not many in the nation of Israel who received Jesus as sent from God, nor as their shepherd. “He came unto his own, and his own,” as a nation, “received him not.” (John 1:11) Some did, however, and these, being separated from the others, became the nucleus of a new “little flock,” recognizing Jesus and following him as their “shepherd.”—John 1:12; Luke 12:32

## **OUT FROM THE LAW**

Over a period of many centuries, these “sheep” of the Israelitish fold had become restrained by the terms of the Law Covenant. For Jesus to become their “shepherd” and lead them forth into the green pastures of the Father's love, it was necessary that a release from this bondage be attained. Jesus accomplished this by giving his life for the sheep—by dying as their Redeemer

and Savior. He says in the parable, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”—John 10:11

Jesus, by virtue of his sacrifice on behalf of the sheep, became the “door of the sheep.” (vs. 7) He was the means by which one would now enter the sheepfold of God, rather than by the old Law Covenant arrangement. By giving his life for the sheep, Jesus redeemed them from death, something the Law could not do, and thus he released them from bondage to the Law. In addition, he demonstrated his love for the sheep and his genuine interest in their welfare. To the sheep this is very important, for it proves to them that they can have confidence in such a shepherd. By contrast, one pretending to be a shepherd, but not willing to lay down his life for the sheep, is not to be trusted.

In the parable, Jesus explains that when the “good shepherd” calls to his flock, “the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, ... for they know not the voice of strangers.” (vss. 4,5) It was true in Jesus’ day that sheep had this keen awareness of their shepherds. Not only did they know the shepherd’s voice, but the shepherd knew the name of each sheep in his flock. Under this intimate relationship, the sheep had full confidence in their shepherd and would follow him at all times.

#### **THE SHEPHERD’S VOICE**

The “voice” of the “good shepherd” in Jesus’ day was the voice of truth. The truth then was the great fact that the promises of God pertaining to the coming of a Redeemer and Messiah were being fulfilled through Jesus. While the scribes and Pharisees argued over trifles, and displayed their hypocritical holiness by long prayers on the street corners, Jesus was preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and demonstrating the coming blessings of the kingdom by his many miracles. The wholesomeness of his message inspired confidence in the hearts of the “Israelites indeed” of his time, and in that message they recognized the voice of the Good Shepherd.

The voice of the “good shepherd” today is still the voice of truth, which is found in the great fundamentals of God’s great plan of the ages. This “voice” speaks of the wisdom, justice, love, and power of the Creator, and gives assurance of his design to bless all the families of the earth through Christ and his faithful consecrated followers of the Gospel Age, the church. It is a glorious message, and we feel secure in being a part of the “flock” that hears, recognizes, and follows it as we journey in the narrow way toward the heavenly kingdom.

The voice of truth spoken by our Good Shepherd should both give us confidence in our standing as sheep, and also serve as a unifying influence among the flock as a whole. Complicated interpretations of obscure portions of God’s Word may intrigue some of the sheep for a little while. However, they can easily lead to a spirit of separation in the fold, with certain ones feeling that they have perhaps advanced beyond others. The voice of the “good shepherd” never leads in this direction.

#### **“HIRELING” NOT A TRUE SHEPHERD**

The “good shepherd” is more interested in the welfare of all his flock than in himself. This is why Jesus laid down his life for his sheep. Undershepherds who do not have this same interest are not true representatives of Jesus. One who is desirous of securing a following for himself, regardless of the needs of the flock as a whole, is not a true shepherd. He is serving for his own gain, and is styled by Jesus a “hireling.”

In verses 12 and 13 of John 10, Jesus explains that a “hireling” shepherd is one who flees when the sheep are in danger of being scattered and destroyed by wolves. He does nothing to protect his flock in their time of peril, because he “careth not for the sheep,” but only for his own interests. A true shepherd will do all he can to protect the sheep. He will lay down his life doing this, even as Jesus did, if necessary. As an undershepherd, representing Jesus, his own interests will always be secondary to those of whom he serves.

### **MOTIVATED BY LOVE**

In the parable, Jesus states that the reason he would lay down his life for the sheep is because, “As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father.” (vs. 15) This implies that he knew the Heavenly Father’s plan of redemption, and how divine love was manifested therein. Jesus and his Father were in complete accord in the carrying out of this plan of salvation.

Not only so, but Jesus’ love for the world was also the same as his Father’s love. With such a love motivating all that he said and did, he could be nothing less than a “Good Shepherd,” who would lay down his life for the sheep. The greater our knowledge of the Heavenly Father and of our Lord Jesus, the more firmly we will trust them, and the more enthusiastically we will follow the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Jesus further explained that the Father loved him because he laid down his life for the sheep. (vs. 17) During the centuries prior to Jesus’ First Advent, there had been many who alleged to represent God as servants of his people. However, for the most part these had sought their own interests, and had persecuted those prophets whom God specially sent to his people. These were, in Jesus words, “thieves and robbers” who had appeared as shepherds. (vs. 8) Once again, what a contrast was the attitude of Jesus, who gladly laid down his life for the sheep. It can be no wonder that the Father loved him.

### **OTHER SHEEP**

Near the end of the parable, Jesus explained that he had “other sheep ... which are not of this fold.” These also were to be gathered so that eventually there might be “one fold, and one shepherd.” (vs. 16) It has been suggested that this might be a reference to the Gentile “sheep” that later were to be brought into the one fold with Jewish believers. While this explanation would seem to fit the circumstances, we believe that there is a larger application.

So far as the Gospel Age is concerned, there is just the one true flock, which is the “little flock” to whom it is the Father’s good pleasure to give a position of rulership with Jesus in his kingdom. (Luke 12:32) The previous nationality or other fleshly differences of any of these is unimportant to the Lord. To him there is “neither Jew nor Greek, ... bond nor free, ... male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”—Gal. 3:28

Jesus said, though, that there is to be another group of the Lord's sheep, "not of this fold." We might speak of this as the Messianic Age flock, in contrast to the Gospel Age flock. The Messianic Age flock is brought prominently to our attention in another parable of Jesus—the sheep and the goats, recorded in Matthew 25:31-46. This parable will be treated in a future article in the "Parables of Jesus" series. It is sufficient for our present consideration, however, to state that many things with respect to this "flock" are different, particularly with respect to the reward which they will receive at the end of the Messianic Age.

