

# Magazine

## Parable of the Two Builders

Larry Ray Hafley

**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. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes (Matt. 7:21-29).**

First, the two builders are not compared and contrasted as to what they built. Rather, they are observed with respect to the foundation upon which they built. The success of the wise man was not because his house was better built, but because “it was founded upon a rock.” The failure of the foolish man was not because his house was shoddily constructed with inferior materials, but because its foundation was not stable (Luke 6:49). For all we know, the

foolish man may have built the body of his house equal to or better than that of the wise man. We are told nothing in that regard.

Second, what judged one to be wise and the other foolish was not that one was more intelligent than the other. No, it was the foundation upon which they constructed their houses which made one wise and the other foolish.

Third, the wise man’s house did not endure because the storm was any less severe against his house. Both houses were beaten and battered “vehemently” by tempestuous winds and tossing waves (Luke 6:48, 49). Again, it was the nature of the foundation, the rock versus the sand, which determined which house remained and which house was ruined.

Fourth, the builders’ quality and character are determined by one thing—did they hear and obey the word of the Lord? To hear and obey is to be a wise builder. To hear and not obey is to be a foolish builder. If we are hearing and obeying the word of the Lord, we are wise men; if we are hearing but not obeying the word of God, we are foolish builders.

Fifth, storms and trials of life may be expected. In the final analysis, this is the Judgment of God. Those who have

*continued on p. 502*



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## The Parable of the Chief Seats (Luke 14:7-11) and The Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24)

Ron Halbrook

The parables of the chief seats and of the great supper in Luke 14 emphasize that humility in character is essential for citizenship in the kingdom of God.

If we are to get the full force of what Jesus taught in these two parables, we must focus on humility and not look for hidden or multiple lessons which might be spun off from various details mentioned in these accounts.

It was not perception of some deep, esoteric truth by his hearers, but a decisive response of repentance, faith, hope, and love that motivated Jesus' use of parables. Therefore, his parables may be likened to arrows which were aimed at man's heart, the core of his being, the place of his will and affections. Just as the entire weight and momentum of an arrow make their impact felt at one decisive point, so Jesus' parables rested their full weight upon a relentless, searching claim upon man's heart.

As an arrow has one point and one area of impact, so has a parable. A failure to focus all the force of the parable upon its one point will result in dissipation of its power (David H. Wallace, "Interpretation of Parables," in Bernard L. Ramm, *et. al*, *Hermeneutics*, 38-39).

The Master Teacher used these parables to aim the imperative lesson of humble character "at man's heart, the core of his being," in order that men might receive salvation in the kingdom of God (Wallace 38).

### The Context of These Parables

The book of Luke records Jesus coming as the King of the kingdom of God, and the bitter resistance and rejection of him by the religious leaders of the Jews. In the first chapter, the angel Gabriel announces the appearance of John as the forerunner of the kingdom who would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). Next, Gabriel announces the appearance of Jesus as "the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). In chapters two and three John and Jesus begin preaching, and the royal lineage of Jesus is established by Luke.

*continued on p. 504*



# The Parables of the Marriage of the King’s Son and the Wedding Garment (Matt. 22:1-14)

**Irvin Himmel**

Comparisons were used by Jesus to teach lessons pertaining to the kingdom of heaven. In the book of Matthew, the kingdom of heaven is likened to (1) a man who sowed good seed in his field, but his enemy came and sowed tares (13:24-25), (2) a grain of mustard seed (13:31), (3) leaven (13:33), (4) treasure hid in a field (13:44), (5) a merchant seeking goodly pearls (13:45), (6) a net (13:47), (7) a king who had a servant who owed him ten thousand talents (18:23-24), (8) a householder who hired laborers to work in his vineyard (20:1), (9) a king who made a marriage for his son (22:2), (10) ten virgins who went forth to meet the bridegroom (25:1), (11) a man who delivered talents to his servants before going into a far country (25:14-15). Such comparisons as these, presented in stories of reality, help us to understand different aspects of the kingdom.

## **A King Made a Marriage for His Son (v. 2)**

Attention is directed, not to the wedding ceremony, but to the marriage feast. The first mention in the Bible of a feast related to a marriage is in Genesis 29:22. Jesus and his disciples attended a marriage feast in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11). A steward, called the “ruler of the feast” in John 2:9, was placed in charge of the arrangements for such an event, preparing the tables and orchestrating the festivities. A wedding banquet for a king’s son was a social event of great importance. A king could provide food and drink in abundance. There would be sumptuous dining. This was no ordinary supper. It was a royal banquet.

## **Invitations and Notifications (v. 3)**

Today, beautifully printed wedding invitations are sent through the mail. The exact time is included. There were no print shops during the days of Christ’s earthly ministry, and there was no postal system. Invitations were sent by word of mouth. It appears that a preliminary invitation not specifying the precise time was sent first. Later, when everything was in readiness, a notification was sent that the banquet was prepared and those invited were urged to come. If this custom seems strange, remember that there were no supermarkets, no microwave ovens, and no pre-packaged ready-to-eat foods. The time required for the massive preparation of a lavish feast must have been difficult to calculate. And wedding feasts often lasted seven days. There may be other reasons why the initial invitation was general and followed by an urgent reminder.

*continued on next page*

**Parable of the Two Builders**  
Larry Ray Hafley . . . . . front page

**The Parable of the Chief Seats and The Parable of the Great Supper**  
Ron Halbrook . . . . . 2

**The Parables of the Marriage of the King’s Son and the Wedding Garment**  
Irvin Himmel . . . . . 3

**The Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin**  
Jarrod Jacobs . . . . . 5

**The Prodigal Son: The Gospel in a Microcosm**  
Randy Blackaby . . . . . 8

**The Rich Man and Lazarus**  
Joe R. Price . . . . . 12

**The Parable of the Pharisee and The Publican**  
Donnie V. Rader . . . . . 15

**The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard**  
Chris Reeves . . . . . 17

**The Parable of the Two Sons**  
Tom M. Roberts . . . . . 19

**The Wicked Vine Growers**  
Charles Willis . . . . . 21

### **Servants Were Sent to Call the Invited (vv. 3-4)**

The king sent forth servants to call them who were bidden. They refused to come. Other servants were sent to tell the invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." "Fatlings" are animals fed well over a period of time in anticipation of their being slaughtered for food. The prodigal's return was celebrated by killing the fatted calf (Luke 15:23). King Saul permitted the people to bring back the best of the sheep, oxen, fatlings, and lambs after defeating the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:9). Oxen and fatlings were sacrificed when David brought the ark of the Lord to the city of David (2 Sam. 6:13).

### **Refusal and Violent Rejection (vv. 5-7)**

When told that all things were ready and entreated to come to the feast, those who were invited "made light of it." They gave no heed; they paid no attention. Other things took priority. They "went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise." Instead of feeling honored to be invited to the royal banquet, they were grossly discourteous. They were more interested in their farms and businesses than partaking of the king's feast. Others who were invited resented the invitation and turned violent. They mistreated the king's servants and slew them. Injurious treatment of the king's messengers was treason. Upon hearing of this, the indignant king sent soldiers who destroyed the murderers and burned up their city. He took steps to end the violence and punish those guilty of murder.

### **Servants Sent Into the Highways (vv. 8-10)**

Sorely disappointed, the king said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden are not worthy." Those previously invited demonstrated by their attitudes and actions that they did not deserve to be honored by an invitation to the royal banquet. The servants were then told, "Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage." The term "highways" refers to main thoroughfares leading out of the city where the side-streets branch off; a place where the streets cross the city boundary and go into the countryside; intersections and crossroads where country people and poor folks could be found easily. The servants did as instructed, gathering in as many as they found, "both good and bad." In this manner the banquet was furnished with guests.

### **The King Confronts a Guest Without a Wedding Garment (vv. 11-12)**

Whether this is a separate parable or a continuation of the parable of verses 2-10, makes little difference. The king came in to see his guests and spotted a man without a wedding garment. According to the customs of that time, attendance at a wedding necessitated appropriate (at least clean) attire. Some scholars contend that the host furnished robes for the guests; others disagree. Whatever the answer to that problem, the king asked his guest why he came in

without a wedding garment. The man was speechless. He knew that he was not properly dressed for the occasion. There was nothing he could say to justify himself.

### **A Guest Cast Out (v. 13)**

The conduct of the man without a wedding garment was shocking and reprehensible. The king ordered the servants to bind the man hand and foot, "take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Social feasts that lasted into the night were held in brightly-lighted rooms. The darkness without was called "outer darkness." In that darkness the evicted man would weep over his own stupidity, grinding his teeth in exasperation for having played the fool.

### **Many Are Called, But Few Chosen (v. 14)**

Jesus summarized the main point illustrated in verses 2-13. Many were invited (called) to the wedding feast, but relatively few accepted the invitation (were chosen). One present at a wedding feast might be considered unfit and therefore cast out. The message from Jesus in Matthew 22:1-14 is a solemn warning. He has bad news for all who reject the good news.

No parable should be pressed to make every detail have some meaning. Such an approach leads to endless speculation. The central lesson must be kept in view. The blessings of the kingdom of heaven are compared to a marriage feast for a king's son. Old Testament prophets had foretold the coming of the kingdom (Isa. 2:2-4; Dan. 2:44). John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles declared that the kingdom of heaven is "at hand" (Matt. 3:1-2; 4:17; 10:7). The Jews were expecting the kingdom, but their erroneous concept of its nature blinded them. Such leaders as the Pharisees and lawyers rejected God's message through John the Baptist (Luke 7:29-30). The chief priests and elders did likewise (Matt. 21:23-27). The parable of the marriage of the king's son was in answer to the chief priests and Pharisees who "sought to lay hands on him" (Matt. 21:45-46). In rejecting God's messengers, the Jewish leaders were showing contempt for God and demonstrating that they were unfit to partake of the blessings of the kingdom of heaven. Like the good and bad gathered from the highways in the parable, the publicans and harlots were more receptive to God's call (Matt. 21:31-32).

To partake of the blessings of the kingdom of heaven one must be willing to enter that kingdom. The call comes through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). Although the invitation of the gospel is universal, it has to be accepted. All who hear the gospel do not obey it (Rom. 10:16-21). Those who preach the gospel are God's servants. Many reject the gospel due to misplaced values. Farms and businesses are more important to them. Some mistreat God's messengers (Acts 6:9-15; 7:54-60; 13:50; 14:19; 16:19-24; 17:5-10; 21:27-33). When the Jews refused the gospel, thereby

# The Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin

Jarrold Jacobs

Christ's parables made a great impact upon folks when he was on earth. Christ's parables still have a great impact on folks today. First and foremost, the reason why this is true is because these parables came from the mouth of the Lord, whose words will never pass away (Matt. 13:34-35; 24:35). No doubt, an additional reason why Christ's parables have such an impact on men is because the subjects in the parables are things with which men can easily identify. Folks of all ages can comprehend a fisherman's net, a field, a tree, planting crops, a father with unruly sons, losing valuable objects, finding a valuable item, employer/employee relationships, inviting folks to a wedding, and the like. In Christ's parables, he did not use items which would have only been known or appreciated by those in the first century. Rather, the subjects in his parables endure even to this day.

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judging themselves unworthy, the messengers turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:45-47). Many Jews were called, but relatively few were chosen. Those who obey the gospel, whether Jews or Gentiles, are called out of darkness into light and "translated" into the kingdom (Acts 26:18; 1 Pet. 2:9; Col. 1:13).

Furthermore, sharing in the blessings of the kingdom of heaven necessitates proper attire. One must be clothed with humility (1 Pet. 5:5). He is to be arrayed in righteousness (Rev. 19:8). Without white raiment (Rev. 3:18) he is shamefully naked. The character of a person is his spiritual attire. Those who enter the kingdom but fail to live righteously will be cast out. Again, "many are called, but few are chosen." Diligence is required to make one's calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10).

