

The Parables and their Meanings

1. 1. Lamp under a basket

He said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light."

(Mark 4, 21 – 22 NRSV)

See also Matthew 5: 14 – 16, Luke 8: 16 – 17 & 11: 33 – 36

Jesus is talking about his teaching. That it should be broadcast to everybody and not just kept to those listening to him (his disciples). It can also be carried a stage further, that the light represents his word and the truths. The bushel basket can carry many things, good sweet fruit, grain, fresh caught fish, so many varying items and is indicative of many things we all get caught up with in our busy lives. We have our businesses and work as well as all our enjoyable leisure activities and sports, in fact everything that we put more credence in when we could be using everything in our basket of life to pass on his word.

The bed is our place of comfort and can be thought of to represent the laziness of not wanting to carry out his wishes in spreading his word. It is so much easier to sit back and do nothing.

So what Jesus is telling us, is to not hide his and God's message but to use all means available to us to pass it on so that everyone is aware.

2. A Wiseman builds on a Rock and a Fool on Sand

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!"

(Matthew 7: 24 – 27 NRSV)

See also Luke 6: 47 – 49

Jesus is saying that we shouldn't just hear his word and do nothing but that we should set our very lives around it. The wiseman is the one who by being obedient to his words, which are really a set of instructions to the way we should live our lives and carry them out, comes to Christ's salvation and will build his life on true Christianity. This doesn't mean that he won't experience any of life's trials and tribulations but he will have built his life so firmly that he will stand resolute and will reach that promised salvation.

To listen and yet do nothing is the way of the foolish man. For should he be hit by life's problems he would take the easy way out and not go through the narrow gate that Jesus speaks about (Matthew 7: 13 – 14) but will take the wide gate and get lost, not reaching his final salvation.

So, does the house falling represent the final divine judgement? I think so.

3. New Cloth on an Old Garment

“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made.”

(Matthew 9: 16 NRSV)

See also Mark 2: 21 & Luke 5: 36

Jesus is saying that you can't practise true Christianity whilst still following older religions, the two don't work together. At this time Jesus probably meant the older forms of the Jewish economy but it could also mean that if you bow down to idols, you can't expect to have Jesus and our true God waiting in the wings.

The ancient idols of yesterday can now have various forms and don't necessarily mean some stupid statue carved from stone or even gold, no matter its worth but can mean the everyday things we worship today from football, to television and just about everything in between.

4. New Wine in Old Wineskins

“Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

(Matthew 9: 17 NRSV)

See also Mark 2: 22 & Luke 5: 37 - 39

This is to reinforce the previous parable. Jesus came to bring in a new dispensation which would not fit in with the old for he came to bring us a new form of religion, full of joy and fulfilment which needed to be able to express itself. Gone was the time of the Old Testament, the preparation for the new, with all of its sorrow and its fasting, this was the new.

5. The Sower

And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!”

(Matthew 13: 3 – 9)

See also Mark 4: 2 – 9 & Luke 8: 4 – 8

This passage starts off by saying 'He told them many things in parables.' This was a common way of teaching in the Near East and Jesus adopted it becoming very expert in its method. It is also possible that Jesus taught in parables to hide the truth about both himself and the kingdom of heaven from those who refused to believe and just taunted him but would reveal all to those who carefully considered his word.

Jesus explains this parable himself in Matthew 13: 18 - 23, Luke 8: 110 and Mark 4: 13 - 20

Some of the seeds fell on the path and the birds came and ate them; many truths that Jesus told were scorned by those who thought they knew better and so were killed off in the minds of others. Was Jesus also thinking of those sent by the devil to put his ministry into jeopardy I wonder? Don't we still hear the 'Mickey takers' today?

Some of the seeds fell where there was little soil and sprang up quickly but soon died off. These were those who were highly enthusiastic and took up his challenges for something new but as soon the going got tough lost interest and found something else to occupy their minds.

Others fell in thorns and the thorns grew and choked them. These were the people who just weren't in the least bit interested, they had their own ideas of what they wanted for themselves and soon forget about the words that Jesus spoke. But by some the truth was listened to, deeply digested and passed on to others spreading the word. The seed that fell on the good soil is what has made Christianity so strong in the world today.

6. The Weeds (Tares) in the Wheat

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.' "

(Matthew 13: 24 – 30 NSRV)

This is a warning that during its growth, Christianity will spread throughout the World unchecked, and amongst the true converts and true believers some will use it as a cover and hide their true beliefs.