The "sheep" of Matthew 25 are "to inherit the kingdom" prepared for them "from the foundation of the world"—the earthly dominion given to Adam. However, as we have seen, the "little flock" of the present age is to receive a position of rulership in the Messianic kingdom. This kingdom will function for the purpose of restoring the willing and obedient of the human race to at-one-ment with their Creator. The reward of the Gospel Age "little flock" will be spiritual, or heavenly, while the reward of the Messianic Age flock, the "other sheep" of John 10:16, will be earthly.

From the divine standpoint, however, these two groups of sheep will eventually be as one. Paul wrote of the "dispensation of the fulness of times" during which God would "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth." (Eph. 1:10) Thus, at the close of the Messianic kingdom work, there will be, as Jesus promised, "one fold, and one shepherd."

#### **THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES**

Whereas the parable of the good shepherd was spoken by Jesus a few months prior to his crucifixion, the lesson of the vine and the branches was given less than a day before his death, and is recorded in John 15:1-11. This account is not specifically identified as being a parable. However, similar to the parable of the good shepherd, Jesus used a well known occupation of his day—vineyard husbandry in this case—to bring important lessons to his disciples. Thus, being in harmony with the teaching method Jesus had used on many previous occasions, we feel it is not improper to speak of this lesson as a parable.

The parable of the vine and the branches was related by Jesus to his disciples in the "upper room" the night before he was crucified. The reports by Matthew, Mark, and Luke of Jesus' final message to his disciples that night do not contain this parable. Indeed, John reports much which was omitted by the others. Thus, in the Lord's providence, we have a number of precious truths brought to our attention which otherwise we would not have had the privilege of enjoying.

The portions of Jesus' sermon in the upper room which are recorded by John emphasize his love for, and closeness to, those who have covenanted to walk in his footsteps of self-sacrifice. Jesus knew that a severe test was just ahead for his disciples, and he endeavored to prepare them for it by assuring them of his love and care, and also that the Heavenly Father loved them. Jesus knew that soon he would be leaving the disciples, but he assured them that he would return and receive them unto himself. He promised that in the meantime the Holy Spirit would be their comforter.—John 14:1-3,16,17

We may think of the parable of the vine and the branches as a further assurance of the Master's oneness with his disciples, his love for them, and their need to rely on him as the source of their spiritual strength and vitality. The importance of fruit-bearing is also a particular lesson emphasized by the parable.

Jesus begins with these words: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (John 15:1,2) By referring to the Heavenly Father as the "husbandman" who cares for both the "vine" and the "branches," Jesus reflected his true spirit of humility, and emphasized that he came into the world, not to do his own works, but his Father's. Later in the parable, Jesus explained that it was the Heavenly Father who would be glorified by the fruit-bearing of the branches.—vs. 8

The branches cannot bear fruit of themselves, unless they "abide in the vine." (vs. 4) Jesus clearly explained this symbolism: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." (vs. 5) Thus, the footstep followers [branches] of Christ Jesus [the vine] who continually abide in him, are cared for by the Heavenly Father [the husbandman], to whom properly goes the credit and glory for the fruitage.

It is not essential that we consider every detail in connection with the growth of a vine and its branches as being pictorial. In this lesson, however, the importance of fruit-bearing is particularly stressed by Jesus. We might think of the sap and life-giving nutrients which flow through the vine and out into the branches as representing the energizing power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples. That promise was fulfilled at Pentecost, and all who have come into Christ since that time by means of full consecration have received of this same power and influence which enables them to "bear much fruit."

### **SPIRITUAL FRUITAGE**

Paul wrote, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Gal. 5:22,23) These righteous qualities are those possessed by our Heavenly Father, and by our Lord Jesus. As we permit the Holy Spirit to flow through our lives, this same fruitage should become evident in us.

If the Holy Spirit does not transform our lives, and we "beareth not fruit," then, as Jesus declares in the parable, the Heavenly Father, as the husbandman, will remove us from the vine. If, however, we bear a measure of fruit, the husbandman prunes, or purges us that we might "bring forth more fruit." (John 15:2) This pruning is accomplished by the various experiences which the Heavenly Father permits to come into our lives.

Such pruning may be the removal of certain earthly advantages, friendships, comforts, popularity, wealth, or other things which might tend to keep our minds and hearts from being centered on the Lord as they should be. Our Heavenly Father knows just what is needful and best for us. He knows what to "trim away" from our life, and what to leave, that we may bring forth the greatest amount of fruit.

## **FRUIT-BEARING TO GOD'S GLORY**

The branches of a natural vine do not bear fruit for their own benefit, and this is also true of the branches of the vine which are in Christ. Jesus explained that the Heavenly Father is glorified by the fruit-bearing of the vine. To glorify God is the ultimate motive in all Christian endeavors. We can glorify God only by continually striving to do his will. An important facet of the divine will was expressed by Jesus when he said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."—Matt. 5:16

Here Jesus declares that we glorify God by letting our light shine. Actually, it is not our light, but the Father's. It is his truth—his light. He has shined into our hearts by the Gospel message, and we have made this glorious truth our own. However, we are not to hold it selfishly merely for our own enjoyment, but to tell it out for the blessing of others. As we do this, motivated by love, it brings glory to our Heavenly Father.

This aspect of the Christian life is very closely associated with the matter of fruit-bearing. Like Paul, the Apostle Peter also admonishes us to add certain types of fruitage to our foundation of faith: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Then he adds, "If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren [Greek: inactive] nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."—II Pet. 1:4-8

If we have developed the character qualities mentioned by Paul and Peter—summed up by love in all its various aspects—we cannot be inactive or unfruitful in the use of the knowledge which we have received from the Heavenly Father. The resulting fruitage will manifest itself in an unselfish desire to impart blessings to others, and our best means of doing this is through the proclamation of the Truth. Such activity thus becomes evidence that as branches in the true vine we are bearing fruit—the fruit of the Spirit—which will not allow us to be idle as light-bearers in a dark world.

