

Bible Lessons



"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink;
but righteousness, and peace,
and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Romans 14:17

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Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

THEME FOR 2021 4TH QUARTER BIBLE LESSONS

The Kingdom of God

Jesus' teachings in the Gospels contain much about the Kingdom of God. Many of His parables contain, in symbols and object lessons, precious, individual, detailed truths about the kingdom. Studies into the Old Testament reveal wonderful things in type and shadow; in prophecy and in actual fulfillment. As we study about the kingdom of God in this series, my prayer is that our experience will be as the songwriter joyfully expresses:

“There’s a theme that is sweet to my memory,
There’s a joy that I cannot declare,
There’s a treasure that gladdens my being,
‘Tis the kingdom of righteousness here.”



Bro Edgar and Sis. Gloria Martens

We are sorry to report that Bro. Edgar Martens, who has faithfully served this ministry by having the Bible Lessons printed, mailing them, and overseeing the financial part, has been quite ill over the summer and is no longer able to take on this enormous task. We appreciate him so much for his willing service over the past several years and pray God will richly reward his labors. Please remember him in prayer; also, if you have opportunity, it would be good to send Bro. Edgar a note of thanks for his service. Mail to: Edgar and Gloria Martens, 2200 Edwards Avenue, Muscle Shoals, AL 35661.

In his place, the Lord has supplied Bro. Kevin Sorrell and his family to take care of the printing and mailing. This is a great answer to prayer! As always, God takes care of His work. We are so grateful, and want to welcome Bro. Kevin and his wife, Sis. Kimberly, and their children to our *Bible Lessons* family!

—Angela Gellenbeck

OCTOBER 3, 2021

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN PROPHECY

Genesis 49:10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

Numbers 24:17 I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

Psalms 2:6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

7 I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

Psalms 145:13 Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.

Daniel 2:44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Daniel 7:13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

27 And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

MEMORY VERSE: But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. —**Micah 5:2**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Throughout the Old Testament, God foretold the establishment of the heavenly kingdom by the Messiah. The kingdom was to come out of Zion, be an everlasting kingdom encompassing the entire world and be given to the saints of the most High.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Genesis 49:10 “Scepter”: shepherd’s implements, such as a rod or staff; mark of authority; tribe. “Lawgiver”: commander’s staff; from a word meaning *decree*, or *to cut in* or *inscribe*. “Shiloh”: a title given to the Messiah in this passage, meaning *he who is to be sent* or *that which belongeth to him*; also *Peaceful One*; in other places Shiloh was a city of Ephraim. “Gathering of the people”: obedience; referring to the winning of the hearts of the Gentiles to Christ and their submission unto Him.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Genesis 49 is the chapter in which Jacob called his twelve sons and prophesied what would happen to them “in the last days.” Jacob addressed Judah in verses 8 through 12. Although Judah was not the eldest son, he was given the distinction of being the one from whom the Messiah would come. The passage mentions the rule and dominion of the Messiah and the obedience and submission of the people of the world unto him.

Balam (Numbers 24:17), although not a faithful prophet of the Lord, was also inspired by a prophecy concerning the Messiah. He had been hired by King Balak of the Moabites to curse Israel, but instead, he blessed them over and over again. How significant to note the word *scepter* again, referring to the kingship of Christ and the dominion that would be His over the nations. Here also is the word *star*—a tiny hint of detail about the Messiah’s birth, over which a special star was observed in the sky and which led the wise men from eastern lands to the place where baby Jesus was. It is perhaps also a reference to Christ being the morning star, or the Sun of righteousness, the Light of the world.

The Psalms contain many references to the Messiah as the coming King, beginning with the second Psalm. The New Testament author of Hebrews applied verse 7 directly to Christ, and the holy hill, or Zion, “which is the resting-place of the divine presence and therefore excels all the heights of the earth, is assigned to Him as the seat of His throne” (*Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the New Testament*).

The 145th Psalm gives the description of the Messiah’s kingdom as being everlasting. This same truth was also given in Daniel’s prophecies when he referred to a kingdom that would never be destroyed, would not pass away, and would stand forever. Daniel also expressed the scope of Messiah’s kingdom: all people, nations, languages, and dominions. He gave the blessed truth that Christ’s kingdom would also be given to, or possessed by, the “saints” or holy people of the most High.

Micah declared the birthplace of the Messiah to be Bethlehem and called Him the ruler in Israel.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Jacob prophesied that the Messiah would descend from which of his sons?
2. What other Old Testament prophet mentioned a *scepter*?
3. The Messiah was to rule from what city?
4. How is this applied spiritually?
5. What is the scope and longevity of the Messiah's rule?

LIFE APPLICATION

Living now in the period of time subsequent to Christ's birth, earthly life, death, resurrection, ascension, and sending forth of the Holy Spirit, we rejoice as we look back on these Old Testament prophecies and see their fulfillment.

Was Jesus born of the lineage of Judah? His lineage is given in Matthew 1. We know that David definitely came from Judah's heritage and that Jesus is called the son of David. Judah's leadership in Israel, once established under David's kingdom, though interrupted during the captivity, did not depart until Christ came, just as Jacob prophesied.

As we also noted, the detail about the star mentioned by Baalam was fulfilled at the birth of Christ, and the idea of the kingdom was alluded to by him in the mention of the word scepter.

Has the dominion of Christ's kingdom been from sea to sea, encompassing all nations, people, languages, and dominions? Truly, the gospel message has gone to all nations and people. There are believers in Christ in every part of the world. The persecuting powers of satan have endeavored to stamp out the kingdom of Christ in every place and every age, but the rule of the Messiah has conquered every time.

Was Christ indeed born in Bethlehem? The historian, Luke, details the story in the second chapter of his gospel. Secular historical accounts confirm the time and place of the birth of Jesus.

As Gentiles, we are so privileged to have heard the wonderful story of salvation! We too have had the Spirit poured out in our hearts. We gladly submit to His dominion in our lives and obey His Word. As kings and priests we reign with Christ and possess the greatness of the kingdom every day!

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Many times the disciples asked Jesus for a sign of his coming kingdom. No doubt they were eager to exact vengeance on their oppressors. James and John, as well as their mother, desired that Jesus would make them next in command. Peter stated that he would fight for Jesus "to the death." He tried to prove this in the garden of Gethsemane when he cut off the servant's ear with a sword. Their understanding just could not take in the spiritual kingdom of which He spoke.

But Jesus kept pointing to a kingdom that would exist within the heart of man. This would be a kingdom that could never be destroyed; one which would extend from this physical life and into the eternal one. He taught that to be the greatest in the kingdom of God you must be willing to be the smallest in this kingdom. He exhibited a servant's heart when he knelt down and washed the disciple's feet. He desired that the children of God would not be taken out of the world but that they might overcome the wickedness and evil of this world by his abundant grace.

This kingdom would supersede any political power or high place set up by man. It would then be possible to establish this dominion within the heart of every believer, in any nation, under any government rule. Daniel 2:44 states it well, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever."

—LaDawna Adams

OCTOBER 10, 2021

CHRIST ON DAVID'S THRONE

II Samuel 7:12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

17 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

Psalms 132:11 The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.

17 There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed.

18 His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish.

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Isaiah 16:5 And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness.

Ezekiel 34:23 And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.

24 And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them.

Ezekiel 37:24a And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.

25b And my servant David shall be their prince for ever. [See also **Hosea 3:5.**]

Amos 9:11 In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old.

Luke 1:30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

Mark 11:9 And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord:

10 Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest. [See also **Matthew 21:1-9.**]

Acts 2:29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne.

31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.

32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

MEMORY VERSE: And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. —**Acts 15:13-17**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Through the Old Testament prophets, God established a firm promise that He would raise up the Messiah to reign on David's throne, to be prince, ruler, lawgiver, shepherd, judge and king.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 132:17 "Horn of David": a symbol of might, strength, power and dominion.

LESSON BACKGROUND

After King David had successfully brought the ark home to its tabernacle and God had given him peace from all his enemies, he told the prophet Nathan that he desired to build a proper temple for the Lord. That night God sent Nathan to David with the message that David's son, his successor, would be the one to build the temple; however, Nathan pronounced a blessing upon David and his lineage, prophesying that his throne would be established forever. David expressed this blessing in Psalm 132, reminding the Lord that He had chosen his household and the city of Zion for His dwelling and his throne.

This promise to David is repeated in several of Isaiah's prophecies and again in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Amos.

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary telling her that the Holy Child she was chosen to bear would reign over the house of Jacob in the throne of His father, David.

The birth of another special child, John, filled his father Zacharias with inspired praise as he too reminded the people of the prophecies of the Messiah filling the throne of David.

The passage from Mark's gospel lets us hear again the praises of the people who heralded Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on the young colt. They shouted Hosannas and welcomed Jesus as their king, ruling the kingdom of their father David. Matthew recorded the event, explaining that it was the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass...and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth." (Zechariah 9:9-10b)

The apostles in the book of Acts expounded upon the old prophecies, applying them so clearly to Christ. Two things are especially significant: Peter linked the sending of the Holy Spirit with the establishment of Christ on David's throne; and James applied the building of the tabernacle of David to the salvation of the Gentiles. These applications are important because they prove the time of the establishment of Christ's kingdom—Pentecost; and that the preaching of the gospel of salvation to the Gentiles also began at that time, not in a future millennial age.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What prophet assured David that God would establish his eternal kingdom in his lineage?

2. What prophet called the Messiah the “Prince of Peace”?
3. What prophet called the Messiah the “shepherd”?
4. What prophet prophesied the rebuilding of David’s tabernacle?
5. What messenger announced the birth of the Messiah and His reign upon the throne of David?

LIFE APPLICATION

I’ve heard it said that if you’ve only handled genuine currency, you will know at once when a counterfeit bill touches your fingers. In the same way, once you immerse your mind in the genuine, pure truth of these prophecies and their fulfillment, you will identify when a false teaching is presented. We don’t actually need to pore over the details of the various millennial doctrines in order to see the truth clearly. Do we believe the eye-witnesses?

The apostles spoke of what they had seen and heard. Immediately, they connected the familiar prophecies with what was unfolding before their very eyes. As the Holy Spirit fell upon them with power and fire, they knew Isaiah’s “burning and fuel of fire.” As thousands of Gentiles came to believe the gospel, they identified the “building” of the tabernacle as Amos foretold, and they knew He had spoken “peace to the heathen,” as Zechariah had announced.

