



Week 4 – When Jesus Speaks: Studying His Parables FINALE

Spend Your Summer Listening: When Jesus Speaks

Join the Wednesday Night Crew as we study the words of Jesus to figure out how to actually live them. Until we get to meet face to face, will we be Livestreaming our “Chew On This” podcast on Wednesday Nights @ 6:30PM on Facebook (Maranatha Forest Lake) and Youtube. Links available www.realchurch.org

Thank you for joining us here LIVE in the WAJC radio station.

You can listen to WAJC at 88.1 or 91.7 or at Realiferradio.fm or search WAJC in the TuneIn App on your phone

Intro

We welcome you to this special live stream experience of Chew On This.

You are about to enter a discussion on how to actually live out faith in Christ.

Living it out loud within our messy lives. The content of this discussion comes from The Pastoral Preaching notes and this live, small group discussion these notes will prompt here tonight. Something we call: A Community Based Learning Experience. Come, Chew On This with us.

Opening Question(s): [Pertains to Subject being discussed. Pulls listener in.]

Introduction: This is Pr. Orleen Haseltine with and Sam Beamond along with Bruce Nelson (and our very own Otto Steve Lunde & Pr. Robin Bjornson joining us remotely).

Date/Topic: Wednesday, June 24th

We thank you for joining us for this week’s discussion on Chew On This. This week’s topic

When Jesus Speaks: Studying His Parables – The Finale!

(Premier video Parable wrap up will be dropped on 7/1...with Pr Mike)

Access/Website: All sermon/discussion, raw notes, and handouts are available at: realchurch.org/wednesdaynight

Discussion

Closing Statement [Gives application of the topic. How do I apply to my life what was just talked about?]

Outro (Steve)

Thank you for joining us for this week’s discussion on **When Jesus Speaks: Studying His Parables**

To enjoy this process live, come join us and the Wednesday Night Crew every Wednesday night @ Maranatha’s Forest Lake Campus @ 6:30PM. This is Steve Lunde, ALWAYS BE KIND.

Intro:



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13:34–35

MYTH: JESUS CHRIST WAS ONLY A GREAT MORAL TEACHER

People marveled at the teaching of Jesus. Whether He spoke in interesting parables (Matt. 13:34) or gave more straightforward, extended discourses (chs. 5–7), people followed Him everywhere, hanging on His every word (7:28). “No man ever spoke like this Man!” His listeners remarked (John 7:46). And they were right. **Jesus was a master teacher and communicator.**

Moreover, beyond simply teaching the highest moral and spiritual principles ever known, Jesus actually *lived* them. He told people to love their enemies; He forgave those who crucified Him. He told people to lay down their lives for others; He laid down His own life for the world. He told people not to worry about material possessions; He owned no more than the clothes on His back. Jesus’ example makes Him the most remarkable of all teachers.

And yet that legacy almost makes it too easy for people to dismiss Him, ignoring both His message and His person: “Jesus? Yes, He was a great moral teacher.” What they really mean is that, for them, Jesus was *only* a teacher—a great teacher, perhaps the greatest the world has ever seen, but a teacher and nothing more.

Neither He nor His followers would allow for that. Jesus was either very much more than a great teacher or else very much less than one. For in addition to His great moral precepts, He made astonishing claims that no other sane person has ever made, and behaved in ways that no other decent human has. For instance:

- He claimed to forgive people’s sins (Matt. 9:2; Luke 7:47–48).
- He accepted people’s worship (Matt. 8:2–3; 9:18–19; 14:33).
- He said that He alone was the way to God, the truth of God, and the life of God (John 5:40; 6:44; 7:16–17; 14:6).
- He said that He had come to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).
- He promised that He would rise from the dead (Matt. 20:19; 27:63).
- He claimed that humanity would ultimately be accountable to Him (Matt. 7:21–23; 25:31–46).
- He claimed to be God and allowed others to call Him God (16:15–16; 26:63–64; John 8:58).

These are astonishing claims. Any teacher who would make them had better be telling the truth or else He would be the worst of all liars and neither great nor moral.

The evidence suggests that Jesus was telling the truth. For in addition to His explicit claims are the implicit claims of fulfilled Old Testament prophecies and the performance of supernatural miracles. And there is also the fact that countless others who have examined His words and actions have come away convinced that He was not merely a great moral teacher, but the very Son of God. Among them have been determined and supposedly unshakable skeptics like Thomas and adamant opponents like the brilliant Saul of Tarsus who ended up becoming His most ardent follower.

To believe that Jesus was simply a great moral teacher is untenable. **As C. S. Lewis put it in his book *Mere Christianity*:**

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else He would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.¹

¹ [Word in life study Bible](#). (1996). (electronic ed.). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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Parables already studied:

Parable #1: Matthew 13:44

“The kingdom of heaven (A) is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy (B) he goes and sells all that he has and (C) buys that field. (ESV). WE are His Treasure

Parable #2: Matthew 20:1-15 Laborers in the Vineyard

Standard view: The Kingdom of God rewards on its own measuring system. **Alternative view:** The Kingdom of God redefines rewards: Care & Generosity. The Kingdom of God understands our needs. (All willing workers got paid a day’s wage as they had the same life needs to support)

Parable #3: Luke 15:11-32 The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Standard view: The main character is the Prodigal. God rejoices over the Prodigals return home. Salvation for the lost.

Alternative view: Lost Sheep...Lost Coin...Lost Son

Is the main ‘character’ Heaven? The Kingdom of God.

Instructing us on what Heaven is like...what happens when the lost are found?

- Who was He responding to before He told these three parables?

Luke 15:1-3 *“Now (A) the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes (B) grumbled, saying, (C) “This man receives sinners and (D) eats with them.”³ So he told them this parable:”*

- How does it affect our now with all that is going on in Society?
(There are no “Those People”.)

“For Jesus, sin is desiring the death of God and wanting to take his gifts without reference to the giver.” Bailey, K. E. (2003). [Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel’s Story](#) (p. 137). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Parable #4: Luke 11:5-9 Parable of procuring Bread (Luke 11:1-4 Disciples asking how to pray, LORD’s prayer)

Standard view: PRAY...Ask and Seek and you will Find – Persistence

Alternative Additional view: Not just what to pray but HOW to pray in FAITH

Our daily bread: What happens when we do not have any ‘daily bread’? Is this parable about asking for the things we do not have? Missional prayer?

“it’s for people who find themselves with absolutely nothing to offer when facing a person in desperate need.”

Doug Newton

Parable #5: Matthew 18:23-35 The Unforgiving Servant

Standard view: You are forgiven so you must forgive.

Alternative Additional view: Don’t get caught in rationalizing...‘I cannot do that forgiveness thing’

Parable #6: Matthew 7:24-27 The Parable of the House on the Rock

Standard view: Jesus is our foundation **James 1:22: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only”**

Alternative view: This goes beyond *saving* grace; He offers *sanctifying* grace. Call to understand and walk in the process of Sanctification. DO THE HARD THINGS...yes, Jesus means that. **Luke 14:26**

Parable #7: Matthew 25:14-30 The Parable of the Talents

Standard view: We have Eternal Rewards (Handout on website) “Well done good and faithful servant.”

What does this mean for the servant who did not invest? The worthless servant? You shall know them by their fruits. **Matthew 7:15-20**

Alternative Additional view: Rewards/Giftings given **NOW** as well, for us to invest

Matthew 16:25 *“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”*

Living without fear of not doing or being enough because: Success = Faithfulness not accumulation.

Parable #8: Luke 16:1-9 The Parable of the Dishonest Manager (Connected to Prodigal Son, reinforces same thoughts)

Standard view:

Hmmm...cunning is good? Ha! Use your worldly resources for eternal means?

Alternative view: Robin Hood

Master “pays” for the salvation of the Dishonest Manager....

Parable #9: Luke 10:30-37 The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Standard view: What God means by ‘neighborly’

Alternative view: This is what love does. Period.



Parable #10:

Luke 18:1-8

The Parable of the Persistent Widow

18 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” ⁶ And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

- Imagine a Judge who “He felt no shame before people.”
In a culture where shame is used to motivate, control, teach....
“Middle Eastern culture is often called a shame/pride culture, in which social behavior is guided by a community sense of honor and shame more than by means of an individual sense of loyalty to an abstract principle of right and wrong.”
How would this Judge be received in society?
- A community sense of honor dictates a code that shouldn’t be violated. “You do not take advantage of the weak.”
- As regards the judge in the parable, people cannot appeal to him saying, “for the sake of God,” because he does not fear God.
Nor can anyone plead, “for my sake,” because he does not care what anyone thinks about him. He possesses no inner sense of honor to which supplicants can appeal.
In the Middle East these two approaches are the standard ways to appeal to someone for help. But with this judge neither appeal will be successful, **and thereby the widow’s situation appears hopeless.**
- The widow in the Old Testament is the classic symbol of the most vulnerable adult in the culture.
In Middle Eastern society, women do not go to the courts; men go for them.
When this woman appears, the reader knows that **she is alone**, with no father, uncle, brother or nephew to speak for her. She must plead her case alone.
- Alone and against impossible odds, the widow plays the only card she has, which is her loud persistent pleading. She refuses to be quiet or to go away until the judge surrenders and says, in effect, “She is giving me a headache. I cannot put up with this racket any longer.” Finally, he agrees to settle her case favorably in order to be rid of her.
- What woman can do that men cannot. They are invisible. I.E. Yelling at armed guards.
“In like manner, in the parable, a man would be thrown out at once if he tried to pester the judge with his shouting. But the widow can manage if she has courage and persistence.”
- Was the judge being bribed to not help her?
- “Jesus uses the rabbinic principle of interpretation “from the light to the heavy.” If in this somewhat humorous scene, such persistence pays off, *how much more* is persistence appropriate in prayer where we kneel before a compassionate God? Jesus makes clear that we are not in the presence of a grim judge who is taking bribes from someone else and wants nothing to do with us. On the contrary, in prayer believers are in the presence of a loving father who cares for his children.”

Standard View:

Additional View:



TEAM ASK:

Middle Eastern Eyes NOTES:

The Parable of the Widow and the Judge

LUKE 18:1–8

THIS PARABLE IS DEEPLY IMBEDDED in traditional Middle Eastern public chivalry toward women, and needs to be compared to a similar account composed more than two hundred years earlier in a book titled the Wisdom of Ben Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus).

This book is often referred to as deuterо-canoical and is read as Scripture by Eastern Sirach 35:14–18 appears in figure 19.1.

He will not ignore the *supplication of the fatherless*, nor the *widow* when she pours out *her story*. Do not the *tears of the widow* run down her cheek as she *cries out* against him who has caused them to fall?

WIDOW HEARD
Against Adversaries

He whose *service is pleasing* to the *Lord* will be *accepted*, and *his prayer* will reach to the clouds. The *prayer of the humble* pierces the clouds, and he will not be consoled until it *reaches the Lord*; he will not desist until the *Most High visits him* and does *justice* for the *righteous* and *executes judgment*.

OBEDIENT/HUMBLE HEARD
Persistence
Justice for the Righteous
Judgment (on adversary)

The *Lord will not delay*, neither will he be *patient* with them, till he *crushes the genitals* of the *unmerciful*, and repays *vengeance on the Gentiles*.

LORD NOT PATIENT
Brutal on Gentiles

Figure 19.1. Widows and adversaries in Ben Sirach 35:14–18

Clearly, there are similarities and differences between the words of Sirach and Jesus. As recorded in Luke, the parable of Jesus appears in figure 19.2.

1. And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said,

2. “In a certain city there was a *judge*. *God* he did *not fear* and before people he was never ashamed.

JUDGE
God
People

3. And a *widow* there was in that city who was *coming* to him saying, ‘*Vindicate me* from my adversary.’

WIDOW
Coming
Vindication

4. *He did not want* to for a time. Then he said to himself, ‘Although I do *not fear God* and *do not respect people*,

JUDGE
God
People

5. yet because *she causes me trouble*, this widow, I will *vindicate her*,

WIDOW
Vindication



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lest in continual coming she wear me out.' ”

Coming

-
- 6. The Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says.
And *will not God vindicate his elect*
 who cry to him day and night?
 Also he is slow to anger with them.
I tell you, *he will vindicate them speedily.* FUTURE
Present
Present
FUTURE
 - 7. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes,
will he find faith on the earth?” SON OF MAN
Future—Faith?