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In our study of the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin, who among us cannot identify with the concern one would have if an animal wanders away? There are many farmers in this country who can identify with Luke 15 and those times when his cattle, or other livestock he raises, leaves the confines of the pen or fenced-in pasture, and needs to be "rescued" and returned before the animal hurts itself or others. In addition to this, all of us can certainly identify with losing an item we value (money, car keys, etc.), and the need for extensive searching in order to recover the item! Thus, as we read these parables in Luke 15:1-10, let us put ourselves in their place.

As we study these two parables, or any other, let us remember that Christ spoke these things so that he might teach valuable spiritual lessons! This is the reason for every parable! In Luke 15:1-10, Christ was not teaching about agriculture. He was not offering house cleaning tips, either! He was teaching lessons which were to be applied in a spiritual way. This is seen clearly when we remember that the word "parable" itself carries the idea of laying things side-by-side, or a comparison of some sort. Therefore, the physical subject was used in order to illustrate a spiritual truth! In each parable, there are spiritual lessons to learn and apply. Let us study the parable of the lost sheep and lost coin, and learn some valuable spiritual lessons.

## Some Background Information Concerning the Parables In Luke 15

Not all parables were motivated by what folks did or said in Christ's presence, but some parables were taught for that reason. For example, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican was taught because Christ saw some who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9). In like manner, Jesus spoke the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and lost boy because of the following accusation made by the Pharisees and scribes. They said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Luke 15:2). Matthew records a parallel to this in Matthew 9:10-13.

What is the nature of their accusation? We might have put it in these terms today: “Birds of a feather flock together.” Quite simply, they were casting aspersions on the Lord and his moral character due to the fact that he claimed to be the Son of God, yet allowed publicans, sinners, and others in his presence. In Matthew’s record, he makes it clear that the reason he was around them was to “heal” them of sin. He said, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Matt. 9:12). On this occasion, Luke records three parables Christ spoke in order to answer their charge of “birds of a feather flock together.” No, he was not condoning sin and error, but rather he spoke with them in an effort to get them to repent and return to the Lord. He wanted the same for the Pharisees and others, but they refused him. “The common people heard him gladly,” and so he went to the audience who was willing to listen and obey (Mark 12:37).

Therefore, as we focus on a study of the first two parables in Luke 15, let us not forget the single purpose which connects all three parables. Simply put, Christ wants these folks to understand that he (and the Father) loves those who have sinned, and wants them to return. Both the Father and the Son will wait for as long as possible in order to allow men the opportunity to get back in a right relationship with God (2 Pet. 3:9). As we study the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin, we must keep in mind that in each parable we see the responsibility one has toward the lost. We are also made aware in each parable of the sadness the person feels when he realizes that he has experienced a loss. Third, take note of the diligence of the man and woman in trying to retrieve the lost items. Finally, we see joy expressed when the lost is found. Through these parables, Jesus is making it clear that the Pharisees ought to have had similar experiences in caring for the lost. Sadly, they did no such thing. They were more concerned about themselves than with those who were lost. Therefore, when Christ showed genuine care and concern for the publicans and sinners, it condemned the inaction of the Pharisees and scribes. Yet, instead of repenting, they began condemning Jesus, and placing doubt upon *his* morals, saying, “This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.”

Let us study the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin and see what lessons we can apply to our lives.

### **The Parable of the Lost Sheep**

**What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (Luke 15:4-7).**

As we analyze this parable, we see a man which had one hundred sheep, but one went astray. When he saw this, he left the ninety-nine, and went to search for the one who had left. Realizing that a sheep is a creature of instinct, we understand that this sheep wandered off due to his own carelessness. Yet, upon learning that the sheep is lost, the man willingly goes to retrieve it. This man did not neglect his duty and then rationalize the loss of the one by saying, “It is his own fault.” He did not merely say, “He should not have done it,” and then return to the ninety-nine. The man did not minimize the value of the one lost sheep by saying, “He is not important,” or “I have ninety-nine left.” He did not adopt a “Little Bo-Peep” philosophy (“Leave him alone, and he’ll come home. . .”)! Rather, he left the ninety-nine in order to “*go after*” the lost one until he found it (Luke 15:4). Once found, the man returned with his sheep “*on his shoulders*,” rejoicing, and inviting his friends to come and rejoice that he found the sheep (Luke 15:6). With this, Jesus states that in like manner, there is joy in Heaven when even a single sinner repents.

What lessons can we learn from this first parable? We can learn that there is infinite value in a single soul! Sometimes, people minimize themselves or others by thinking that one soul has little or no value when compared to many souls. This parable declares that a single soul has great value in the eyes of God (Matt. 16:26)! Yes, it is true that Christ died for the whole world (John 1:29), but don’t forget to make this “personal,” realizing that Christ came to die for your soul and mine! Furthermore, remember that the man offered no excuses for refusing to go after the lost sheep. Yes, we recognize it was the sheep’s fault for wandering away, but if this was what the man said, what would that have accomplished in trying to get the sheep back? It is true that the sheep should not have wandered away. At this stage, though, it is too late to speak about that. It was time for the man to get to work and find the sheep. Once found, the return of the sheep was a time of rejoicing, not brow-beating or belittling the straying sheep for his carelessness.

In like manner, when we see dear ones who have strayed from the Lord, we need not look for excuses as to why they are in the mess they are in. The fact is that they are in sin, and we need to be busy in trying to win them to the Lord! Whether one has never obeyed the gospel and needs to be saved from sins through baptism and “transplanted” into God’s kingdom (1 Pet. 3:21; Col. 1:13); or if it is someone who once was faithful to the Lord, but left him for some reason, we need to be aware of such folks and encourage them to turn to the Lord before it is too late (2 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 3:7-8, 15)! Paul said, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). James put it this way, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error

of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (Jas. 5:19-20). Let us keep in mind that “*all we like sheep have gone astray*” (Isa. 53:6). Therefore, once those straying ones have repented and turned to the Lord, let us rejoice over the fact that these lost ones were found, just like the angels do!

### **The Parable of the Lost Coin**

**Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth (Luke 15:8-10).**

In this parable, Jesus speaks of a woman who lost, not a living item, but money. Like the man above, she did not offer excuses, but took responsibility for the lost money. She did not say, “I do not have time to search right now.” She did not rationalize the loss by saying, “One coin does not have that much value when compared with the rest of my money,” or “I have nine other coins.” Having discovered that a coin was missing, she was diligent in sweeping the house and searching for the coin. She even lit a candle so that she might perhaps look in dark corners around the house and hopefully find the money. Once it was found she, like the man in the first parable, called together her friends in order to celebrate the fact that she had found the lost coin. Jesus stated again that joy is in Heaven when one sinner repents.

In reading this parable, we readily recognize that this coin is money. Yet, we ought to also recognize that money is neither right nor wrong in itself. Money itself is not good or evil (contrast: 1 Tim. 6:10). Money has no character. It does not live! It depends on someone else for movement. In other words, unlike the sheep that was lost due to his own carelessness, this coin (money) was lost due to someone else’s carelessness!

At the same time, in order for money to be profitable to a person, it must be in *circulation*! Money is not profitable to us when placed on a shelf, or in a dresser drawer somewhere. Money is profitable when it is in circulation, and in our economy. Similarly, the souls of men must be in circulation, i.e., active, if they are to be what God would have them to be. An inactive soul will not produce any good thing.

Let us learn from the industrious woman in this parable. Just as she took responsibility for the loss, so also men and women today must bear up to their responsibilities! You see, Cain was wrong; we *are* our brother’s keeper! We have a responsibility to teach others and bring them to Christ (2 Tim. 2:2). We need to look for opportunities to be an “Andrew” (John 1:40-42), a “Philip” (John 1:45), or a “Cornelius” (Acts 10:24). Christ is not here physically on earth, but he left us his word which we can use to teach others in an effort to save their souls from eternal death (Rom. 1:16). Upon their return to the Lord, let us then rejoice over their renewed commitment to God, just as the angels do!

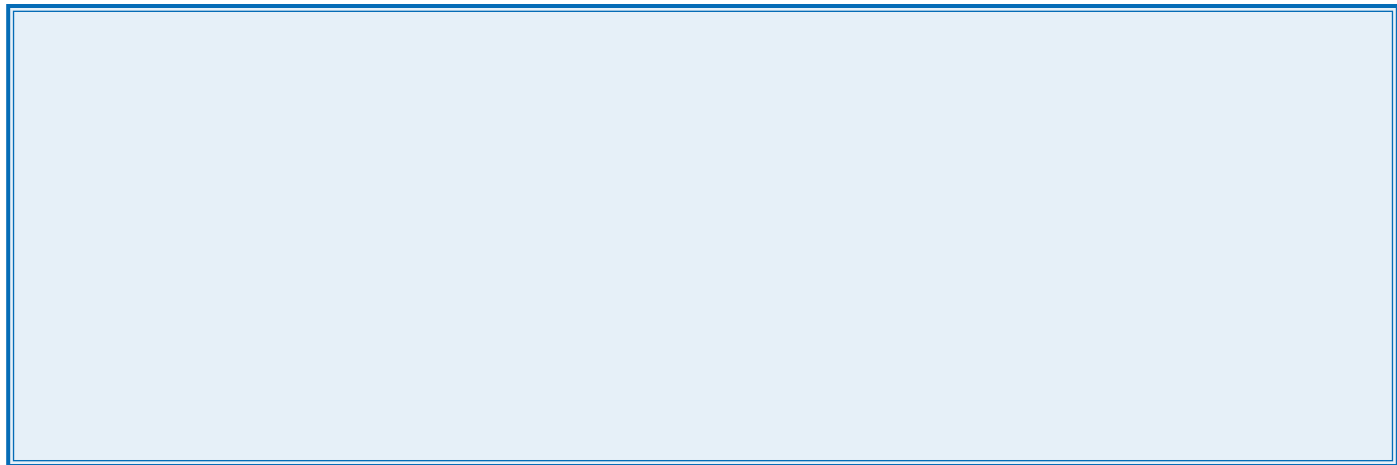
May we be as industrious as the woman who searched for the lost coin as we search for lost souls. May we be active, and in “circulation” in this life.

### **Conclusion**

Let us learn and learn well that when it comes to our Lord, one soul is of great value to him. Therefore, if he considers one soul of great value, so ought we! While Christ was on earth, if sinners and publicans were ready to hear him gladly, then he was ready to teach them so that they would repent. In like manner, had the Pharisees, scribes, and others been willing to listen, he would have gladly been with them, teaching them, too. Let us beware not to be caught up in the sins of the Pharisees and think that we are better than others, or that we do not have time to teach the truth to others.

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# The Prodigal Son: The Gospel in a Microcosm

**Randy Blackaby**

**From the day Satan tempted Eve with the possibility of being as wise as God, sin has always promised the opposite of what it produces. Excited by desires and lusts, the mind that rejects fatherly counsel (earthly or heavenly) isn't sober or sound. Such a mind can't be reasoned with or convinced.**

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son is a comprehensive consolidation of the gospel. It at once fully reveals the lure, progress and end of sin, while giving us a tangible glimpse of God's merciful and gracious character. It dissects the gospel message so that we see salvation as combining the Father's grace and the repentant, active response of a sinner.

This parable rebukes the prideful arrogance that disdains sinners deemed too lost to be worthy of mercy. But the rebuke, whether of indignant scribes and Pharisees, or their modern counterparts in the church, is fatherly and mild, designed to awaken pity and not merely chastise.