The most common tare found in grain fields in the Holy Land is bearded darnel, a grass poisonous to humans and almost indistinguishable from wheat while the two are growing into blade. But when they come into ear, they can be separated without difficulty.

But why were the workers told to wait until the harvest before pulling the weeds? This is because by pulling out the weeds before harvest, the roots would be entangled with those of the wheat, ruining both. By waiting the two can be separated easily.

If someone were to ask, 'Is the World now a better place to live in?' the answer could be yes, because in many ways it is because for so many living standards have improved, on the other hand that same person could ask if it were worse. The answer could again be yes, because in many ways it is.

We've thought up more and more ways to kill more and more people at a time and we regularly only think of ourselves when other people could do with our help. The full meaning of the parable is solved by Jesus himself in Matthew 13: 37 – 43, the harvest will be a harvest of souls when Jesus returns.

7. The Mustard Seed

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

(Matthew 13: 31 – 32 NRSV)

See also Mark 4: 30 – 32 & Luke 13: 18 – 19

At the time, the mustard seed was the smallest known seed measuring about 1mm in diameter but left to its own devices the ensuing plant, whilst is really a shrub, can emulate a tree and grow three metres tall.

Jesus was referring to himself as the sower of the seed and that by his word, like the mustard seed, the kingdom would grow. But he also said that birds would come and nest in it. A very nice thought, unless you regard those birds as the agents of the devil then the whole context changes. He has mentioned birds with this connection before. The birds that ate the seed on the pathway.

8. The Yeast

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

(Matthew 13: 33 NRSV)

See also Luke 13: 20 – 21

The common conception is that Jesus is talking about the world and just a small proportion of his truth is needed to spread throughout the whole world and save everyone. However, further thought on this reveals that at the time Jesus told this parable, leaven was considered evil. Don't forget God commanded his people to rid their houses of leaven (Ex. 12:15). So this parable after this further thought reveals that it is warning about the powers of evil that the devil can develop in the Kingdom of God.

Referring back to parable of the mustard seed, the birds in the trees can represent the evil on the outside of the Kingdom and the yeast can represent the evil on the inside. In other words, we should always be on our guard.

9. The Hidden Treasure

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

(Matthew 13: 44 NRSV)

I believe that the treasure is Jesus himself and the joyous person is someone who found him and gave up all that he had to follow him and that is what we all should do.

Selling all that he had is not literally selling everything but is a metaphor for putting away distractions when we should listen to what God is trying to tell us.

10. The Pearl of Great Price

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

(Matthew 13: 45 - 46 NRSV)

At first glance, this parable is like ‘The Hidden Treasure’ but there is a slight difference. The treasure was found by accident, the pearl by searching. The metaphor this time is that you can seek out God's love. You don't necessarily come across it by accident. Many people today actively seek God out but once you have found him you need to put him before all else.

11. The Dragnet

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the

age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

(Matthew 13: 47 - 50 NRSV)

This is telling us that it is not up to us to judge others. Many people of different nationalities with so many differing religions will allow others to believe that theirs is the true belief but we must not judge them. We are told here that the angels of the Lord only, will sit in judgment and only those found worthy will be allowed to join our Lord. Others will be discarded. To the furnace?

Just an idea to conjure with, older testaments said the end of the world not the end of the age. It is generally thought that by this, that at that time they meant when Jesus returns again. But Jesus is the son of God, so what if those testaments are correct, that when Jesus returns our world will be no more and those not worthy will not be taken with him but will remain here to face destruction.

12. The Householder

And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

(Matthew 13: 52 NRSV)

Jesus spoke this parable after his disciples said that had understood his preceding parables and was a direct instruction to them that they like a householder showing off his home, should teach others not only about him and his word but also what went before (the Old Testament). I believe that it is also an instruction to all of the Christian faith, that the truth should be shared and not kept hidden in the dark depths of our own minds.

13. The Lost Sheep

What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

(Matthew 18: 12 - 14 NRSV)

See also Luke 15: 3 - 7

The shepherd in the Middle East was responsible to his master for all the sheep under his care and woe and betide him should one get injured or lost. Jesus is saying that we are all God's children, his little ones, and those responsible for our spiritual care have the same sort of responsibility for us.

Should one spiritually fall out of the fold then the carer is responsible for nurturing and bringing that person back. In this same way, we are each responsible for one another and should one person lose his/her way, it is our responsibility to bring him/her back into safety.