The Apostle Paul, in commending the brethren at Philippi for sending him gifts, added, "Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." (Phil. 4:17) Here the good works of the Philippian brethren in ministering to the needs of Paul are referred to by him as "fruit." From this we see that while activity in the Lord's work is not in itself the fruit of the Spirit, it is very closely allied to it, for the branches that bear fruit will inevitably be active in the Lord's service. They will be doing good unto all as they have opportunity, "especially unto them who are of the household of faith."—Gal. 6:10

## **ABIDING IN CHRIST**

One of the most essential lessons of the parable of the vine and the branches is that we must abide in Christ if we are to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. Jesus said, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." (John 15:3) We had to be cleansed in order to become a branch in the true vine, and Jesus said that this was accomplished through the word which he had spoken. This is a reference to the truth of God's plan, and it is through the acceptance of this message—including the consecration of ourselves to do the Heavenly Father's will—that we become "clean," or "justified by faith" in Jesus' blood, and therefore acceptable to God.—Rom. 5:1,9

While it is thus through the full surrender of ourselves to do God's will as it is expressed through Christ that we become branches in the true vine, this spirit of full consecration must be maintained if we are to "abide" in the vine. We cannot bear the fruits of righteousness by doing God's will today and our own will tomorrow. There must be an abiding surrender to the divine will in order that the Holy Spirit may have free direction in our minds and hearts. Only thus can we bring forth "much fruit."

According to the parable, the branches which lose their place in the vine are gathered up and "cast ... into the fire" to be burned. (John 15:6) This could refer to the possibility of being destroyed in the second death. In any case, it denotes destruction as branches. It may be similar to the "wood, hay," and "stubble" Paul refers to as being burned in the day of the Lord, which represents a destruction of human works, but not necessarily of individuals.—I Cor. 3:11-15

### **ABIDING IN LOVE**

To abide in Christ means to continue in his love, and in the Heavenly Father's love. Jesus said, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love." (John 15:9) He then explained what it means to continue in his love, saying, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."—vs. 10

Jesus' commandments are exacting, including the one that we are to love one another as he loved us. This calls for the laying down of our will, preferences, and life in the service of the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren. How wonderful is the return for doing so! It is to be loved by the Heavenly Father as Jesus was loved by him. To our imperfect, finite minds this is incomprehensible. How could the Heavenly Father love us as he loved Jesus? It is only because he views us, not as members of a fallen and dying race, but as branches in the true vine, which have been made "clean" through the blood of Christ.

Later that same night before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed on behalf of his disciples that they might be one with him, even as he was one with the Father. He prayed also that eventually the world might know that the Father loved his disciples as he loved the Son. He prayed that his disciples might ultimately be with him, even as he had promised, that they would behold his glory.—John 17:20-26

The Apostle John was evidently greatly impressed by the wonderful things which he heard the Master say that night in the upper room. Later, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John wrote, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."—I John 3:1-3

In conclusion, let us continue, as sheep, to dwell under the care and guidance of our Good Shepherd, and also daily abide, as branches of the true vine, in Christ Jesus. In so doing, we will ever appreciate the need for reliance on the assistance and example of our Lord and Master each



day, and in every experience. Accordingly, we will gain the approval and “well done” of the Heavenly Father, our loving Chief Shepherd and caring Husbandman.

# Jesus Observes the Pharisees

## Three Parables from Luke 14 and 18

*“Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”*

*—Luke 14:11; 18:14*

**THROUGHOUT JESUS’** earthly ministry, he was observed by the Pharisees and other religious leaders of the Jews. Their motivation for watching the Lord was most often to catch him in violation of some feature of the Mosaic Law, or with the hope of stumbling him in some way—either of which might result in his being condemned as a sinner. As these attempts failed to produce their desired results, and as Jesus’ ministry became more popular among the people, Israel’s leaders increasingly viewed him as a threat to their position. They then sought to show that he was a blasphemer of God—a sin punishable by death under the Law. They finally succeeded in gaining enough false witnesses to carry out this devious plot, and killed “The King of the Jews.”

Just as they had observed him, Jesus took the opportunity during his encounters with the Jewish religious leaders to also observe them. He noted their hypocrisy, pride, and disdain for the common people of the nation. On a number of these occasions, he took the added opportunity to speak parables to those gathered together. These were given typically to a mixed audience—those Pharisees and other leaders who opposed him, as well as his disciples and the multitudes who followed him from place to place, desiring to hear more of his message. This being the case, the parables associated with Jesus’ observations of most Pharisees were designed to contrast their character, which had been corrupted by sin, with those righteous qualities God would be pleased to see developed in his chosen people.

Our opening text provides one of the key elements in this contrast, stating that anyone who seeks, by pride, to exalt himself, cannot be used of God until he is humbled—“abased.” By distinction, the Master states, one who is of a humble character can be used by God, and upon proper testing and obedience, may be found worthy of being “exalted.” This particular contrast—pride versus humility—is one of the central lessons in the three parables we will consider.

### **JESUS ATTENDS A FEAST**

In the opening verses of Luke 14, we are given an account of Jesus’ entering the house of one of the chief Pharisees to “eat bread,” evidently having been invited to do so. As he entered the abode of the Pharisee, he noted a man who was ill with the “dropsy”—bloating caused by water retention. It was the Sabbath, and realizing that many were watching to note what he would say and do under the circumstances, Jesus asked whether or not it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath day. No one responded, and Jesus performed a miracle which healed the man ill of the dropsy. The Lord then asked, “Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?”—Luke 14:1-5

Neither the chief Pharisee, nor anyone in the house, could give Jesus a reasonable answer as to why he should not have healed the sick man on the Sabbath. (vs. 6) All of them were in the home of the Pharisee to eat, thus caring for their physical needs, so why should not Jesus do something for this man which he could not do for himself? The fact that Jesus had been invited to the house might indicate that this Pharisee, unlike most others, was somewhat favorable to the Master. This may be why the account does not record any special controversy over the question of healing the sick on the Sabbath day.

### **PARABLE OF THOSE BIDDEN**

As Jesus lingered in the home of the Pharisee, he observed that the guests were seeking the best or “chief rooms” in the house, without any regard for the host’s planned arrangements for seating. (vs. 7) This circumstance he used as the basis for a parable, recorded in verses 8-11. Using the example of a wedding feast, the parable suggested that if they were invited to such a special event, they should not sit down in the most prominent and honored seats, but wait until they were seated by the host. This, Jesus explained, could save them and their host much embarrassment.

Jesus reminded those at the Pharisee’s house that the host in the parable might well have planned for some important guest to have the more honorable seat which they had taken. If so, he would be obliged to ask them to accept a lower place. How much better it would be, Jesus explained, to take the lower place at the outset. Then, possibly, they might be invited to occupy a more honorable position. In this event, the host would rejoice that he could extend such a favor. The guest would be pleased also, and no one would be embarrassed.