This greatest of short stories is timeless. It captures the essence of Adam's fall and our own individual sin and their consequences. But for every sinner who has felt the hopelessness and despair that sin brings, this story magnifies the marvelous majesty of the gospel. Hope and joy are possible because of a loving heavenly Father who is eager to forgive and restore.

Like all of Jesus' parables, this one is designed to make the point immediately intelligible and to make the listener a part of the message. When combined to form a trilogy of stories, including the "lost sheep" and the "lost coin," every listener immediate-

ly realizes that it is the normal human tendency to rejoice when something "lost" is "found." To do otherwise is quickly perceived both inhumane and ungodly.

So, the parable illustrates the propriety of loving and receiving the sinful. And it demonstrates God's willingness to receive not only the "lowly" but the "low."

## **The Historical Context of the Parable's First Telling**

The story was precipitated by the disdainful criticism of the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus "receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:1-2). And this was true. He had gathered despised tax collectors and other despicable sinners to hear him preach.

The "leading lights" of Israel had absolutely no comprehension of Jesus' mission. Their behavior suggests they had little idea of why God had blessed their nation for hundreds of years. They did not comprehend the concept of the gospel, the "good news" of salvation from sin through Jesus.

Elsewhere Jesus declared, "the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). His parable of the prodigal son and the loving father made the Father's will and his mission unforgettably clear. Thus, one commentator has called



the stories of Luke 15 a “prelude to the cross” (Bruce 264).

### The Story of the Younger Son

The father in the parable had two sons. We are introduced first to the younger. He is immature, impatient, and ultimately, wasteful. He asks his father to give him his inheritance, which at most would have been one-third of his father’s estate, since the elder brother got a double portion (Deut. 21:17). Receiving it and wanting to get away from the limiting oversight of his father, he headed for a “far country” (15:11-13).

#### Similarities to Earlier Story

The story of the prodigal son has a number of striking similarities to the story of Isaac’s two sons.

Jacob, the younger, leaves the family for a far country and later returns, worried about how he will be received. Esau at one point hated his brother.

Jacob’s repentance transformed him from a “deceiver” into the man from whom the twelve tribes of Israel descended.

Finding there the freedom he desired, he let his passions run wild, acted like a fool and “wasted” the inheritance his father gave him. This wasting of his potential is why he is called the “prodigal” son. He apparently lived up what he had without saving, living extravagantly and without moderation, frugality, or self-control. If his elder brother knew what he was talking about, he spent some of his money on harlots (15:13, 30).

There is no reason to doubt he had a good time. Sin does often produce pleasure, albeit “passing pleasure” or fun for a “season” (Heb. 11:25). But then his money was gone. And to compound his problems, a famine came

(15:13-14). The first problem was of his own creation, the latter evidence that “it is not accidental that physical and moral evil meet in human history . . . designed by Providence to serve a beneficent purpose” (Bruce 284).

### The Real Fruit of Sin

Destitute, the young son of a wealthy father now finds his only recourse to be “joining” himself out to a citizen of that far country. His associate either can’t, because of the famine, or won’t, due to a lack of concern, feed him.

His deep degradation is evident in his new job, feeding pigs. This isn’t a pleasurable task at best, but with swine being unclean animals (Lev. 11:7), it painted a good picture of a man being about as low as he could get. And to make it worse, he apparently wasn’t eating as well as the pigs. He wished to have their food. But the owner’s priority seems to have been on feeding his pigs. They had value to him, but the prodigal son did not (15:15-16).

Jesus’ first audience hardly could miss the similarity between the conditions of the prodigal and the tax collectors and sinners for whom Jesus was condemned for showing kindness. A man who collected taxes for the Romans and a hog handler were equally loathed. But, at the same time, it would be difficult not to identify the scribes and Pharisees with the uncarving attitude of the pig farmer toward a suffering fellow human being.

### Reality is Awakened

When the young man “came to himself” he realized life was much better back at his father’s house. Even the hired servants there had plenty to eat. But in this far country he found himself ready to perish from hunger (15:17).

From the day Satan tempted Eve with the possibility of being as wise as God, sin has always promised the opposite of what it produces. Excited by desires and lusts, the mind that rejects fatherly counsel (earthly or heavenly)

isn’t sober or sound. Such a mind can’t be reasoned with or convinced.

It often takes the physical consequences of sin to awaken a sinner’s mind to reality. It may not be the highest moral motivation to change, but it is a tool God uses to arouse to change those who aren’t completely hardened.

So it worked with the prodigal. He made up his mind to go to his father, confess his sin against heaven (God) and his earthly parent and plead for a place as a hired servant (15:18-19).

This well illustrates how the gospel works. The beginnings of repentance are seen in his change of mind. His humility is apparent and his understanding that confession of his sins was needful. Further, he realized his sin wasn’t just against his father, but against God.

Furthermore, the young man didn’t just think about these things, he acted. He arose and went to his father’s house. When he not only changed his mind but also changed his direction, true repentance was the result.

### The Reaction of a Loving Father

So beautiful are the actions of the prodigal’s father and so important to the main theme of this parable that many commentators believe the parable ought to be identified as the story of “the loving father.”

The father saw his son coming afar off and ran out to meet him (15:20). This suggests a number of things; that he was looking for him, hoping he would return. There was no thought of making his son beg and plead, grovel in the dirt. He was just delighted to see him coming home. He had compassion and his hugs and kisses demonstrated a father’s love. All this was extended *before* the son had a chance to make his rehearsed confession and plea. It reminds us that God so loved the world that he sent his son to die for us, while we were yet sinners (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8).

The father's actions simultaneously show us God's character and attitude toward sinners while contrasting this to the hard-heartedness of the scribes and Pharisees.

Casting aside the suggestion that he just make his young son a "hired servant," the father puts on him the best robe, a ring, and sandals (15:22). He restores to him all the signs of being a son and provides for his needs. He gives him a new start. The young man no doubt felt like he had been "born again."

But if the story stopped here it would be incomplete. The father killed a calf especially fattened for a festive occasion (15:23). He prepared a feast and celebration so that everyone could enjoy the happiness and joy he felt over his son's return. And that is God's attitude as well, this parable teaches us.

The reason the father was so happy: "this my son was *dead* and is *alive* again; he was *lost* and is *found*" (15:24). Whether you take the father's use of "dead" and "lost" in the natural or the moral sense as he originally spoke, you can't but see the moral implications that Jesus was teaching.

If we can get excited over finding a lost sheep or a lost coin, how much more so a lost son. Jesus at once defends his seeking of lost sinners and gently indicts the inhumane and merciless attitude of the scribes and Pharisees.

### The Older Brother's Reaction

Jesus sets a mirror before the scribes and Pharisees as he tells the second half of the story. The elder brother's anger, resentment and rejection at the return of his lost and sinful brother created a striking resemblance to the Lord's detractors.

The reason for his vexation is explored. He hadn't been prodigal. He had faithfully worked in his father's fields. He hadn't rejected his father's leading and instruction. He was envious. His father had never celebrated his faithfulness with a feast (15:29-30). He saw the gladness and festivities as grossly unfair.

Further, he wouldn't even recognize the returning prodigal as his brother. He called him "this son of yours." He despised his sinful brother. And, he sought to change his father's kindly disposition by highlighting how his brother had wasted the father's hard-earned wealth on harlots (15:30). Thus, he tries to make the father look reckless, unwise, and maybe sinful in receiving the prodigal.

### Father's Response to Elder Brother

As the father had shown kindness to the returning prodigal, he also shows gentleness to his equally sinful elder son. Rather than sharp words of rebuke, he pleaded with his older son to see things as he did, to understand the joy

of a "lost" son found (15:32). He explained that such joy in no way subtracted anything from his appreciation of the older son. The prodigal's return took nothing away from the older son, either. The eldest had his inheritance and none of that would be lost (15:31).

Thus, the elder brother's behavior and thinking was shown to be as unjustifiable as that of the scribes and Pharisees to whom Jesus spoke.

### Application for Today

Now we must turn the mirror our direction. How do we feel and act when someone particularly sinful repents and returns to the Lord?

When a close family member or brother in Christ leaves the faith for a life that totally repudiates everything we believe, it hurts. They have, in essence, divorced us. So, when they return, it is tempting to hurt them in return, to say harsh things or reject them. There may even be fear they will leave again and hurt us again.

But it is imperative that we act like the father in this parable, always receptive to a penitent returning. Galatians 6:1 instructs, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."

The prodigal might never have returned if he had known his father to have the attitude of some "righteous" members of the kingdom. So, who would be the worse "prodigal," the sinner who repents or the child of God who won't receive the penitent sinner?

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

Joe R. Price

Jesus concluded the parable of the dishonest steward with the summary that “no servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13). The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, scoffed at his teaching and derided him (Luke 16:1-13, 14). They honored themselves before others, but God knew their hearts and detested their pretentious, self-righteous conduct (Luke 16:15).

It is within this context that Jesus tells of “*a certain rich man*” and “*a certain beggar named Lazarus*” (Luke 16:19-20, 19-31). These two men lived very different lives. The rich man lacked for nothing, satisfying himself each day in luxury. Lazarus begged daily at the rich man’s gate, desiring to eat the crumbs that fell from his table. Not only did Lazarus have to contend with daily hunger; disease was his constant companion, as were the scavenger dogs that licked his open sores.

The rich man did not show compassion toward the beggar. His clothing was splendid and his food a feast. Yet, he had no pity on the poor man Lazarus; he was too self-consumed to notice.

But, death comes to both the rich and the poor, and it came to these two men as well. In life the rich man received his good things while Lazarus experienced calamity and trouble. But now, Lazarus was comforted in Abraham’s bosom while the rich man was tormented in flames (Luke 16:22-25).

Jesus gives us a glimpse into the realm of the dead (or departed spirits, known as Hades, Acts 2:27, 31; 1 Cor. 15:55). This realm is distinguished from hell (*gehenna*),

the place of eternal punishment following judgment (Rev. 1:18; 20:14; Mark 9:43-48). There would be no relief given to the rich man in torments, for there was a great gulf between that place and the peaceful rest and safety of Abraham’s bosom (called “Paradise” by Jesus in Luke 23:43). While alive, the rich man’s love of money had figuratively fixed a “*great gulf*” between himself and the beggar that he failed to mercifully reach across to relieve the suffering of Lazarus. In death, a real gulf now existed between them that could not and would not be crossed by either (Luke 16:26).

Materialists (those who deny humans have an immortal soul that exists beyond death) scoff at this story just as the Sadducees must have. Whether this narrative is to be considered a parable or an actual event does not weaken the truth of its content in the least: its message remains the same. Jesus did not use error and fantasy to depict divine truth. If it is noted that nowhere is this account described as a parable, one should also note that neither was the parable of the dishonest steward

described as such; the first verse of this same chapter begins with the same words: “*There was a certain rich man*” (Luke 16:1; see Luke 10:30; 15:11 for more examples of such parables). Parables use real life events to teach spiritual lessons. Therefore, to view the rich man and Lazarus as a parable confirms the reality of its events. On the other hand, nothing suggests this could not have been an actual event. If it is the case, the truth it teaches remains the same. Therefore, rather than exhaust ourselves with a discussion of whether or not it is to be considered a parable, we will study its content to gain real and relevant insight into the realm beyond the grave, so that we may live by faith in this life as we prepare ourselves for the next.