Figure 19.2. The parable of the widow and the judge (Lk 18:1–8)

There are a number of contrasts between the two accounts. First, Sirach begins with a woman and immediately shifts to a man. No such shift appears in Jesus’ parable, where the woman maintains her presence throughout the story. Second, in Sirach, God responds “to the one whose service is pleasing to the Lord.” Such a person receives rewards. **In Jesus’ parable there is no mention of any good works done by the woman that earn her the right to a hearing.** Third, at the end of Sirach’s account the reader is told that God will crush the genitals of the Gentiles. Jesus’ parable ends with a wistful hope that the Son of Man might find faith at the end of all things. No word of judgment appears, but in its place there is a realistic awareness that all may not be well when history comes to its close.

Both stories include a judge, but Sirach assumes the judge to be God. Jesus introduces a very human judge who did not fear God or respect people. Ibrahim Sa’id succinctly explains these two aspects of the judge’s character by noting, “**‘He does not fear God’ means that he does not grant God’s authority, ‘and does not respect people’ means he pays no attention to the opinions of people.**”

Literally the Gospel text says, “**He felt no shame before people.**” ~~Middle Eastern culture is often called a shame/pride culture, in which social behavior is guided by a community sense of honor and shame more than by means of an individual sense of loyalty to an abstract principle of right and wrong.~~ Such an outlook is common to many cultures. A common American phrase affirms that “You don’t kick a man when he’s down.” To do so would be dishonorable. ~~A community sense of honor dictates a code that should not be violated.~~ It is in light of such things that the judge in the parable must be seen. Luke’s introduction to the parable is as follows:

- 1. And he told them a parable,
to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

The introduction to the parable is clearly supplied by Luke or his source. One strand of interpretation suggests that such Lucan settings should be set aside to let the parable speak for itself. Whenever that happens, the interpreter inevitably adds his or her own frame of reference. A green and brown picture may be mounted with a brown frame. As that happens the brown frame will highlight the browns in the painting. But if the frame is removed and the picture placed on a green wall, the greens of the picture will be reinforced. When the first-century “frame” is removed from this parable, consciously or unconsciously a modern frame is added by the commentator. Surely Luke’s understanding of the focus of the parable is superior to the views of any modern commentator (including me).

Furthermore, the Jewish tradition expected that the *māšāl* (the parable) should be accompanied by its *nimšal* (that extra bit of information that the listener/reader needed to understand the parable). Isaiah’s parable (*māšāl*) of the vineyard (Is 5:1–6) is followed by its *nimšal*, which appears in verse 7 and identifies the symbols of the parable. The parable is not a balloon to be carried with the wind of the interpreter’s experience or perceptions. Rather, the text itself provides the author/editor’s understanding of what the parable is about. This pattern is already clear in the Isaiah passage. In Luke the text makes clear that persistence in prayer and fear are together a major thrust of the parable. By this point in Jesus’ ministry there was considerable opposition to his message, and the passage that appears just before this parable is not reassuring. The parable presents two opposing forces, the judge and the widow.

The textual picture of the two of them is as follows:

- 2. “In a certain city there was a *judge*. JUDGE
 God he did not fear God



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and before people he was never ashamed. People

- 3. And a *widow* there was in that city Widow
 who was *coming* to him Coming
 saying, '*Vindicate me* from my adversary.' Vindication

As regards the judge in the parable, people cannot appeal to him saying, "for the sake of God," because he does not fear God. Nor can anyone plead, "for my sake," because he does not care what anyone thinks about him. He possesses no inner sense of honor to which supplicants can appeal. In the Middle East these two approaches are the standard ways to appeal to someone for help. But with this judge neither appeal will be successful, and thereby the widow's situation appears hopeless.

The widow in the Old Testament is the classic symbol of the most vulnerable adult in the culture. In Middle Eastern society, women do not go to the courts; men go for them. When this woman appears, the reader knows that she is alone, with no father, uncle, brother or nephew to speak for her. She must plead her case alone. The parable continues.

- 4. *He did not want* to for a time. Then he said to JUDGE
 himself, God
 'Although I do *not fear God* People
 and *do not respect people*,

- 5. yet because *she causes me trouble*, this Widow
 widow, Vindication
 I will *vindicate her*, Coming
 lest in *continual coming* she wear me out.' "

Alone and against impossible odds, the widow plays the only card she has, which is her loud persistent pleading. She refuses to be quiet or to go away until the judge surrenders and says, in effect, "She is giving me a headache. I cannot put up with this racket any longer." Finally he agrees to settle her case favorably in order to be rid of her.

CHIVALRY: The chivalry that surrounds women in Middle Eastern culture is striking. In situations of extreme danger women can do things that men dare not do. At the height of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991) radical militias were kidnapping male Westerners. Teaching at a seminary in the center of Beirut, the time came when it was no longer safe for me to walk the four blocks to the seminary building. In order to survive I imposed "house arrest" on myself, and the militia that controlled our quarter granted permission for my students to come to the house for classes in our living room. For four months I did not leave the house and avoided kidnap because my brave wife and daughter could come and go, buy the food, do the banking and make it possible for us to survive. They were not under threat of being kidnapped, because traditional chivalry protected them.

In another incident, before I was obliged to go underground, I vividly remember a particularly violent militia that had its headquarters a few blocks away. Walking by, I chose not to notice the heavily armed men guarding the entrance and certainly did not engage them in any conversation. The community did not "see" them. But there was one old woman, dressed in a traditional long black dress with a black head covering who would regularly go to that building, stand out front, point her finger at the guards and shout invectives at them, telling them to get out of the quarter. The guards would smile, address her politely and tell her not to get upset. Had any man in the quarter engaged in such activity, he would have been shot *at once*. It is not by accident that the women disciples followed Jesus to the cross. Had the men appeared they could have been arrested, but the women were safe. John, being young, was the exception that proves the rule. Furthermore, he was protected by being with Mary. **In like manner, in the parable, a man would be thrown out at once if he tried to pester the judge with his shouting. But the widow can manage if she has courage and persistence.**

The parable presupposes that the woman is in the right but the judge is dragging his feet. Perhaps someone was bribing him from the other side. The woman's response is to persist and continue shouting until he settles her case favorably.

Jesus uses the rabbinic principle of interpretation "from the light to the heavy." If in this somewhat humorous scene, such persistence pays off, *how much more* is persistence appropriate in prayer where we kneel before a compassionate God? Jesus makes clear that we are not in the presence of a grim judge who is taking bribes from



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someone else and wants nothing to do with us. On the contrary, in prayer believers are in the presence of a loving father who cares for his children.

The parable concludes:

- 6. The Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect who cry to him day and night? Also he is slow to anger with them. I tell you, *he will vindicate them speedily.*”
 - FUTURE
 - Present
 - Present
 - FUTURE

- 7. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”
 - SON OF MAN
 - Future—Faith?

The critical sentence is, “Also he is slow to anger with them.” I read this as a statement rather than as a question. The Greek verb used here literally means, “He pushes anger far away.” It is one of the three Greek words in the New Testament for *patience*. Usually, this sentence is seen as a question and is translated, “Will he delay long over them?” But the elect are not sinless and their faith is not always strong. Being the elect does not automatically protect them from failure. Too easily those who suffer injustice assume that the injustice they suffer automatically renders them righteous. Their opponents are evil. Because of the oppression they endure, God will most certainly be angry *at their oppressors*, but never *at them!* Such is not the case. Only if God is able to “put his anger far away” is he able to come and hear them. The very wistfulness of the final question, “Will he find faith on the earth?” makes clear that Jesus is realistic about the frailties of those he has chosen.

SUMMARY: THE PARABLE OF THE WIDOW AND THE JUDGE

What is this parable trying to say? I would suggest the following:

- 1. A woman is the hero of the story. Sirach began with a woman and he quickly shifted to a male image. Not so Jesus. The woman is presented as a model to emulate in regard to confidence and persistence in prayer.
- 2. As the saints and martyrs have known for ages, prayer can conquer fear. The suffering church across the centuries has found encouragement in this parable as Ibn al-Tayyib wrote in Baghdad a millennium ago: “It is said that the purpose of this parable is to clarify what is incumbent on the believers during the life of the present church as regards perseverance and persistence in heartfelt, fervent prayer. [The faithful pray] with full confidence that if they accomplish this, there is no doubt that God will come to them with joy, look upon their suffering and torment, and grant them victory at the appropriate time.”
- 3. Persistence in prayer is appropriate for the believer up until there is an answer. If God denies the request or offers a solution other than the one requested, the faithful person is expected to respond with “Thy will be done.” But before the answer is clear, persistence in pray is a part of genuine piety.
- 4. Unlike the woman, the believer faces a loving Father, not a capricious Judge. Within that relationship of love and confidence, prayers are offered to God.
- 5. History is not random. Rather it moves toward a goal, and the future is secured for the community of faith — God will vindicate his elect.
- 6. Vindication is assured in spite of our failures. God is able and willing to put his anger far away in order that he might reach out to us in love.
- 7. Such a promise does not free the believer from self-examination and renewal lest the Son of Man appear and find that faith has evaporated from the earth.

As the cross approached, the role of the women in the band of disciples became more prominent. A woman anointed the Messiah as he approached the triumphal entry. Women were faithful to the end at the cross. They had the courage to follow Joseph of Arimathea as he made his way to Pilate to request the body, and on to the tomb. Thereby the women knew where Jesus was buried. On Saturday evening it was the women who ventured out to buy spices for the anointing of his body. Sunday morning they made their way to the tomb, heard the glorious yet frightening word of the angels, overcame their fears and took the good news to the absent disciples. In like manner the hero of this parable is a woman, a woman with persistence and courage—the very virtues that his female disciples so nobly exhibited all through Holy Week. To them and to him, the church remains forever in debt.

Regarding the parable as a whole, Hultgren aptly concludes:



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Soon Jesus and his disciples will be in Jerusalem. That could mean disaster, even death, for Jesus and his followers. But within such perilous times, one should not lose heart. God will not only care for his own, but even vindicate them. Therefore the disciples should persist in prayer and faith.²

Christ-taught persistence

Jesus powerfully and clearly taught the necessity of dogged persistence in his moving parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1–8).

In verse 1, Luke declares explicitly the reason for the parable: “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (NIV). The word *should* indicates not merely the duty, but the necessity of persistence in prayer. (In other words, persistence is not only nice, but necessary to effective prayer.) And the word *always* should be understood as praying continually or persistently in spite of the temptation to give up because of delayed answers.

The parable centers on two characters: a corrupt judge and a needy widow. The corruption of the judge is vividly set forth by the double characterization, “who neither feared God nor cared about men.” This points up the unlikelihood of anyone receiving his consideration.

The petitioner is someone seemingly very unlikely to prevail before this self-centered magistrate. (The first-century audience knew that widows were utterly helpless.) This particular widow, however, has a weapon: *persistent petition*.

Her action is set forth with the verb “kept coming.” She made not one appearance before the judge, but many. Jesus highlights this woman’s action with the response of the judge when he says, “For some time he refused” (v. 4). The woman kept coming and the judge kept refusing.

Eventually, however, the woman’s persistence prevailed. It was solely this persistence and nothing else that caused the judge to grant her request. Verse 5 furnishes an interesting insight into the judge’s reasoning: “so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming.”

Having thus illustrated the effective power of persistent prayer, the Lord applies the truth to the audience. He centers the significance of the parable on the judge’s statement, “Though I’m still a ruthless judge, I have decided to grant this woman’s petition because by her continual coming she is driving me out of my mind!” The judge freely acknowledges that the request was granted because of the pressure of the woman’s persistence.

Next, the Lord attempts to bring his listeners to an understanding of the parable’s critical lesson regarding the practice of prayer (v. 7). The words “And ... God” are emphasized in the original text. The word translated *and* is actually a mild adversative contrasting God with the judge. It could just as well be translated “but ... God.” All that the judge is, God is not. All that the Lord is, the judge is not. The judge cared for neither God nor man. God, on the other hand, is exactly the opposite. The judge was selfish, our God is loving. The judge was unjust, our God is just.

But while a basic contrast exists between God and the judge, there is one point of similarity—their delayed response. God, like the judge, does at times delay responding to the cries of his children. Note that the assurance that God will indeed bring about justice is given to those “who cry out to him day and night.” Thus justice is promised by God in response to persistent crying out in prayer.