The worldly-minded Jews and then the carnal heretics who lived around the early church time each insisted it was an earthly kingdom that Christ would set up. Jesus Himself told the Jews, “My kingdom is not of this world,” and the early church fathers condemned the heretical teachings of Cerinthus in the first century and Nepos in the second. The Word and the Holy Spirit both witness to the truth that Jesus set up His kingdom at Pentecost, and He is reigning now on David’s throne, in the midst of His enemies, in the hearts of those who have submitted themselves unto Him.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

In II Samuel 5 we read how King David “took the strong hold of Zion” and it became the City of David. Jerusalem was beautifully situated with natural fortifications, abundant springs of water, and centrally located in David’s kingdom. Here David established his throne and prepared to build the temple.

Fast forward a thousand years and we see the King of kings ascending into The Holy City, Mount Zion. He’s riding an ass, a young colt draped with the garments of His disciples. Throngs

of people are all about Him as He enters the city. “Hosanna! Hosanna!” is their cry. “Save us now, Son of David!” They are waving palms and laying their garments in the street for Him to pass over. “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of The Lord!”

Less than a week later, the scene is completely altered. The King of the Jews is beaten and bruised, mocked and scorned. He’s crowned with thorns. The mob now cries, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Bearing the cross, He is led outside the gates of Jerusalem to the hill Golgotha. There He is hung between two thieves. The Savior of the world gives up His life for you and for me.

Now what awaits our wondering eyes? Every eye shall see Him! He’s coming! He’s coming! Every tongue shall confess! Lord of lords! King of kings! Every knee shall bow! Men will faint with fear, crying for the rocks and mountains to cover them! Saints will rejoice, leaping up into the air to join Him! He’s coming, He’s coming! We will see Him descending from Heaven to welcome His Bride! Oh, what a day that will be!

—Sarah L. Herron

OCTOBER 17, 2021

ENTERING THE KINGDOM

Mark 1:14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God

15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Matthew 5:20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

Matthew 12:28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

Matthew 18:2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 19:23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

Acts 14:22b ...We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Colossians 1:13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

MEMORY VERSE: The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. —**Luke 16:16**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The kingdom of heaven was at hand and available, but there were definitely some restrictions for entering that Jesus taught the people: repenting, believing the gospel, obtaining a righteousness that was greater than that of the Pharisees, doing God's will, becoming as a little child, being converted and born again; and being willing to fight, press, lay down idols such as earthly wealth, and endure persecution and tribulation.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Mark 1:15 "At hand": approaches; has come near.

Matthew 11:12 "Suffereth violence" and Luke 16:16 "Presseth": to advance forcefully; to apply force.

Matthew 18:3 "Be converted": to turn; to change direction; about-face.

LESSON BACKGROUND

“The kingdom of heaven is at hand!” was the cry of John the Baptist, and later, Jesus, as He began preaching after John was put in prison. When Jesus read the gospel, or good news, of the kingdom (Isaiah 61) in the synagogue, He announced that the Spirit was anointing Him to preach the gospel to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, and preach deliverance to the captives. When He cast out devils by the Spirit, He said, “The kingdom of God is come unto you.” He was letting the people know that the kingdom was there, available, and whoever would repent, be converted, and believe His words would be able to enter.

Jesus taught definite prerequisites for entering the kingdom of God. The Pharisees had a certain kind of outward righteousness. But, Jesus said, “Ye neither go in [to the kingdom of heaven] yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matthew 22:13). So the righteousness of the Pharisees wasn’t sufficient for entering God’s kingdom, since it was their own righteousness and not God’s; this was also Paul’s testimony in Romans 10:3. Jesus said that, “Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Additionally, a man could not enter merely by saying, “Lord, Lord.” He had to DO God’s will and not just talk about it. This definitely takes in being converted, or changed, and becoming meek, humble, willing to learn, and as submissive as a little child.

In Matthew 19 a young man came running to Jesus. Jesus looked at him with great love, although He knew of the idols in this wealthy young man’s heart. When the young man confessed to something lacking in his life, although he had kept all the commandments, Jesus put him to the test. “Go and sell all you have, and give to the poor, and then come and follow me.” The young man hesitated. “You’ll have treasure in heaven,” Jesus promised. Sorrowfully, the man turned and walked away. Jesus made no bargains with him. Instead, He turned to His disciples and made the statement that it was nearly impossible for a wealthy man to enter the kingdom of heaven; only God could make it possible. A wealthy man would have to humble himself, change his direction and purpose, give up his idols, and surrender all to enter the kingdom.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee who came to Jesus at night, acknowledging that Jesus was a teacher come from God, as evidenced by the miracles He performed, but wanting to know more. Jesus responded by teaching him about being born again. The passage does not tell us that Nicodemus believed in Jesus at that time, but later he defended Jesus before his fellow Pharisees and assisted the disciples and Joseph of Arimathea with the care of Jesus’ body after His crucifixion.

The remainder of verses in our lesson have to do with dealing with the opposition we

encounter when we desire to enter the kingdom. With the rich man, it was his desire for riches; with Nicodemus, it was his fear of man. Our own flesh opposes submission to God's righteousness, humility, and the willingness to learn as a child and do God's will instead of our own. The violence Jesus spoke of and the pressing we must do is against our flesh.

We also have an adversary, the devil, who seeks to devour us. He will "try his worst" to turn us back from entering the kingdom. Again, we must be violent and aggressive with our intention to repent and be converted. Persecution, tribulation, or temptation must not deter us from our purpose.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What did it mean when John and Jesus preached, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand?"
2. Name the conditions for entering the kingdom of heaven.
3. For whom is it nearly impossible to enter the kingdom, and what is the remedy?
4. What forms of opposition must we deal with to enter the kingdom?
5. What did Jesus say we must do about the opposition?

LIFE APPLICATION

Studying these verses definitely presents a clear picture of the challenge before every soul who desires to enter God's kingdom. The contest is still the same as when Jesus spoke to the rich man and to Nicodemus. There is still a battle to be fought if we want to be saved, and definitely one to fight if we are to keep saved. The disciples encouraged the early church that it is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom. At that time in history, your life was in jeopardy if you became a follower of Jesus. In many places in our world today that is still the case.

We live in a prosperous society that puts nearly all of us in the position of the rich young man. For us to enter the kingdom and stay there, our wealth presents an almost impossible obstacle. We will have to be as aggressive and courageous against covetousness as the Christians were who faced the lions. Jesus spoke of surface conversions in the parable of the sower; those who get excited about the gospel message but lack a depth of desire and the willingness to follow through. To enter the kingdom, we must apply our will and trust His grace to withstand the opposition.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

There are many great cities in the world, and all are quite different. It seems that each has its very own personality. As we enter them, we can immediately sense the atmosphere and get a feeling of the culture. The design of the buildings, the modes of transportation, the crowded streets, all set the tone of the city.

We get a glimpse of its wealth and an idea of how it is governed and what's important to its citizenry. As we tour, we are drawn to the sights that make it unique, the monuments that keep its rich history alive. We are mesmerized by the lights, the sounds, the colors.

This is the city—a collage of people who have embraced the benefits of living in close proximity, under the authority of the same government.

Christians are the light of the world, cities that are set on hills and cannot be hidden. We are neither isolated nor alone. We are not self-governed but are under the authority and kingship of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

No matter where one travels throughout the world and no matter the race, language, or culture, the spirit and atmosphere of the cities of God are the same because they are part of the same kingdom.

Their histories run parallel. They have like stories of battles fought and victories won. Stories of press, resistance, and triumph. We hear grand descriptions of their towers, bulwarks, and palaces. These are the stories that inspire us, and we determine to experience this kingdom for ourselves.

As we start the journey, we too, encounter strong oppositions and discouraging setbacks. But the richness of the kingdom, and the love of the King, propels us and draws us as it did the prior generations.

Then we enter! We arrive! And oh, what a city! What a kingdom! What a King!

—Darrell Johnson

OCTOBER 24, 2021

THE KINGDOM ENTERING YOU

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 6:10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Luke 12:31 But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Luke 17:20 And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:

21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.
[See also **John 18:36**.]

Acts 1:4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

MEMORY VERSE: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. —**Romans 14:17**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jesus taught us to seek for and pray for the kingdom of God to come; saying of the persecuted and poor in spirit that the kingdom was "theirs"; that it was the Father's good pleasure to give it; and that it was "within you." When asked after His resurrection if He was now going to restore the kingdom to Israel, He answered by telling them that the Holy Ghost would shortly come upon them and give them power to be His witnesses, thus connecting the coming of the Spirit with the coming of the kingdom within them.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 5:3 “Poor in spirit”: one who crouches and cowers like a beggar; deeply destitute; completely lacking resources; humble and devout.

Luke 12:32 “Good pleasure”: same word as “well-pleased”; pleasingly acceptable.

Luke 17:20 “Observation”: visible signs that can be observed by close watching.

Luke 17:21 “Within you”: in the inward parts and of a spiritual nature.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The verses from Matthew come from what is called the Sermon on the Mount, a formal exposition of the kingdom of God and a setting forth of the burden of Jesus’ ministry. Seated upon one of the mountains around Jerusalem, Jesus addressed His disciples primarily, but the presence of the multitudes is also indicated. Jesus explained what the kingdom of God was, who it belonged to, and the righteousness associated with it.

Luke echoed many of the same teachings. In Luke 11 and 12 Jesus taught about prayer, explained what happened when He cast out devils, pronounced woes upon the Pharisees, forewarned the disciples about persecution, and exhorted about being ready for His second coming. Using various stories and parables, Jesus taught about the kingdom of God. Luke 12:32 gives us a hint, as do the verses in Matthew chapters 5 and 6, that the kingdom is something one can have or possess. Jesus taught us to ask for the kingdom and seek for it, comforting us with the promise that it is well-pleasing to Him to grant it at our request. In the same place, He taught us to ask for the Holy Spirit. In answer to the Pharisees inquiring about the kingdom, Jesus again taught that an earthly kingdom with outward demonstration was not what He intended. At Jesus’ trial before Pilate, He plainly stated that His kingdom was “not of this world.”