Jesus drew a very practical lesson from this parable, and one that is emphasized throughout the Word of God. Quoting again the words of our opening text, he said, “Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (vs. 11) It is important to humble ourselves before men, and before our brethren, as shown in the circumstances of this parable. However, it is even more essential that we maintain the proper spirit of humility before God. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”—I Pet. 5:6

### **WHOM TO INVITE**

As the dinner at the Pharisee’s home progressed, Jesus made a further observation. Looking around him he probably saw that the guests were essentially from the same stratum of society as the host. They were not poor people, nor the sick. Jesus had been included because at the time he was getting much prominence in Israel as a teacher. Perhaps, depending on the purity of his motives, the chief Pharisee who arranged the feast wanted his friends to learn more about this man.

Regardless of the reasons for the selection of the particular guests at this dinner—including Jesus—he took advantage of the situation, using it as a basis for a timely lesson, which he addressed directly to his host. “When thou makest a dinner or a supper,” Jesus said, “call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed,

the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.”—Luke 14:12-14

A beautiful lesson is herein provided. It suggests that our benefactions should be on behalf of those who are not in a position to repay us. Such is a display of the divine quality of love. It was this quality that motivated our Heavenly Father to give his Son to die for the sins of the world. (John 1:29; 3:16) This was a costly gift to bestow, and it was presented on behalf of those—the fallen human race—who are in no position to repay.—Ps. 49:7

Jesus displayed this same quality of unselfish love. Additionally, the only ones who will have the opportunity of being with him in the spiritual phase of the kingdom will be those who are motivated to give their lives for others by the same spirit of unselfish love. Jesus said that these would receive their reward at the “resurrection of the just.” (Luke 14:14) These are the same ones who are spoken of by Jesus as those who have “done good,” and who will come forth to a “resurrection of life.”—John 5:28,29

The record states that one of the guests in the chief Pharisee’s home who heard this statement by Jesus observed, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 14:15) Evidently this man was one of the devout of Israel, and who looked for the kingdom of God. He sensed that what Jesus said about being rewarded in the “resurrection of the just” would have its fulfillment in conjunction with that kingdom, and he evidently understood that this would be a blessed experience for all those who would qualify. He perhaps even entertained the hope of attaining to such a reward himself, through the grace he found to be centered in Christ Jesus.

#### **PARABLE OF A GREAT SUPPER**

While still at the home of the Pharisee where he had been invited to take bread, Jesus related another parable pertaining to a feast, recorded in Luke 14:16-24. He told that “a certain man made a great supper, and bade many.” When the supper was ready and the invited guests were summoned to assemble and partake, they began to make excuses to the host’s servant as to why they could not be present. One had bought a piece of ground which he had to inspect. Another had purchased five yoke of oxen that he had to examine. Still another had married a wife and could not attend the feast.—vss. 16-20

The servant reported this situation to his master who, in turn, instructed him to go out into the streets of the city and invite others to come and partake of the supper which had been prepared. The “poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind” were thus invited. The servant carried out these instructions, and then reported to his master that there was still room at the feast.—Luke 14:21,22

Finally, the servant was instructed to go “out into the highways and hedges, and compel”—that is, constrain or entreat—people to come to the feast, that it might be filled with guests. The master of the house had determined that none of the originally invited guests, who had made excuses for not attending the feast, would later have any opportunity to change their minds. “None of those men ... shall taste of my supper.”—vss. 23,24

This parable, in a general way, illustrates the outworking of God's plan for his people during the Gospel Age. The "certain man" of the parable aptly represents the Heavenly Father, who has made a great feast for his people of the present age. This supper pertains to all the good things relative to the spiritual phase of the Messianic kingdom in which the consecrated followers of the Master are invited to share. This feast is symbolically referred to in Revelation as "the marriage supper of the Lamb."—Rev. 19:7-9

Originally, the whole Jewish nation was the Lord's chosen people—invited guests who were given the opportunity to partake of this "great supper." As we know from the Scriptures, however, very few of these responded to the call announcing that the "kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 4:17) For one reason or another, the professed Israelites of Jesus' day made "excuse," and were not ready for the opportunity which was then offered to them.

Beginning at Pentecost, another call went out specially to the Jewish people. Quite a number were humble and readily accepted. (Acts 2:41; 4:4) However, still there were not sufficient guests to fill the house as planned by the Lord. Then the call went to the Gentiles, and has continued to do so throughout the entire Gospel Age. In due time the Lord's predetermined number of guests for this feast will be found and made "ready," and the marriage supper of the Lamb will take place.

Following this will be another great feast, during the earthly phase of Messiah's kingdom. The Scriptures describe it as a "feast of fat things" which God has prepared for "all people, ... fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." It will be then that the Lord will "swallow up death in victory," and "wipe away tears from off all faces."—Isa. 25:6-9

#### **PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN**

The third parable of our present consideration is found in Luke 18:9-14. In this account, Luke explains that Jesus spoke this to certain ones who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." (vs. 9) The parable, as related by Jesus, concerned two men who went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other a publican. In his prayer, the Pharisee thanked the Lord that he was not like other men, such as "extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." He then presented his own claims of righteousness to the Lord as a reason for expecting to be heard and have his prayer blessed. The publican, on the other hand, stood "afar off," and would not even lift his eyes toward heaven. Rather, beating himself upon his breast, he said, "God be merciful to me a sinner."—Luke 18:10-13

Jesus surely chose appropriate examples to illustrate the point of the parable. The Pharisees were indeed a mostly self-righteous group of people. However, this self-righteousness was not pleasing to the Heavenly Father, and it was clearly recognized by Jesus. Near the end of his earthly ministry, we find a series of woes pronounced upon this class by the Lord, and the reasons set forth as to why they were not approved by God. These reasons were, for the most part, their pretensions of righteousness and outward displays of goodness, which were designed to impress the rank and file of the people.—Matt. 23:13-33

The Master was not deceived by these. He knew their real heart condition, and recognized that they were not the sort of people whom the Heavenly Father could use in connection with the

work of the new Gospel Age which was about to open. They were to be cast off from the high position of representing the Lord, and Jesus' own humble and true followers were to take their place.—chap. 21:43

Just before presenting this excoriating description of the Pharisees, Jesus gave some wholesome instruction to his disciples. For the time being they were to observe and do what was bidden them by the scribes and Pharisees, for at that time these were still sitting in “Moses' seat.” They were to be obedient to the Pharisees, even though they knew that “all their works they do for to be seen of men.”—chap. 23:1-7

The disciples, however, were not to copy the example of the scribes and Pharisees. “Be not ye called Rabbi,” Jesus said to his disciples, “for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.” To this Jesus added, “Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”—vss. 8-12

## **THE PUBLICANS**

The publicans of Jesus' day were in quite a different category, and were looked down upon by the scribes and Pharisees, and even by the Jewish people as a whole. They were mostly tax and toll collectors, working as agents of the Roman government. The Jews resented paying tribute to anyone. The fact that some of their own people were participating in making collections, operating under a system that offered many opportunities to engage in fraud and exploitation, caused the Israelites to look especially upon the publicans as sinners, and even traitors.