**Not only did Lazarus have to contend with daily hunger; disease was his constant companion, as were the scavenger dogs that licked his open sores.**

## Lessons from the Dead

God had forbidden the children of Israel from seeking after the dead for knowledge and understanding (Deut. 18:9-14). Instead, God gave them his law and sent his servants the prophets to Israel to speak his words of truth and warning (Deut. 18:15-19; Jer. 7:3, 13, 25). But now, the rich man desperately wanted a dead man—Lazarus—to return to earth and warn his five brothers about the future torment they would incur unless they repented. However, Lazarus would not be going back to earth with such a warning, for they had the law and the prophets (the revealed word of God) that taught them “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8; Lev. 19:18). If they would not be persuaded to repent of their selfish, sinful love of money by God’s inspired word, the resurrection of a dead person would not convince them, either. Even when Jesus was shown to be alive after his death “by many infallible proofs” there were many who would not believe (Acts 1:3; 4:10-12, 15-20).

Jesus taught many lessons in the story of the rich man and Lazarus to convince us that we cannot serve two masters (Luke 16:13). Please consider the following:

**1. Do not trust in riches (16:19, 25, 27-31).** This is at the heart of why Jesus told his audience about the rich man and Lazarus. Those who live for material things, serving mammon rather than God, serve a false god that cannot save them (Luke 16:13; 9:25). The idolatry of covetousness drowns many souls in destruction and perdition (Col. 3:5; 1 Tim. 6:9-10). The love of money elevates one in his estimation of himself; it is arrogant and self-righteous as it selfishly pursues material fulfillment at all costs (Luke 16:15). In death, the rich man experienced the result of living for himself and not being rich toward God; of loving himself more than God and his neighbor (Luke 9:25; 12:15-21; 10:25-37).

The Lord expects us to be good stewards of our material possessions instead of making mammon our master (Luke 16:8-13). Material goods should serve us, not the other way around. Those blessed with material abundance are to remain humble and use their wealth as an opportunity to advance goodness, compassion, and faith in God:

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

**2. Salvation is not universal (Luke 16:23).** One man was saved and the other was lost. God offers salvation to everyone because he desires all to be saved from their sins (1 Tim. 2:3-4). Yet, few will choose to enter the narrow

gate and walk the straightened way that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14). Apparently, the rich man gave little thought to his salvation; he was too busy in his self-indulgent life to lay up treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

**3. Salvation is conditional (Luke 16:25).** In death, both the rich man and Lazarus received according to their lives on earth. The rich man had taken good things without evidence of giving good things to others (including Lazarus). On the other hand, Lazarus had lived with trial and trouble without relief. What happened to them after death is a clear example that “God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal. 6:7-8). How we live now will be recompensed in the next.

**4. Death does not end one’s existence (Luke 16:22-23).** Man is composed of body and soul, of flesh and spirit (Matt. 10:28; Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7; John 4:24). We have an “outward man” (the flesh) and an “inward man” (the spirit): the first is temporal, mortal; the second is immortal and continues beyond the death of its body (Eccl. 12:7; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Jas. 2:26).

While the world advises us to live for the moment because “you only live once,” Jesus is teaching us that this life is not all there is with which to be concerned. We are more than flesh and bones, and our lives should reflect our understanding of this truth.

*a. There is consciousness after death.* Sight, speech, feelings, desire and reasoning abilities are all present in the scene before us. This passage shows the falsehood of the Jehovah’s Witnesses doctrine of annihilation and the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of soul sleep.

*b. Human beings do not become angels or ghosts after death.* Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom when he died—he did not become one (Luke 16:22). Angels are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14). Neither do we see Lazarus hovering over the earth like a ghost, haunting and intervening in the affairs of men. He was not allowed to return to the earth (Luke 16:29-31). Humans remain human when we die—we do not become angels or ghosts.

*c. We do not go directly to our final, eternal reward when we die.* God has appointed a day of judgment when all the dead ones will come forth and stand before Christ to be judged for the things done in the body (Heb. 9:27; Acts 17:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:10; John 5:28-29; Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:12-15).

The day of judgment will be the time (1) When each person will “give account for himself to God” (Rom. 14:12). Neither Lazarus nor the rich man has done this

yet. (2) When the true and righteous judgment of God will be vindicated (Rom. 2:2, 5; Acts 17:30-31). The books (divine truth) will be opened and the dead will be “judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Rev. 20:12). There will be no mistakes; each person will receive a just sentence. (3) When “every knee shall bow” and “every tongue shall confess to God” (Rom. 14:11). The rich man, like many others, did not confess God during life. But on the day of judgment all will bow to the sovereignty of the Almighty.

**5. Second chance doctrines are false (16:26).** There is no crossing over the “great gulf” that is securely placed between Abraham’s bosom and the flame of unquenchable anguish. The Catholic doctrine of purgatory that says one will be punished for and purified of venial sins is a false doctrine. The unjust are kept under “punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Pet. 2:9). Mormonism’s vicarious work for the dead (including baptism and marriage) is equally false. One can neither believe nor obey for another person (Mark 16:15-16). The concept of reincarnation, in which souls migrate from being to being, is also false: “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

**6. God’s present truth is sufficient to persuade us to prepare for death (16:27-31).** Some are waiting for what they call a sign from heaven before they will believe God. The rich man wanted his brothers to get a sign from beyond the grave about the torment to come. But, heaven has already given us its message about life, death and eternity: God has spoken to us in his Son (Heb. 1:1-2). The gospel of Christ is powerful to persuade and save sinners (Rom.

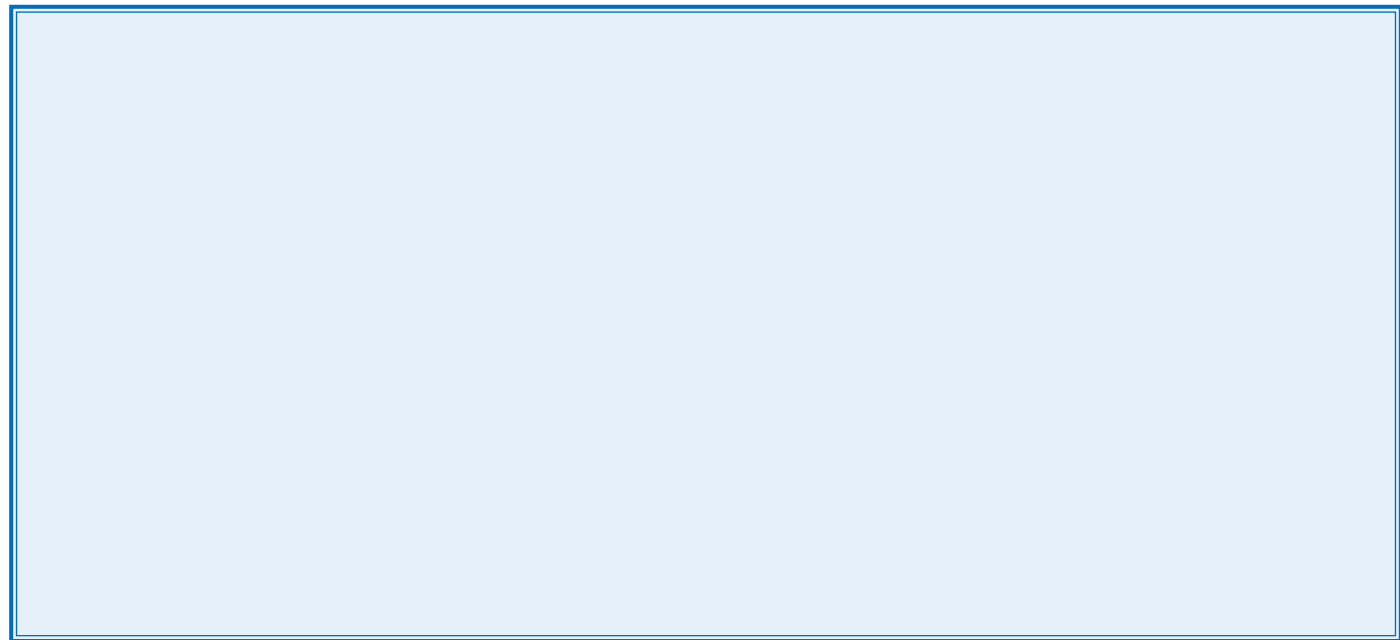
1:16). The “word of this salvation” has been sent to the whole world (Acts 13:23; Mark 16:15). The New Testament is inspired by God and thoroughly equips us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The resurrection of Jesus Christ confirms the validity of his gospel, yet sadly, most are still not persuaded (even though Jesus arose from the dead, Luke 16:31; Acts 2:32-33; Rom. 10:16-17).

**7. The comfort of being saved (Luke 16:22, 25).** At death, Lazarus was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. “Abraham’s bosom” indicates a place of close intimacy, of warm embrace and restful security (John 1:18; 13:23; see Isa. 40:11, in the kingdom the Lord carries his lambs in his bosom). The grief of hunger and the pain of disease were replaced with the comfort of blessed safety and rest. Christians will have tribulations in life, but rest awaits those who put their faith in Jesus Christ and obey him (John 16:33; Rev. 14:13).

**8. The terribleness of being lost (Luke 16:23-24).** The rich man was fully conscious and completely aware of his circumstance, of his pain and horror, and of why he was “in torments.” The torment experienced by the rich man in death is a warning to all who are presently living for themselves and serving “mammon” to repent and obey God (Luke 16:13). The wages of sin is eternal death (Rom. 6:23). Torment and anguish without relief is the prospect for those who are lost in sin. Now is the time to repent and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 5:8-9).

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# The Parable of the Pharisee and The Publican (Luke 18:9-14)

Donnie V. Rader

Humility and self-righteousness are opposites. However, it is possible to have both among people who are alike in many ways. We like to think of ourselves as humble, yet it may be we are self-righteous at times. A study of the parable of the Pharisee and Publican explores these two attitudes.

## The Setting (v. 9)

Luke tell us, “Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (Luke 18:9). Jesus spoke to those who (1) *trusted in themselves as being righteous* and (2) *despised others* as being nothing. What an attitude! There is no doubt that the Pharisees were in the hearing of this parable. They, indeed, trusted in their own righteousness and viewed others with disdain.

Two groups are represented in this parable: the Pharisees and the Publicans. The Pharisee “belonged” to the temple, while the Publican didn’t “belong” there. The Pharisee’s face would show fasting, while the Publican made no such show. The Pharisee had a righteous “air” about him, while the Publican’s reputation was bad. The Pharisee wore Scriptures as a display, while the Publican made no such display. The Pharisee was viewed as being religious, while the Publican was viewed as being unworthy.

Knowing something about those of whom Jesus spoke will help us to better understand the parable and the lessons we learn from it.

## The Parable (vv. 10-13)

The text says,

**Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes**

**of all that I possess.” And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:10-13).**

## 1. The two men were similar or alike in many ways.

Both men were Jews. Both men were religious. Both men had a covenant relationship. Both men had temple privileges. Both men prayed.

**2. The two men were different.** While both prayed, their prayers were different! Their attitudes were contrasted.

The Pharisee prayed: “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”

The Publican prayed: “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”

The Pharisee was arrogant. The Publican was humble. The Pharisee viewed himself as righteous. The Publican viewed himself as a sinner. The Pharisee felt that he was “too good” to associate with others such as a Publican. The Publican felt that he was “too bad” to associate with others such as a Pharisee. The Pharisee had no need for mercy. The Publican had a great need for mercy. The Pharisee singles himself out as righteous. The Publican singles himself out as a sinner.

## The Lessons Learned (v. 14)

Having stated the parable, Jesus said, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (v. 14). The point of the parable is self-righteousness versus humility.

**1. The sin of self-righteousness.** The Pharisee in this parable was self-righteous (cf. v. 9). His focus is on self

rather than God. In his short prayer, he mentions “I” some five times. Notice again his prayer, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess” (emphasis mine, DVR).

The self-righteous ignore their weakness and gloat in their own righteousness. They seek the praises of men (Matt. 23:23-30; John 12:32-43). They focus on the weakness of others. They place self in one class and all others in another class. They thank God, not for what God has done for them, but for what they have done for God. The self-righteous focus on the outward and not the attitudes. They have no wants, no needs or acknowledgments.