14. The Unforgiving Servant

For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

(Matthew 18: 23 - 35 NRSV)

We are all sinners and God is that king who, if we truly repent will forgive us our debt of sins. But in return no matter how difficult it may seem, we must forgive those who sin against us. Recently a policeman was shot in Northumberland and blinded. He has said he holds no malice against the man who shot him. That is true forgiveness. A mother whose son was murdered forgave the person who stabbed him. That also was true forgiveness. We are not asked to forget, all we are told is that if we want eternal forgiveness, then we in our part must forgive those who have transgressed our lives. This is God's law if and to transgress it by not forgiving others must mean that we are setting ourselves up against God and making mini gods of ourselves.

15. The Workers in the Vineyard

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three

o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

(Matthew 20: 1 - 16 NRSV)

There is a very subtle difference in the way the master employed his workforce. Notice, that with first set of workers he employed, he agreed a daily wage. The next batch, at 9 o'clock, he told them go to the vineyard and he'd pay them what is right. At noon and 3 o'clock he did the same. At 5 o'clock he saw more labourers and just told them to go to the vineyard with no mention of wages. Then in the evening he told his paymaster to pay the men starting with those who he hired last. These he paid the amount of money he'd agreed with the first to be hired, so imagine, those waiting for their pay must have started rubbing their hands with glee, thinking that they would get more, but no. The next batch got the same and so did those hired at noon, and 9 o'clock and when the first hired got their pay and found it to be exactly the same they must have been really angry. Why should they work hard all day and yet receive only the same as those who had been working for only about an hour? It just wasn't fair and they made their position clear to the master. But the master merely told them that he'd agreed a fair day's wage with them before they started and that was what he had paid them. I bet they chuntered.

Now substitute God for the master and those of us here on his mortal coil as the workers. What do you expect when he calls you to glory. You've been a good Christian for many years and always been on hand to help those less fortunate than yourself. Should you be allowed to sit nearer to Him at His table than that character down the road who only found him a few days before he was called? God says NO! Everybody in his eyes are equal, the only qualification to sitting at his table at all is that you show true belief and follow him. We are all equal and will all be paid the same.

16. The Two Sons

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the

same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

(Matthew 21: 28 - 32 NRSV)

Jesus told this parable to the chief priests and elders as a stinging rebuke to their pious ways and in not following John the Baptist. Whilst they professed to approve of John's preaching, they didn't repent of their sins nor put their trust in the Saviour. But as Jesus said, the recently called sinner would immediately repent and be more worthy of a place in heaven than them. It is the same today, so many people outwardly follow his word and profess regularly that they will do his will but the spirit is weak when it comes to putting him before themselves, "Mrs. So and So is ill along the road, I'll go and see her tomorrow, she could do with some cheering up." But tomorrow doesn't always come and Mrs. So and So can sit there waiting. Then there's the busy person, "I'd like to see her but I'm too busy." Then sits and thinks about her all alone and pays a visit maybe just to say a quick hello. That person has found time for the will of God in his busy life.

17. The Wicked Tenants

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

(Matthew 21: 33 - 44 NRSV)

See also Mark 12: 1 – 11 & Luke 20: 9 – 18

This parable is fairly complex but has immense meaning. The landowner was God with the vineyard being his nation. The tenants were the leaders of the nation and the slaves, his servants. The son was Jesus himself and this parable was to tell the Church elders that he knew what they were planning and what would happen to himself, that they were in fact planning his death.

It also told them that God would give the kingdom of God to the nations that followed him.

It can also be seen as a foretelling of his second coming. The builders rejected the stone (Jesus) which became the cornerstone. Those who fall on this stone will be broken into pieces and it will crush anyone on whom it falls (his second coming)!

Looking at these words even more closely; initially the stone is on the ground ready for people to stumble over it (his first coming) but the second mention is that it will crush anyone on whom it falls, meaning it will be coming down in judgment.

18. The Wedding Feast

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

(Matthew 22: 2 - 14 NRSV)

See also Luke 14: 16 – 24

In Matthew's version, the feast is a wedding feast and in the version written by Luke it is purely a feast given by some unknown man. Some say that in Matthew's version, the king is God, the son is Jesus and his church is the bride but in reality the reason for the feast is of no significance. It is purely that for some reason the man gave a feast and sent out invitations but one by one they were rejected. Isn't that how life is, we have the opportunity to serve God but so many of us find excuses, we have other, to us, more important things to do.