The judge, of course, delayed out of selfish indifference, but this is never why God delays. Hence another contrast: Whenever God delays it is the tarrying of love. God’s delay is always part of the “all things” that he is causing to work together for good (Rom. 8:28).

The answer, then, to the rhetorical question “Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones?” requires the positive answer, “He certainly will.” Jesus makes this affirmative answer explicit in his next statement (v. 8): “I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.” Clearly, persistent prayer will get results.

The word translated “quickly” has appeared to some to contradict the concept of delayed response. But such need not necessarily be the case. The phrase translated “quickly” is built around a noun that has the root meaning of “speed, swiftness, haste.” A form of the same word is used in Revelation 22:20 where Christ promises, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Yet, it has now been almost 2,000 years and Christ still has not come. However, when he does come, he will not be dilatory; he will swiftly descend from heaven, destroy his enemies, and set up his kingdom.

So it is with the prayerful crying out of his children. Though there appears to be a delay, when the time arrives for God to answer, he will do it—quickly.³

18:1–8. And he spake a parable unto them. The verses that follow are often called the parable of the unjust judge. This judge was blatantly bad, unprincipled, lawless, and void of moral fortitude to do what was right. The poor widow, on the other hand, was helpless, friendless, destitute, and with no hope. Yet through her great persistence, the wicked judge was so bothered that he finally granted her request. Although Jesus taught perseverance in prayer in other places (Mt 7:7–8), He is here using a form of logic that reasons from the lesser to the greater. Jesus said, regarding God’s children, that **he will avenge them speedily** (vs. 8). The idea is this. If this poor woman with no hope received help from a wicked unscrupulous judge, how much sooner and greater will be the help a loving heavenly Father gives to His own dear children.

² Bailey, K. E. (2008). *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (pp. 261–268). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

³ Mitchell, C. C. (1985). [Why Keep Bothering God?](#) *Christianity Today*, 29(18), 33–34.



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When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? (vs. 8). The implied answer is “no.” The faith spoken of is probably the body of truth, or revealed doctrine, since the word is preceded by the definite article in the original. Improvement in the worldwide spiritual climate is not here predicted.⁴

Parable #11:

Matthew 25:1-13

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

25 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps^[a] and went to meet the bridegroom.^[b] ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Standard View:

⁴ Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). [KJV Bible Commentary](#) (pp. 2054–2055). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



Additional View:

TEAM ASK:

Middle Eastern Eye NotES:

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Young Women

MATTHEW 25:1–13

THIS PARABLE TOUCHES ON A VARIETY of ethical and theological topics. The text exhibits a modified prophetic rhetorical template of seven stanzas with a climax in the middle. Its rhetorical structure is shown in figure 20.1.

THE RHETORIC

This parable consists of seven stanzas with the climax in the center. As is usually the case, that center is related to the beginning (1) and the end (7). It is a further case of the prophetic rhetorical template. The center climax around which the story revolves is the cry, “Behold the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!” As is common in this particular rhetorical form, the theme that appears in the center (meeting the bridegroom) is also prominent in the beginning and at the end. The word *bridegroom* appears only in stanzas 1, 4 and 7.

The “wise” and the “foolish” young women are contrasted in 2 and 6. Numbers 3 and 5 focus on sleeping and rising up. I have called this a *modified* prophetic template, in that there is an extra stanza at the end that needs to be examined. The rhetorical style identifies the parable as being deeply rooted in the Hebrew tradition.

COMMENTARY

Before examining the parable, it is important to note the comparisons between it and the parable in Luke 12:35–38, which I prefer to name “The Parable of the Serving Master.” The list is as follows:

1. Both stories occur at night.
2. Both are wedding feasts.

| | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It shall be compared the kingdom of heaven to ten young women who took their lamps and <i>came out to meet the bridegroom</i> [and the bride]. Five were <i>dimwitted</i> and five were <i>thoughtful</i>. | <p>MEET THE GROOM (expectation) Ten Come Out</p> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. When the <i>dimwitted</i> took their lamps, they took <i>no oil</i> with them. But the <i>thoughtful</i> took <i>flasks of oil</i> with their lamps. | <p>DULL—NO OIL Thoughtful—Oil</p> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. As the bridegroom was delayed, they <i>all dozed and fell asleep</i>. | <p>ALL SLEEP</p> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. But at midnight there was a cry, “<i>Behold the bridegroom!</i> Come out to meet him!” | <p>MEET THE GROOM (arrival imminent)</p> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Then <i>all</i> those young women <i>arose and serviced their lamps</i>. | <p>ALL ARISE</p> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. And the <i>dimwitted</i> said to the <i>thoughtful</i>, “<i>Give us some of your oil,</i> for our lamps are going out.” But the <i>thoughtful</i> replied, “Perhaps there will <i>not be enough for us and you</i>. | <p>DULL—NO OIL Thoughtful—Oil</p> |



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Go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.”

- 7a. And while they went to buy,
the *bridegroom came*,
and *those prepared went in* with him
to the marriage feast,
and the *door was shut*.
MEET THE GROOM
(realization)
FIVE GO IN—
FIVE SHUT OUT
- b. Afterward the other young women came
saying, “*Lord, Lord, open to us.*”
But he replied,
“Amen I say to you, I do not know you.”
TOO LATE!
Watch therefore for you know neither the day
nor the hour.

Figure 20.1. The parable of the wise and foolish young women (Mt 25:1–13)

- 3. In each there are people waiting for something important to happen.
- 4. The question of being prepared or not prepared is important in both.
- 5. Having lamps, burning or not, at the moment of the arrival of the master is important in both stories.
- 6. “Staying awake” versus “falling asleep” is important in each parable.
- 7. The door of the house is a dramatic prop in both. (Is it open or closed, and who is to open it?)
- 8. The delay of the “big man” is an issue in each account.
- 9. The time of his arrival is unknown in both stories.
- 10. The central figure is called master/bridegroom in Matthew. In Luke he is master/Lord.

The close relationships between the two parables are clear. One way to understand this data is to affirm that the two parables were created in some form by the same mind. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison present a detailed discussion of the various options regarding the history of the composition of this parable. I note the above list of comparisons to make the point that both of these parables have similar traditional Middle Eastern culture behind them and to that culture we now turn.²

The scene focuses on preparations for a wedding banquet that is to take place in the home of the groom. A great crowd of family and friends fills the house and pours out into the street in front of the dwelling. As the crowd is gathering, the groom and several close friends are making their way to the home of the bride, which is assumed to be across town or in a nearby village. From there the groom collects his bride and escorts her back to his family home, where the crowd awaits and the marriage feast will be held. Several of the ancient Greek, Latin and Syriac texts of this parable specifically mention the groom *and* the bride. This reading of the story fits traditional village life and is probably the original. In any case, the presence of the bride is implied even if not mentioned. When she was ready, she would be placed on the back of a riding animal, and the groom, with his friends, would form a disorganized, exuberant parade. This happy group would take the longest possible route back to the groom’s home deliberately, wandering through as many streets of the village as possible so that most of the populace could see and cheer them as they passed.

In traditional village life in the Middle East, weddings take place during the seven months of the hot and cloudless summer. At the groom’s home some of the crowd would therefore wait in the street as they anticipate the arrival of the meandering wedding party. The parable takes place at night, and among the guests are ten young women. Each of them has a lamp, and of course all ten lamps are lit. It is one thing for young men to roam about at night without lamps. Starlight or moonlight is usually bright enough to see by in the dry, clear air of the Middle East. But women, young and old, always carry lamps. Their reputation, and in some cases their personal safety, depends on the lamps. For young unmarried women to move around in the dark without carrying lamps is unthinkable! What might they be doing in the dark and with whom? Also, with a lamp, no one can harass them unseen. I have observed that village women do not carry such lamps conveniently close to the ground (like a flashlight) so that they can see the street. Instead, they carry them directly in front of their faces so that all can witness who they are and where they are going.

The ten young women are very circumspect in their behavior. All have lamps, and each of the lamps is burning. But there are differences among them. Half of them have brought extra olive oil with them in small flasks, while the other half have not taken this precaution.



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The parade, winding slowly through the village, takes a bit longer than these ten young women, in their youthful enthusiasm, anticipate. Such things usually do. The wiser young women realize that it could be the middle of the night before the wedding party arrives at the groom’s ancestral home. The young women become drowsy, carefully place their burning lamps on a window ledge or some other appropriate sheltered place and doze off inside or outside the house.

Finally, the front of the parade enters the alley and the cry goes out, “Behold the bridegroom. Come out to meet him.”

Guests and family still in the house rush into the street. The ten young women arise quickly, recognizing that some time has passed and begin to “service their lamps.” The loose unattached wicks must be adjusted, and the oil reservoirs inside the lamps replenished. To their horror, five of the women suddenly realize their mistake. Their lamps are almost out of olive oil and they have no reserves. The other five take out their little clay flasks and calmly replenish their lamps. The five foolish women crowd around them demanding oil. Politely (and no doubt firmly) they are in effect told, “We don’t have enough for ourselves—and as for you—solve your own little problems!” No doubt irritated and sputtering, the five stomp off to beg, borrow or buy a bit of oil. Everyone knows everyone in such villages, so acquiring a little oil from someone is not a problem—even in the middle of the night.

In the meantime, the groom and his new bride arrive and the entire crowd sweeps into the house and the door is shut. After all, it *is* the middle of the night.

In the final scene at the end of the story (7b) the shortsighted crowd of five women finally acquire some oil, get their lamps working again and arrive back at the house. “Sir/Lord! Open to us!” they shout through the door. “Sorry,” replies the groom, “I don’t think I know you.”

As is often the case, the reader of the parable is left hanging. Does the bridegroom relent and let them in or not? The listener/reader is not told. The locked door is what they deserve. We do not know what they receive when the conversation is over. In the Middle East the word *no* is never an answer, rather it is a pause in the negotiations. The reader has to finish the play. What then is the story all about?

SUMMARY: THE PARABLE OF THE WISE AND FOOLISH YOUNG WOMEN

Granting the inevitable fusion of good ethics and good theology, on the *ethical* level Jesus appears to be saying four things:

First, the *place of women*. Equality between men and women was important to Jesus. This could have been a parable about ten young men. The previous story in Matthew’s Gospel (24:45–51) is an account of a master and two male servants, one noble and the other ignoble. By contrast this story is about women, not men, and there are ten of them, not two. Why so?

Thoughtful answers to both questions come from the great Syrian Orthodox monk, scholar, physician and poet, Ibn al-Tayyib, of the eleventh century. In his commentary on this text he points out that in the Gospels, the church is always feminine: the bride of Christ is the mother of us all. Thus it is appropriate that Jesus has here chosen women to act the part of the membership of the church, both wise and foolish.

Ibn al-Tayyib then reminds his readers that it took ten Jewish males to form a company for the celebration of the Passover, and he claims that ten males were required for a valid wedding ceremony. Thereby this parable has ten women. Ibn al-Tayyib implies that by choosing ten women, Jesus is trying to compensate for the gender gap in the religious culture of his day. The worth of women is clearly affirmed by the composition of the story.

Second, there is the question of *borrowed resources*. The faithful borrow many things from each other. But they cannot borrow their own preparations for the coming of the kingdom. Commitment and the discipleship that follows can be neither loaned nor borrowed. Each believer must participate in the kingdom with his or her own resources.

Third, is the *long haul*. Life in the kingdom of God requires commitment to the long haul. Advanced planning is necessary and reserves must be on hand. There is neither instant discipleship nor instant maturation in the fullness of the kingdom. The wise, thoughtful women knew it might be a long night and prepared accordingly.

Fourth are the *reactions to failure*. When things go wrong, due to poor judgment and other inadequacies, the resulting problems cannot be solved by shouting orders at neighbors and at the Lord in the manner exhibited by the foolish women. When short of oil they screamed at their friends, “Give us some oil!” When they arrived late and found the door of the house locked they cried to the bridegroom, “Lord! Lord! Open the door!”