The disciples expressed the hope and desire of all Israelites—that of regaining the kingdom and David’s throne and being free from the yoke of Roman authority. Jesus did not promise an earthly kingdom; rather, He explained that the power of His kingdom would be by His Holy Spirit filling them with the power to be His witnesses, beginning in their local cities and spreading unto all the world. Later, when Peter and the other apostles explained to the multitudes about the miracle of Pentecost, they cited David’s prophecies about his throne, explaining that Jesus had risen, was exalted and reigning at the Father’s right hand, and had sent forth the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Paul, speaking to the Roman saints, encouraged them to not be consumed by judging one

another in issues of food or observance of certain days; rather, they were to realize that the kingdom of God was the life of the Holy Spirit within them.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. The kingdom of heaven would belong to what kind of people?
2. Share the words which express how the Father feels about granting His kingdom to His children.
3. What two things did Jesus share about the kingdom in Luke and John?
4. When the disciples asked about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, how did Jesus answer?
5. “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but _____.”

LIFE APPLICATION

In our preceding lesson, we shared the concept of *entering the kingdom*, and we were given proof that entering the kingdom means to be born again, as a new baby; converted. We were also instructed that there were some hurdles to be overcome, and that through persecution and tribulation we would be born into the kingdom by pressing our way and doing warfare to the flesh and satan’s opposition. When Jesus, as the stronger man, delivers us from satan’s power, He delivers us from satan’s kingdom and into His kingdom.

Today’s lesson expresses a deeper truth and a deeper experience: that of *the kingdom entering us*. Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God coming “unto you” or “upon you” (Matthew 12:28 and Luke 11:20). We are to seek for the kingdom of God to come, as Jesus said, “within” us. We are to seek for it “first”; we are to pray for it to come, and as Jesus instructed His disciples, we are to “tarry” or “wait” until we are endued with the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to be comforted by the knowledge that He has promised the Spirit to us, He loves to give good gifts (meaning the Holy Spirit) to His children, and it is His good pleasure to give us the kingdom. The kingdom belongs to those who are willing and humble; it is a power to those who experience opposition and persecution.

His kingdom within us is righteousness. His Spirit is a holy Spirit, and it will produce holy lives. His kingdom is peace. The prophet Isaiah said, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain” (Isaiah 11:9); and, “The work of righteousness shall be peace” (Isaiah 32:17).

His kingdom is joy. When the one hundred and twenty came out of the upper room they were overflowing with joy and told of the wonderful works of God. Their joy strengthened them to suffer the persecution they soon encountered.

“Tis a kingdom of peace, it is reigning within, it shall ever increase in my soul.

We possess it right here when He saves from all sin, and shall last while the ages shall roll.”

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

A few years ago this "city boy" took up gardening, since the climate here in Southern California allows for growing vegetables of varying types year-round. Over the years I've learned a few things. I've found out that some seeds can be duds; I have planted them and followed all of the instructions provided, but when the seeds didn't activate I've had to go buy more in hopes of still getting a crop planted before the planting season was over. I've also learned about the DNA of seeds and how everything to make the plant into what it will be when it is mature is already encapsulated in the seed before it is ever planted. For instance, I have planted two similar varieties of tomato plants, and while they looked identical at planting, at least to my untrained eye, when they were ready for harvest I had tomatoes that were distinctly different in size, texture, taste and appearance.

When I think of the Kingdom of God being within us, I think back to those seeds. Every child of God that is born of His Spirit has received the spiritual DNA that will ensure they grow into the mature product He is expecting. In seeking for this kingdom within us, we must first humble, or as Jesus stated, "...fall into the ground and die..." Then, watered by the revelation of His Word, our hard outer shell falls away and the activation of His Holy Spirit within us causes us to spring forth from the earth (ourselves) exhibiting the tiny shoots of new life! As we begin to grow, the DNA within us causes us to take on His form, His nature, His characteristics, and those looking on can tell that we are indeed one of His. The brilliant sunshine of His smiles upon us as we walk in obedience with Him causes us to exude His righteousness, His peace, His joy, and finally, as we reach maturity, the fruit that we yield looks like, smells like, and tastes like Him.

Lord, help all of us not be "duds" who say we are Yours, but truly have your Holy Spirit activated within, and may we continuously experience this kingdom within us "springing up into everlasting life" as You promised in Your word! Amen!

—Fari Matthews

OCTOBER 31, 2021

WHEAT AND TARES AND THE NET OF FISH

Matthew 13:24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:

48 Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

MEMORY VERSE: And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.

—Mark 13:26-27

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, but his enemy secretly sowed tares. It is also like a net cast into the sea which gathered both good and bad fish. Both parables illustrate that at the end of the world the good are harvested and the bad are thrown into the fire.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 13:25 “Tares”: zizania; a type of dandelion resembling wheat; a plant grown in Palestine which resembles wheat in many ways but is worthless.

Matthew 13:39 “The end of the world”: Literally, the completion of this æon, “the point where one æon ends and another begins” (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*).

Matthew 13:49 “Sever”: place apart: mark off by boundaries from; separate.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jesus had gone to the seaside to teach, but the crowd grew so great that He entered a nearby ship, sat down, and taught the people who were standing on the shore. The parable in today's lesson was Jesus' second of three. When He had sent the crowd away and had come into the house, His disciples questioned, *What does it mean when You say that the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man?* Jesus explained that “the man” was the Son of man, or Jesus Himself. The sown seed were the children of the kingdom, or true believers regenerated by the Word. The tares represented the children of the wicked one, or those conceived from “doctrines of devils” or “another gospel.”

Different writers and commentators have had various views on this passage. Adam Clarke, in his commentary written in the 1700's and early 1800's, wrote, "[It is] here translated tares, and ... should rather be translated bastard or degenerate wheat ... Christ seems to refer, first, to the origin of evil. God sowed good seed in his field; made man in his own image and likeness: but the enemy, the devil, (Matthew 13:39), corrupted this good seed, and caused it to degenerate. Secondly, he seems to refer to the state of the Jewish people: God had sowed them, at first, wholly a right seed, but now they were become utterly degenerate, and about to be plucked up and destroyed by the Roman armies, which were the angels or messengers of God's justice, whom he had commissioned to sweep these rebellious people from the face of the land. Thirdly, he seems to refer also to the state in which the world shall be found, when he comes to judge it. The righteous and the wicked shall be permitted to grow together, till God comes to make a full and final separation."

Several details in these parables are mystifying, and we definitely need the Lord's help to rightly divide this scripture. It seems quite clear that "the field is the world," and that the kingdom of God coexists in this world with the kingdom of the devil. Yet further in the passage He says that the angels shall "gather out of his kingdom" all things that offend. The same difficulty is found in the parable of the net of fish when it says that the kingdom of heaven is "like unto a net," and in the net are every kind of sea creature, bad and good.

A satisfactory explanation found in the 1885 *Gospel Trumpet* may help: "Now, the question does not arise whether, or not, we shall root out of the Church the children of the wicked one, for there are none such in it, but whether or not we shall root them out of the world. This rooting out does not involve, consequently, the commonplace, unscriptural absurdity of turning persons out of the church, but the final and absolute destruction or annihilation of the devil's children from the face of the earth. We are not to use violence of any sort, nor to execute. God will repay, and His angels, not we, shall execute His judgments.

"But it may be asked then, how the angels 'shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity,' if the good and the bad are not mixed together in the Church? The answer is at hand and comprehensive: the 'enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.'—Verse 25. Not in the Church among the wheat, but among the wheat in the world, for 'the field is the world.' Out of, here, does not mean from within, but from side by side... The wheat and tares grow together in the field side by side and the tares are taken from among the wheat. So it is said in Matthew 13:49, in the parable of the net, 'the angels shall come forth, and shall sever the wicked from among the just.' In both cases the same word—*ek*—from is used. The unworthy may be as parasites endeavoring to adhere to the kingdom, but never able to enter it, hence, never taken from within it, but from among those who are in it" (A. M. Kiergan).

H. M. Riggle, in his book, *Biblical Trace of the Church*, in 1893, wrote that the angel reapers signify God's messengers. Riggle, along with D. S. Warner, Samuel Speck (*Bible Readings for Bible*

Students, 1902), and later, Fred Pruitt (*The New Testament Church and Its Symbols*, 1944), sincerely believed they were part of an “angel” ministry; wrote and preached and sang about it, and felt strongly that Jesus was going to come very shortly. Other ministers and leaders of movements since Riggle and Warner’s time have adopted these same views regarding their particular movement and ministry.

As the coming of Christ lingers, and apostate religion remains yet in the world—despite the efforts of various ministries to rid the world of it—simply interpreting the passage *as Christ said it*, that the *angels* on that last and final day will come with Christ and make this final separation between the good and the evil, seems the best and truest way of all.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What is the *field* in Jesus’ parable?
2. Who is represented by the *good seed*?
3. Who are the *reapers*?
4. What is represented by a *net* containing both bad and good kinds of fish?
5. What time period is represented by the *end of the world* in both parables?

LIFE APPLICATION

Since the two kingdoms—representing God’s true church and the apostate church—coexist in the world and will do so until the Lord’s return, this passage is a real comfort. For one thing, we can be sure there will always be a true people of God all the way to the end.

Secondly, there will always be false religion. Sometimes the accuser of the brethren will whisper, “If you were true Zion, you would have eclipsed Babylon long ago,” as we pass the filled parking lots of the mega churches and pull in to the little chapel with only a few cars. But we can continue doing our best for precious souls, refusing to be discouraged that we’ve not won all the lost to Christ. We don’t have to be confused because “fallen Babylon” still exists. Jesus Himself said that it would.

Neither should we be dismayed because there appear to be hypocrites among the holy ones. Again, it’s prophesied in the gospel. We can rest assured that the foundation of God stands sure, “having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his” (II Timothy 2:19). He won’t get anyone mixed up at the judgment. Our chief concern should be, “Lord, I want to be in Your

kingdom. I want to be among the righteous that shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of the Father.”

The parables speak to us of a great merciful God who cares so much about each strand of wheat. The malicious spirit which says, “Destroy the heretics! Kill the atheists!” dominated the Crusades and the Inquisition in the Middle Ages; the massacres and witch hunts in early America, and the wars and church strife in modern ages. It is practiced in Islam. It can work in true disciples and we may not be aware of it, as when the disciples asked if they should command fire from heaven to come down upon those who opposed Jesus. He said: “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of” (Luke 9:55).