Self-righteousness is a sin because:

- § One doesn't love his neighbor as himself (Matt. 22:39).
- § One doesn't treat others the way he wants to be treated (Matt. 7:12).
- § One doesn't look upon the things of others (Phil. 4:2).
- § One makes others a standard where he will always look better (2 Cor. 10:12)
- § One trust in himself rather than God (Luke 18:9-14).
- § One is proud or arrogant (Prov. 6:17).
- § One doesn't see that he can fall (1 Cor. 10:12; Gal. 6:1).
- § One binds more than God has (like fasting twice a week).

**2. The blessing of humility.** The Publican's prayer demonstrated humility. Jesus said that he was the one

who was justified (v. 14). Those who are humble will be blessed because:

- § They see their need for and dependence upon God. Thus, they cry for mercy.
- § They have reverence for God. Note that the Publican “stood afar off”—not presuming to draw near.
- § They make no effort to justify, excuse or ignore what is wrong in their life.
- § They have wisdom (Prov. 11:2).
- § They have honor (Prov. 29:23).
- § They receive grace and exaltation from God (Jas. 4:6, 10; 1 Pet. 5:5).

**3. Strong, religious, and devoted people can be lost.**

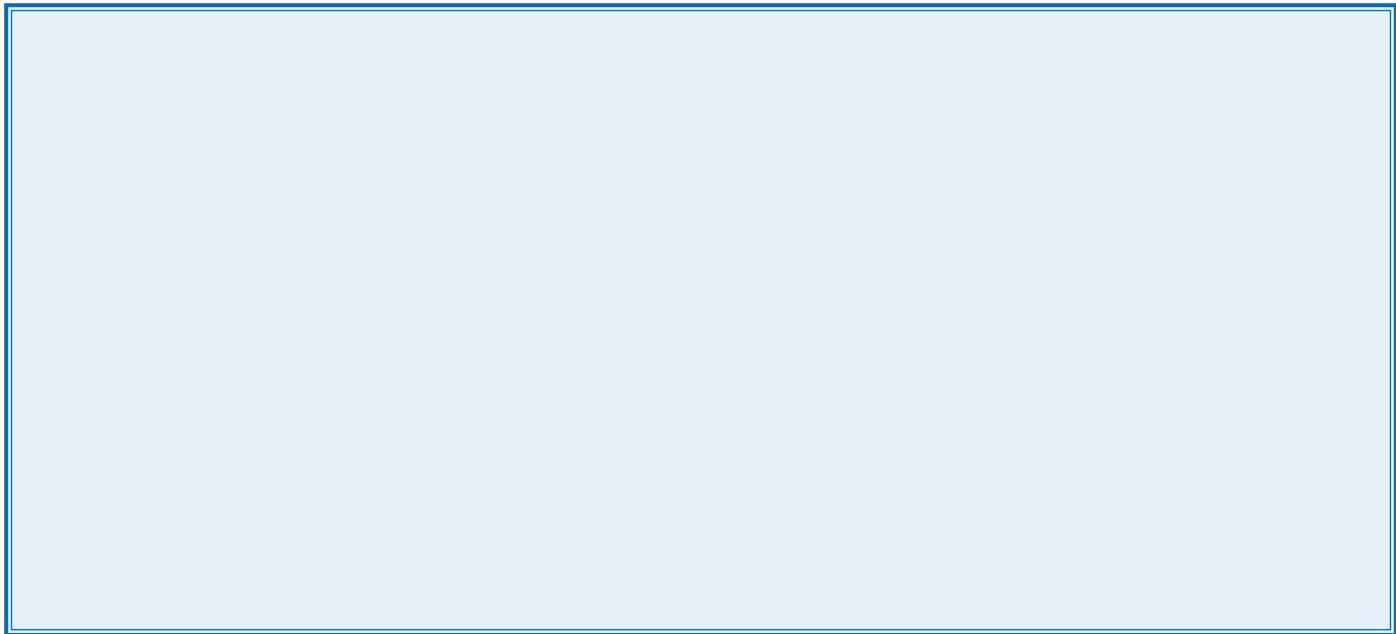
The Pharisee had many good characteristics. He was devoutly religious—he was at the temple praying. He may have been sincere. There is nothing said against his morality. He must have been faithful to his marriage vows. He was not an extortioner. He was not unjust (not unfair). He was apparently liberal with his money. Yet, he was not justified. He had attitude problems. He was lacking in other areas. He was proud and self-righteous. Thus, being religious, devoted, etc. were not enough.

**4. If mercy was granted to the Publican, mercy can be shown to me too.** The Publican was an outcast. He was thought to be unworthy. If God would grant mercy to such a one as him, we too can be recipients of his grace.

May God help us to humble ourselves as the Publican did and not lift ourselves up with pride as did the Pharisee.

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# The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16)

Chris Reeves

One teaching method of Jesus common to his ministry was his use of parables (Matt. 13:3). As the son of a carpenter, Jesus grew up around the laboring class of people. He was well acquainted with landowners, workers, and wages. Consider Jesus' parable of the laborers in the vineyard found only in Matthew 20:1-16.

## The Setting

When studying any parable of Jesus it is important to examine the setting and context of the parable. The setting of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard goes back to Matthew 19. In the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry before going to Jerusalem, Matthew records: "And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these words, he departed from Galilee, and came into the borders of Judaea beyond the Jordan; and great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there" (Matt. 19:1-2). There, Jesus taught on the subject of marriage (Matt. 19:3-12), little children (Matt. 19:13-15), riches (Matt. 19:16-30), and the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16). When Jesus finished talking to the apostles about their sacrifice for the kingdom, he said, "But many shall be last that are first; and first that are last" (Matt. 19:30). This statement introduces the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, and Jesus will close this parable with the same statement: "So the last shall be first, and the first last" (Matt. 20:16). The word "for" (v. 1) at the beginning of this parable lets us know what Jesus teaches in this parable illustrates what he has just said in Matthew 19:30. The actions of the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-22), Jesus' response and Peter's question (Matt. 19:23-27), all set the stage for the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.

## The Parable

The parable opens with a "householder" who hires laborers early in the morning at sunrise to go work in his vineyard (v. 1). A "householder" (Gr. *oikodespotes*) was literally, a "house master" or "house ruler." He was a landowner who

had authority over the laborers who worked his land. The laborers in this story agreed to work for one "shilling" a day (v. 2). A "shilling" (Gr. *denarion*) was a silver Roman coin worth about 25 cents today. According to the historian Tacitus (*Annals* 1:17), it was the usual daily wage for a working man in the first century. It was common at this time to hire a laborer for a day and pay him at the end of the day regardless of how long he worked (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:15; Job 7:2; Mal. 3:5). The historian Josephus gives us an example of this kind of day labor and payment in *Antiquities* 20:219-220. This author grew up in Texas and often saw migrant farm workers standing around in town waiting to be hired for a day by a Texas ranch owner. This parable depicts a similar situation.

In addition to the laborers hired early (around 6 a.m.), the landowner in this story hired other laborers throughout the day whom he found standing idle in the marketplace—five groups of workers in all (vv. 3-7). He hired them at the "third hour" (9 a.m.), the "sixth hour" (12 noon), the "ninth hour" (3 p.m.), and the "eleventh hour" (5 p.m.). Each laborer responded immediately to the invitation to work. The Jewish day ran from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. It was common for day laborers to stand around in the Greek agora, the Roman forum, or Eastern marketplace waiting to be hired. They could be hired all day long especially in the months of July to September when a vineyard owner would have a large crop of grapes that had to be gathered. Grapes must be harvested within a day or two of ripening before the sugar content rises too high, or before they are destroyed by bad weather.

At the end of the day, the landowner sent his "steward" (Gr. *epitropos*), guardian or manager, to call the laborers together and pay them. All the laborers, from the last to the first, received the same wage—a shilling (vv. 8-10). The landowner is shown to be a man of his word. He is trustworthy, honest, good, and generous. However, some

of the laborers “murmured” against the landowner supposing that they who worked about twelve hours and in the heat of the day would receive greater pay than those who worked just one hour (vv. 11-12). They had an “evil eye” full of envy (v. 15; see Deut. 15:9; Prov. 22:9; 23:6; 28:22). They felt the landowner was unfair. But, the landowner, in a friendly tone, reminded the laborers that they all agreed to work for one shilling a day, and that he had a lawful right to pay each one as he willed to do with his own money (vv. 13-15). (Note: This section of Matthew begins and ends with what is “lawful,” Matt. 19:3 and 20:15.) Jesus closed this parable by saying, “So the last shall be first, and the first last” (v. 16).

### The Lessons

First, Jesus teaches that God will reward those who are willing to sacrifice for the kingdom of heaven. Jesus told the rich young ruler that he could have treasure in heaven if he would sell what he had, give to the poor, and follow Jesus (Matt. 19:21). But, the rich young ruler was not willing to sacrifice (Matt. 19:22). On the other hand, Peter sacrificed his fishing business to follow the Lord (Matt. 19:27). The other apostles were willing to sacrifice, too. Jesus said there will be a reward, temporal and eternal, for all who sacrifice (Matt. 19:29-30). Jesus said if you give up all to follow me, each one of you will receive your own “wages” (spiritual blessings) in the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 3:8). The landowner in this parable represents God, and God is not like some greedy landowners who refuse to pay up (Jas. 5:4). God will not treat his laborers unfairly or try to shortchange them. By God’s grace, all the righteous will receive their wages at the end of the day (Heb. 6:10).

Second, Jesus teaches that all people, Jew or Gentile, can receive the same “wages” (spiritual blessings) in the kingdom of heaven. No matter *who* comes to God, and no matter *when* they come to him, they can all be blessed with the same “wages” of the gospel. All can be forgiven of their sins and have eternal life in heaven, even the latecomer or the outsider. The gospel is for all, both Jew and Gentile (Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 1:16; 2:6-11; 10:12). Remember that right before Jesus spoke this parable the apostles asked, “Who then can be saved?” (Matt. 19:25), and Peter asked, “What then shall we have?” (Matt. 19:27). Jesus used this parable to answer these questions this way: You apostles will have what everyone can have; everyone can have the same spiritual blessings in the kingdom of heaven. Unlike the landowner in this parable, it is not common today for an employee to pay each laborer the same when each one has worked for different hours. But then again, God’s ways are not man’s ways (Isa. 55:8-9). God’s kingdom is not like earthly kingdoms in many ways (John 18:36). This parable is not about business management, economics, labor relations, or hourly wages. Rather, it is about God giving the same good gifts to all men as he sees fit (Pss. 34:8; 107:1; Jas. 1:17). When the laborers said, “thou hast made them

equal unto us” (v. 12), they certainly spoke the truth. All true disciples are equal in God’s eyes. God gives to all in the kingdom liberally and equally, whether apostle (like Peter) or disciple, whether Jew or Gentile (Eph. 3:6). The thief on the cross (Luke 23:42-43) will be blessed along with those who followed Jesus from the beginning (Acts 1:21-22). Paul, “the least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:8-9), will be blessed along with the other apostles who were “reputed to be pillars” (Gal. 2:9).

Third, Jesus teaches the first will be last, and the last will be first (Matt. 19:30; 20:8, 16). What does this mean? In this context it means that those who are “first” by worldly standards (like the rich young ruler) will not receive the blessings of the kingdom of heaven when they turn away from Jesus. And, those who are “last” by worldly standards (like the apostles who forsook all) are “first” in God’s eyes and will receive his blessings when they follow Jesus.