This will not do. These five women are like the rich man in the story of Lazarus, who mistreated Lazarus day after day. They both died and the rich man found himself in hell while Lazarus was taken by the angels to the side of Abraham. The rich man then began giving orders. He commanded Abraham to send Lazarus down with a drink of water because he (the rich man) was thirsty. When that did not work, he made a second demand, which was, “Send



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Lazarus to my brothers to warn them.” The rich man expected Abraham to carry out these orders. Lazarus was expected to jump at the chance of becoming either a table waiter or a messenger boy for the very man who had neglected him for years! In the kingdom of God, barking orders at others is not an acceptable way to try to solve problems created by our inadequacies.

But there is a more distinctively *theological level* to the story as well. On that level Jesus appears also to be saying four things:

1. There is Jesus’ *disappointment at the lack of readiness* to receive the kingdom when it arrives. In his ministry, Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God and was disappointed that many around him, who had been waiting for the revelation of that kingdom, were not prepared for it when it arrived. Anna and Simeon, Nicodemus and the disciples were mostly ready. The high priestly guild, Jesus’ hometown and many of the Pharisees were not. The shepherds were ready. Herod was not. The wise men were ready. The soldiers at his birth were not. The reality of Jesus’ disappointments appears in this parable.
2. There is a *challenge and a warning* related to his second coming. The story clearly looks forward to the consummation of all things when the Messiah of God comes to his own and his own receive him at the marriage supper of the Lamb. He knows full well that some who come to the banquet, and are deliberately waiting for his arrival, will not be ready when he appears. For each believer, on a personal level, that meeting with the Lord will occur at the time of death. Thus the parable holds an existential challenge for all.
3. The kingdom has a *door that can and does close*. For all who are committed to the host of the banquet, the door to the banquet is open. But near the end of the parable that door is closed. Jesus’ parable places limits to the Roman sacred cow of inclusiveness that wandered the streets of Rome and now traverses the byways of contemporary Western culture. As Allison and Davies have written, “The foolish virgins, who stand for unfaithful disciples, reveal that religious failure will suffer eschatological punishment.”
4. This parable is a warning that the time of the *arrival of the bridegroom is unknown* and that speculation regarding the hour is pointless. The enormous amount of energy that in certain Christian circles is poured into such speculation is here declared misguided. For “of that day or that hour no one knows” (Mk 13:32).
5. Finally there is *Christology*. The parable also provides information about the person of Jesus. Jesus is the returning bridegroom who will arrive joyfully at the end of the age, extend a warm welcome to all the guests who have patiently remained in waiting for his coming, and are duly prepared for his arrival. Blessed are those whose lamps are faithfully kept burning as they watch and wait for his appearance.⁵

(5). *The Parable of the Ten Virgins. 25:1–13*

25:1–13. The Parable of the Ten Virgins explains the place of Israel’s true converts of the Tribulation Period in relation to the church. These **virgins** (Gr *parthenos*, cf. 1:23) are the attendants at the wedding, not multiple brides. The one bride of Christ is the church, John the Baptist is the best man (Jn 3:29, i.e., friend of the Bridegroom) and the prepared virgins are the saved of the Tribulation Period. While all share as the people of God, the church is accorded a unique relationship to the Master. The number **five** in each group does not necessarily indicate that half of humanity will be saved but that there are two types of people. The **lamps** seem to refer to their lives which are either prepared or unprepared. The **oil** refers to that which prepares them to give forth light and may properly be illustrative of the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. The fact that they all **slept ... While the bridegroom tarried** implies a period of Jewish inactivity during the Church Age, while the Bride is gathered. **Foolish** (Gr *mōros*) means “stupid,” and is the designation for those who are carelessly unprepared. They had no oil at all, not an insufficient amount. The refusal of the five prepared virgins to share with those unprepared must not be taken as cruelty. If the oil represents personal possession of the Holy Spirit, He cannot be shared but must regenerate each person individually. Thus, the Lord responds, **I know you not** (vs. 12), indicative of 7:23. False profession will save no one and only brings the final judgment of Christ upon the unsaved.⁶

Parable #12:

Luke 16:19-30

The Rich Man and Lazarus

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor

⁵ Bailey, K. E. (2008). *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (pp. 269–275). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

⁶ Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). *KJV Bible Commentary* (p. 1950). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



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man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.^[a] The rich man also died and was buried,²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.'²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

Standard View:

Additional View:

TEAM ASK:

Middle Eastern Eye NOTES:

The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man

LUKE 16:19–30

THE PARABLE OF LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN (Lk 16:19–31) is often ignored. This may be due to uneasiness with the fact that the parable appears to be affirming a “reversal of roles” solution to the problem of “theodicy” (the justice of God). The story seems to be saying: Life is unfair. But, never mind, God will ‘even things up’ in the next life. Lazarus had a hard time here—and as a result he will enjoy good times in heaven. The rich man had a good life on earth and will therefore automatically spend eternity in hell. Put bluntly, the parable would then mean, If you are comfortable here, hell awaits you. If you are homeless here, heaven is guaranteed.

Indeed, there *are* stories like this from before and shortly after the time of Jesus, but did Jesus endorse them? If so, most of the rest of the New Testament must be discarded. How then can this parable be viewed? What is it saying, and what is it not saying?

In the Middle East there is a huge corpus of pearly-gate stories that circulates orally. The “pearly gate” is reduced to “the gate of heaven,” but St. Peter remains the gatekeeper even though the main characters are sometimes Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. These stories are usually humorous and often have nothing to do with the teller’s understanding of eschatology. Frequently, they offer a political commentary on the ambiguities of public life in the Middle East. Somewhat similar stories are also found in the early Jewish tradition, such as the account of the two holy men in Ashkelon and Bar Maayan, the village tax collector. In the light of this long Middle Eastern tradition, it is possible to suggest that the parable under consideration is such a tale. Indeed, it bears many of the traditional marks of these stories (as I have known them). If the parable is a first-century “pearly gate story” its primary purpose is not to present fine points of Jesus’ view of life after death. Jesus was no doubt opposing the Sadducees, who claimed that there was no resurrection from the dead. The Sadducees were wealthy, and the entire composition of the story appears to be a challenge to them. In fact there is judgment after death, which is related to our earthly lifestyle. But the main point of the story can perhaps be stated differently.

A few verses before the parable of Lazarus there is a short poem on God and mammon (Lk 16:9–13). The poem can be understood as an introduction to the parable. *Mammon* is an Aramaic word meaning “material possessions,” “money” or “that which sustains life,” and the poem says three things about mammon relevant to the parable.

First, Jesus says, “No servant can serve two masters.... You cannot serve God and mammon.” The problem with material possessions is that they assume the characteristics of a personified force seeking mastery. They are necessary to sustain life and can be used to serve God, but the press for mastery is always there. This is probably



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why possessions are called *unrighteous mammon*. Mammon seeks to usurp God’s place in human life. No one can serve both masters.

Second, Jesus asks the pointed question, “If you have not been faithful in unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the truth to you?” (Lk 16:11, my translation). This text exhibits a play on words in Aramaic, which was the language Jesus spoke at home. He says:

If you have not been *amin* [faithful]
in the unrighteous *mammon* [your material possessions]
the *amuna* [the truth]
who will *ja’min ith kun* [entrust to you].

The root *amn*, which appears in the word *amen*, is used here four times. It makes the point that anyone who cheats on his or her taxes will never understand the gospel. Those who have been unfaithful before God with material possessions cannot expect God to reveal his greater treasure to them, which is the truth of God.

Jesus’ third point reinforces the second. He says, “If you have not been faithful in what is *another’s*, what is *your own* who will give to you?” (Lk 16:12, my translation). All possessions belong to God because he created matter. Indeed, “The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof” (Ps 24:1). This basic biblical principle is foreign to the contemporary capitalist West. The car in the driveway, the house I live in, the pen in my pocket, the watch on my wrist, the computer I use to compose these reflections—all belong to God. I am merely a steward of them. If all possessions belong to God, is there anything that is *really* mine/ours? There is. The small part of God’s truth that we manage to understand and struggle to live out is truly ours, and we will “take it with us.” God looks to see if his people are faithful stewards of material possessions and then decides what he will reveal to them of the “deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10 NIV). The potential transforming power of such a worldview is limitless.

This poem on money and God is followed by a reference to the Pharisees who “were lovers of money” and who “lifted up their noses at him” (literal translation). This is a gesture of disdain used across Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. “Scoffed” (RSV) and “ridiculed” (NRSV) are too strong. No words are involved. A slight backward tilt of the head and a lifting of the eyebrows signal rejection laced with condescension. Jesus’ comments on money trigger this negative response.

With Luke 16:9–13 in mind as background, the reader of Luke’s Gospel is presented with the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. It is as though Jesus says, “Now I will tell you a story of two people; one served God and the other mammon.”

This parable is the third of a trilogy. In the first a *prodigal* wastes his *father’s* possessions (Lk 15:11–32). In the second a *dishonest steward* wastes his *master’s* possessions (Lk 16:1–8). And in the third, a *rich man* wastes his *own* possessions. All three, properly understood, deal with the theme of salvation. This third parable is composed of two sections, each with its own rhetorical structure. Together these can be seen in figure 30.1 (see following page).

THE RHETORIC

If the reader focuses on the two actors, the first four sections would be formatted A B B A. The rich man is the subject in the first and the fourth and Lazarus appears in the two scenes in the middle. But an alternative focus is:

In Life: banquets
and pain
In Death: a banquet
and pain

The Story

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1. There was a <i>rich man</i> who dressed himself in <i>purple and fine linen</i> and <i>feasted sumptuously</i> every day. | RICH MAN (In Life: banquets) |
| 2. At his gate a <i>poor man named Lazarus</i> was <i>laid</i> , full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. <i>But [alla]</i> the <i>dogs</i> came and licked his sores. | LAZARUS (In Life: pain) |
| 3. The poor man died and was carried by the angels | LAZARUS |



to Abraham’s bosom.

(In Death: a banquet)

- 4. The rich man also died and was buried,
and in Hades, being in torment,
he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far
off
and Lazarus in his bosom.

RICH MAN
(In Death: pain)

The Dialogue

- 5. And he called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy
upon me,
and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in
water
and cool my tongue;
for I am in anguish in this flame.”

RICH MAN (1)

- 6. And Abraham said, “My dear son [*teknon*],
remember
that in your *lifetime you received good*
things,
and *Lazarus* in like manner *evil things*;
and now he is *comforted* here,
and you are in *great pain*.
And besides all this, between us and you a
great chasm has been fixed,
that *those who would pass from here to you*
cannot
and none may cross from there to us.”

ABRAHAM (1)

- 7. And he said, “Then I beg you, father,
send him to my father’s house, for I have five
brothers,
to warn them, lest they also come into this place
of torment.”

RICH MAN (2)

- 8. But Abraham said,
“They have Moses and the prophets;
let them hear them.”

ABRAHAM (2)

- 9. And he said, “No, father Abraham;
but if someone comes to them from the dead,
they will repent.”

RICH MAN (3)

- 10. And he said to him,
“If Moses and the Prophets they do not
hear,
nor if one rises from the dead will they be
convinced.”

ABRAHAM (3)

Figure 30.1. Lazarus and the rich man (Lk 16:19–30)

Granting that both rhetorical patterns are present in the text, the second appears to dominate the story, and thus I have chosen to format the text accordingly. Actually, there is a counterpoint. Both “tunes” are playing simultaneously.

The second half is a dialogue between the rich man and Abraham. The rich man makes three requests and Abraham responds to each of them.

COMMENTARY

- 1. There was a *rich man*
who dressed himself in *purple* and *fine linen*

RICH MAN



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and feasted sumptuously every day.

(In Life: banquets)

The first scene is a brief yet brilliant picture of a self-indulgent rich man who cares for no one but himself. The verb tense used indicates that the rich man dressed himself (middle tense) every day in purple robes. He had other clothing. But purple cloth was extremely expensive, and only the truly wealthy could afford it. This man wanted to ensure that everyone knew he had money. Each day he was overpowered with the impulse to drive his “gold-plated Cadillac.” In short he was a “clothes horse” with an inner need to constantly remind everyone of his wealth. He also wore “fine linen.” The word in Greek is bussos, which transliterates the Hebrew word butz, which, in turn, refers to quality Egyptian cotton used for the best underwear. There is light humor here. This man not only had expensive outer robes, but in case anyone was interested, he also wore fine quality underwear.