In Matthew, after all the initial rejections, the man told his slaves to try again by telling of the feast that had been prepared but again many rejected his invitations, some even murdered the slaves. The man sent his troops and killed them. How many of us reject God's invitations more than once?

The man then sent his slaves into the streets to round up all they could find and yes they filled the hall. But as Matthew said one man hadn't bothered to wear his wedding robes. In the Middle East at that time it was etiquette to wear a special robe for a wedding feast and it would have been usual for those not having such robes to be given them on entry. So this man purposefully rejected the wedding robe and he was thrown out into the darkness.

The most significant part of this parable are the last few lines; 'For many are called, but few are chosen.' Everybody is given the chance to enter God's kingdom but we must take up the offer and we must prove that we are worthy to remain there, in other words wear his robes.

19. The Fig Tree

"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

(Matthew 24: 32 - 35 NRSV)

See also Mark 13: 28 -31 & Luke 21: 29 – 33

Buds are a sign of things to come and Jesus wasn't just pointing out the show of outward growth of the fig tree he was actually telling of the second coming, the summer, for it goes on to say 'that he is near, at the very gates', but when?

He says within 'this generation' but again what did he mean by this. Did he mean all the while the Jewish nation were hostile towards him, the generation that were alive at the time or did he mean the length of time the earth and our solar system exists? The clue may exist in the last sentence. 'Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not.' Surely this is alluding to the ending of our world as we know it.

20. The Ten Bridesmaids (also known as The Ten Virgins)

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not

be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

(Matthew 25: 1 - 13 NRSV)

Substitute Jesus as the bridegroom and the parable will begin to make sense.

Again it is about his second coming. There were ten of them, Jesus called them bridesmaids but it could be any of us, all had lamps to light the way.

Many times Jesus is referred to as the light of the world as is the truth but notice the significant part. Only five took oil with them, the others didn't have just a little bit, they had none at all. Many times in the Bible we read about oil with its holy and religious implications and so this is the sign that five had accepted the Holy Spirit whilst the other five had not. The girls fell asleep and when they woke up it was dark. The five with oil trimmed and lit their lamps ready to go with the groom but the others couldn't and had to go and get some oil. The groom arrived, the remaining girls took him to the wedding feast and he locked the door behind them. When the other five arrived he wouldn't let them in.

Think of the second coming. Jesus comes to us where we show that we are followers, we all have our lamps to greet him, but hang on a minute, some of the lamps aren't lit, there's nothing behind our facade. We've no oil, we've not received the Holy Spirit. We're left behind.

21. The Talents

For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and

lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

(Matthew 25: 14 - 30 NRSV)

See also Luke 19: 11 – 22

First off what is or was a talent? A talent was a sum of money worth about six thousand denarii and according to Matthew 20: 2, a denarius represented the day's wage for a typical working man. So a talent was a heck of a lot of money to trust anyone with, the man was either a fool or a very trusting sort of character.

Just a minute though, let's look at this a bit closer, we all have a wealth of spiritual gifts inside us, hidden talents. What are we doing with them? This parable again is about Jesus second coming. Jesus is that man, our master. He has gone away but we have been entrusted with immense spiritual gifts some with more, some with less but it's up to us what to do with them.

You will notice that when the master came back, the first two had doubled their talents. Though one had ended up with more, he didn't promise more but promised equal. The third slave had done nothing with it. He said that he had buried it to keep it safe. He hadn't even banked it to earn interest. Not only that, he started berating his master to cover his own laziness. The master threw him out into the outer darkness and gave his one talent to the slave who had earned the extra five.

The moral of this story is that you must make use of all the spiritual gifts that you've been given, don't hide them away and say it's nothing to do with you.

God has left us in sole charge whilst his son is away, so use your own gifts and just show him what you can do for him. Don't end up with nothing.

22. The Growing Seed

He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

(Mark 4: 26 – 29 NRSV)

It is interesting that Mark for all his brevity is the only one to record this parable. Imagine Jesus as the scatterer of the seeds as he did with his few years of mission scattering seeds of truth. Some carefully sown, others sown almost randomly, and those few seeds gradually grew. He was made to leave us but the seeds of his mission grew stronger and stronger, not just through

the few towns and villages that he visited but throughout the whole world, a world of true believers. But then the plants ripen and along comes the harvester, a harvest to be taken to the heavenly store. Again this could be taken as a hint of the second coming.