The kingdom of Heaven is one of separation between good and evil, and the Gospel message does bring judgment upon all sin; but, it is also a kingdom of mercy and grace. Thank the Lord!

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

“My Grandpa, O. C. Porter, was a wheat farmer. I remember him giving me a lesson one day. We were at the wheat field, and Grandpa took two stalks; a stalk of wheat and a stalk of what he called ‘cheat.’ The cheat looked almost exactly like the wheat, but the difference was there were no grains of wheat in the stalk called ‘cheat.’ It was called ‘cheat’ because while it was growing up it used the fertilizer and the rain, and the farmer was cheated out of the fruit or the grain that he was expecting.

“Wheat and tares. Do you have the fruit tonight? Is there the fruit of the Spirit in your life—joy, peace, longsuffering? Are these things bubbling up from within you, or when the Lord is looking for something out of your life, does He find emptiness? Do you feel like a husk? Do you feel like there’s something still missing in your life?

“Matthew 13:47: ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind.’ People are making very different choices from the opportunities that come to them in life. Some good choices and some evil. So, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that is cast into the sea and gathers all of these people up.

“Verse 48: ‘Which when it was full, they drew to the shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.’ Which is more important? that I get to swim in the sea? that I get to devour other fish? that I can be the kind of fish I want to be? that I did it my way and nobody could put me down? or is it more important where I end up after the net is cast, and I’m gathered in?

“Verses 49-50: ‘So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.’

“Did you notice that it said *the angels* shall sever the wicked from the just? That’s not my job. That’s not your job. We don’t want to cut people off. We don’t want to go out there and pluck up tares— ‘Enough of you! your mercy is run out!’ No! Our attitude is, ‘Oh God, restore the soul before it’s eternally too late.’ The angels are going to have authority on that day. And oh, what a day of terror for those that are lost, for those that have been lifelong, professional hypocrites! What a day of terror!

“The separation is permanent! Shall we stop and let that soak in a little bit? Permanent! What? The one that I love? Lord, have mercy! No! I love that person! My enemy, Lord? alright. But my loved one? my child? Oh God, have mercy! Do you see the seriousness of this?

“Lord help us to have the goods on hand, to have the fruit in our lives, to have the Spirit of Christ, to be spending time at the feet of Jesus, to be begging Him, ‘Lord, this day I need you, I don’t want to be empty of the fruit of Christ in my life. I need you so much Lord, and I realize the end of time could be imminent. Because Bible prophecies are being fulfilled. Because our nation is becoming more wicked. Our culture is rejecting You more and more.’ There will come a time when the cup of the wrath of God will be full and He’ll say, ‘Angels, go!’ How will it be for you on that day? Are you going to be full of fruit in your life?”

—An excerpt from a message preached by Bro. Doug Wall,

Green Bank, WV camp meeting, June 2021

—Submitted by Bro. Harlan Sorrell

NOVEMBER 7, 2021

KINGDOM GROWTH: SEEDS AND LEAVEN

Mark 4:26 And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground;

27 And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

28 For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

29 But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the

harvest is come.

30 And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:

32 But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

33 And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.

34 But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

Luke 13:20 And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?

21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Isaiah 60:22 A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.

MEMORY VERSE: And the stone which smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. —**Daniel 2:35b**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The ancient prophecies from Isaiah and Daniel were reestablished by Jesus: the kingdom of God would start small but grow to fill the earth, a concept illustrated in several of Jesus' parables.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Mark 4:31 (Also Matthew 13:31 and Luke 13:19) "Grain of mustard seed": "the smallest of all seeds that a Palestinian farmer would sow in his field. A mustard plant reaches a height of three meters (about ten feet). This is a huge plant when fully matured and bears very tiny seeds" (*HELPS Word Studies*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven in the meal were both recorded by Matthew and preached by Jesus in the setting described in our previous lesson. Luke records both stories, but Mark records a third story, that of the growth of a seed, in addition to these.

These parables not only tell the personal story of the growth of the kingdom of God in each person, but also in the whole world. Each story contains the concept of something very small being able to influence and grow into something great. This, you could say, is the theme of the kingdom of heaven. It started with small beginnings—a baby in a stable; a poor virgin and her carpenter husband; a small band of shepherds. The grain of wheat, as Jesus called Himself, dropped into the ground and died, and from His death, He brought “many sons” into glory. A little group of disciples in one upper room, lit on fire with the Holy Spirit, burst out of that room and spilled the Gospel seed everywhere. Their tongues were anointed to preach in seventeen different languages, reaching people who were in Jerusalem from all over the world. Within hours, several thousand were repenting, believing on Jesus, and being baptized. From Jerusalem, as Jesus had said, they went all over Judaea and Samaria. Today, the Gospel message is still being spread unto “the uttermost part of the earth.”

The prophecy from Isaiah and from Daniel also contain this theme or law of the kingdom: the stone, cut out of the mountain without human hands, whom we know is Jesus Christ, became a great mountain, filling the whole earth. The little one would become a thousand.

Jesus used common, familiar objects—seeds of plants and grains of yeast—to awaken the minds of the farmers and housewives listening to His words that day on the seashore. But in the background of history, something more than common was at the core. “For who hath despised the day of small things?” an angel messenger asked the prophet (Zechariah 4:10). Surely he was looking forward to the influence that the Word and the Spirit would have upon the “whole earth.”

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. To what two very small things did Jesus compare the kingdom of Heaven?
2. What prophecies do these parables resemble?
3. What theme or law of the kingdom of God is expressed by these parables?
4. Share what is meant by the fowls of the air lodging under the shadow of the mustard

branches.

5. What do you think is meant by the three measures of meal?

LIFE APPLICATION

This teaching brings a thrilling current of joy into my soul, as we now live on the other side of the beginning story. We have seen the filling of the whole earth; we live clear across the globe from where this took place. We can read the exciting history of how the Gospel message reached our continent. There has been blood, sweat, and tears shed, imprisonment and torture suffered, and much sacrifice of life, health, and possessions for the Word of the Kingdom to reach our hearts. But look what it has done—in every soul and in every nation and in every age of time. The kingdom of God has transformed lives and communities. It has exalted marriage to the honorable and noble position originally intended by the Creator, and uplifted womanhood from a degraded, depressed status to a blessed, equal status. The Gospel message worked to abolish slavery in nation after nation. There are many “hidden” stories of individuals, families, communities and nations where the kingdom of God brought economic success, health, sanitation, educational progress, industrial progress, and peace in the place of poverty, disease, filth, ignorance, indolence, and strife.

Sometimes we don’t think much is happening when we sow the seed into the hearts of men and women, boys and girls, but remember, growth may be slow and hidden. The seed is powerful; be patient. Someday you will see a harvest.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

About seventy-five years ago, a young mother named Katie Marler was making yet another move in southeast Missouri with her husband and young family. In the process of moving, Katie found a *Faith and Victory* paper in the house left by the previous owners. She read the contents and was overwhelmed with gladness in her heart. This had been the very thing her soul had been hungering for! She contacted the publishers who in turn contacted Bro. Darius Gibson. Bro. Darius came to visit the Marler family and a little mustard seed was planted.

Katie was so happy that she shared this gospel with her neighbor, Effie Miller. Effie was also a young wife and mother who was eager to embrace the truth that Katie had found. Katie then shared the good news with her cousin, Arthur Gentry. He and his family rejoiced, as they had been searching for the truth as well. Soon there were enough folks to establish a

congregation in the little town of Senath, Missouri.

The mustard seed grew into a mighty tree as the young children became adults. They moved to different areas of the country and began to marry and start homes of their own. Some of the families they married into are: Palmer, Flynn, Masters, Adams, LaCroix, Humphrey, Whitson, Williamson, Doolittle, Stover, Sorrell, Thurman, and the list goes on.

I never knew Katie Marler but I thank God for her life and the mustard seed that was planted a long time ago. Because of it, I am blessed to be married to one of those branches.

—LaDawna Adams

NOVEMBER 14, 2021

TREASURE IN A FIELD AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Matthew 13:44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Psalms 19:10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Psalms 119:72 The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.

Psalms 119:127 Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.

Psalms 119:162 I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.

Proverbs 2:3 Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;

4 If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;

5 Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 23:23 Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.

MEMORY VERSE: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich. —**Revelation 3:18a**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The kingdom of God far supersedes any treasure of this world; if we must sell all that we have and put forth every effort to obtain it, it will totally be worth it.

LESSON BACKGROUND

While Jesus had given the parables about the seed, the mustard seed and the leaven to the multitudes at the seaside, it seems that later, when His disciples inquired privately about the deeper meanings, Jesus gave these two parables about the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price especially to them. Like Moses of old, they had esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Like Elisha of old, they had forsaken material pursuits to follow their Prophet. Like the Psalmist, whose verses we share in this lesson, they had found the Words of eternal life were far better than riches or treasures or food. And as Solomon instructed in the Proverbs, Jesus counseled them to keep searching and uncovering the treasures of the kingdom. They had indeed “left all” to follow Him. Perhaps He wanted to impart a deeper insight to them of what it really meant.

The first parable talks about a treasure that was hidden. How was it found? Did the hired man know it was there somewhere and purposely dig around until he found it? Or had a sudden, unexpected thing happened and, flash! There it was. Had he trodden the rounds of the furrows for years with the treasure just under his feet, just as many people do with the Gospel they hear day in and day out?

The pearl was obviously the result of many years of searching. The pearl connoisseur had seen many; perhaps owned many. But there was one, the only one of its calibre and size. He knew it. He was convinced there was no other. “There are two ways of finding the treasure. It is flashed on unexpectant eyes, and it is disclosed to seeking souls” (*MacLaren’s Expositions*).

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What was the emotion that came when the farmer found the treasure?
2. What was the conviction that came in both parables when the treasure/pearl was discovered?
3. How did they act upon that conviction?
4. Explain the truth about the kingdom expressed by these parables.
5. Share a personal example of your discovery of the “pearl of great price.”

LIFE APPLICATION

The two parables join together at this point: *I must have it. What is the price? No matter; I will pay, even if I have to sell everything else I have.* The prophet Isaiah, said, “Come, buy, without money, and without price.” We’re not talking about purchasing salvation, or the kingdom, or heaven, with anything material. We cannot buy this gift with good works or sacrificial offerings. Then, what is it that we must “sell” in order to obtain? What is the only thing we have?