In addition to his purple robes and expensive underpinnings, the man feasted “sumptuously every day.” He did not, therefore, observe the sabbath. His servants were never given a day of rest, and thereby he publicly violated the Ten Commandments every week. His self-indulgent lifestyle was more important to him than the law of God. The injustice he inflicted on his staff meant nothing to him. What of Lazarus?

2. At his gate a poor man named Lazarus was laid,

full of sores,

LAZARUS

who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table.

(In Life: pain)

But [alla] the dogs came and licked his sores.

Lying outside the gate of the rich man was laid a sick, hungry, neglected beggar. The poor man had a name, but why this particular name?

Lazarus is the only individual with a name in all Jesus’ parables. Major characters move in and out of the parables but are not identified by name. The good Samaritan, the Pharisee, the father, the older son and the sower are anonymous. Lazarus is the sole exception, and therefore his name must be significant.

The name Lazarus is a Hebrew word that means “the one whom God helps.” Lazarus lay, day after day, at the rich man’s gate and may have had a few scraps thrown to him, but was always hungry. He was so sick he could not stand, and so poor he was reduced to begging. He appears to be a person whom God did not help.

I was a professor in a seminary in Beirut, Lebanon, from 1967 to 1984. The Lebanese Civil War raged for nine years of that period. A blind beggar stood at the gate of a Greek Orthodox Church near the apartment building where we lived. I passed him every day on the way to the seminary. He was a quiet, gentle man with a lovely face. He did not cry out in the traditional fashion of beggars. Instead, he had a small wooden box with a hinged glass top strapped to his shoulders and waist. It was filled with chewing gum because he was a “shopkeeper.” I bought his Chiclets whenever I saw him, paid him double the price and then gave the gum to street children in the next block. He and I became friends. He insisted on imagining me and addressing me as “Mudir jamaa” (University Rector!). The war around us triggered horrible passions, but not in him. His quiet calm was never broken, regardless of the shells exploding nearby or the rattle of machine guns down the block. An inner peace radiated from him to all around.

His name was Abd al-Rahman (the servant of the Compassionate One). The Compassionate One naturally shows compassion. Did God show compassion to him? He was a blind beggar! How could he be blind and be called Abd al-Rahman? Was his name a cruel joke?

Lazarus “was laid” (passive) outside the rich man’s gate. As he was too sick to walk, members of the community carried him to that gate every day and returned him to wherever he stayed each night. Ibn al-Tayyib writes, “And Lazarus, the poor (miserable) man was unable to move about and so was carried by his family and friends and placed at the door of the rich man.”

The community around Lazarus respected and cared for him as best it could. The only man in town with the resources necessary to meet his medical needs was the rich man, so members of the community carried him to the rich man’s gate each day in the hope that the rich man or his guests would feel some compassion and give Lazarus something. The practice is common in the East. On Sunday morning beggars are usually gathered outside churches and at the doors of mosques for noon prayers each Friday.

The rich man had a gate to his property in addition to a door. There was, therefore, land, probably a garden, around his house with an ornamental gate that opened onto the street where Lazarus was laid by his friends.

Covered with sores, Lazarus was too weak to work or sit up, and he “desired to be fed” with what “fell from the rich man’s table.” The verb desired is used in Luke’s Gospel for something a person wants but is unable to have. The



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prodigal son in Luke 15:16 desired to eat the pods he was feeding to the pigs, but did not have a stomach that could digest them. In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man food was thrown away in the rich man's house but it was not given to Lazarus. As reference is made to leftovers from meals, a Middle Easterner immediately thinks of the estate's guard dogs, who are the natural recipients of the remnants of any meal.

This same scene appears in the account of Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman, near Tyre and Sidon (Mk 7:24–30). She pleads to be given the small pieces of bread, which, after the meal, are thrown to the dogs. Lazarus longs for the remainders of the meal that “fall from the rich man's table.” They were not given to him, but rather fed to the dogs. He may have been given a scrap or two, but never enough to be satisfied.

Lazarus was sick, hungry and covered with sores. But his deepest suffering was psychic. Traditional Middle Eastern villages are geographically tightly compacted. The gate at which Lazarus lay was certainly within easy earshot of the daily sumptuous banquets of the rich man. Only a few feet from Lazarus a group of overfed men reclined each day, while he lay hungry and in pain, listening to their conversation. Those same men passed him every day as they entered and left the rich man's house. They didn't need the food—he did. Help was always near at hand, yet withheld from him.

Having faced the beggars' gauntlet on numerous occasions for decades in the Middle East, I know something of the dynamics of the scene. It is easy to survive by developing compassion fatigue. Beggars are ever present. There are so many of them. One's resources are limited. Finally, one doesn't notice them anymore. Compassion fatigue becomes a way to cope and a strategy for survival. Perhaps this is what happened to the rich man.

A wealthy man who dressed in the most expensive robes available, had a banquet every day and lived on an estate with a walled garden would naturally keep and feed vicious guard dogs to protect his property. Those dogs were fed, but Lazarus was not. One of the key features of the story here unfolds.

In reference to these dogs the text reads, “But [*alla*] the dogs came and licked his sores.” The Greek word *alla* always indicates a contrast. Invariably, the English language tradition has understood the dogs' actions to be in harmony with the cruelty of the rich man, and thus the Revised Standard Version translates the text as “*moreover* the dogs came and licked his sores,” which indicates continuity with the rich man's behavior. The New Revised Standard Version and New International Version state, “even the dogs came,” which also places the dogs on the side of Lazarus's tormenters. But for more than a thousand years most Arabic versions have accurately translated the Greek word *alla* as a contrast, and thereby emphasized that the dogs *were not* joining the rich man in tormenting Lazarus. This contrast is clear in the Greek text and is important to the story.

Dogs lick their own wounds. They lick people as a sign of affection. But more than this, recent scientific scholarship has identified that saliva contains “endogenous peptide antibiotics,” which facilitate healing. A dog's saliva contains such peptide antibiotics, and the ancients somehow discovered that if a dog licked wounds they would heal more rapidly.

In 1994 Professor Lawrence Stager of Harvard University discovered more than 1,300 dogs buried in ancient Ashkelon. The graves date from the fifth to the third centuries B.C. when Ashkelon was ruled by the Phoenicians. These animals were probably linked to a Phoenician healing cult. The dogs were, in all likelihood, trained to lick wounds or sores, whereupon a fee was paid to their owners. This may explain the background to Deuteronomy 23:18, which forbids the worshiper from bringing “the wages of a dog” into the house of the Lord. Irrespective of healing or no healing, both the attitudes of the time against dogs and Lazarus's amazing friendship with them lead to comprehension and a discernable contrast. The rich man will *do nothing* for Lazarus, but these wild guard dogs, who attack all strangers, know that Lazarus is their friend and do what they can—they lick his sores. Lazarus lay each day in the heat and flies of the village street. The dogs gathered to help him.

Dogs in the Middle East are not pets. Elsewhere in Scripture they are always seen in a negative light (Is 56:10; 66:3; Phil 3:2; Rev 22:15) and often mentioned in connection with pigs (Is 66:3; 2 Pet 2:22). In the early Jewish tradition dogs were considered almost as unclean as pigs. The Mishnah notes, “None may rear swine anywhere. A man may not rear a dog unless it is kept bound by a chain.” Such dogs were kept as guard dogs. The dogs in this story may be wild street scavengers, but in that case the rich man's servants would have driven them away for the benefit of his guests.

This beautiful scene depicts a great deal about the person of Lazarus. He was kind, gentle and lived in quiet harmony with the animal world around him, regardless of the harshness of his environment. Many of the desert fathers exhibited this same harmony with wild animals. The traditional story of Jerome and the lion in the region of Bethlehem is one such example. St. Francis is said to have made friends with a wolf. Friendly lions attended the funeral of Paul the Hermit. Abba Macarius healed the blind pup of a hyena. John Climacus tells of a monk who



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reared a leopard by hand. Pachomius spoke of being carried across the Nile on the backs of crocodiles. St. Cuthbert of England was saved from the incoming tide by sea lions. Historical or traditional, the list goes on and on, and begins notably with Jesus in the wilderness who “was with the wild beasts” (Mk 1:13). In this parable, with the briefest of strokes, Jesus paints a clear picture of Lazarus’s gentle soul. He was a man at peace with himself—within his suffering—and managed to live in harmony even with the wild guard dogs around him. Did he sense that the dogs, like himself, were unjustly despised and ill-treated? The reader is not told. But there is much to ponder. Ibn al-Tayyib, the monk, biblical scholar and *medical doctor*, comments:

I understand that the licking of Lazarus’s sores gave him relief and eased his pain. This reminds us that the silent, unspeaking animals felt compassion for him and they helped him and cared for him more than the humans. He was naked *without medical attention other than what he received from the dogs*. This demonstrates that the rich man did not notice him or give him any attention at all. Thus when we compare the rich man’s condition to that of Lazarus, we see that the first was clothed with purple and linen. The second was naked and covered with sores. The first luxuriated every day with a banquet while the second longed for scraps of bread. The first had many servants ready to satisfy all of his needs and the other had *no servants other than the dogs*.

The parable continues:

- 3. The poor man died
and was carried by the angels
to Abraham’s bosom. LAZARUS
(In Death: a banquet)

Lazarus was too poor for a funeral, but angels transported him to heaven, where Abraham threw a party to welcome him. Reclining in “Abraham’s bosom” meant reclining on a U-shaped couch (triclinium) in the place of honor to Abraham’s right. At the Last Supper John reclined “in/on the bosom of Jesus” (Jn 13:23). Such was the place reserved for Lazarus, beside Abraham. In his earthly life the rich man enjoyed sumptuous banquets every day. How will the rich man respond to a party/banquet in honor of Lazarus?

- 4. The rich man also died and was buried,
and in Hades being in torment
he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off
and Lazarus in his bosom. RICH MAN
(In Death: pain)

Shortly thereafter the rich man died, was given a funeral and was buried. To no one’s amazement the rich man found himself in Hades enduring its torments. The dramatic tension between the rich man and Lazarus continues in the afterlife; a tension which is critical to what the parable is about. To the reader’s surprise, the rich man recognizes Lazarus and knows his name. So, the rich man *knew* that Lazarus was at his gate and was acquainted with his desperate plight. Surely now the rich man, cast into Hades, seeing Lazarus honored by Abraham, will apologize to the former beggar and ask his forgiveness. The second half of the parable and its three-stage dialogue begins with a request from the rich man.

- 5. And he called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy
upon me
and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in
water
and cool my tongue
for I am in anguish in this flame.” RICH MAN (1)

Amazingly, the rich man does not speak to Lazarus. The reader/listener is left to conclude that the rich man never talks to untouchables! Instead, he addresses Abraham, and what he says is revealing. He opens with, “Father Abraham, have mercy upon me.”

The Semitic idiom says “*Abi Abraham*” (*my father Abraham*). All Syriac and Arabic versions add the personal pronoun, which is implied but not stated in the Greek text. The rich man is playing his “racial card.” He has the blood of Abraham in his veins, and Abraham is the patriarch of his clan. Matta al-Miskin notes that, after all, the rich man was circumcised, which would surely guarantee assistance from Abraham. It didn’t. Family is everything in the Middle East, and when in dire need one can always return to the family patriarch and throw oneself on his mercy because the patriarch is honor bound to offer help. This time it doesn’t work.



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The reader expects to find the rich man embarrassed to be talking with Abraham. But Abraham was a man of faith who went forth not knowing where he was going. He left his country, his father's house and his gods in costly obedience to the one true God who called him. Is the rich man, therefore, really a son of Abraham? Did he pay a price for obedience to the God of Abraham? The rich man evidences no such embarrassment.

After reminding Abraham of their family connection, the rich man verbalizes the traditional cry of the beggar, "Have mercy on me!" Two chapters later, in Luke's Gospel, this same cry appears in the mouth of the blind beggar beside the road (Lk 18:38). The rich man doesn't like beggars and obviously will not talk to them, his attitude being that if one feeds beggars they will return like stray dogs. Now he has become one of them. He longs to become "Lazarus" (the one whom God helps), but it is too late.