23. The Watchful Porter

Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

(Mark 13: 33 – 37 NRSV)

Jesus is likening himself to a traveller who puts his servants in charge of his house and estate and is telling us that we must all be vigilant because we won't know when he will return until he arrives. Note the 'each with his work' statement, Jesus is expecting us to do our duty by him in his absence. And the 'Keep awake' statement is a warning for even the stoutest of believers don't in themselves have sufficient resources to be alert to all spiritual dangers.

24. The Creditor and the Two Debtors

“A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.” And Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.”

(Luke 7: 41 – 43 NRSV)

This parable was spoken after 'a sinful woman' had washed his feet in a Pharisee's house. There is no proof but it is often believed that the sinful woman was Mary Magdalene. Whilst Simon hadn't (we believe) complained loudly about this, Jesus obviously recognized the expression on his face and told this parable to bring it home to Simon that everybody had a debt of sin and just because one person's sin was greater than another, forgiveness should be given to all.

25. The Good Samaritan

Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came

to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

(Luke 10: 30 – 37 NRSV)

This whilst only to be found in St. Luke's Gospel is possibly one of the best known parables of all and follows on from a question set to Jesus by a lawyer.

"Who is my neighbour?"

A man, most likely a Jew, was robbed and beaten up in the road. Along came a Jewish priest and passed by, probably looking out for the robbers and not wishing to be attacked himself. Then a Levite (descendant of Levi and one who served as an assistant to the priests) came along and also passed by not offering any assistance but when a Samaritan, a person from Samaria in central Canaan and despised by the Jews saw him, he stopped, tended his injuries and then took him to an inn and paid for him to stay there. To the Samaritan that Jew was his neighbour and needed help. Then Jesus asked the lawyer who that Jew's neighbour was. Of course the lawyer had to admit that it was the hated Samaritan.

Jesus is expecting us to help anyone who needs help. Not just those that fit in with our own tight little circle but all those outside of it as well. No matter their class, creed, or the colour of their skin.

26. A Friend in Need

And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

(Luke 11: 5 – 13 NRSV)

See also Matthew 7: 7 – 11.

Jesus is talking about prayer and praying to God for our special needs and at first glance it would appear that Jesus is telling us that God is a stropky sort of character and that you've got to keep on and on at him before he'll do anything. Not so. First off, to start with Jesus is talking about a friend, anybodies friend and at that time it was quite common for houses to have only one room where all the occupants would sleep communally, and so when the neighbour was saying his children were in bed, he would be worried that to light a lamp to find the bread he would awaken the whole household. But nevertheless after a bit of persistence and after calming himself, would still help. If a neighbour with those sort of difficulties would help, think how much easier it is for God. He has no problems and will help at any time. 'Ask and it will be given, search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you'.

Jesus concludes by telling us that God will not only give us what we ask for but much, much more and that you only have to ask and he will accept you into his care.

27. The Rich Fool

Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

(Luke 12: 16 – 21 NRSV)

Jesus is telling us that possessions are not the main things in our lives. This man had a worrying problem, he had such a good crop that he didn't know what to do with it. He didn't want it to rot, so at some expense he decided to pull down his barns and build bigger ones, he have plenty of grain stored and could well afford to retire and live it up for the rest of his days. Very sensible to, except that he had forgotten those around him who had nothing and needed help. God then told him that he was going to die that very night. Woops, great slip up. Who'd end up now with his store? And this was the point that Jesus was making, if we store up treasures for ourselves here on earth it's a matter of luck if we are able to make use of them. They're no good to us when we've gone but if we share our luck be it something solid like giving away our unneeded cash or goods, or just sharing our various talents then we will be storing our heavenly treasure.

28. The Faithful and Wise Servant

Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

“But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

(Luke 12: 35 – 40 NRSV)

The King James version of this passage starts ‘let your loins be girded’ in this later version it is slightly changed to ‘Be dressed for action’; the original version refers to the fact that in those times a person would fasten a belt around their waist to hold their robes whilst they ran or walked fast both this and the later version suggests that there was a mission to be accomplished and to have their lamps lit suggests that his disciples were to maintain Jesus’ testimony, the testimony of faith. It also goes on to say that that they should be prepared for him to return at any time and that it would be at an unexpected hour. We are all Jesus disciples and this is also a warning to us to stay vigilant for his return, for the moment we stop, we allow slackness to set in which can easily take over our lives. We must all do Jesus work while he is away, be on our guard ready to welcome him but also to keep the devil out of our lives. He will then, on his return, bless and welcome us into his father’s kingdom.