SELF. I must deny, or give up, or sell out—myself. We can do that initially, in faith, but it will be quite another thing to surrender self, submit self-will, and live a life of continual self-denial.

“Is there anything worth calling wealth, except that wealth which meets my deepest need, which satisfies my whole nature, which I may have all in one, and which, if I have, I may have for ever? That wealth is the God who may be ‘the strength of your hearts and your heritage for ever.’ Surely if the wealth which is in God is more precious than all besides, you have the best of the bargain, if you part with the world and yourselves and get Him.

“And if, on the other hand, you stick to the second best and cleave to yourselves and to this poor diurnal sphere and what it contains, then I will tell you what your epitaph will be. It is written in one of the Psalms, ‘He shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his latter end shall be a fool.’ And there is a more foolish fool still—the man who, when he has seen the treasure, flings another shovelful of earth upon it, and goes away and does not buy it, nor think anything more about it. Dear brother, do not do that, but if, by God’s help, any poor words of mine have stirred anything in your hearts of recognition of what your true wealth is, do not rest until you have done what is needful to possess it, given away yourselves, and in exchange received Christ, and in Him wealth for evermore” (*MacLaren’s Expositions*).

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

How is it that some esteem the value of eternal life so highly that they find the cost to obtain it reasonable? While others find it too costly? Is the difference in the value, in the cost, or in something else?

The value according to the parable of the penny is the same. Everyone receives the same thing, eternal life. The cost is also the same, as illustrated by the parable of the pearl of great price. It takes us giving up everything, presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice. So the difference must lie in how we perceive either the value of eternal life or the cost of obtaining

it.

Satan paints the picture this way: Look at all you must give up! It is too hard! It's not worth it! On the other hand, the Lord appeals this way: I have an abundant life and eternal glory to give you! Whatever you give up for My sake, you'll receive a hundredfold!

Like a child that wants a toy, but can't bear to give up his money, the sinner may long for salvation and eternal life, but not be willing to give up his sins to inherit all of God's wealth. How foolish!

—Sarah L. Herron

NOVEMBER 21, 2021

THE FORGIVING KING AND THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

Matthew 18:21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

MEMORY VERSE: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. —**Colossians 1:13-14**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The kingdom of heaven is represented by a merciful, forgiving king, who forgave the enormous debt of his servant, and as is the nature of the king, so is the nature of the laws and administration of His kingdom; in all His realm there is to be mercy, grace and forgiveness.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 18:24; 28 “Ten thousand talents/an hundred pence (denarii)”: “The denarius was one day’s wage for a typical day laborer, who worked six days a week with a Sabbath day of rest. Allowing approximately two weeks for various Jewish holidays, the typical laborer worked 50 weeks of the year and earned an annual wage of 300 denarii (50 weeks x 6 days). Therefore, 100 denarii was one-third of a year’s salary, or four months’ wages.

“Now suppose you continued to work as a day laborer earning 300 denarii each year. After 20 years of such labor, you will have earned 6,000 denarii.

“At this point, the king would say to his debtor, ‘Congratulations. You have worked for 20 years and have now earned 6,000 denarii. That’s enough to pay back one talent. You only have 9,999 more talents to go.’

“From this, we can easily see that if it takes 20 years to earn one talent, then repaying 10,000 talents would require working 200,000 YEARS! How absurd then for the servant to beg

for mercy and tell the king that he would ‘pay back everything.’ As a day laborer, he had no hope—almost literally ‘not in a million years’—of ever repaying his debt” (*The Parable of the Two Debtors in Modern Terms* by Philip Massey, an adjunct faculty member for Crowell School of Business, Chimes Newspaper, Biola University).

If you earned \$10 per hour, working 12 hours per day, 72 hours per week, for 50 weeks, you would make \$36,000 in a year. If 100 denarii equaled four months’ salary, it would be equivalent to \$12,000. That is how much the unmerciful servant’s servant owed him.

How much would you earn in 200,000 years, to equal 10,000 talents? $36,000 \times 200,000 = \$7,200,000,000$, or 7.20 billion, the amount of debt forgiven by the merciful king.

Matthew 18:26 “Servant”: a petty king; a tributary prince (*Clarke’s Commentary*). “Worshiped him”: crouched as a dog before him, with the greatest deference, submission, and anxiety (*Clarke’s Commentary*). “Pay thee all”: “A sinner may be said, according to the economy of grace, to pay all, when he brings the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus to the throne of justice, by faith; thus offering an equivalent for the pardon he seeks, and paying all he owes to Divine justice, by presenting the blood of the Lamb” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

Matthew 18:34 “Wroth”: enraged; moved with anger.

LESSON BACKGROUND

As we have noted in the Word Definitions, the debt owed to the king by his servant was literally and totally impossible to pay. No doubt, the impossible figures are given so that we might have a clear understanding of what this means in the kingdom of God. Our insolvency was insurmountable. Our debt because of our sin against God could not be paid by hard labor, doing good deeds, burning sacrifices, shedding tears, accumulating money, or even dying. Jesus took our debt and paid it, along with the accumulated debt of the entire world of sinners!

Jesus explained these things following a lengthy teaching of the necessity of being humble as a little child, a warning against becoming stumbling-blocks for others, a description of His love for all “sheep,” and an admonition concerning church discipline. The summary of these teachings can be described as lessons in kingdom culture. Peter listened to all this and brought up a question, “How often shall I forgive?” I’m sure Jesus’ answer was beyond all Peter’s imaginings!

Our memory verse states what is included in being translated into the kingdom of His dear Son: redemption and forgiveness of sins. The parable lets us know just how awesome that is!

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What is the figure given by Jesus in answer to Peter's question?
2. Jesus likened the kingdom of heaven to a king. Describe the character of this king.
3. Describe the actions of the servant who had been forgiven so much when he found that someone owed him.
4. What did Jesus say would happen if a brother does not forgive?
5. What law of the kingdom of God is expressed by this parable?

LIFE APPLICATION

A kingdom is only as good as its king. We aren't familiar at all with this type of government, but in Bible times they understood what it meant to have a good king or a bad king. In God's kingdom, with Him reigning on the throne, and with us, His loyal subjects, happily doing His will, enjoying His presence, employed in His service—there is no better form of government, no more prosperous economy, no better life that could be lived. All our needs are supplied. The King cares for each one of us. "How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!" is spoken of the King in Zechariah 9:17, continuing the praise begun in verse 9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly...he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth." "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us" (Isaiah 33:22).

This parable expresses a law of the kingdom of God: mercy and forgiveness. It is the character of the King and is to be the law by which His servants also live. We are to care for each other and live in the kind of forgiveness Jesus described. We are to extend grace to every fellow servant of the king. "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye (Colossians 3:13).

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Character defects are a human problem. They are maladies inherited from Adam's fall. Some of us may speak too soon, while others may not speak soon enough. These character flaws can cause much pain to our brother. We seek the Lord about them, and we make improvements, but though there is progress, somehow it seems that there is more progress to be made. Why can't we just find the perfect balance? Why do we struggle to overcome what ails us?

There is a process that the Lord takes us through to teach us His way more perfectly. If we were to always get it right the first time, every time, we would never learn compassion and longsuffering. We would never have the patience to forbear with our brothers' weaknesses and infirmities. We would become arrogant and altogether unmerciful. So, God teaches us these valuable lessons by allowing us to struggle, to wrestle with ourselves and to never quite be satisfied with our own performance. We are then forced to humble ourselves and beg for forgiveness yet again. But from these lessons, we learn the essence of mercy and forgiveness.

First, we must be merciful to and forgive ourselves. We've all been advised: "Don't be so hard on yourself." This advice is worthy of our acceptance. But what is equally advisable is: "Don't be so hard on your brother, cut him some slack".

Secondly, we must understand that mercy and forgiveness are attributes of the King and must, therefore, be attributes of His subjects. They go hand in hand and must be perpetuated throughout the kingdom and throughout our lifetime.

A primary principle of the kingdom is: blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. When we are merciful, mercy is reciprocated. Today we administer it to others. Tomorrow it is administered to us.

—Darrell Johnson

NOVEMBER 28, 2021

A LITTLE CHILD

Matthew 18:1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye

shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 23:8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Luke 22:24 And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

26 But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

27 For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

MEMORY VERSE: Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. —**Philippians 2:5-8**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The law of the kingdom of God expressed by this parable is humility, the quality exemplified by Christ Himself and taught by Him as the true way to be great in the kingdom of heaven.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 23:8 “Rabbi”: my master; my teacher; my great one; Clarke has *infallible teacher*.

Matthew 23:9 “Father”: a title of honor applied to teachers, prophets or members of the

Sanhedrin, “whose prerogative it was, by virtue of the wisdom and experience in which they excelled, to take charge of the interests of others” (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*). “Our Lord probably alludes to the *Ab*, or father of the Sanhedrin, who was the next after the *nasi*, or president. By which he gives his disciples to understand that he would have no Second, after himself, established in his Church, of which he alone was the head; and that perfect equality must subsist among them” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

Matthew 23:10 “Masters”: leader; guide; master-teacher; modern Greek has *professor*.

Luke 22:25 “Benefactors”: well-doer; worker of good. “Those who were listening knew well how utterly false these high-sounding human titles often were. *Euergetes* (Benefactor) was the well-known title appropriated by Ptolemy Euergetes and other hated royal tyrants well known to the Jewish people” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

Philippians 2:6 “Thought it not robbery to be equal with God”: did not consider equality with God something to be grasped or used to His own advantage.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The scene described in our lesson follows Peter’s declaration that Jesus was the Messiah in Matthew chapter 16; the transfiguration in chapter 17, where Peter, James, and John were privileged to go up onto the mountain with Jesus; and the miracle of the tribute money which Peter found in the mouth of a fish. Mark records that the disciples were disputing about who was the greatest. When Jesus questioned them about it, they grew silent; after which, He called the little child to Him and expounded this lesson to them.

Jesus’ denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew chapter 23 included rebukes for their worldly ambition, their love for honor, prestige, titles and positions; their hypocrisy, false doctrine and fanatical inconsistencies; their sanctimony and their emphasis on outward righteousness, while at the same time they inwardly hid iniquity, corruption and murder. Jesus ended that message with a sorrowful farewell lament over Jerusalem.