There are a few secondary lessons that can be gleaned from this parable as well. For example, do not murmur against God (v. 11). The envious complainers in this parable (like the elder brother in Luke 15:28-30, or the Jews in Acts 13:45-46) felt that they deserved more than others. In this parable, Jesus taught his followers to let God write the contract and pay the wages (Rom. 9:31ff; 11:22ff). No one has a just cause to murmur against God. He is just and right (Gen. 18:25). God will always give us “whatsoever is right” (v. 3). Don’t worry. God will always treat you right. We should be grateful, not grumblers. Don’t be envious when God is generous. Also, do not be overconfident (v. 10). In the parable, some of the laborers “supposed that they would receive more” (v. 10). They supposed wrong. God is good and he gives his laborers exactly what he wills to give. What God gives is great (Eph. 3:20; Phil. 4:19). Finally, do not stand around idle (vv. 3-7). Rather than standing around idle in the marketplace of the world, we need to be busy working in the vineyard of the Lord. Idleness, laziness, indifference, apathy, and lethargy plague many in and out of the Lord’s church today. Those who stand around idle and unemployed in the Lord’s work are actually employed in the Devil’s work (1 Tim. 5:13, 15; Tit. 1:12). May we all be co-laborers together in the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 3:5-9). The Lord is in great need of laborers today (Matt. 9:37-38; Luke 10:2)!

Friends, God’s grace and salvation are full and free to all who will obey the gospel. Have you obeyed the gospel (Acts 15:7; 17:30-31; 22:16; Rom. 9:9-10)? If not, it is not too late to become a Christian today. Are you a faithful, laboring Christian (1 Cor. 15:58)? If not, it is not too late to come back to the Lord and get busy working today. We all have the wonderful opportunity to labor for God, and God has the right to reward us all as he sees fit.

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# The Parable of the Two Sons (Matt. 21:28-32)

Tom M. Roberts

Without a doubt, the parables taught by the Lord were crafted in language that disguised a message, “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” When asked by his disciples why he taught in parables, he replied: “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given” (Matt. 13:11). “Them,” no doubt, included the Jews who did not believe, but who envied him his popularity with the people (Matt. 27:18). Yet, on occasion, the parables were so pointed that not even his detractors could help but understand the meaning. This was especially true when Jesus himself offered the explanation: “And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them” (21:23, 45).

One of Jesus’ severest criticisms from his enemies was that “he ate with sinners” (Luke 15:2). His response was: “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 9:13). Many of his lessons illustrated heaven’s interest in the lost: the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, etc. But this parable turns his criticism back on those who carped at his saving message, the chief priests and the elders. Earlier in the passage before us, they had asked Jesus “By what authority are you doing these things?” (v. 23). To show their hypocrisy, he parried their question by his own question and they were unable to answer. In fact, the leaders of Israel (for the most part) were lost and did not perceive it. Jesus was the “stone which the builders rejected” (v. 42) and this parable identifies the cause: unbelief and disobedience.

## The Cast of Characters

In many of the parables, the chief character is God himself, illustrating, in this instance, the role of “father.” Lesser roles depict the lost, the wise, the unwise, etc. In this parable, one son is portrayed as the self-righteous Jews who rejected John and Jesus (v. 32) while the other son depicts the “tax collectors and harlots” who repented at

their teaching. Tax collectors and harlots were looked upon as the scum of the earth by the chief priests and elders, all the while seeing themselves as the elite of God. The great tragedy of mankind is that we do not realize that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). All of mankind is in the need of grace and forgiveness that is found only in Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Rom. 5:7-9; 1 John 2:2). The Jews had trouble seeing themselves as sinners, all the while rejecting the saving message which John and Jesus brought: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:1-2; 4:17). How well do we understand our need of forgiveness in our own life? Which of the sons would most accurately portray us? Which son would you rather be?

## Different Attitudes

The first son in the parable is the son who was asked, “Son, go work today in my vineyard” (v. 28). At the first, this son answered, “I will not,” but afterward “he repented and went.” Clearly, this illustrates sinners who heard John’s and Jesus’ call to repentance but delayed obeying when they first heard it. But after some time, they reflected on the message, repented (regretted, NKJ) and obeyed. By saying, “I will not,” this son demonstrated rebellion and sinfulness. In this sense, all of us have, at one time or another, failed to do God’s will and have become sinners. Had he continued in his waywardness, there would have been no hope for him. If we continue in sinfulness, there will be no hope for us. As this first son, we must repent (Luke 13:3) and obey the Lord (Acts 2:38).

The second son was also asked the same question and responded, “I go, sir” (v. 30), but he did not go. Whether this son never intended to go or thought that superficial promises would be acceptable, we are not told. But the former finally obeyed; this one did not. Did he think that his privileged position as a son did not carry responsibility? Did he think that the other brother should be the one to

carry out his father's wishes? Did he intend to obey "when he got around to it?" Regardless, please observe that "he went not." Lip service is not the same as obedience.

Notice:

Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams (1 Sam. 15:19-22).

We are told by James: "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead," and "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (2:17, 26). To show faithfulness, one must connect true faith with obedient works. "But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (v. 18). And again, "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (v. 24). A true son will not make promises he does not intend to keep. To show faith and fidelity to a father, sons must be willing to accompany promises by faithful action.

Which of the two did the will of his father? (v. 31)

The penetrating question which Jesus finally directed toward his critics is one we should be ready to answer ourselves. They accurately answered that "the first" son did the right thing when he repented later and went. But by this admission, they convicted themselves as being equal to the second son who said, "I go, sir," but "went not." The Jewish hierarchy failed to obey John: "But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him" (Luke 7:30). Likewise, Jesus "came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). The great tragedy of the Jewish nation is that they rejected their own Messiah. They were great students of the Bible, but failed to understand its message. "You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life: and these are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). How many of us read the Bible and fail to see ourselves in its "mirror" (Jas. 1:22-25)?

This parable emphasizes that sinners need to repent. God will forgive sinners who repent. However, we will never repent until we come face to face with our sin. What do you think of a harlot (prostitute)? Would you want to belong

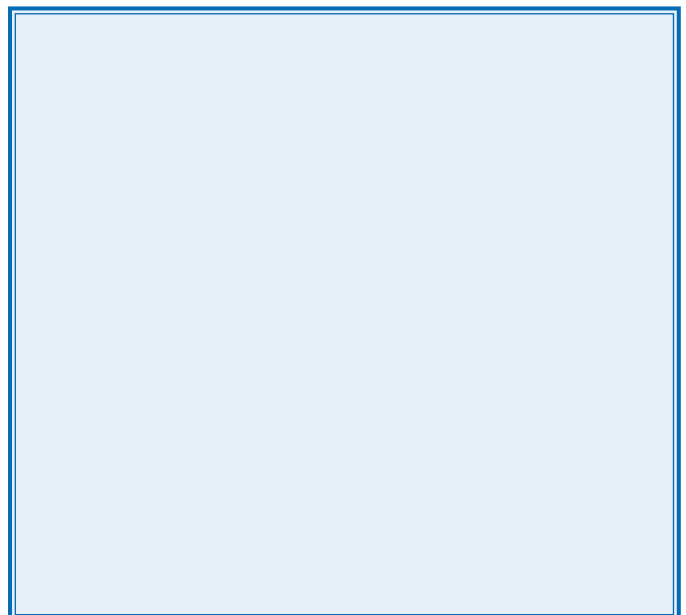
to a congregation in which such sinners were members? Do you ever look around the auditorium where you worship and think "I am glad that I am not sinners like those folks?" Read Luke 18:9-14. The church at Corinth was a church filled with such people. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (6:9-10). But what do all these sinners have to do with being a member of the church? Read on another verse: "And such were some of you" (v. 11). The church at Corinth was full of sinners. But notice how they parallel the first son: "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." Yes, they had been sinners, but they repented and obeyed the gospel, being baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 18:8). These people believed and repented. Sadly, Jesus said of the chief Jews, "when you saw it, you did not afterward repent that you might believe him" (Matt. 21:32).

### Conclusion

We must learn to see ourselves in the parables of Jesus. Whether sinner or saint, there are lessons in them which will lead us into eternal life. Develop your ability to understand the parables. Look into them to learn the saving message of Jesus. "For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him" (Matt. 13:12). Are you a son who is ready to repent and do the will of your heavenly Father? Or are you a son who said, "I will go," but did not?

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# The Wicked Vine Growers

**Matthew 21:33-45 (Also in Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19)**

**Charles Willis**

During all of his ministry prior to this time, Jesus had not proclaimed himself openly as the Messiah. He repeatedly told people to not reveal who had healed them. His time was not yet come. In Matthew 21 Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem with the people crying “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (v. 9) and they called him a “prophet” (v. 11). This event was recognized as a fulfillment of prophecy from Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9. Jesus enters the Temple and chases out the money changers. He spent the night in Bethany and returned to the Temple the next morning where he was approached by the chief priest and elders who demanded to know the source of his authority. Jesus in essence refused to tell them because their hearts were not honest and they would not accept the truth. He then taught the parable of the two sons, and then the parable of the wicked vine growers. In our text Jesus clearly teaches he is the Messiah, not just another prophet. He condemns the priests and religious leaders. He makes it clear man cannot thwart God’s plan. Read carefully the text from Matthew 21:33-45.

## God’s Preparations

The landowner in the parable represents God. As the creator of all things we can see how all things belong to him. Notice—God is the one who planted the vineyard. He did not do it half-way, but also “put a wall around it and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower” (v. 33). The vineyard represents the nation of Israel which God created. He purposed it through Abram (Gen. 12:1-3) and brought it to pass through Jacob (Exod. 1:1-7). Moses led the people out of the Egyptian bondage to Mt. Sinai where God’s covenant was established with Israel to become their God and they would be his people (Exod. 19:5-6). God built a wall around his vineyard separating them from all other nations (Exod. 23:32-33). He protected them and watched over them as symbolized in a “tower” in the vineyard. God did all of this on his own. It was by his good will and mercy that he chose to bless the Israelites.

Now God is ready to “receive His produce” (v. 34). He provided everything necessary for Israel’s livelihood (a wine press) and their godliness (the Old Law). We see a truth: God expects something in return! Just as a man could expect a return on his investment in a vineyard, so God had expectations of Israel: their devotion, obedience, and love.

## Attitude of the Vine Growers

In the parable, the vine growers treated poorly all the servants sent by the master. Israel did the same thing with God’s servants—his prophets. “Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord” (1 Kings 18:13) and threatened to kill Elijah (1 Kings 19:2). Zedekiah struck Micaiah on the cheek (1 Kings 22:24). The King of Israel pledged to remove the head of Elisha (2 Kings 6:31). Pashur, the priest, had Jeremiah beaten and put in stocks because of his prophecy (Jer. 20:1-2). Hebrews 11:33-39 tells of even more abuse directed toward and endured by God’s servants. We are even told of the beheading of John the Baptist. Throughout their history, the Israelites repeatedly rejected God’s servants, just as the vine growers do in the parable.

God, in his patience and mercy, sent “last of all” (Mark 12:6) his Son thinking “they will respect My Son” (v. 37). Mark’s account goes so far as to call him his “beloved son” (12:6). In these statements Jesus is clearly making himself out to be God’s Son, yet the vine growers do not accept the Master’s son. Instead they said, “this is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance” (v. 38). This was a breach of trust, a breaking of the covenant agreement. John 11:47-53 demonstrates this attitude among the Jewish leadership that sought to kill Jesus. Their reasoning (evident in the parable as “seizing his inheritance”) is found in John 11:48 which says, “if we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” The “inheritance” of the son symbolized his authority and leadership. This is what

the vine growers wanted. They wanted to keep their place, their position among the people. They wanted to continue to rule the people. Theirs was a rebellious attitude.