29. The Faithful and Wicked Servant

And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and if he begins to beat the other slaves, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the unfaithful. That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

(Luke 12: 42 – 48 NRSV)

(See also Matthew 24: 45 – 51)

According to Luke, Peter, always the spokesperson, posed the quest of the previous parable (The Faithful and Wise Servant), did that parable apply to just themselves or everybody and Jesus answered with this further parable. What Jesus is saying is that anybody who follows his teachings should take charge of his ministry and look after his people. For those that do, great things will happen for them on his return but woe and betide any that purport to follow his teaching and use it for their own gain. He is also making it clear though that for those who don't do as he would wish, justice would be metered out according to the severity of their misdoings balanced with the knowledge that they had of what he wanted of them.

30. The Barren Fig Tree

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.' "

(Luke 13: 6 – 9 NRSV)

It is easy to be wise after the event and this parable can now be taken as a warning of what was about to happen. The fig tree is generally accepted to be representative of Israel, the fruit is faith, the gardener is Jesus and the 'man' is God. God could see little true faith appearing in Israel and was telling Jesus his work should be spent elsewhere but Jesus asked that he be given a little longer. A theory some like to believe is that the three years refer to Jesus' three years of ministry. The Jews put Jesus to death which showed no bearing of fruit and brought about its own retribution. God's cutting it down is recognized to be the fall of Jerusalem. It is interesting to note that the Jewish nation has been cut down and scattered throughout the world. Is this divine retribution for rejecting all the nurturing that it was given?

31. The Lowest Seat

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

(Luke 14: 7 – 11 NRSV)

Jesus was eating in a Pharisee's house and you can imagine the scene. In those days couches were used in preference to seats and the guests would recline in them whilst eating, each position being granted a certain place of honour. Dinner is served. There are no place cards at the table and so a mad rush ensues, men of all ages some more agile than others each in their long robes, they'd have their belts slackened or even removed ready to eat, not tightened for easy movement, finding it difficult to move fast and all chasing to get to that best seat, get served first with the first choice and have a good hot meal. No one wanting to wait about until the choicest food is gone and what is left has got cold. I bet the servants had some funny tales to tell afterwards

Jesus whilst a guest himself, decided to speak out against this situation by saying that if they chose a low place for themselves, the host could always move them up the table and it would give them a greater presence than if they had to be moved to a lower seat. If we humble ourselves before God, we can only move up isn't this is what Jesus has always taught us?

32. The Costs of Building a Tower and Making War

Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

(Luke 14: 25 – 35 NRSV)

See also Matthew 10: 34 – 39

By this time Jesus had multitudes of followers, all keen to hear his word but many out of curiosity and he used this parable to tell them what was expected of them. It sounds as though he was actually telling them that they must completely reject their dearest families. This wasn't the case, it was more a matter of comparisons. Jesus was saying that they must put him first, even before their own lives, in fact they should be prepared to die for him

Remember, he was using strong words to get rid of those who were only following for the ride. These words are still important in our lives today. No we shouldn't go around hating everybody but we also shouldn't be living self-

centred lives. What we should do is put Jesus and our Christian values first, second and third. We may have to put up with jibes and criticism for our actions, some may make unkind remarks and not just behind our backs but look what Jesus had to put up with and so many have given their own lives for their faith in him.

Jesus then went on to comparing following him with building a tower and waging war; how much it was all going to cost, would it be worth it. Then he says that to be his disciple means giving up all their possessions. I honestly don't believe that this is meant to be taken literally. The disciples were not meant to give up their homes, their boats, their stock and all that they owned.

I believe he meant that they should give up their way of living, that they should put him and his word before anything else and if what he said was disagreeable to their way of life, tough. Then they should give up that kind of life.

The last part about salt. It must be realized that at this time salt wasn't as refined as we know it today and it contained many impurities therefore was liable to lose its flavour becoming completely worthless. This was a metaphor for the disciples who followed Jesus with great flair to start off with but gradually lost interest and began backsliding. They were no longer any use to carry his word and should be discarded.

Jesus then completed his parable by saying 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!' In other words, if you want to follow Jesus you must abide by his strict rules and not follow him at half pace.