However, there were individuals among the publicans who were not happy with their lot. In any group, there are usually individuals who are not in sympathy with the principles for which the majority stand. Nicodemus was a worthy example of this among the Pharisees. (John 3:1) Matthew, chosen by Jesus to be one of his twelve apostles, was a good example with respect to the publicans. The message of John the Baptist appealed to many of the publicans, and they repented of their wrongdoings.—Luke 3:2,3,12,13

Thus, in the parable under discussion Jesus chose a repentant publican to illustrate the true attitude of those who recognize that they are indeed sinners, and who manifest the proper attitude of mind and heart in their desire to seek the Heavenly Father and be assured of his blessing. The publican was a sinner, but the positive fact in his case was that he was sufficiently honest of heart to admit it. His repentance was to such an extent that he cast himself upon the Lord, asking for mercy. It was very much like a criminal who pleads guilty to the charge against him, and looks to the court for mercy and compassion. As far as God was concerned, the Pharisee in the parable was just as guilty as the publican. However, he remained proud of heart, and sought the Lord's blessing upon the basis of his professed righteousness.

Jesus leaves no doubt as to which one of these men in the parable represents those with whom God is pleased. He said, “I tell you, this man [the publican] went down to his house justified rather than the other,” and reiterating once again the words of our opening text, that anyone who “exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”—Luke 18:14

The important lesson here is that in order to be exalted by God and have his blessings bestowed upon us, it is essential to humble ourselves before him. The specific point of humility stressed in the parable is the acknowledgment of sins and recognition of our need of the Lord's mercy. This attitude is essential when we devote ourselves to the Heavenly Father in consecration, and it must be maintained throughout our walk in the narrow way if we desire to be assured of his continued blessing.

This true spirit of humility is, first of all, before God. If we are sincere in our humility before him we will, in the natural course of events, be humble before the brethren, and all with whom we come in contact. We will not be seeking the chief seats at the feasts, as it were. We will not be endeavoring to promote ourselves among the brethren, nor by displays of professed wisdom seek to draw away disciples after ourselves. We will also steer clear of criticism of others who our sinful flesh might perceive as merely "publicans." We will remember Jesus' words that "one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren"—not by our own merit but by his, not by our own righteousness but because of the tender mercy of our Heavenly Father.—Matt. 23:8

### **JUSTIFIED**

Jesus said that the publican in the parable "went down to his house justified." This is an interesting use of the word "justified." The Scriptures speak of our being justified by faith, and through the blood of Christ, but neither of these is mentioned in the parable.—Rom. 5:1,2,8,9,18

However, since the parable is based upon situations which existed in Israel at the time of Jesus' ministry, and prior to his death, we might think of this publican as being in a similar position as those reached by the ministry of John the Baptist. John's message to the Jewish people was one of repentance and a return to the principles enunciated in the Mosaic Law. Doing so placed them in a position of having a heart prepared to exercise faith in the blood of Christ when the due time came. Prior to Jesus' death and resurrection they did not receive what Paul described as justification to life, but they did receive the assurance of God's blessing and of his willingness to accept them into the arrangements of the new age once it would begin.

In the lesson pictured by the parable we might think of those represented by the Pharisee as those who, when John the Baptist—and then Jesus—appeared to them, proved unworthy, and were cast off from the special favors of the Gospel age. Similarly, we might regard the publican as denoting those who recognized their sins, and repented. There were many such under the preaching of John the Baptist, and others later as Jesus taught. These were the ones among Israel who were brought into the Gospel Age fold. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, they were given the opportunity of entering into the narrow way and running for the mark of the prize of the High Calling of God, "justified" through the blood of Christ Jesus.

As we strive to fulfill our vows of consecration, let us daily apply the important lessons of these parables to ourselves as followers of the Master. As we have noted, one of these essential principles is that those who seek to exalt themselves shall be abased, and those who humble themselves shall be exalted. Let us, therefore, humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he might exalt us in due time!

# Parables of the Vineyard and the Wedding Garment

*“Many are called, but few are chosen.”*  
—Matthew 22:14

**IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**, chapters 21 and 22, we have recorded the two parables of our title. As was true with many of Jesus’ parables, they were specifically given for the purpose of enlightening those of Israel who had “hearing ears” to the great privileges they had been given as God’s chosen people. They also contained various reprimands and predictions of punishment upon the nation given by the Lord due to a general lack of faithfulness—especially of their religious leaders. In these two parables, however, we also see lessons for the entire Gospel Age church, summarized in the warning of our opening text.

## **THE VINEYARD**

Jesus’ parable of the vineyard is found in Matthew 21:33-46. It is based upon similar words recorded in Isaiah 5:1-7, in which we are told that “the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel.” In this Old Testament version of the parable, God “looked for judgment” in Israel, but saw “oppression.” He looked for “righteousness, but behold a cry.” (vs. 7) These few words of explanation by the prophet help us understand the meaning of Jesus’ parable on the same subject.

As Jesus related the parable, he said that there was a certain householder who planted a vineyard and hedged it about, dug a winepress in it, and built a tower. He let out this vineyard to husbandmen, and then went into a far country. When the time drew near for fruit, the householder sent his servants to the husbandmen to receive it. However, the husbandmen beat the servants, and slew some of them. Later, the householder sent his own son, but the husbandmen slew him also.—Matt. 21:33-39

After relating the parable, Jesus asked his listeners what they thought the householder would do to those husbandmen when he returned. They replied that he would “miserably destroy” them, and would let out his vineyard to other husbandmen. (vss. 40,41) As we shall see, Jesus agreed with this, and in his explanation indicated that, just as in Isaiah, the application of this parable was to Israel, and especially to the Pharisees.

This vineyard, as explained by Isaiah, was the house of Israel. The fruit which the Lord looked for was justice and righteousness. Israel, however, as a people, failed to produce this sort of fruit, although through the Law Covenant and its arrangements every provision was made to encourage the growth of righteousness.