The rich man's first demand is unbelievable. When Lazarus was in pain, he was ignored *by the rich man*. Now the rich man is in pain and something must be done about it—immediately! After all, he is unaccustomed to such things. Instead of an apology he *demand*s services, and from the very man he refused to help in spite of his great wealth! He wouldn't even give Lazarus some of his "dog food." He might as well have said, "Now that Lazarus is feeling better and is on his feet, I would like a few services. Given who I am, and he, being of the servant class, such service is expected. Send him down Abraham—and hurry up about it. Unlike Lazarus, I am not accustomed to discomfort!"

The person who works in a bakery cannot smell the fresh bread, and the clerk in a chocolate shop cannot smell the chocolate he or she sells. Even so with the pain of others: the rich man was oblivious both to what he did to Lazarus in the past and to what he wanted to do to him in the present. He saw Lazarus with his eyes but never with his heart. James has a few things to say about those who see the hungry and intone, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled" (Jas 2:16). Perhaps this is one of those cases where the parables of Jesus shine through the pages of the book of James?

The rich man played his cards instinctively. Had he absorbed the new realities of where he was and where Lazarus was, he could at least have pretended to "eat humble pie" and apologize to Lazarus in order to please Abraham. After all, Lazarus had become Abraham's guest of honor. It is in the rich man's interests to say something nice to Abraham's special guest. But the rich man cannot imagine a world where social stratifications do not apply. All he can think of is demanding help, even from the man he injured deeply.

Those who are listening to the parable are electrified! The tables are turned: Lazarus is in a position of power, reclining beside a man of great influence—no less than Abraham himself! How will Lazarus now respond to being treated as a servant and asked to relieve the pain of a man who unceasingly ignored his suffering? The listener/reader expects him to explode in rage and say something like:

You half dead dog! I see you recognize my face and can call my name! You saw me outside your gate, but you did nothing to alleviate *my* pain. Your dogs were kind to me. They licked my wounds. But you—you no good scum of the earth—where were you when *I* needed your help? Now you want me to serve you? I can't believe it! Abraham! Leave this monstrous ego to fry in hell until the flesh falls off of his bones. He fed his dogs! He would not feed me. What he's now suffering is only half of what he deserves!

But Lazarus is quiet. This gentle, longsuffering man has no reservoir of anger ready to explode, no reflections on retaliation in the waking hours of the night, no score to settle and no vengeance to exact. Like Job he creates meaning by his response to what happens to him. Lazarus is a model of the mercy described by Jesus and recorded by Luke with the words: "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:35–36). Lazarus is silent even as he was silent outside the rich man's gate.

In his matchless definition of Christian love (*agapē*), Paul provides a list of characteristics that are found in such love (1 Cor 13:4–7). The list begins with one form of patience (*makrothymia*) and ends with a second form of patience (*hypomonē*).

Makrothymia is a composite word consisting of *makran* (far away) and *thymos* (anger). As a single word *makrothymia* has to do with "putting one's anger far away." This is the patience of the powerful who are able to wreck vengeance on their enemies but choose to be patient and refrain from doing so. It is the patience of David standing over the sleeping body of Saul when Saul went to kill David (1 Sam 26:6–25). David could have opted for a "preemptive strike." Saul's only purpose in making that expedition was to kill David. David, with an aide, managed to penetrate Saul's camp in the night, and David's aide urged him to kill his sleeping enemy. But David exhibited *makrothymia* and stayed his hand.



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The other form of patience, *hypomonē*, is also comprised of two Greek words. The first is the preposition *hypo* (under). The second is *monē*, which has to do with endurance. The person with *hypomonē* is willing to “remain under” great stress or suffering. The primary biblical example of this virtue is Mary standing silently at the cross and choosing to not walk away. She and her son exhibit *hypomonē*, usually translated “longsuffering.” In this parable Lazarus exhibits both of these forms of patience. In his earthly life he had no complaints, he was longsuffering and full of *hypomonē*. When, in a position of power, at the side of Abraham, he demonstrates *makrothymia*, he puts his anger far away. Like Greek, Arabic has a word (*halim*) that describes this virtue precisely. American English has no such word.

Lazarus created meaning by what he chose not to do. He was quiet in his days of powerless suffering, and remained silent in his days of power as he listened to his former tormenter demand services from him. As the story continues all eyes are focused on Abraham to see how he will respond to this insensitive request.

6. And Abraham said, “My dear son [*teknon*], remember that in your lifetime you received good things,

and Lazarus in like manner *evil things*; ABRAHAM (1)

and now he is *comforted* here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed that *those who would pass from here to you cannot*, and none may cross from there to us.”

The rich man still fails to get the point, even though he is frying in hell. How can anyone respond adequately to such class pride? Abraham begins with the affectionate word *teknon* (my dear boy), rather than the more neutral *huios*. In the parable of the prodigal son, *teknon* is on the lips of the father when the older son insults his father in public by refusing to enter the banquet hall and greet his father’s guests. The father humiliates himself publicly, walks out to his older son and addresses him as *teknon*. In this story Abraham does not deny that the rich man is a member of his extended family and addresses him in a kindly manner, irrespective of the rich man’s insult to Abraham’s guest and thereby to Abraham.

Abraham then voices the classical cry of the prophets as they call on wayward Israel to repent with the word *remember* (Mic 6:5). The rich man is called to remember four points:

- 1. You received good things (the rich man—his extravagant life)
- 2. Lazarus, bad things (Lazarus—his sickness and his neglect)
- 3. He is comforted (Lazarus—in Abraham’s bosom)
- 4. You are in anguish (the rich man—in hell)

These four statements *exactly* match the four scenes in the earthly life of the two men as recorded in the first part of the parable and are in the same order. English translations often put the word *but* before the third statement. No contrast is indicated in the Greek text. Rather, continuity is expressed and should be translated “*and he is comforted.*” Each of these four phrases is freighted with meaning.

Abraham begins with “you in your lifetime received good things.” The verb is in the passive; the rich man neither earned nor deserved the good life he enjoyed; it was a gift. Such passives clearly refer to God. All the rich man’s possessions, as well as his assumed good health, were free gifts from a bountiful God.

Abraham continues with the last three of the quartet:
and Lazarus in like manner *evil things*;
and now he is *comforted* here,
and you are in anguish.

These three phrases should be seen together. Lazarus is not described as *healed*, in which case his main problem would be his sores. Nor is he *well fed*, which would mean that his hunger was the focus of his suffering. But Abraham affirms that he was *comforted*, which demonstrates that outside the rich man’s gate he was in anguish. It was his *psychic pain* that hurt the most. While reclining with Abraham he is *comforted*. Someone cares for him and does not



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leave him in earshot of banquets that produce garbage which he longs to eat but cannot because it is fed to the dogs. The key phrase “now he is comforted” emphasizes that the source of the most painful evil Lazarus endured was the treatment he received from the rich man. God gave good things to the rich man, and that same rich man in turn passed on evil things to Lazarus, lying helpless at his gate.

Abraham then points out another problem and reveals a new and stunning surprise as he continues:

And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed,
that *those who want to pass from here to you cannot*,
and none may cross from there to us.

The fact of a “great chasm” is easy to understand. But why does Abraham remind the rich man that “those who want to pass from here to you” cannot? Who, for heaven’s sake, would want to journey from heaven to hell? Obviously, Abraham has a volunteer. There is only one other person on stage. Lazarus is whispering in Abraham’s ear and saying something like, “Father Abraham, that’s my old neighbor down there. We have known each other for years. Poor man—he is in such a fix. We have plenty of water here, and if it pleases you, I will be glad to take a glass down to him!”

More of Lazarus’s nature is now revealed. His *makrothymia* motivates him on the deepest level of his being. He not only refrains from gloating over the rich man’s well-deserved predicament but shows compassion for his fallen oppressor. Additionally, the rich man’s speech is a broad hint that he would like to join those reclining at the banquet with Abraham. But it is too late; the one wanting to join Abraham’s party cannot get there.

The rich man, in turn, responds. At this point in the conversation he has just received an order from the patriarch of the family to “remember” the good gifts that had been freely given to him. He chooses to disobey Abraham and changes the subject as he cries out:

7. And he said, “Then I beg you Father,
send him to my father’s house, for I have five RICH MAN (2)
brothers,
to warn them lest they also come into this place
of torment.”

Once again the rich man becomes a beggar. It is noble of him to show an interest in his brothers, but they are presumably of the same class in society that he enjoyed, and for him such people matter in the scheme of things, while the poor—like Lazarus—do not. If Lazarus cannot be used as a table waiter, he can surely be turned into an errand boy to serve the interests of his superiors, such as the rich man and his siblings. Once again, there is no hint of repentance before Abraham or of apology to Lazarus. The rich man’s class-structured world is still intact.

Commentators have noted that the rich man’s family was composed of six brothers (the number six being a symbol of evil). Had they accepted Lazarus as a brother, there would have been seven of them (the number of perfection).

8. But Abraham said,
“They have Moses and the prophets;
let them hear them.”

It has been estimated that no more than 3 to 10 percent of the population in the first century were literate. The observant Jew could “hear” the Law and the prophets read in the synagogue. But the rich man was otherwise engaged on shabbat. He ordered a sumptuous banquet every day, so it was unlikely that he was familiar with the sacred writings of his community. The Law and the Prophets called for compassion for the poor, and the rich man’s brothers could learn all they needed to know from the Scriptures. Besides, “to hear” in Semitic languages means “to listen and obey.” The daily prayers opened with, “Hear, O Israel.” If the rich man’s brothers chose to worship and “hear” what was read to them from the Law and the Prophets, they would have had ample information to reform their lives. The request is declined. Yet the rich man, who is unaccustomed to anyone saying no to him, tries once more.

9. And he said, “No, Father Abraham;
but if someone comes to them from the dead,
hey will repent.”

The rich man contradicts and tries to correct Abraham as he would an inferior and in effect says to him, “No, you are mistaken!” Amazing! Furthermore, in the story, Lazarus was visible to the rich man beyond the grave. Indeed,



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Lazarus “appeared” to the rich man, but the latter did not repent. Instead, he began demanding services: waiter, messenger boy—whatever the rich man wanted, Lazarus was expected to comply immediately!

The rich man was not given a vision of Lazarus reclining “in the bosom of Abraham” at a party where he was also a guest. Instead, while frying in hell, he saw Lazarus enjoying a banquet at Abraham’s side, and yet none of his attitudes changed! If the fires did not change the rich man, on what basis is there any hope that a vision or visitations would change his brothers?

Abraham concludes the conversation firmly with a terse statement:

10. And he said to him,
“If Moses and the prophets they do not hear,
nor if one rises from the dead will they be convinced.”

The high priest had clear evidence that another man named Lazarus had been raised from the dead by Jesus. But the high priest did not repent; instead, news of that event solidified the high priest’s determination to oppose Jesus (Jn 11:45–50).

It is good to seek historical evidence in matters of faith, but the deepest levels of some types of knowledge are not open to historical investigation. Neither the existence of God nor the fact that my family loves me can be demonstrated conclusively at the bar of historical research. I have a great deal of evidence for both facts, but at the end of the day a decision of faith is required, and as Lesslie Newbigin states repeatedly, all historical inquiry itself begins with “plausibility structures” in the mind that are themselves affirmations of faith.

The parable invokes a realistic picture of too much of the world where the divide between the rich and the poor reflects gross injustice. Such things should not be. The sensitive listener/reader is encouraged and stimulated to create a just society in which adequate care is extended to the poor.