33. The Lost Coin

"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

(Luke 15: 8 – 10 NRSV)

In the days of Christ it was a 'man's world', what the man said to a woman was almost law, he was the master. Jesus always chose his words very carefully, so why did he chose a woman looking for a coin? Why not a man looking for a coin he lost on his way home from the inn? It is quite possible that this parable was purposely spoken to tell people that in the eyes of God women are as important as men.

A coin has no life, no feelings and no knowledge and would therefore not know if it were lost but she swept and cleaned the house until she found it.

She was most likely representative of the Holy Spirit looking for one lost soul, a soul with absolutely no knowledge of God and no understanding that it was lost. The joy that the woman had on finding it is the joy that is expressed in heaven whenever a lost soul is returned to the Lord's presence.

34. The Lost Prodigal Son

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.' "

(Luke 15: 11 - 32 NRSV)

This whilst only to be found in St. Luke's Gospel, along with 'The Parable of The Good Samaritan' is possibly one of the best known parables of all. The scene is set and we have an excellent story but it is worth looking closer at the characters in this tale. A 'prodigal' is one who excessively wasteful and extravagant and later becomes the repentant sinner. There is a father, all powerful and all loving who gives his son the right to make his own decisions in life as does our father in heaven with all of us, and we have the older son who gives the impression that he is standing by his father the whole time, doing his will and could so easily be a scribe or Pharisee or even the rest of us.

The younger son is bored with life, why should he have to wait for his inheritance, why not have it now whilst he could enjoy it? So his father gives

him and his brother their shares. The brother stays by the father but off this youngster goes to enjoy himself in the nightspots of some distant country. It doesn't take long for him to fritter all the money away and there he is with nothing. A depression hits the land, little money and little work so he is forced to take the most menial jobs to try and keep himself alive. Have you tried eating pig food? It can't be very pleasant. Then as we so often do when we're having problems, he looked back on when times were better and he began to think of home. Why, even his father's workers ate better than he was now, so with that in mind he went home. Not to demand his old seat in the house but to try and get a job as a servant. He'd already realized where he'd gone wrong and was ready to plead his case and show his remorse.

Notice this next part: While he was still far off his father saw him coming and ran to him. He didn't show patience and wait for him, he saw him filthy dirty in the distance and ran and put his arms around him. By his appearance he could see he'd wasted all of his inheritance but he was welcoming him back into his loving arms.

"Kill the calf, get a robe for his body, sandals for his feet and a ring for his finger!" the father couldn't contain his excitement. Many times we hear of God's judgment being in haste, but this is probably the only time we hear of God's haste done in love and this part of the parable is to show how God reacts when a sinner completely repents of his sins and returns to his care. Now the older brother returns home, hasn't he always stuck by his father and done his bidding and never asked for anything? So he is mortified when he sees his younger sibling being regaled in such a manner. It just wasn't fair and he very soon said so, but his father soon put him to rights, hadn't he had always had the same as his father? His brother had lost everything when he'd gone into sin, now he was back and alive in his own family.

We regularly act in the same way as this older brother. Haven't we always been righteous? Then along comes some idiot who's been living it up and sinning all over the place and just because he's said he's sorry (and proved it) gets the same as the rest of us. He won't even be put in the cheaper seats when he gets to heaven, he'll be put in the same seats as us. But come to think of it, on the other hand aren't we supposed to forgive others? Here we are racked with jealousy so perhaps it's us that should be put in the cheaper seats and he should sit in the balcony.

35. The Dishonest Manager

Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.' Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' Then he asked

another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.' And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

"Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

(Luke 16: 11 - 13 NRSV)

Is this what it sounds, that Jesus is telling us to be dishonest? On the surface yes, but in essence no. This is a really difficult parable to understand, probably the most difficult and it was aimed at the disciples.

Here we have a manager apparently dishonest, who is being called to book by his governor, a rich man (God). The manager is a person looking after somebody else's property and appears as a direct reference to the disciples being expected to carry on Jesus word after he had gone.

This particular manager was accused of embezzling his governor's money and was dismissed. He'd lost his job, he'd been accused of theft, how on earth would he get another job? Nobody would want to employ him after this, he would need money to live on during his retirement and the only way that he could see to get it was to make friends, lots and lots of friends and so he went around his governor's customers collecting what they owed his old boss. But he didn't take it all, he reduced all their payments, some as much as fifty percent. Then he took what he had collected and gave it to his governor. When his governor saw it, he never asked for the rest, he didn't call him a thief he actually congratulated him. But we need to read on to discover why.