## **SERVANTS PERSECUTED**

God’s servants, who were sent from time to time to those Pharisees and other religious rulers in charge of the “vineyard,” were usually persecuted. Sometimes they were even put to death, just



as Jesus indicates in the parable. These servants were the prophets. Finally God, the “householder” of the parable, sent his “only begotten son” to look for the fruit of obedience and righteousness, and the keepers of the vineyard had him killed also.

God’s purpose in the choice of Israel as his chosen people—his vineyard—was that they would produce fruits of righteousness. By so doing, they would be qualified to be a people associated with the promised Messiah in the kingdom which he would come to earth to establish. God had promised that, if obedient, they would become a “holy nation,” a “kingdom of priests,” and a “peculiar treasure,” or very special people.—Exod. 19:5,6

The final and most crucial test upon the nation of Israel to qualify them for this high position in God’s plan was the coming of Jesus as their King and Messiah. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not,” although as individuals some did accept Jesus. These few were invited to sonship and to be associated with Jesus in the heavenly phase of his kingdom.—John 1:11,12

### **GOD’S “STONE” REJECTED**

To illustrate Israel’s rejection of the “son” of the parable—that is, the Messiah—whom the “householder” sent to look for fruit in his vineyard, Jesus referred to a prophecy in Psalm 118:22,23 concerning the “stone which the builders refused.” Evidently in this prophecy a pyramid-shaped building is visualized, with Jesus pictured as the topstone. Naturally this “stone” would not fit in any other place in this prophetic temple of the Lord. The religious rulers of Israel could see no place for him in God’s arrangement, especially if he was to be considered a topstone, and above them in authority. Consequently, they rejected him and put him to death.—Matt. 21:42

Israel’s rejection of their Messiah thus was at great peril to themselves. Continuing to use symbolic language, Jesus further explained, “Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it [the stone] shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” (vs. 44) The record states that when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, and this one in particular, “they perceived that he spake of them.” (vs. 45) They were right, and as symbolically prophesied by Jesus, they were ground to powder later as rulers of God’s people.

Jesus further explained to them that the “kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (vs. 43) As we have noted, it was the opportunity of joint rulership with Jesus in his Father’s kingdom that was given to Israel. However, as a nation they did not bring forth the necessary “fruits” to qualify for this, so this special kingdom prospect was taken from them, and as Jesus foretold, given to another “nation” that would bring forth the proper fruitage.

### **“SPIRITUAL HOUSE” AND “HOLY PRIESTHOOD”**

The Apostle Peter identifies this nation for us. To the faithful followers of Jesus during the Gospel Age, he wrote concerning a “holy nation” to which the kingdom would be given. His words are in harmony with the lesson in Jesus’ parable of the vineyard in which he refers to the “head of the corner,” or topstone in God’s “spiritual house” which Israel rejected.

Peter says, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up ... sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar [purchased] people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God.”—I Pet. 2:5-10

From this it is clear that the “nation” to which the kingdom was to be given when taken away from the natural house of Israel is comprised of the faithful consecrated followers of Jesus during the Gospel Age. At the beginning of the age, many of these were faithful individuals of the Jewish nation who accepted Jesus and became his footstep followers. However, there were not enough of these to make up the number which God had foreordained. Therefore, the Gospel call went to the Gentiles also. Subsequently, both Jews and Gentiles have had the glorious opportunity, upon the basis of faith in Jesus as their Redeemer, and consecration to do the Father’s will, to run for the prize of joint heirship with the Messiah. To these Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

#### **THE WEDDING GARMENT**

The parable of the wedding garment is recorded in Matthew 22:1-14. It immediately follows the verses in the aforementioned lesson. This is another of our Lord’s parables in which experiences in connection with a feast are used to illustrate valuable points of truth. The beginning of the parable is similar to the one recorded in Luke 14:16-24, but there are several differences. In the parable recorded by Luke “a certain man” arranges for the feast, whereas in the parable of the wedding garment the arrangements are made by “a certain king” in connection with his son’s marriage. In both parables, however, there is the failure on the part of the originally invited guests to appear at the feast, so finally the king’s servants are sent into the highways to invite others to the feast.

Although similar in some respects, we believe the parable in Matthew is different from the one in Luke, for other details are given which are not recorded in the Luke parable. The bidden guests in this parable who refuse to attend the feast are again urged by the servants to do so. However, instead of accepting the invitation, they spitefully treat the servants. We are further informed that this results in their master, the king, sending forth his armies and destroying the murderous guests.—Matt. 22:2-7

It is not difficult to see in these circumstances of the parable that which actually occurred in the outworking of the divine plan beginning with the First Advent of Jesus. The “king” in the parable seems clearly to represent God, and the “son” for whom he made a marriage, his beloved son Christ Jesus. God is indeed the great King of the universe, and we know that in his plan for the redemption and restoration of the human race he has arranged that his beloved son will have a “bride,” and that there will be a “marriage supper of the Lamb”—another name for God’s son.—Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2,9

It is indicated in the parable that it had been predetermined who would be invited to the marriage and have the privilege of participating in it. The Scriptures show that these “guests” were initially the Israelites, particularly those living at the time of Jesus’ First Advent. The record also reveals that the majority of these not only declined the invitation, but evilly entreated those who called it to their attention, bitterly persecuting many of these faithful servants of the Lord, both before and after Pentecost.

### **GO INTO THE HIGHWAYS**

It is also true that only a few decades later the Jewish nation was destroyed, and thousands of Israelites were killed. This was in the A.D. 70-73 time period. This did not interfere, however, with the King’s plan for the marriage of his Son, for invitations have since gone out into the “highways”—that is, to the Gentiles, giving opportunity for other guests to prepare themselves for the feast and for the marriage.—Matt. 22:7-9

The parable states that in sending out the call to the marriage and feast both the “bad and good” were to be brought in. (vs. 10) This does not imply that the servants were arbitrarily to bring to the supper those whom they knew to be wicked or unworthy. The thought is, rather, that as the Gospel call has gone forth throughout the world, all sorts of people have responded to it. In most instances, no doubt, those who respond are sincere, but many fail later to measure up to all that is required of them.