SUMMARY: THE PARABLE OF LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN

This parable contains an embarrassment of theological riches. The primary focus is not on “reversal of roles” but on answering the question, How are we to respond to the grace and pain of life? In the process of presenting this theme the parable deals with the following ideas:

1. *The question is not Why? but What now?* The events of our lives have meaning. We access or fail to access that meaning by the way in which we *respond* to those events. What we *do* with the good gifts and the pain of life is what matters. The rich man responded to the good things given to him with self-indulgence, indifference to the needs of others, arrogance and class pride. Lazarus responded to his pain with patience, longsuffering, gentleness and implied forgiveness. He made friends with the wild dogs and inevitably showed gratitude to his friends in the community who carried him each day to the rich man’s gate.
2. *Who is El’azar* (the one whom God helps)? From Lazarus’s response to *suffering* in this life and his implied forgiveness of the rich man in the next life, it is clear that God was with him and helped him all the way. Only with divine help is such a response possible. He was indeed *El’azar* (Lazarus). In life the rich man refused God’s help. He had money and managed his affairs alone. In hell, he begged to become “the one whom God helps,” but it was too late.
3. *Repentance after death*. There is no opportunity for repentance after this life. Call upon God while God is near. Now is the only acceptable time.
4. *Pride of race*. The rich man was a member of the family of Abraham and could call him “Father Abraham.” Yet even a family link to Abraham was not enough. Racism takes many forms. The rich man was infected by one of them. If anyone could claim privilege on the basis of racial connection, surely it was a son of Abraham. John the Baptist was faced with the same attitude. He cried out, “Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Lk 3:8). Clearly, in the eyes of God no racial identity has any intrinsic merit.
5. *Compassion for the poor*. Lazarus has a name and becomes one of Abraham’s guests. His neighbors, the wild dogs, the angels and Abraham love him and help him. He is the hero of the story, which rings with compassion for the poor.
6. *False formulas*. The formula “Wealth necessarily = God’s blessing,” and the related formula “Suffering always = You must have sinned,” are both *totally rejected*. The story depicts an arrogant, rich man whom God does not bless, and a humble, sick man whom dogs, humans, angels and Abraham love, serve and honor.
7. *The corrupting potential of wealth*. Wealth, be it little or much, is not condemned in Scripture. What is criticized is the failure to see that all material possessions belong to God. We are merely stewards of his treasures. The parable reflects the corrupting, blinding *potential* of wealth and is critical of the socially



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irresponsible wealthy. The rich man used his resources for his own self-indulgent living. He cared nothing about his God, his staff or the needy in his community. Even in hell he remained unrepentant and continued to see Lazarus as an inferior who should serve him as a waiter or an errand boy. Mammon had become his master.

8. *Mission at home.* Mission is found on our doorstep. Just as in the case of the rich man, compassion fatigue can prevent us seeing it.
9. *Eternal life.* There *is* life after death (against the Sadducees). Earthly life is related to it.
10. *Theodicy.* The question, Why did Lazarus suffer? is not answered fully. We are not told how or why Lazarus became ill. Life is not fair, yet Lazarus had no complaints. He was even more patient than Job. This story can rightly be called “The New Testament Job.” Job was wealthy, lost all, suffered, was vindicated and in the end recovered and prospered. Lazarus died in the midst of his hunger, sores and anguish. This gentle, forgiving man was respected, loved and served by the community, the dogs, Abraham and the angels. The arrogant, self-indulgent, insensitive, racist rich man received his just rewards. The mystery of suffering is not fully revealed—but this story is a significant move beyond the book of Job.
11. *The call to repentance.* The only call to repentance offered us is the witness of Scripture. It is enough. God does not owe us a supernatural visitation.
12. *Social justice.* In the parable wealth is not distributed justly. Economic resources are wasted by the rich and powerful on themselves. The tears of the poor and powerless are ignored. Lazarus is obliged to wait for the next life to find comfort. The parable presents a realistic social picture; such things happen. But the seeker after the kingdom of God “on earth” is stimulated to promote the kind of economic equity that eliminates the suffering presented in this parable.
13. *Judgment.* Death is not the end. The rich man’s failure to love God (he breaks the sabbath every week) and his neighbor (Lazarus) does not pass unnoticed. Bishop Allison has written, “there is a sentimental cruelty inherent in the idea of a ‘manageable deity,’ because it cuts out any hope of final justice.... Abraham Heschel teaches us that ‘God is not indifferent to evil!’ ” The rich man apparently thought he was.
14. *Historical verification and faith.* Historical proof of resurrection does not necessarily create faith. The rich man saw a resurrected Lazarus and failed to repent. To demand proof for great mysteries is to cheapen faith.

The focus of the parable is not on a form of justice that evens the score, but is found in discovering the ways in which meaning is created by our responses to the good gifts and the suffering that life brings to everyone. Lazarus’s silences are eloquent beyond any words that he or we might use. As Plummer writes:

The silence of Lazarus throughout the parable is very impressive. He never murmurs against God’s distribution of wealth, nor against the rich man’s abuse of it, in this world. And in Hades he neither exults over the change of relations between himself and Dives, nor protests against being asked to wait upon him in the place of torment, or to go errands for him to the visible world. He was indeed Lazarus—the one whom God helped.⁷

19–21. There was a certain rich man ... and there was a certain beggar. This is the true account of a real history of two men, even though it is used much like a parable, i.e., to teach a particular lesson or to emphasize some principle. Some, however, contend that this is a parable saying that (1) the name Lazarus means “God helps” and is figurative or perhaps was intentionally chosen later because another Lazarus did come back from the dead; (2) it begins exactly as the preceding “parable” in Luke 16:1 (which incidentally is also not called a parable in the text); (3) it is used in parabolic fashion to prove a main point; (4) facts are presented in symbolic form; (5) it is in the context of other parables in Luke 15–18; (6) Christ would not have divulged such truths to unbelieving Pharisees; (7) the ability to see, hear, and communicate between heaven and hell after death is not possible; (8) the rich man would not have known Abraham and Lazarus by sight; and (9) in real life the names of rich men are given, while beggars’ names are unknown. Some of these points are well-taken, but none prove that this account was only a parable.

There are numerous arguments for this account being a real history. (1) Parables are hypothetical illustrations and never name specific individuals. Here not only Lazarus is named, but also Abraham (vss. 22–25, 29–30) and Moses (vs. 31). (2) Jesus said “there was a certain rich man.” Harry Ironside noted, “Was there, or was there not? He definitely declared that there was.” (3) Moses, Abraham, and the prophets are real people, whereas parables never refer to specific Old Testament saints. (4) Luke does not call this a parable as he does in thirteen other clear cases of parable so designated. (5) It is narrated like a real history. (6) Parables deal with the commonplace of what is known to be true to illustrate moral lessons, and come from natural life. This does not. (7) Hades is a reality, not a figure of speech. (8) There is no reason why Jesus could not have had in mind a particular

⁷ Bailey, K. E. (2008). [*Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*](#) (pp. 378–396). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.



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case. He is describing what took place after death in the cases of two men for the moral profit of His hearers. (9) The conversation between the rich man and Abraham does not seem to lend itself to parabolic format. (10) Even a case history, as this is, could be used in parabolic fashion to teach a precise moral truth.

22. Abraham's bosom. This is a designation for where Abraham was, taken variously as being heaven itself or some other intermediate place.

23–25. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments. Between death and resurrection the immaterial part of man goes either to be with the Lord, if he is saved (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23), or into conscious torment as here. Resurrection reunites the body to the soul, and the state of existence continues to be either with Christ, or in the punishment of eternal duration (Mt 25:41, 46).

26. A great gulf fixed. Once a person passes from this life his probation is ended, and his eternal destiny is fixed. It has been appointed by God that once a man dies, then comes the judgment (Heb 9:27).

27–30. I have five brethren. The rich man's name and town are probably omitted in Christ's recounting of this history because of the embarrassment it might bring to his family that was still living.

31. If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. Another Lazarus did return from the dead and the religious leaders sought only to kill him, though some believed through his testimony (Jn 12:9–11). Several additional teachings about hell are contained in this brief history. Memory and personality continue there even in the midst of untold anguish, misery, and suffering. There is no returning or sending back of messages from hell; thus, no reincarnation, nor spiritism as it is thought of by those who are thereby deceived.⁸

Extra NoTES:

Matthew 13:10-17

The Purpose of the Parables

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹ And he answered them, ^(U) "To you it has been given to know ^(K) the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² ^(L) For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, ^(M) even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because ^(N) seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, ^(O) nor do they understand. ¹⁴ Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

^(P) " "You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive."

¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears ^(Q) they can barely hear,
and ^(R) their eyes they have closed,

lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and ^(S) understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them. '

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ ^(V) For truly, I say to you, ^(W) many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Parables of Jesus

⁸ Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). [KJV Bible Commentary](#) (pp. 2051–2052). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



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Introduction to the Parables

VERY EARLY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH outsiders saw Christians drawing their faith from parables. One of these witnesses was Galen, the most famous medical doctor of the second century. He was also the first pagan to say positive things about Christians. Around A.D. 140 he wrote:

Most people are unable to follow a demonstrative argument consecutively; hence they need parables, and benefit from them ... just as now we see the people called Christians drawing their faith from parables [and miracles] and yet sometimes acting in the same way [as those who philosophize] ... and in their keen pursuit of justice, have attained a pitch not inferior to that of genuine philosophers.

In later centuries parables became a source for Christian *life* (ethics) but not Christian *faith* (theology). It is instructive to note that in the second century Galen saw Christians building their *faith* on parables. How did parables lose their status as a source of the Christian faith?

Today, Jesus is naturally seen by Christians as the Son of God and Savior of the world. The New Testament also presents him as the perfect example of love and an effective storyteller for simple folk. But have we thought of him as a serious *theologian*?

Jesus was a *metaphorical* theologian. That is, his primary method of creating meaning was through metaphor, simile, parable and dramatic action rather than through logic and reasoning. He created meaning like a dramatist and a poet rather than like a philosopher.

THEOLOGY: CONCEPTUAL AND METAPHORICAL

In the Western tradition serious theology has almost always been constructed from ideas held together by logic. In such a world the more intelligent the theologian, the more abstract he or she usually becomes, and the more difficult it is for the average person to understand what is being said. Paul works with ideas *and* metaphors. In the West we have tended to emphasize his concepts and sideline his metaphors. By so doing we have made him fit into our world of conceptual theologians.

In contrast, the popular perception of Jesus is that of a village rustic creating folktales for fishermen and farmers. But when examined with care, his parables are serious theology, and Jesus emerges as an astute theologian. He is, as noted, primarily a *metaphorical* rather than a *conceptual* theologian.

What precisely is a metaphorical theologian? Consider the following. We know that God is Spirit and is neither male nor female. Yet in the Scriptures we are told that the believer is “born of God” (1 Jn 3:9). Here John uses female language to describe the relationship between God and believers. Similarly, when Jesus addressed God as “Father,” he used a male metaphor/title to help us understand the nature of God. Scripture uses male and female images to enrich our understanding of God, who is Spirit and thereby beyond male and female.

A metaphor communicates in ways that rational arguments cannot. Pictures easily trump but do not replace abstract reasoning. A powerful television image communicates meaning that a thousand words cannot express. When used in theology to create meaning, the parable challenges the listener in ways that abstract statements of truth cannot approach. Yet the two are often linked, and both are critical to the task of theology.

Theologians often use “illustrations” to infuse energy and clarification into their abstract reflections. Illustrations are frequently “the sugar-coating on the theological pill,” as T. W. Manson so aptly stated. A metaphor, however, is *not* an illustration of an idea; it is a mode of theological discourse. The metaphor does more than explain meaning, it creates meaning. A *parable is an extended metaphor* and as such it is *not a delivery system for an idea* but a house in which the reader/ listener is invited to take up residence.

The listener/reader of the parable is encouraged to examine the human predicament through the worldview created by the parable. The casing is all that remains after a shell is fired. Its only purpose is to drive the shell in the direction of the target. It is easy to think of a parable in the same way and understand it as a good way to “launch” an idea. Once the idea is “on its way” the parable can be discarded. But this is not so. If the parable is a house in which the listener/reader is invited to take up residence, then that person is urged by the parable to look on the world through the windows of that residence. Such is the reality of the parables created by Jesus of Nazareth, a reality that causes a special problem.

If theology is built on logic and reasoning, then all one needs to understand that theology is a clear mind and a will to work hard. But if, for Jesus, stories and dramatic actions are the language of theology, then the culture of the storyteller is crucial. Our task includes the responsibility of trying to understand the metaphors and stories from and about Jesus in the light of the culture of which he was a part.

UNLOCKING METAPHORS



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To unlock the secrets of these metaphors, there are a few simple yet far-reaching challenges.

The first is to realize the importance of the task. It is easy to ignore historical questions. Granted, anyone can read the Bible and be blessed by that reading, just as anyone can listen to a Bach cantata and be moved. But at the same time, the trained ear will hear more and be moved on a deeper level by the same music.

One ploy often used to escape the hard work of attempting to discover what Jesus was saying to his audience is to affirm the “universal appeal” of his parables. Every culture has loving fathers, rebellious sons and self-righteous older brothers, and many, directly or indirectly, assume that the parable of the prodigal son needs no special cultural glasses. It is universal in its appeal. Up to a point this is true. But in the Middle East when a young man asks for his inheritance while his father is still alive his request means, “Dad, why don’t you drop dead.” The father is expected to get angry, slap the boy across the face and drive him out of the house. None of these things happens in the parable. By the time we process the significance of these three bits of cultural insight, the parable exhibits new meanings that otherwise would be missed.