The passage from Luke is a parallel to the discussion found in Matthew and Mark. Here, Jesus described the way the kings of the world dealt with their subjects. Emphatically contrasting the way His kingdom would be ruled, Jesus said, “Ye shall not be so.” He spoke what they already knew: He, although He was Lord and Master and the greatest of them all by far, always humbled Himself before them, even stooping to wash their feet as a household slave would do (John 13).

I have included Paul’s description of our Lord from Philippians 2 as our memory verse. It all begins with what kind of MIND we have. Do we have the mind, or mindset, of Christ, who gave

Himself to take on human flesh, and lower yet, to serve as a slave, and lower still, to die as a common criminal?

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What is the “law of the kingdom” expressed by these verses?
2. Jesus used ____ to illustrate his lesson.
3. Jesus forbade his disciples to take on certain titles. What were they, and what were their meanings?
4. The name “benefactor” had been self-applied titles of what kind of leaders?
5. Describe the progression of the humility of Jesus in Philippians 2.

LIFE APPLICATION

An important law of the kingdom of God is explained in this lesson: humility. It would do us well to recognize the solemn warning He gave His disciples, for it is this temptation—this error—self-exaltation, which has shipwrecked many a precious servant of God or gathering of God’s saints. I would like to include further comment by Adam Clarke:

“The way to arrive at the highest degree of dignity, in the sight of God, is by being willing to become the servant of all. Nothing is more hateful in his sight than pride; to bring it into everlasting contempt, God was manifest in the flesh. He who was in the likeness of God took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man, and humbled himself unto death. After this, can God look upon any proud man without abasing him? Spiritual lordship and domination, ecclesiastical luxury, pomp, and pride, must be an abhorrence in the sight of that God who gave the above advices to his followers.

“Another lesson, which our blessed Lord teaches here, is, that no man is implicitly to receive the sayings, doctrines, and decisions of any man, or number of men, in the things which concern the interests of his immortal soul. Christ, his Spirit, and his word, are the only infallible teachers. Every man who wishes to save his soul must search the Scriptures, by prayer and faith. Reader, take counsel with the pious; hear the discourses of the wise and holy: but let the book of God ultimately fix thy creed.”

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

When I was in grade school, I asked for a job so I could make a little money, and my parents were able to procure a job for two of my brothers and me where we'd make \$24 a month between us three by cleaning the bathrooms and cutting the grass down at the chapel each week. My parents also took this opportunity to train us in giving God what was His, which usually meant putting a dollar in the offering box each time we were paid. However, I remember one month I decided I wanted to give my dollar to our pastor, and my younger brothers agreed to follow suit. When the next Sunday arrived we excitedly raced each other to our pastor and declared breathlessly, "Brother Trotter! Brother Trotter! Here is our offering and we want you to have it!"

To this day, I can vividly remember the initial look of surprise on his face when we each handed him our money. He then smiled and shook our hands, graciously accepted our offering, and in his high-pitched, grandfatherly voice commended us for our service to God. Here were these three young boys between six and nine years old with no understanding of just how little three dollars would impact his life, and yet he treated us as if we had given him something much more substantial!

That incident has always stayed with me, and as I have matured to serve the Lord in other capacities, I've always taken that lesson with me. Those who serve God are all equal in His sight, and He wants us to treat each other as such. The preacher is no greater than the newborn babe that has just gotten saved, and the singers are no better than the campmeeting cooks working diligently in the kitchen. Let us all remember that we are only "earthen vessels" in His kingdom and stand ready to serve Him in whichever duties He has given us to perform.

—Fari Matthews

DECEMBER 5, 2021

PARABLE OF THE PENNY

Matthew 20:1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,
4 And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you.
And they went their way.

5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

9 And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

11 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

12 Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

MEMORY VERSE: So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen. —**Matthew 20:16**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jesus taught that the reward promised to those who labor in His vineyard would be the same for the Jews who answered the call earliest and then for the Gentiles who would come later—or, the laborer who began living for God in youth and labored his entire life would receive the same “penny” as the old man who only received the message of salvation in the end of his “day.” They were each given, by grace, the gift of eternal life.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 20:1 “Early in the morning”: about six o’clock in the morning; spiritually, the place in time when God started building His church; the believing Jews came to labor first; later the Gentiles came to faith and began to work. Another view: “...Meaning either in the morning of the world, as Adam, Abel, Seth, Enoch, and others; or in the morning of the Jewish church state, as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and the like; or in the morning of the Gospel dispensation, as the apostles of Christ, which seems most likely; or in the morning of youth, as Timothy and others” (*Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*)

Matthew 20:2 “Penny”: a Roman coin; it appears to have been the ordinary price of a day’s labor at that time (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

Matthew 20:3 “Third hour”: in descriptions of the Jewish work day, about nine o’clock in the morning—early in the morning being the 1st hour, the third hour nine o’clock, the sixth hour, twelve o’clock; the ninth hour, three o’clock in the afternoon; the eleventh hour, five o’clock, with the Jewish work day closing at six o’clock in the evening. By Mosaic law, a servant’s wages were to be paid to him before night, or by sunset.

Matthew 20:15 “Is thine eye evil”: meaning, among the Jews, a malicious, covetous or envious person (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

I spent quite a bit of time researching the different writings concerning this parable. Some of the findings I have used in the Word Definitions. The theme of the parable is very similar to the story Jesus told of the prodigal son, which was a lesson meant to admonish the Jews to receive the erring Gentiles into the kingdom of God and not be as the elder brother who was envious and resentful of the welcome-home given to his younger, rebellious brother. That view is very likely a correct take on the story; but I also believe this parable has meanings that reach to all of us and not just the Jews.

Consider this from *Clarke’s Commentary*, as he quotes the writer Quesnel: “The Church is a vineyard, because it is a place of labor, where no man should be idle. Each of us is engaged to labor in this vineyard—to work out our salvation through him who worketh in us to will and to perform. Life is but a day, whereof childhood, or the first use of reason, is the day-break or first hour, in which we receive the first Call. The promise of the kingdom of glory is given to all those who are workers together with him.

“The second call is in the time of youth, which is most commonly idle, or only employed in

dissipation and worldly cares.

“The third call is at the age of manhood.

“The fourth, in the decline of life.

“The fifth, when sickness and the infirmities of life press upon us. “How many are there in the world who are just ready to leave it, before they properly consider for what end they were brought into it! Still idle, still unemployed in the things which concern their souls; though eternal life is offered to them, and hell moving from beneath to meet them!”

And another quote from Sarah Smith (co-worker of D. S. Warner) in *Life Sketches of Mother Sarah Smith*: “I once asked a woman to come back to God. She was then, and is today, in a backslidden state. She said she could not keep saved, but remarked, ‘I know the way, and I can get saved just before I die.’ Many expect to receive a penny in the eleventh hour (Matthew 20:6, 7). Here we have a parable of a man who went out early in the morning to hire laborers in his vineyard. Why did he do so? Because he wanted them to put in a whole day’s work. He invited some at the eleventh hour because they had not been hired before. Now God invites sinners to come unto him at all hours, and if they heed and obey they receive a penny; but there is a time coming when God’s Spirit will not strive with man. Those who will receive a penny at the eleventh hour are only such as have never been invited, and who will yet make use of their privilege. They said, ‘No man hired us.’ Oh, I do praise God that I obeyed the first call.”

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who is a _____ who went to the marketplace to find laborers for his _____.
2. He agreed to pay them a _____ for a day’s wages.
3. What problem did the workers who had hired on at the beginning of the day have with the workers who had just come at the eleventh hour?
4. Explain the different kingdom themes this parable teaches.
5. What can we know about the “penny” given at the end of the day? (The spiritual meaning.)

LIFE APPLICATION

One theme of this kingdom parable is the concept of the first being last, and the last, first, as in the verse directly before this story and also at the end of the parable. It is such a tendency of humans to feel that because we are faithful, and worked very hard and long in difficult conditions, that we are entitled to a little more than someone who showed up late. Jesus was endeavoring to get His disciples beyond that mindset and remember that when we begin to feel like we are “first,” we are still only as good as the one we feel is “last.”

The jewel of this story is that little “penny” promised to every laborer. The ones who were hired at dawn, who worked through the heat of the day—they were promised a penny; the ones who came on at noon and at other times of the day were promised “whatever is right.” As they lined up at sunset, he began distributing the payment to the eleventh-hour group first. They got—a penny. Watching each group of workers receive a penny, the first group began to anticipate that because they had worked the longest, they would get a bonus. But they were disappointed and murmured about it.

We may be tempted to feel disgruntled when we consider that a lifetime criminal could believe on Jesus as he is dying, and get to go to the same heaven to which a precious saint of God, who has lived for Christ since he was a child, has gone. Jesus warned the Jews several times of this type of resentment. Eternal life is the free gift by grace to *everyone* who believes. “To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.”

Have we seen inside heaven to describe it? Once we have gone there, would we want to come back and say, “This really isn’t worth the long, hard, hot day of work I put in.” Would we say, “I sure wish my old neighbor, who put off salvation for so long, wouldn’t be able to come.” The householder represents the King of glory, who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, and thence, to glory. As someone has said, heaven is like a child being paid \$20,000 after he mowed his neighbor’s yard. It will be so much more than we could have ever dreamed. We will be so vastly overpaid for any suffering, loss, labor, or time we have expended for the kingdom. As the heart of our king is so loving and merciful, let all of His subjects have that same mind toward one another: I want everyone to get his “penny.”

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Why stand ye all day idle? The harvest time is here.
Behold, the flaming sickle, The reapers gather near;
Oh, hear the earnest pleadings, Which come from ev'ry land,
“Lord, send us Gospel workers, To lend a helping hand.”

Why stand ye all day idle? The lab'ers are so few,
The harvest is increasing, And there's so much to do;
The Master calls for workers, Then, brother hear the cry,
Go quickly join the reapers, And in His service die.

Why stand ye all day idle? The sun is sinking fast,
The day will soon be over, The harvest-time be past;
Go, work today for Jesus, Bring in the golden sheaves,
And in the day of crowning, A penny you'll receive.

No, I shall not be idle, Lord, here am I, send me,
I care not how you use me, I care not where it be;
Content with this assurance, That I'm in Thy employ,
Then gath'ring souls for Jesus, Shall be my greatest joy.

Oh, who will go for Jesus, across the stormy wave,
And o'er the rugged mountains, Some precious soul to save?
Oh, who will go in highways, And in the haunts of sin,
With messages from Heaven, And gently lead them in?