The closing verse of the parable, which is our opening text, states that “many are called, but few are chosen.” This is one of the important lessons of the parable. It is a point that is emphasized in many Scriptures. The Apostle Peter speaks of making our “calling and election sure.” (II Pet. 1:10) It is not enough simply to be called. If we are to enter into the marriage of the Lamb, and to the marriage supper of the Lamb, we must make our calling “sure” by faithfulness to its terms. The same thought is mentioned by the Revelator when he speaks of those who are with the Lamb as “called, and chosen, and faithful.”—Rev. 17:14

### **THE WEDDING GARMENT**

In this parable, special wedding garments are provided for the guests by the king. After all the guests are present there is an inspection of them, and it is found that one of them is not wearing “a wedding garment.” (Matt. 22:10,11) It seems that the custom of the time was for hosts on such occasions to provide a special robe for each guest to wear. It is assumed, therefore, that this one individual must have accepted and put on the robe in order to mingle with the guests, but later removed it.

When the king observed this man without a robe, and “speechless” as to a reason, he gave orders to “Bind him hand and foot,” and to “cast him into outer darkness” where there would be “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” denoting a condition of great chagrin and disappointment. (Matt. 22:12,13) It would seem reasonable to conclude that this one man might well represent some who would remove their robes after appearing at the feast, or in the outer chambers of the king’s home, waiting for the marriage and the feast to take place.

A robe is a covering, and in this case, one which made the individual acceptable in appearance to the host. This symbolism is used in many places in the Scriptures. In Revelation 19:7,8, the entire Christ company, spoken of as the “wife” of the Lamb, is shown to be “arrayed in fine linen” robes, “clean and white,” which are further described as “the righteousness of saints.”

#### **GARMENTS OF SALVATION**

Every individual who eventually becomes a member of the “bride” class was once a member of the fallen Adamic race. The inherent righteousness of all these has been but as “filthy rags,” and not pleasing to the Lord. (Isa. 64:6) The imperfections of all the guests in the parable must, therefore, be covered by attire which the King provides. The Prophet Isaiah describes this as “garments of salvation,” and “the robe of righteousness.” (Isa. 61:10) The “salvation” and “righteousness” of the saints are not their own, but that which has been provided by the Lord—the righteousness of Christ.

It seems clear that none could become even a probationary guest at the Lord’s marriage feast who did not accept Christ as their Redeemer, and upon the basis of this make a full consecration to do the Father’s will. Wearing the robe of Christ’s righteousness would, therefore, denote an acceptance and appreciation of the great ransom feature of God’s plan, that “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” and made acceptable in the sight of God.—Acts 4:12

Taking off the wedding garment, after having been clothed with it, would therefore imply a loss of appreciation for the ransom. It could be an outright denial of the fact that Christ gave himself as a corresponding price for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. It could also be a gradual cooling of zeal toward our development of Christian character or of service in the interests of God’s plan. The Lord is, of course, the judge as to all that might be implied in this statement. Our privilege and intent in connection with it is to maintain our keen interest in the ransom, as well as our desire to be faithful to our consecration vows. Let us ever remember that apart from the righteousness of Christ, we could have no part in God’s great plan for man’s salvation, and no hope of being at the marriage and the marriage feast of the Lamb.

# The Rich Man and Lazarus

*“If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”*  
—Luke 16:31

**THE PARABLE OF THE** rich man and Lazarus is one that is used widely by certain church denominations in their efforts to prove that eternal torment is the punishment for sin, rather than death, as so clearly stated by the Apostle Paul. (Rom. 6:23) In this parable, recorded in Luke, chapter 16, Jesus speaks of a “certain rich man,” who was clothed in “purple and fine linen,” and who “fared sumptuously every day.”—vs. 19

There was also a “certain beggar named Lazarus,” who lay at the doorway of the rich man’s house. This beggar was “full of sores.” He desired to be fed, and was quite willing to eat the “crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table.” In the parable, dogs were present which licked the sores of the beggar.—vss. 20,21

In the course of time the rich man and the beggar of the parable both died. When the beggar died he was “carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.” When the rich man died he was buried, and “in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.” He saw Abraham afar off, with Lazarus “in his bosom,” and he said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”—vss. 22-24

Abraham did not grant this favor, but simply reminded the rich man of his former favorable position, and the previous unfavorable lot of the beggar. He explained also that there was a “great gulf fixed” between them and the rich man, making it impossible for communication between them.—vss. 25,26

In the concluding verses of the parable, the rich man told Abraham that he had “five brethren.” He asked that they be warned against the same course he had taken, so that when they died they would not find themselves in “this place of torment.” In reply to this it was explained that these five brethren, like the rich man himself, had “Moses and the prophets” as their instructors, and that if they had not sufficiently heeded their warnings and repented, nothing more could be done, “though one rose from the dead.”—vss. 27-31

## IS IT A PARABLE?

Those who advocate the teaching of the eternal torment theory insist that the account of the rich man and Lazarus is not a parable at all, but a statement of fact. They call attention to the fact that Jesus did not refer to it as a parable. They also refer to the statement, “a certain rich man,” claiming that Jesus was telling a story of a man who actually lived and who, when he died, found himself being tormented in a literal hell of fire.

This story of the rich man, it is claimed by the eternal torture proponents, teaches that wicked, unconverted sinners go to a place of torture when they die, and that righteous believers in Christ go to heaven. However, since the story, by their own claim, is a literal statement, it does not prove these points at all. Nothing is said in this account about the rich man being an unbeliever, or even a sinner. It simply states that he was rich, “fared sumptuously every day,” being evidently well fed. Moreover, the story does not inform us that the beggar was righteous, or a believer in Christ, but merely a “certain beggar.” It also does not say that he went to heaven when he died. It does say, however, that he was “carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom.”

So far as we know, there is no group of professed Christians who believe that the righteous are carried to Abraham’s bosom by the angels when they die. According to the professed beliefs of those who teach the eternal torment theory, that part of the story is not a statement of fact and, therefore, must be a parable. We are also unaware of any groups which believe that Abraham can be addressed by those suffering in the flames of eternal torment, and that he is able to talk back to them, as occurs in this story. These verses also must be parabolic in nature.

There are other details of the story which would be equally unreasonable if we considered them to be literal statements. Thus, it seems manifestly evident that the whole account is a parable, even though, as in the case of a number of other parables, Jesus did not so designate it. Deeming it to be a parable, therefore, it is proper that we consider the lesson which it teaches. This is one of Jesus’ parables which he did not explain, so we should not be dogmatic as to its meaning, although there are certain statements in the story itself which provide clues as to what it teaches.