The second challenge is to realize the historical nature of the Word of God. The Bible for Christians is not *just* the Word of God. Rather, it is the Word of God spoken through people in history. Those people and that history cannot be ignored without missing the speaker or writer’s intentions and creating our own substitutes for them. Historical interpretation is the key to unlocking the vault that contains the gold of theological meaning. Without that key the gold turns to brass. It is helpful to note that this is true of all significant literature.

How is President Lincoln’s Gettysburg address to be understood today? That speech was a turning point in American history because of the meaning it created in the middle of an identity-forming Civil War (“War Between the States”? or “The Great Rebellion”? or perhaps “The War of Northern Aggression”?). Each American brings his or her own history and experience to a study of that war. In spite of that, anyone who ignores the context of the war and the battle of Gettysburg cannot understand Lincoln’s speech. In like manner, it is critical to interpret the parables of Jesus within his own world. Only then can we grasp the meaning created by them. The question becomes, How much meaning?

The third challenge is to distinguish what meaning or meanings can be attributed legitimately to the parables. For many centuries allegory reigned supreme as a method of interpretation, and the fatted calf in the parable of the prodigal son became a symbol for Christ because the calf was killed. Through allegory, interpreters were able to locate their favorite ideas almost anywhere, and confusion and finally meaninglessness conquered. This is probably why parables ceased to be sources for Christian faith and were limited to ethics. The Latin proverb reads, “Theologia parabolica non est theologia argumentativa.”

In reaction to the fanciful exaggerations that the allegorical method produced in past centuries, across the twentieth century there was a stream of scholarship that argued for “one point per parable.” Others allowed for several themes in a parable. The purpose was to protect interpretation from adding meanings to the text that could not have occurred to Jesus or his audience. But if a parable is part of a larger worldview, and if it is “a house in which we are invited to take up residence,” then the dweller in that house can look out on the world from different windows. The house has a variety of rooms. If the great parable of the prodigal son has “only one point,” which shall we choose? Should the interpreter choose “the nature of the fatherhood of God,” “an understanding of sin,” “self-righteousness that rejects others,” “the nature of true repentance,” “joy in community” or “finding the lost”? All of these theological themes are undeniably present in the story and together form a whole that I have called “the theological cluster.” Each part of that cluster is in creative relationship to the other parts. The meaning of each can only be understood fully within the cluster formed by the entire parable. The content of the cluster must be controlled and limited by what Jesus’ original audience could have understood.

When the Pharisees sat together and reflected on what Jesus was talking about in a particular parable, what ideas were available to them? There may be one or more. The themes that comprise the theological cluster of a parable must grow out of the world in which the parable was told and first heard. But should such a principle be strictly applied?

A great work of art has a life of its own. The viewer of that art brings his or her own life and experience to the moment of encounter with the work. Michelangelo’s statue of Moses leaps beyond the world of sixteenth-century Italy and becomes “the angry man of God.” Yet there need to be limits to what can legitimately be found in a story. One of the island cultures of the Pacific glorifies the cleverness of the deceiver. People of that culture read the story of the passion of Jesus and the hero of the story becomes Judas. Jesus turns into the duped fool. In the West some have found Marxism or Freudianism or Existentialism in the parables of Jesus. Postmodernism is selected by others as the appropriate lens through which to study the parables. Such interpretations could not have been imagined by



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Jesus or his audience. Additionally, whatever the interpreter finds in a parable needs to be evaluated in the light of the life and witness of Jesus. All fair-minded reviewers appropriately extend such a courtesy to any modern author. Can't the same courtesy be offered to Jesus? Such a discipline keeps one within the "critical realism" that N. T. Wright eloquently presents as a starting point for New Testament interpretation.

SUMMARY: INTRODUCTION TO THE PARABLES

Finally, the question is not, Where are you on the ladder? but Did you get there by climbing or falling? All of us have limited intellectual and spiritual resources as we approach "the mind of Christ" in the parables. Each of us is aware of great interpreters who are so far ahead of us that they are nearly out of sight. Others known to us may not have had the opportunity to learn what we have learned. This perspective is shared by the greatest scholar and the simplest believer. All readers of Jesus' parables are challenged to do the best they can with what they have and not despair at the ignorance or achievements of others.

Simply stated, our task is to stand at the back of the audience around Jesus and listen to what he is saying to them. Only through that discipline can we discover what he is saying to any age, including our own. Authentic simplicity can be found the other side of complexity. The theological and ethical House of the Parables of Jesus awaits. May all enter with great expectations!⁹

13:10 The purpose of parables was to make spiritual truths clearer to hearers; to put truth in a form easily remembered; to avoid offense with hostile people who would not receive the truth; and to declare judgment upon those who were willfully blind. See note on Mark 4:12.

13:11 See note on Mark 4:11.

13:16 The disciples were privileged to see and hear things not given to God's servants in the OT.

WORD WEALTH

13:17 **desired**, *epithumeo* (ep-ee-thoo-meh-oh); Strong's #1937: To set one's heart upon, eagerly long for, covet, greatly desire, lust after. The word emphasizes the intensity of the desire rather than the object desired. It describes both good and evil desires.¹⁰

Mark 4:11 **Mystery**: In biblical thought the term "mystery" means something formerly hidden, but now revealed, which people cannot understand except by divine revelation.¹¹

14. **Is fulfilled** (ἀναπληροῦται). Rather of something in progress: *is being fulfilled or in process of fulfillment*.¹²

B. The Purpose of the Parables (13:10–17)

13:10 The disciples were puzzled that the Lord should **speak to** the people in the veiled language of **parables**. So they asked Him to explain His method.

13:11 In His reply, Jesus distinguished between the unbelieving crowd and the believing disciples. The crowd, a cross-section of the nation, was obviously rejecting Him, though their rejection would not be complete until the cross. They would not be permitted to know **the mysteries (secrets) of the kingdom of heaven**, whereas His true followers would be helped to understand.

A mystery in the NT is a fact never previously known by man, which man could never learn apart from divine revelation, but which has now been revealed. **The mysteries of the kingdom** are hitherto unknown truths concerning the kingdom in its interim form. The very fact that the kingdom would *have* an interim form had been a secret up to now. The parables describe some of the features of the kingdom during the time when the King would be absent. Some people therefore call this "the mystery form of the kingdom"—not that there is anything mysterious about it but simply that it was never known before that time.

13:12 It may seem arbitrary that these secrets should be withheld from the multitude and revealed to the disciples. But the Lord gives the reason: "**For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away.**" The disciples had faith in the Lord Jesus; therefore, they would be given the capacity for more. They had accepted the light; therefore, they would receive

⁹ Bailey, K. E. (2008). *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (pp. 277–283). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

¹⁰ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Mt 13:10–16). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

¹¹ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Mk 4:11). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

¹² Vincent, M. R. (1887). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 78). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.



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more light. The Jewish nation, on the other hand, had rejected the Light of the world; therefore they were not only prevented from receiving more light, they would lose what little light they had. Light rejected is light denied.

13:13 Matthew Henry compares the **parables** to the pillar of cloud and fire which enlightened Israel while confusing the Egyptians. The parables would be revealed to those who were sincerely interested but would prove “only an irritation to those who were hostile to Jesus.”

So it was not a matter of whim on the Lord’s part, but simply the outworking of a principle which is built into all of life—willful blindness is followed by judicial blindness. That is why He spoke to the Jews in parables. H. C. Woodring put it so: “Because they did not have the love of the truth, they would not get the light of the truth.” They professed to see, that is, to be familiar with divine truth, but Truth incarnate stood before them and they resolutely refused to see Him. They professed to hear God’s Word, but the living Word of God was in their midst and they would not obey Him. They were unwilling to understand the wonderful fact of the Incarnation; therefore, the capacity to understand was taken from them.

13:14, 15 They were a living fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9, 10. Israel’s heart had **grown dull** and their **ears** were insensitive to the voice of God. They deliberately refused to **see with their eyes**. They knew that if they saw, heard, understood, and repented, God would heal them. But in their sickness and need, they refused His help. Therefore, their punishment was that they would **hear** but **not understand**, and **see** but **not perceive**.

13:16, 17 The disciples were tremendously privileged, because they were seeing what no one had seen before. The prophets and righteous men of the OT had longed to be living when the Messiah arrived, but their desire had not been fulfilled. The disciples were favored to live at that crisis moment in history, to see the Messiah, to witness His miracles, and to hear the incomparable teaching which came from His lips.¹³

13:10–15 Jesus’ parables were a teaching method designed to reveal spiritual truths in such a way that those who wanted to respond would understand and receive more (vv. 9, 12, 43). Those who chose not to respond would not completely understand, and what little understanding they did have would disappear.

WOMEN AND THE PARABLES OF JESUS

| Parable | Audience | Application |
|--|--|---|
| The lamp under a basket (Matt. 5:14–16; Mark 4:21, 22; Luke 8:16, 17). | To the disciples. | Life and words should give personal testimony to God’s redemptive and transforming grace. |
| The marriage (Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19, 20; Luke 5:34, 35). | To the Pharisees and the disciples of John. | Joy will be found in Christ’s companionship. |
| The patched garment (Matt. 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke 5:36). | To the Pharisees and the disciples of John. | Jesus did not come to adapt to the old order of legalism but to make all things new. |
| The children in the marketplace (Matt. 11:16, 17; Luke 7:31, 32). | To the multitudes concerning John the Baptist. | Those who rejected Jesus and John could not be pleased. Beware of focusing on personal whims. |
| The leaven (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20, 21). | To the multitude on the seashore. | Beware of sin that makes its way into life to corrupt and draw away from the good and true. |
| The pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45, 46). | To the disciples. | The relative value of the gospel exceeded all else. |
| The wedding garment (Matt. 22:10–14). | To the chief priests and the Pharisees. | Keep your life pure and holy. |
| The wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1–13). | To the disciples on the Mount of Olives. | Always be prepared and watchful. |
| The wedding feast (Matt. 22:2–9; Luke 14:16–23). | To the chief priests and the Pharisees. | Do not reject God’s invitation to salvation. |

¹³ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (pp. 1254–1255). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



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The lost coin** (Luke 15:8–10). To the Pharisees and scribes. Remember Christ’s love for sinners and His determination to draw them to Himself.

The persistent widow (Luke 18:1–8). To the disciples. Persevere in prayer.

**Biblical women often wore a *frontlet* (Heb. *semedi*) on their foreheads. This adornment was made of coins (perhaps part of the woman’s dowry) and signified betrothal or marriage. The monetary value of the coins was not as important as the sentimental value and symbolism of commitment.

A parable is a lesson from daily life that teaches a spiritual truth. Jesus often told parables to provide an understanding of life, especially life in God’s kingdom. Thirty-five percent of all gospel teaching is written in parables.¹⁴

11–13. The Saviour’s reply was that only the disciples were to know the **mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**. The mystery implies a secret into which one must be initiated in order to understand it. The mystery revealed would be the new form of the kingdom during the interval between the first and second advents. Kent (p. 45) notes, “These parables describe the strange form of the kingdom while the King is absent, during which time the gospel is preached and a spiritual nucleus is developed for the establishment of the messianic reign.” This special revelation is given only to the apostles who will become the foundation of that church. Those to whom this revealed secret is **not given** are those who have already rejected Christ. Thus, to the unbeliever, the parable form leaves him without understanding. Their rejection of Him leads to His rejection of them.

14–17. The quotation from the **prophecy of Isaiah** [Isaiah], (i.e., Isa 6:9–10) follows the LXX, emphasizing the obstinate unbelief of the people. As in Isaiah’s day, the Jews had hardened themselves against God’s truth and He had further hardened them in their unbelief. Their hearts had **waxed gross** (fat) and they would not, nor should not **be converted**, i.e., changed or saved. The faith of the disciples was evidence of their conversion and caused them to see and hear the truth which the **prophets** (vs. 17) had desired to know (cf. 1 Pet 1:10–12).¹⁵

¹⁴ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman’s Study Bible* (Mt 13:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁵ Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). *KJV Bible Commentary* (p. 1917). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.