He wasn't congratulating him on his theft but on his foresight. He had acted shrewdly and had sacrificed his present gain for his future reward. This is what is expected of any ourselves and all disciples of Jesus, we must use our Master's (God's) goods to secure our future in heaven. We shouldn't just sit around saying how good we are and expecting our rightful place, we must go out and work for it. We should where necessary use money to do His work and can make money to use for spreading the faith though we mustn't make money for the sake of it, without purpose, that is an act of worship and serving two masters.

As I read somewhere, death comes as a certainty and we must prepare properly for what comes afterwards.

36. The Rich Man and Lazarus

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’
(Luke 16: 19 - 31 NRSV)

The name ‘Lazarus’ means ‘God helps’, and may have been chosen for this parable because another Lazarus did come back from the dead. This passage is thought by some not to be a parable but an actual event that Jesus is relating because it is the only parable in which he actually names a character.

Nevertheless, this Lazarus is a beggar, smothered in sores, who spent his time at a rich man’s gate begging for scraps from the rich man’s table. The implication is that only the dogs felt sorry for him, the rich man having absolutely no compassion. When the beggar died he was carried up into heaven and tended by angels but when the rich man died, he was sent to hell but where he could see Lazarus in luxury. Here he was being scorched by eternal fires and not even a drop of water to drink, so he asked if Lazarus could be sent to him with some. “No,” he was told, he’d had his chance and he could carry on burning. So then a bit of compassion, could he be sent to warn his brothers. Again no. There were enough warnings about without sending somebody from the dead.

Notice that the rich man had only jealousy for Lazarus, no remorse for his earthly actions, here he was burning in hell and he was asking that Lazarus be sent to him and to his brothers. No repentance for what had gone on before he had reached his sorry state. Then the warning, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets..’ Don’t we have plenty of warnings? How many times do we put ourselves before people like Lazarus, let’s hope we can sit with him in the next world, not gazing up demanding that he should be sent with water.

37. The Unprofitable Servants

“Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table’? Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’ ”

(Luke 17: 7 - 10 NRSV)

This is a parable that is very often overlooked and in many Bibles left untitled.

The meaning is very straight forward. A servant hired to attend a person’s needs would be expected to put that person first no matter how tired he felt.

He could come in exhausted from the fields but there would be nothing prepared for him by those he served. Instead he would be expected to satiate his master’s needs before his own.

In the same way, those who follow Christ are expected to put his work first and serve him by serving others with all their spiritual needs. For this, whilst everybody enjoys a thank you for the good that they have done, no true disciple of Christ should expect any special thanks but should consider it all part of their duty and no more.

38. The Unjust Judge and the Persistent Widow

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’ ”

And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

(Luke 18: 1 - 8 NRSV)

Once again Jesus has chosen a woman as one of his central characters (see ‘33. The Lost Coin’), and this time she is up against a tough opponent. It could be that he chose this widow with the idea of depicting a very weak person but would a very weak person really keep on the way she did? It could also mean that he was portraying anybody, that nobody should be excluded. His other character was a rough, tough, sort of fellow who obviously had only got himself in mind and couldn’t give a hang about anybody else.

The widow has a problem and she goes to the judge and gets no response but she doesn’t give up, she keeps going to him until one day when he’s so fed up with seeing her he does what she wants.

What Jesus is telling us that if somebody as bad as he is can be worn down to give help, think how much easier it is for us to get help from God. That we should pray to him and regard him as our judge to give what is righteous for he really understands our needs.

Jesus then implied that even knowing God is here to help us a great number of people will still have no true faith. How many of us in this day and age pray to God as a very last resort? Faith on earth should mean that we talk to God on a regular basis, not just to ask favours but to give thanks and let him know that we love him, treating him as a very important part of our family and above all to let him know that we know he is there.

39. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

(Luke 18: 9 - 14 NRSV)

Two men, both in the own minds very self righteous went into the temple to pray. The Pharisee, being a man of God was busy thanking God for being so upstanding and righteous whilst the tax collector, collectively despised by many as a rogues and thieves, started banging his chest and showing remorse for all of his sins. Jesus was reminding us that nobody is perfect and it is not up to any one of us to judge another, that is God's job. We should never think that we are a cut above anybody else, in God's eyes repentance for our sins be they large or small make us all equal and by humbling ourselves and repenting our sins, being truly remorseful, brings us closer to God.

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