—W. J. Henry (*Evening Light Songs* #310)

—Submitted by Harlan Sorrell

DECEMBER 12, 2021

THE MARRIAGE FEAST

Matthew 22:1 And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,

2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.

5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:

6 And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

7 But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.

9 Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

11 And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

12 And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

MEMORY VERSE: For many are called, but few are chosen.

—Matthew 22:14

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The “many are called, but few are chosen” law of the kingdom of heaven is illustrated by the gracious King giving to all an invitation to His Son’s marriage feast; a privilege flatly refused by many, lightly esteemed by some, and taken advantage of by others.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 22:2 “Marriage”: from a root meaning *to bind or unite*; a marriage banquet, feast, or celebration. It is in plural form, which suggests marriage festivities, which were spread out into several days.

Matthew 22:3, 4, 6, 8 “Servants”: messengers sent to invite people to the feast; ministers; preachers of the gospel. First, the prophets until John preached to the Jews; then, John the Baptist and Jesus announced, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” After that, the apostles and evangelists of the New Testament preached the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles. “To call them that were bidden”: to call the called. An “Oriental custom of sending a messenger, after the invitations have been issued, to notify the invited guests that the entertainment is prepared” (*Vincent’s Word Studies*).

Matthew 22:7 “He sent forth his armies”: a prediction of the Roman armies commanded by Titus which would put the Jews to death and burn their city to ashes; this happened forty-one years later.

Matthew 22:8 “Not worthy”: “The marriage and recognition of the son as heir to the throne might be combined, which would give to the occasion a political significance, and make appearance at the marriage a test of loyalty” (*Expositor’s Greek Testament*). “Among the Mohammedans, refusal to come to a marriage feast, when invited, is considered a breach of the law of God. Any one that shall be invited to a dinner, and does not accept the invitation, disobeys God, and his messenger” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

Matthew 22:9, 10 “Highways”: places where two ways meet. “It was a custom among the Jews, when a rich man made a feast, to go out and invite in all destitute travelers” (*Clarke’s Commentary*). This is referring to the Gentiles who were called by the Gospel. “Both bad and good”: such as the wheat and the chaff on the threshing floor, the bastard wheat and the good wheat being together in the field, the bad and good fish collected by the net, the sheep and the goats together in the fold, the wise and foolish called together to be wedding attendants.

Matthew 22:11 “Wedding garment”: a special cloak or outer garment provided by the host for all attending the wedding. “To afford accidental guests clothing suitable to a marriage feast, was a custom among the ancient Greeks.” Also, “among the orientals, long white robes were worn at public festivals; and those who appeared on such occasions with any other garments were esteemed, not only highly culpable, but worthy of punishment” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

Jesus may have been alluding to “The Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bidden his guests. And it shall come to pass, in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel” (Zephaniah 1:7-8).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jesus had just given a story about two sons—one who said he was obeying his father and one who at first refused. Later, the son who talked obedience ended up not obeying at all, while the son who at first said “No” went and did what his father asked. This and the next two illustrations Jesus gave were pointed at the chief priests, Pharisees, and Jewish leaders who had come into the temple while He was teaching, questioning Him about His authority. The second story was another about a vineyard, a familiar metaphor in Jewish history. Jesus then quoted to them the scripture about the rejected stone from Psalm 118 , and they, perceiving He was referring to them, tried to lay hands on Him but could not because they were afraid of what His supporters might do. The parable in our lesson today begins in Matthew chapter 22, in which Jesus gave them yet another illustration.

Wedding festivities were especially loved and familiar celebrations in Jewish culture. They could quickly identify with the various components of the story. Jesus expertly wove into His illustration the history of how the Israelites had rejected Jehovah, their Heavenly Bridegroom, in ancient times; had killed the prophets, and were now rejecting Jesus and His invitation to the kingdom. This time He added a prophecy. This was one of about thirteen times the gospels record Jesus predicting the destruction of Jerusalem, a main reason for the Jews putting Him to death.

Jesus also described the condition of some people’s hearts who would hear the gospel and attempt to identify themselves with the invited guests, but neglect to put on the offered and required wedding attire. The parable establishes again the laws of God’s kingdom; first, that many would be invited, but not all would be chosen to belong; secondly, the law of separation between the righteous and the unrighteous; and thirdly, the law of the longsuffering and generous mercy of the King.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What did Jesus foretell would happen to the invited ones who refused and killed His

servants, and how was that fulfilled?

2. Show the progression of how the invitation or Gospel message was given throughout Jewish history.
3. What is meant by “highways”?
4. Explain the importance of the wedding garment.
5. Are there other parables or stories Jesus told that had to do with a feast or a wedding?

LIFE APPLICATION

How may we make a personal application of this parable to our lives? There are certainly ways in which the elements of this story hit home.

First of all, do we understand the significance of the invitation? Are we aware of the grace and privilege that is being offered to us? The grandeur and once-in-a-lifetime importance of the message? Or do we flatly refuse without investigation, as the hired hand in another parable could have done with the treasure he discovered in the field? Do we “make light” of it and go our own ways blithely, as if we had not just turned down the chance of a lifetime? Are we so engrossed in our homes or farms or earthly possessions; in buying, selling, shopping, bargaining, surfing, and dealing until we are totally consumed?

Are we listening to the warning about the end of those who refuse the invitation, or have we bought into the “other gospels” that teach there will be a second opportunity; there is no lake of fire, no end-destruction, no wailing or gnashing of teeth?

Do we believe what Jesus said about having on a wedding garment? Have we been given a new robe of righteousness? Have we been made white and clean by Jesus’ blood, covering our shame and nakedness? Are we making sure we have responded to His call, and that we have received His gift of mercy and grace that makes us worthy to be chosen?

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

In Luke 16:19, Jesus gives us a small glimpse into the eternal realm. He describes two people who had very different lifestyles while here on earth; a rich man and a poor man. The rich man fared sumptuously while Lazarus, the poor man, desired the crumbs from the rich man's table, even as the dogs licked his wounds. Both of these men died and their eternal

fates were vastly different. The rich man lifted his eyes in torment while Lazarus was comforted in Abraham's bosom. The rich man did not end up in this place of torment because he was wealthy but because he had disregarded and renounced the invitation of the Lord. On the other hand, Lazarus did not gain eternal life because he was poor, but because he had accepted the royal summons given by God.

This lesson is a very sobering one. We can be sure of these three truths that were presented:

- Everyone has been given an invitation by the King.
- Each soul has a right to either receive or disregard the royal summons.
- There will be judgment rendered according to the acceptance or denial of the invitation given by our Lord.

"When you come to the final Judgment, the question then will be—not how you will dispose of Jesus, but how He will of thee." No doubt part of the eternal torment will be how many times the invitation was ignored, disregarded and denied.

—LaDawna Adams

DECEMBER 19, 2021

THE TEN VIRGINS

Matthew 25:1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

MEMORY VERSE: Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. —**Matthew 25:13**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: In the end of time, special care must be taken to be prepared for the coming of the bridegroom; every person must acquire and keep a supply of the Holy Spirit and grace to sustain through hours of delay and sleepiness—or forfeit the privilege of entering eternal bliss.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 25:1 “Then”: the time of the coming of the Lord, as described in the last verses of Matthew 24. “Virgins”: unmarried maidens, which represent professors of salvation who live clean lives.

Matthew 25:2 “Wise”: sensible; prudent; discreet; sagacious; intelligent; practical. From a word which is the root of the English term *diaphragm*, which controls key body functions from the inside out (*HELPS Word Studies*). “Foolish”: from a word which refers to physical nerves causing one to be dull and sluggish, and is the root of the English word *moron*; mentally inert; dull in understanding; lacking a grip on reality (*HELPS Word Studies*).

Matthew 25:3 “Lamps”: a hand-held “torch” (sometimes merely a clay vessel); a lamp that uses a wick saturated with oil (*HELPS Word Studies*). “Oil”: olive oil, figurative of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 25:4 “Vessels”: flask; receptacle.

Matthew 25:5 “Tarried”: linger; delay; take a long time. “Slumbered”: to nod in sleep; to be drowsy and overcome or oppressed by sleep. “Slept”: to fall asleep; lie down to rest.

Matthew 25:6 “Midnight”: in the middle of the night; at an hour quite unthought of or least expected. “There was a cry made”: the best manuscripts have “There is a cry.”

Matthew 25:7 “Trimmed their lamps”: put their lamps in proper order; which meant removing the charred portion of the wick, raising the wick, and replenishing the oil.

Matthew 25:8 “Have gone out”: are going out; are being extinguished or quenched.

LESSON BACKGROUND

This parable in Matthew 25 and the one immediately following are both connected to the private discussion Jesus was having with His disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. It is hard to tell, in the progression of verses in the 24th chapter, which verses refer to Jerusalem's destruction and which refer to the time of Jesus' second coming. The end of the chapter speaks about the servants who began to misbehave while they were waiting for the master to return and the sad fate of them when he did return. Some scholars feel the parable of the virgins belongs to Israel's demise; some to the end of time; some, both. Since it involves the element of delay, as was in the story of the servants, and as we are definitely experiencing delay in these last-of-the-last days, I believe it is very applicable and relevant to our time.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto ten virgins—the word *virgin* brings to mind someone who is innocent, morally chaste, undefiled; so all were morally pure people in this parable. The only dividing difference in them before the coming of the bridegroom was that five were wise—discerning, disciplined, having prudence and foresight; and five were foolish—dull in comprehension, sluggish, not mentally disciplined, not facing reality; presuming upon the future but not preparing for it. They each had a lamp. In scripture, the lamp represents the Word of God which gives light. The spiritual meaning is that these individuals each believed God's Word to be true, lived moral lives according to its doctrine, and held a profession and intention of being a part of the wedding festivities—going to heaven.

The catalyst in the parable was the time of delay. If the bridegroom had come when he was expected, they would have all been awake and alert with lamps burning. Waiting for a very long time on something expected is very wearying, especially if it's the middle of the night when you are usually sleeping. The delay made the difference in their preparedness. Lamps quickly used up the oil available, and half of them knew their lamps were going out. Oil couldn't be shared; it had to be purchased from the oil merchants. There was a slight, very slight, hope that they could make it back in time to still meet the bridegroom. At times like this, the person in a hurry hopes that an exception will be made in his special case. But the bridegroom came at the time appointed by the Father. No special deal was made. The door was shut.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. The parable of the ten virgins immediately follows what discussion Jesus was having with His disciples?
2. Explain the spiritual meaning of these terms: virgin, wise, foolish, lamp, oil, bridegroom, wedding feast.
3. What element made the difference?
4. Can oil be shared between persons? (*spiritual application*)
5. Share how this parable follows the pattern of other parables (*tares and wheat, net of fish, invited wedding guests, etc.*).