One of these statements is found near the close of the parable. When the rich man asks Abraham to testify to his five brethren concerning the situation, Abraham’s reply is, “They have Moses and the prophets.” (Luke 16:29) Here we have a family of six brothers who are said to have had Moses and the prophets as their teachers. The Scriptures state explicitly the fact that the only ones, up to Jesus’ First Advent, who had Moses and the prophets as their teachers were those of the nation of Israel. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth,” God said to the Jews through the Prophet Amos. In this same verse, the Lord explains that because of this he would punish them for all their iniquities.—Amos 3:2

## **THE RICH MAN**

Indeed, the Israelites, as a nation, were God’s chosen people, and his means of communicating with them was through the Mosaic Law and the prophets. With this clue to guide us, we believe it is reasonable to consider that the “rich man” of the parable represents Israel as it existed at the time of our Lord’s earthly ministry. This type of symbolism is used even today. For example, the term “Uncle Sam” is used to signify the United States, and the “Land Down Under” is a reference to Australia. Circumstances or events mentioned in context with these terms would readily be understood as having reference to the two countries—United States and Australia.

Let us notice the characteristics of the rich man in the parable. He fared sumptuously every day. The nation of Israel did also fare sumptuously. That is, their table was filled with the nourishing symbolic food furnished by the Law and through the prophets. Paul wrote that they had much advantage in “every way” over the Gentiles in that to them were given “the oracles of God.”—Rom. 3:1,2

The rich man was arrayed in a purple robe and fine linen. Purple is a symbol of royalty, and Israel had the promise of becoming a royal, holy nation under God, through which, under the headship of the Messiah, all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Exod. 19:5,6) The white linen worn by the rich man is a symbol of righteousness. (Rev. 19:8) The measure of typical righteousness enjoyed by the Israelites under the Law gave them a standing before God which other nations did not enjoy.

As a nation, however, Israel “died” shortly after our Lord’s First Advent, losing the special blessings which God had promised them as a people. Nevertheless, the individuals comprising this nation continued to live, but because God no longer deemed them his holy nation, each generation of the Jewish people throughout the centuries has suffered to a greater or lesser extent. They have suffered because of being members of a nation that lost God’s exclusive favor and “died” in that sense.

There is a prophecy in which the Lord, using highly symbolic language, forecast the punishment which he would visit upon the Israelites because of their iniquities. He states, “A fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.”—Deut. 32:22

As noted, this is highly symbolic language, but it denotes the use of fire and speaks of “hell.” This is the Hebrew word *sheol*, the equivalent of the Greek word *hades* found in the New Testament. *Hades* is translated “hell” in the parable under consideration, and is used in association with punishments which Jesus warned that he would visit upon his people. Israel was indeed in *hades* throughout most of the Gospel Age—dead as a nation, just like the rich man. Individually, however, it has been different. During this same period, the Jewish people have almost continuously been persecuted, which, in the parable, is symbolized by the flames which engulf the rich man. Thus, the rich man of the parable who died denotes both the “dead” condition of the nation, as well as the resulting persecution and suffering of its people.

## **THE BEGGAR**

The beggar, we believe, also symbolizes a group—not just one nation, but all non-Israelite peoples—that is, the Gentiles. So far as the promises and blessings of God were concerned, the Gentiles were a poverty-stricken people prior to the First Advent of Jesus. The Israelites themselves often referred to them as “dogs.” We note the Syrophenician woman, a Gentile, who asked Jesus for a blessing. He asked her if she thought it was proper to “take the children’s bread” and “cast it unto the dogs.” To this, she replied that dogs are quite willing to eat the crumbs which fall from the children’s table. (Mark 7:25-30) It is worthy to mention the similarity of these words to those of the beggar in the parable when he asked to be “fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table.”

The incident involving Jesus and the Syrophenician woman serves as an illustration of the wide distinction between the standing of the Israelites at that time and the position of the Gentiles. However, a change was due. Beginning shortly after Pentecost, God visited the Gentiles. (Acts 15:14) Through the proclamation of the Gospel to them, they were given an opportunity to enter into his favor, and to rejoice in the hope held out in his promises to the faithful followers of Jesus.

This change of position is represented in the parable by the beggar being carried into Abraham's bosom. The believers among the Gentiles were now given the opportunity to embrace the faith of Abraham—that through his seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed. (Gal. 3:7-9,16,26-29) This does not mean that all Gentiles have embraced this Messianic hope—the Gospel of Christ which was first preached to Abraham. It simply indicates that there has been no discrimination against them from God's standpoint as there was when Jesus said to his apostles, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."—Matt. 10:5,6

#### **THE FIVE BRETHREN**

The rich man in the parable mentioned having five brethren to whom he wanted a message sent concerning that which had befallen him. There were twelve tribes of Israel. In Palestine at the time of our Lord's First Advent, the great majority were of the former two-tribe kingdom of Judah and Benjamin. There were some of the other tribes there, but the majority of the other ten tribes were scattered among various nations, and did not have the same opportunity as the two-tribe group to hear the testimony of Jesus. We believe it is reasonable that the one "rich man" represents chiefly the two tribes then in Palestine, and that his five brethren symbolize those of the other ten tribes.

In this connection, the statement in the parable accredited to "Abraham" is significant. He said that these other brethren would not believe even though one should rise from the dead. How true this has been! Indeed, the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus has been one of the additional stumbling stones to unbelieving Israelites. The opposition of many Israelites in Palestine and in other nations to the teaching that Jesus was raised from the dead led to much persecution of Paul and others at the beginning of the Gospel Age.—Acts 4:1-3; 17:18,32

The words concerning one rising from the dead may have also pointed forward to the miracle Jesus later performed, as recorded in John, chapter 11, in which he raised Lazarus from the dead. This was not the symbolic Lazarus of the parable, but Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, all three of whom were close friends of Jesus. Here, too, although Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Jewish leaders were not persuaded to repent or believe, but, in fact, redoubled their efforts to put him to death.—vss. 45,46,53

The parable states that a "great gulf" had been created between the symbolic rich man and the beggar—between unbelieving Jews and believing Gentiles. This has also been true. It has been impossible to bridge this gulf, although at times the suffering Israelites have appealed to Gentile believers to do something that might ease their sufferings, as symbolized by the drop of water for which the rich man asked.

As herein discussed, we believe this parable lends itself to a reasonable interpretation. As in all parables, every detail of the story may not fit the facts perfectly, but the general picture is there. A nation that was rich toward God died to that favored position, and, as a people, has suffered. By contrast, those considered by that nation as cast off from God and his blessings were given, as individuals, the opportunity to accept the Gospel as embodied in the oath bound covenant with Abraham. God has blessed all who have entered into their privileges along this line. To all such, "There is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile], ... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."—Gal. 3:28