What makes this worse is an understanding of who the vine growers represent. Matthew 21:45 says the chief priests and the Pharisees understood he was talking about them! The history of the priesthood is full of corruption and sin. “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?” (Ezek. 34:2). “The lips of a priest should preserve knowledge and men should seek instruction from his mouth; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi” (Mal. 2:7-8). The self-righteousness of the leading religious men is exposed by Jesus in this parable. These things so angered them, Matthew 21:46 says they sought to kill him. They did not grasp the importance of what Jesus said, but blinded themselves with anger. They continue to be more concerned about the multitude than they are about God’s attitude toward them.

### Jesus’ Prophecy

Matthew’s account reveals how Jesus used a method reminiscent of the prophet Nathan. In 2 Samuel 12 Nathan presented a parable to King David about a man stealing a pet lamb to provide a meal for his guests. David pronounced a verdict upon himself since God (through Nathan) was exposing his sin with Bathsheeba. In our parable, Jesus says, “when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to the vine growers?” (v. 40). The underlying truths of the parable were not yet understood. The response of the priests and Pharisees will be an indictment upon themselves.

“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine growers, who will pay him the proceeds at the proper season” (v. 41). The problem of wicked vine growers was commonplace in Judea. Everyone related to what was being taught and this response was what any right-thinking owner would have done. They called these men “wicked” (KJV) or “wretched” (NAS). They understood the motivations and attitudes were not righteous for those who entered a covenant with the master. Their place in the vineyard would be given up to someone else.

Only after their statement does Jesus begin making his true applications. He quotes Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14-15, “The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone. This came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (v. 42). This was a known Messianic prophecy familiar to all the listeners. You can almost feel the realization of the parable flowing through the audience. Jesus is the Son, who is the Messiah, who is rejected by the priests. The priests were building the nation of God but would not accept Jesus who in fact is the

corner stone. None of their scheming and planning could change God’s will. Jesus was to become the corner stone in the very near future and this was “from the Lord.” They did not realize how their actions in the crucifixion would be God’s will.

Jesus said the “Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it” (v. 43). This was a very hard statement indicating God’s judgment on the priests and the nation. They would no longer be God’s chosen nation—they broke the covenant. The multitude present surely understood because they said, “may it never be” (Luke 20:16). But it *was* about to happen. God’s kingdom was about to change. Some would fall on “this stone” and “be broken to pieces,” and on some it will fall, and “it will scatter him like dust” (v. 44). Those who stumble on “the stone” (Jesus) will be broken and those who Jesus falls upon in judgment will be destroyed.

### Conclusion

Of all the parables of Jesus, this one contains more indications of his true identity, his true purpose, and his future than most any other parable. The multitude understood the parable, the priests and scribes did, and hopefully we do as well.

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### “Two Builders” continued from front page

heard and obeyed will be saved. “Blessed are they that *do his commandments*, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14). Their souls have been built upon a rock foundation. Those who have heard but not obeyed will be lost. “But unto them that are contentious, and *do not obey the truth*, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath” (Rom. 2:8). Their souls, their lives, were built upon sands of disobedience to the will of God.

### The Obedient Builder

Not everyone can build a material house. I could not. However, any man (“whosoever”) can be a wise man, a wise builder (Matt. 7:24). The wise man of the parable is the one who does three things (Luke 6:47). (1) He comes to Christ, not to Mohammed or Joseph Smith. (2) He hears the word of Christ, not the words of men (John 5:24, 25; 12:48). (3) He obeys the word of Christ. The blessed believer and the wise builder have that in common. They obey the word which they have heard. In that famous “Golden Text” of the Bible, John 3:16, the believer who will not perish but have everlasting life is the one who “doeth truth” (John 6:21). John 8:51 is the echo of John 3:16, 21, “If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death” (cf. John 14:15, 21-23; 15:10).

John unmasks all foolish builders as those who will hear but do not keep or obey the word of God. “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (1 John 2:3-5).

Members of denominational churches, Protestants and Catholics, tell us how much they love the Lord. When we show them the gospel plan and pattern of salvation, when we show them the correct form and nature of true worship, or when we show them the organization of the church in the New Testament, they tell us that we are too intent on dotting every “i” and crossing every “t.” What they mean is that it does not matter whether baptism is sprinkling or immersion; it does not matter if we sing with a piano or an organ; it does not make any difference whether we take the Lord’s supper every Sunday, or whether we have “one Pastor” or two or more. “Just so we love the Lord, that’s all that matters,” they say. When they do this, they contradict the word of Christ as recorded by John above. Too, they identify themselves as foolish builders, building their instruments and institutions upon foundations of sand.

To be wise builders, all men must build upon the rock by hearing and obeying the word of Christ as it is outlined and defined in the New Testament.

James says, “But *be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only*, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (Jas. 1:22-25). Thus, the foolish builder, the one who hears but does not obey, is a liar who deceives himself.

Note, the words, “if any,” that is any person, every person. All who hear and obey are blessed in their deeds. All who hear but do not obey shall see their construction fall and be destroyed.

This rule of John and James encompasses every aspect of our lives. Whether we be one who seeks to enter the kingdom or one who is striving to live in the kingdom, hearing and obeying the word of God is the signal difference between the wise and the foolish builder. This is clearly set forth in the words immediately preceding the parable of the two builders.

In Matthew 7:13-15, Jesus spoke of the strait and narrow way which leads to life and of the wide and broad way

which leads to destruction. In verse 15, he warned of “false prophets” who were savage wolves disguised as sheep. One must hear the truth, and only the truth, if he would be saved (John 8:32; 17:17). To be led by the doctrines and commandments of men is to fall prey to the wolf, the false prophet, and not to hear the truth. To go in the narrow way is to hear and obey the truth and to be a wise builder. To go in the broad way is not to obey the truth and to be a foolish builder.

Immediately following in verses 21-23, the Lord spoke of those who will and those who will not enter the kingdom of heaven. What was the determining standard? It was whether or not one would not only hear but also heed the word of God. Not every one who says, “Lord, Lord,” not every one who proclaims his love for the Lord, but “he that doeth the will of my Father,” this is the one, the only one, who shall enter the kingdom. Again, in context, we meet the wise and the foolish builder.

### Upon What Are We Building?

More properly, upon *whom* are we building? Our building is to be upon him who is the tried stone, a sure foundation (Isa. 28:14-16; Acts 4:11; 1 Cor. 3:11). Having said that, the question remains before us, “upon what are we building?”

Remember, the builder who hears and obeys the word of God is building upon the rock. Are our lives conformed to the world, to its image, to its style? They will not be if we have heard and obeyed the word of the Lord with respect to living godly lives. Christians cannot be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2; 1 John 2:15-17). When they are, they hear the word and do it not and are condemned as foolish builders. When disciples drink, dress, dance, and divorce like the world, they are hearing and doing not. They are building upon the sand. When the trials and tempests of life arise and beat upon that house, or that life, its ruin will be total and complete.

Too often, members of the Lord’s body are content to be seen as wise builders because they diligently and earnestly have followed the pattern of truth to become children of God. Some never progress beyond this point. Do we not know that we must then continue to hear and obey, that we must deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Tit. 2:11-14)? The wise builder lives after the Spirit, in accordance with the Spirit’s teaching, doing the will of God (Gal. 5:16-26). The foolish builder lives after the flesh, in accordance with the desires of the flesh; he hears but does not do the will of God.

When bitter hearts and biting tongues haunt and taunt their brethren, they become foolish builders, for they have heard the word of God which says to follow peace with all

men, but they have not obeyed it (Heb. 12:14). How we treat others is how we treat Christ (Matt. 25:34-45). How we love others is how we love Christ; how we mistreat others is how we mistreat him (1 Cor. 8:12).

By adding to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love, we are growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 1:5-11; 3:18). If we are not so growing, we are foolish builders. We have heard what God expects of us personally, and we have known how he wants us to treat our brethren, but we not done it. We have let our tongue and our temper control us in the home, if not "at church." As such, we are foolish builders whose homes and souls shall come to ultimate and eternal ruin. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Jas. 4:17).

### Conclusion

The parable of the two builders is a fitting climax for the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. The whole sermon was based upon the blessedness of those who would hear and obey the Lord as opposed to those who would be brought to ruin by refusing to obey him whom they had heard speak with the power and authority of heaven.

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### "Chief Seats" continued from page 2

When Jesus began his preaching ministry in his hometown of Nazareth in Galilee, "all they in the synagogue" who heard his claims and rebukes "were filled with wrath" and attempted to kill him (Luke 4:28). The scribes and Pharisees considered him a blasphemer, as recorded in chapter 5 (v. 21). As Jesus repeated his claims and rebuked the religious leaders for their man-made traditions, these leaders watched him with malice in seeking some ground to make "an accusation against him" (v. 7). When he exposed their false teaching and hypocrisy, "they were filled with madness," fury, or violent rage (v. 11).

This battle between Jesus and the religious leaders continued throughout his ministry and culminated in their maliciously and successfully maneuvering to have him crucified. This ongoing battle is reflected in Luke 14, and the parables of the chief seats and of the great supper were taught in the heat of this battle.

### Prelude to the Parables: An Ambush Prepared and Routed (Luke 14:1-6)

In confirming the truth of his claims, Jesus healed people on the Sabbath day the same as any other day. This was

particularly a sore spot with the religious leaders because it violated their human traditions. Yet, every time they protested he put them to shame by exposing their false teaching and hypocrisy (Luke 6:6-12; 13:11-17). Burning with indignation and humiliation, they prepared an ambush for him by inviting him to a meal on the Sabbath day, baiting him to heal a man with dropsy who would also be present (14:1-6). A leading Pharisee, likely a member of the Sanhedrin court, hosted this Sabbath meal.

Why were the Jewish leaders so adamantly, stubbornly, blindly opposed to Jesus? They held preconceived ideas about the kingdom of God being an earthly, political government. Jesus did not meet their expectations of a fierce commander who would raise an army, drive out the Romans, and establish a civil government more glorious than all others. Also, Jesus did not bow to their human traditions or to their inflated sense of self-importance. In fact, rather than flattering them, he contrasted the truth of God's word with their false doctrines and exposed their hypocrisy, embarrassing and humiliating them before the people. To make matters worse, the common people saw the truth of Jesus' teaching and the folly of their own leaders' errors. "And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed [humiliated, confounded, disgraced]: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him" (13:17).

In short, pride, envy, and stubbornness blinded the minds of the Jewish leaders. They could not and would not see the truth of Jesus' teaching. Their pride, envy, and stubbornness dictated that they resist Jesus, entrap Jesus, embarrass Jesus, and destroy his influence among the people. This egotistical, selfish attitude was the root of their enmity against Jesus, and would lead them to murder him at Calvary. This attitude would prevent men from entering the kingdom of God.

In an effort to save men, Jesus repeatedly taught that humility of character is essential for men to enter the way of salvation, the kingdom of God. Just as consistently as Jesus urged this lesson, the Jewish leaders resented and resisted it. This explains the ambush they set and the parables Jesus taught in response in Luke 14.

Jesus walked into this ambush with his eyes open. Seeing the man in need of healing, Jesus first answered the thoughts of his enemies by asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" If they said *yes*, they certified the ministry of Jesus as true, and if they said *no*, they would involve themselves "in an argument with him in which, as experience taught them, they would be humiliated before the people." Christ having made them the victims of their own ambush, they simply starred in stony silence. "Their silence only justified him," thus intensifying their misery and malice (J.W. McGarvey, *The Fourfold Gospel* 493).



Jesus rescued the suffering man from dropsy, then highlighted the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders by pointing out that they rescued animals from pits or wells into which they fell on the Sabbath day. “And they could not answer him again to these things” (v. 6). Their ambush was routed.