LIFE APPLICATION

The only element that made the difference in the outcome of the virgins was the missing oil. The lesson doesn't say that the foolish had become defiled, had decided not to go to the wedding, or had beaten up the other maidens. These virgins were still expecting to make it. But their lamps had burned up the oil in the time of waiting. The wise virgins had brought an extra supply.

In scripture, oil is used many times to represent the Holy Spirit, and I believe it is the Holy Spirit which is represented in this story. Since Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven, is "likened unto" these virgins—and we read in the New Testament that His kingdom is "within you," that it was established when the Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost, and that Jesus said, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"—we can know that it is the Holy Spirit which was burned in the lamps of these dear virgins. It is the Holy Spirit that made the difference as to who entered through the door and who did not.

Of course the enemy has false doctrines to mislead precious souls, so they do not take care of this vitally important element. One false doctrine teaches that everybody who believes is automatically filled with the Spirit; so believers of that doctrine, for the most part, aren't even seeking the assurance of the fulness of the Spirit, because they don't feel the need.

Another false doctrine teaches that the evidence of the Spirit's filling is speaking in tongues. If a person adheres to that teaching, he or she not only receives a spiritually deceptive manifestation, but also does not seek for the Spirit's sanctifying power to fill his heart and life.

Equally at risk are those who know and believe the correct doctrine, but don't take care of

the need because of procrastination, drowsiness, or distraction.

The time of delay, which makes us sleepy and uses up the graces of God in our lives, should be the time we are actively seeking a daily, even hourly, supply of God's Holy Spirit. We need fresh oil, and fresh fire, trimmed lamps, and prepared hearts to last through the last days.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins is a serious warning for today. I've wondered at how they all slumbered and slept, yet the wise were still prepared. I did a little research and found a possible explanation.

In the natural state of slumber there is, of course, no activity. So perhaps this time of slumbering is a time when the church is not able to be active as before. We've experienced in the last year or so, services, meetings, and mission trips canceled. Social distancing, isolation, and wearing of masks has made personal witnessing more difficult.

As restrictions lifted and services resumed, we were thankful. While we appreciated the virtual services, as it was our only means to worship together, it was very inferior to our regular assembly. As meetings also resumed, there was an important alteration: no sharing of the Lord's Supper.

While we are in this time of "inactivity," let us still be wise and stay prepared! Perhaps soon we will hear the cry, "Behold! The Bridegroom cometh! Go ye out to meet Him!"

"Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

—Sarah L. Herron

DECEMBER 26, 2021

THE TALENTS

Matthew 25:14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made

them other five talents.

17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:

27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

MEMORY VERSE: For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch. —**Mark 13:34-37**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The parable of the talents describes the economy of the kingdom: the Lord distributes to every one the calling and resources for His work, and, according to a person's ability, entrusts each one to labor faithfully for the profit of the kingdom until He returns with His reward.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 25:14 "As a man traveling into a far country": a comparison to Christ Himself as He was about to die, be resurrected, and ascend back to heaven, leaving His disciples to do His work on earth, make more converts, and accomplish further His purpose on the earth. He would come to them in the person of His Holy Spirit, infilling believers with power and with different gifts whereby they could accomplish His work (Acts 1:8). "Who called his own servants": not that Jesus was disagreeing with what He said in John 15, "I have not called you servants, but I have called you friends," but He was establishing a kind of spiritual economy by comparing a believer to a servant who is an agent for his master; (think of Joseph in the Old Testament) who "could possess no property, but he was often employed to administer his master's property for his lord's advantage, or was set up in business on capital advanced by his owner, paying him all or a certain share of the profits. The money still was not the slave's, and legally all that a slave acquired by whatsoever means belonged to his master" (*Pulpit Commentary*).

Matthew 25:15 "Several": *idios* (Greek); uniquely one's own; private; personal; peculiar to the individual. "Ability": the Greek word *dunamis*, used 120 times in the New Testament, which meant the ability to perform; power; miraculous strength and might; energy to do work. "The power he had to improve what was given" (*Clarke's Commentary*).

Matthew 25:16 "Traded": to search or examine; to do business; to make gains by trading.

Matthew 25:19 "Reckoneth": to compute or settle accounts. The same word used in the parable of the unmerciful servant. It involves sitting down together and talking things over.

Matthew 25:21 "Faithful": trustworthy; reliable; "Persons who show themselves faithful in the transaction of business, the execution of commands, or the discharge of official duties" (*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*). "Ruler": to set in order; appoint; to give someone charge or standing authority or status.

Matthew 25:24 "An hard man": from a word meaning *dry*. Stubborn; stiff; stern; unyieldingly harsh (*HELPS Word Studies*). Luke uses the word *austere*. "Strawed": scattered.

Matthew 25:25 "There thou hast that is thine": "As if he had said, 'I was no spendthrift of

my estate, not prodigal of my time, not a profaner of thy sabbaths, nor an opposer of good ministers and good preaching. Lord, I never despised my Bible, nor set my wits on work to ridicule religion, nor abused my power to persecute any good man; I never drowned my parts nor wasted God's good creatures in drunkenness and gluttony; nor ever, to my knowledge, did I do an injury to any one.' Many that are called Christians build great hopes for heaven upon their being able to make such a plea" (*Benson Commentary*).

Matthew 25:26 "Slothful": from a word meaning to delay; hesitating; tardy; reluctant; unwilling to participate.

Matthew 25:27 "Exchangers": a money changer; banker. "Usury": interest.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The parable of the ten virgins involved slumber and inactivity while waiting; this parable speaks of useful employment for the kingdom during the time of waiting. Again, we see a theme of earlier Kingdom parables—that of small beginnings growing into something much greater. A similar story is recorded in Luke 19, with a few differences in details: there were ten servants instead of three; pounds were given instead of talents; and mention is made of the nobleman's enemies. In Luke's account, when he distributed the goods to his servants, he gave the command, "Occupy till I come."

In Matthew, after giving the parable of the talents, Jesus went on to describe what "occupy" might involve as we go about our lives extending the kingdom: service to others. Visiting the sick and those in prison, feeding the hungry and giving water to the thirsty, taking care of the stranger, and supplying clothing for the needy—these are practical ways of doing the true business of the kingdom. An important detail is that the service is to be done "to the least of these." Humility, mercy, and compassion are laws of the kingdom!

We also see the separation made between those who are faithful and those who are not, as in other parables. Here, faithful means not being slothful or having an unwilling, haughty attitude about lowly service, which Jesus describes as wicked and unprofitable. What awful words for a professing Christian to hear at the judgment!

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Explain how the parable describes Jesus and the work of the Kingdom.

2. What “talents” has Jesus distributed to His followers?
3. What was so wicked about the attitude and actions of the unprofitable servant?
4. What should we “have” so that more will be given?
5. Identify the different laws of the Kingdom illustrated by this parable.

LIFE APPLICATION

We have come to the final lesson in this series. There is so much that could be said about each of these parables; so many more details I wish I could have covered. I trust that further personal study about the Kingdom of God will be a blessing to you, as you discover many more treasures, new and old! (See Matthew 13:52.)

Every man is given a field (Proverbs 24:30)—even the slothful. So Jesus has distributed His gifts and resources to all His followers. He entrusts us with the air we breathe, moments of time, health and strength, opportunity. But there is more. He left us His Gospel. He sent us the Holy Spirit—His very life and power to endue us with *His* ability, authority, grace, love, and faith.

Do you have a little faith? Don’t stay there. Improve upon it! Are you learning to say, “NO” to the devil? Advance in kingdom power and learn how to do battle for the lost, the sick, the devil-possessed. Has Jesus helped you to love a difficult person? Expand your heart to all God brings your way! Has He given a little verse to inspire you today? Share it! Can you cook? Faithfully feed your family—and make a pan of muffins for the neighbors. Can you fix cars? A single mom in your neighborhood drives a clunker to work. Help her. Can you sing? The sick and dying in hospitals and nursing homes might be cheered by a soft bedside hymn. Can you use a computer? There are so many places where you could fill a vacant spot in God’s work. Can you pray? Pray for the expansion of God’s kingdom all over the world. Pray for the Bible translators. The missionaries. The parents. The lost. The abused children in the world, and—you get the picture.

The kingdom in you starts little. *You stay little*, humble; but grow and lift up and expand *the kingdom in you*, in others, in the world. Be faithful! Be watchful! Pray for His kingdom to come within you, for the Holy Spirit to fill you, each day! Seek for His kingdom, seek His righteousness, peace and joy, FIRST, before any other quest in your life.

We want to hear His “Well done” more than anything—don’t we?

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Excuses! We all have them. It is very easy for us to make a persuasive argument of why we can't do something. And we often have the audacity to present our arguments to God. We say, "I can't" when in reality it should be "I won't." Our resistance is an act of our will, not a lack of our ability. We justify this mild form of rebellion with various points of self-proclaimed logic. It makes sense to us; therefore, it should make sense to God. Surely, He sees it from our perspective.

Yet, we were perfectly created to perform the exact duties that God intended for us. We are custom made and fitly joined together. Each joint supplies. Our talents, and lack thereof, are God-given and are to be used for the benefit of His kingdom. They are kingdom currency—the capital with which we trade.

Experience reveals the reality that others exceed us in ability, and we must accept that fact. The opposite is also true, we exceed others in ability. God made it that way. We are all inferior and superior to each other in some way or another. Therefore, we must depend on others to supply what we lack. This interdependence is a vital part of our spiritual economy. Should one fail to do his part, the lack reverberates throughout the kingdom.

The lessons of life teach us that we can't do everything. We need our brother. Honesty tells us that some of the things that we can do, we may not have the capacity to do them very well. We need God. Regardless, we must put forth the effort, we must try anyway, for the consequences of not doing so are far too severe.

God does not view apathy as a simple act of negligence but as a blatant act of rebellion. We must learn that the talents that God has given, He expects us to use to the fullest extent of our ability.

—Darrell Johnson