#### **The Parable of the Chief Seats (Luke 14:7-11)**

The lawyers and Pharisees had closely watched Jesus in hopes of accusing him of violating the fourth commandment in the decalogue. The Master Teacher turned the tables. He marked well how these very men elevated themselves by choosing the seats reserved for the most honorable guests, thus revealing their character of pride and arrogance. Jesus broke the silence of his would-be accusers by presenting a parable which convicted them of their sinful pride.

Jesus said when a man is invited to a wedding feast, let him not take the highest seat lest the host ask him to make way for someone more honorable, but rather take the seat of the humble, and the host may invite him to a higher seat when appropriate. “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Humility of character is its own reward. Both God and man honor such character.

The parable, such a simple story teaching such evident truth, could not be deflected. It exposed the wicked hearts of his enemies, but in a way which pointed them to the truth, if only they would seek and accept the truth. In seeking to prepare men’s hearts for the kingdom of God, Jesus taught over and over this incisive lesson that *humility of character is essential in God’s kingdom*. Again and again, the Jewish leaders were embarrassed, stung, and enraged by this message because *it laid bare their pride and pretensions* (Luke 11:43, 45). In parable after parable, Jesus exposed their hypocrisy in professing to love the truth while rejecting the teaching of the prophets and of the Son of God, and they knew his words were directed “against them” (Luke 20:19-20).

#### **Another Application (Luke 14:12-14)**

Jesus directed another application of the theme of humility to the host of the feast. Men animated by pride and ego serve others only to advance their own interest, reputation, and importance. They give primarily in the hope of getting, rather than humbly sacrificing to help people who have nothing to offer in return. Jesus instructed that feasts ought not be prepared only for those who prosper and are able to reciprocate, but also for those whose lot in life is poverty and suffering: “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.” Again the point is made that humility of heart is its own reward. Those who focus on serving others rather than being served find the joys of fellowship with God in his kingdom, and “shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.”

#### **The Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24)**

Jesus had now utilized a parable based on meals to which guests are invited to teach his constant lesson on the character essential in God’s coming kingdom. He had directed his discourse to both the guests and the host at the Sabbath meal in the Jewish ruler’s home. One of the guests, understanding that Jesus spoke in the context not of social ethics or etiquette but of the coming kingdom, remarked, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.” This reflects the pride and prejudice of the Jewish leaders who imagined that all Jews, and especially *themselves* as leaders, were destined by their Jewish birth to enter the kingdom envisioned as a civil government. “The Jews believed that the kingdom of the Messiah would be ushered in with a magnificent festival, at which all the members of the Jewish families should be guests” (H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* 286).

Jesus responds by driving home and driving hard the lesson that the kingdom of God is like a feast to which many are invited but few come. The response to the invitation of God reveals the true character of men. Character is essential because the kingdom is spiritual not civil in nature. The clear point of the parable is that *only men of true, genuine humility will enter the kingdom and share its blessings*.

The great supper is planned by a wealthy member of the nobility among the Jews, who honored many friends and nobles by inviting them and who expected to be rightly honored by their presence. When messengers informed the intended guests that “all things are now ready,” these who should have shown a noble character offered ignoble excuses. Blinded by self-importance and self-interest, “they all exhibited an utter contempt for the honor done them, and showed their preference to things of comparatively trivial importance” (Boles 287). Their sense of priorities made the great supper secondary to other pursuits.

All made excuses revealing the same character: *They elevated themselves above the host who prepared the great supper*. Each man had obtained valuable blessings before receiving the invitation: one, a piece of land; the next, a yoke of oxen; and another, a wife.

The first man put his land and possessions above the invitation of the host. He excused himself so that he could examine a piece of land he had bought. He certainly did not buy the land sight unseen, and he easily could have postponed the follow-up examination.

The second man likewise valued his business interests above the invitation. He begged off to test the performance of five yoke of oxen he had purchased. No man buys oxen without first testing them, but he found greater satisfaction in re-examining their prowess and envisioning his profit than in honoring the host of the feast.

The third man pled off for the sake of domestic duties, having married a wife. “Attendance on the feast did not entail the violation of any duty arising out of his new relation, but simply the holding it of inferior importance on a given occasion” (Boles 288).

The people invited felt justified by their excuses because they loved and honored themselves above the host, and thus they were unconscious of the insult conveyed to him by their excuses. The wounded, angered host instructed his servants to invite “the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.” He looked beyond the circle of the prosperous, ruling classes to those of the most humble station in life among the Jews. Seeing there was room remaining still, the host sent his servants to urgently invite any and all passing in the streets and even the dirt paths by the hedges to come to the feast. How shocking, for this would include all classes of people, even Gentiles!

The host concluded his summons: “For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

“Those men which were bidden” but refused to come to the feast fit exactly the profile of the lawyers and Pharisees sitting at the Sabbath meal. The message rang clear and loud: “You men are expecting chief offices and extravagant feasting in the coming kingdom, but in fact your pride precludes you from understanding or entering into that kingdom.” There is no question the arrow hit its mark. By the use of parables, the Master Teacher was simple and deft in approach, but he was not “non-confrontational.” How these proud, pampered religious leaders must have burned with resentment and squirmed in their seats. How relieved they must have been to leave this meal. And, the time was drawing near when they would finalize a plan to murder the Master Teacher, the Son of God, their own Savior—because of their blind pride, from which Jesus was trying to save them.

Yes, many are invited to enter the kingdom of God, but *only* people of humble character may enter the joys of this kingdom, and *all* people of humble character may enter.

### Summary: Parables Focused on Humility of Character

In summary, Jesus focused on humility of character in Luke 14. *In verses 1-6*, the stage is set by the ungodly character of the Jewish religious leaders who prepared an ambush. They are characterized by pride, envy, and stubbornness. *In verses 7-11*, Jesus directs the parable of the chief seats to guests gathered in the Pharisee’s house. The point of the parable is that God blesses people who are humble in character, not those who seek to elevate themselves. *In verses 12-14*, Jesus addresses another application

from the parable to the host. Humble character is reflected in unselfish service to those in need, not in giving to those who are full with the prospect of reaping reciprocal gain, thus advancing and elevating the self-interest of the giver. *In verses 15-24*, Jesus teaches the parable of the great supper to all who were present, driving home the lesson that only people of humble character may enter the way of salvation, the kingdom of God.

The parables of the chief seats and of the great supper are not lessons on social etiquette. They teach the humble character necessary to enter the kingdom of God. May God help us to be people of such character!

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## Quips & Quotes

### Church at Affton, Missouri

The church which has for the past thirty some years met at 6915 Weber Rd. in Affton, a suburb of St. Louis (and before that at Spring and Blaine in St. Louis) is being forced by circumstances to relocate to 9700 Mackenzie Rd. in Affton, about two or so miles away from the present location. It is just a mile or so off of I-55, using the Reavis Barracks Rd. exit. The first date in the new location was Sunday, July 17, 2005. The times of services (Sunday at 9:00 a.m. for Bible study, 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. for worship, and Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. for Bible study) and the phone number (314-842-1612) remain the same. Wayne S. Walker (314-638-4710, wswalker310@juno.com).

### New Congregation

A new congregation has been established in Norman, Oklahoma. Their present meeting place is just off I-35 and approximately four miles north of the Oklahoma University campus. They invite you to join them and encourage this new effort if you are in the area. Contacts: Tony Ripley: 405-872-7280 or Larry Sanders: 405-794-7348.

### 100 With Rainbow Sashes are Denied Communion

“St. Paul, Minn. — A Roman Catholic priest denied communion to more than 100 people Sunday, saying they could not receive the sacrament because they wore rainbow-colored sashes to church to show support for gay Catholics.

“Before offering communion, the Rev. Michael Sklucazek told the congregation at the Cathedral of St. Paul that anyone wearing a sash could come forward for a blessing but would not receive wine and bread.

A group called the Rainbow Sash Alliance has encouraged supporters to wear the multi-colored fabric bands since 2001 on each Pentecost Sunday, the day Catholics believe the Holy Spirit came to give power to Christians soon after Jesus ascended to heaven. But Sunday's Service was the first time they had been denied communion at the altar" (*The Indianapolis Star* [May 16, 2005], A4).

### **Court to Decide if Parents Can Sue For "Wrongful Birth"**

"Columbus — The Ohio Supreme Court is considering whether parents should be able to sue their doctors if a genetic screening misses a greatly disabling or fatal condition that would have caused the parents to seek an abortion had it been discovered.

"A handful of states allow so called 'wrongful birth' claims brought by parents seeking compensation for the emotional trauma of watching a baby die shortly after birth or the financial burden of caring for a severely disabled child.

"Ohio and several other states have rejected a different type of claim, called 'wrongful life,' in which the disabled child is the plaintiff, but Ohio's justices have never decided on wrongful birth" (*Dayton Daily News* [April 15, 2005], A5).

### **Pope Says Condom Use Wrong in Fighting HIV/AIDS**

"Vatican City — In a speech to bishops from five African countries on Friday, Pope Benedict XVI attacked the use of condoms to fight HIV and AIDS, his first comments on the disease, saying the Roman Catholic Church was leading the fight against the epidemic by teaching chastity and fidelity" (*The Indianapolis Star* [June 11, 2005], A9).

### **Gay, Lesbian Ordinations Recommended**

"Milwaukee — The Greater Milwaukee Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has passed a resolution recommending the denomination's top legislative body permit ordination for gays and lesbians in committed relationships.

"The resolution is one of up to 65 that are expected to be delivered to the church's assembly, which in August will consider whether to bless same-sex unions or allow gays to serve as pastors, associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers.

"The issue of what role gays should play in church leadership has been debated for years in the ELCA and other Protestant denominations. Church policy currently bars sexually active gays and lesbians from being ordained; those who are celibate are allowed to become ministers" (*The Indianapolis Star* [June 11, 2005], B3).

### **Church Committee Passes Same-Sex Marriage Ruling**

"Atlanta — A committee of United Church of Christ repre-

sentatives approved a resolution Sunday that moves the church one step closer to becoming the largest Christian denomination to endorse same-sex marriage.

"The resolution supported by the UCC's president, John H. Thomas, drew overwhelming support and was recommended for approval when the General Synod votes on it today.

"It would specify that bisexual and transgender persons merit the same support and protections as gays and lesbians. The wording was revised Sunday, however, to include the 'recognition that this resolution may not reflect the views or current understanding of all bodies within the gathered church'" (*The Indianapolis Star* [July 4, 2005], A4).

## **Field Reports**

### **Searcy, Arkansas**

Much good work has been done in the Lord's kingdom over the last few weeks in Searcy, Arkansas. After over thirty years of work in a church building at 900 West McRae Avenue, the Central Church of Christ has moved to a new facility across from the Searcy Municipal Airport. The new address will be 1100 Airport Loop Road, Searcy, AR 72143, phone (501) 268-2160. The church will now be known as the Church of Christ at Airport Loop.

The Lord seems to have opened several doors for the church. Having outgrown its previous facility, one of the members heard about a church building for sale, priced well below the appraised value. The building had been occupied by a denominational church which had apparently split since their move. Thus, they needed a smaller building. So, in an unusual move, the two churches "swapped" buildings, taking even more off of the price of the denominational church's building. And, so, the church moved into its "new" building (it was built in 2001) in June.

Also, just a few weeks before the move to the new building, elders were appointed. Jim Marsh, Tim Norman, and David Stracener are now serving the church as elders. Tim Norman also serves ably as the preacher for the congregation. The church had been without elders since February 2004 when Truman Hale, one of two elders at the time, passed away suddenly. Deacons have since been appointed, and the future looks bright for the church. It just goes to show, in a town satiated with Harding University and numerous institutional churches, that the Lord's church can grow by "seeking the old paths." The Elders at Airport Loop.





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