

**St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

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Scripture: Many from the Gospels

***“Parables of Jesus – Part 2”***

Last week we spent time looking at some of the parables of Jesus that deal with the present mixture that exists and the future separation that will take place in the Kingdom of Heaven. I mentioned that there were three major areas that we would cover regarding the parables:

1. The character of the Kingdom
2. The character of the King
3. The character of the people in the Kingdom.

In dealing with these – we spent a lot of time with the first section – in the Sower, the Wheat and the Tares – which look at those who are accepting of and nourished in the kingdom, and then the value or preciousness of the kingdom in the Hidden Treasure and Pearl of Great Price. I made a chart available for everyone with all of the Parables of Jesus listed and where they can be found in the Bible – and there are additional copies once again in the Fr. Amend Hall.

We begin this week looking at another parable dealing with the character of the Kingdom – and then we will move to the character of the King and the people.

The Parable of the Dragnet affirms what we learned last week – and reminds us that the “good news” of the Kingdom of Heaven also contains the “bad news” for those who reject it.

In other Gospel accounts Jesus instructs His Apostles to let out their nets from the boat and then when done they filled the boat with their catch. Here, in the Parable of the Dragnet, we are seeing a different kind of net – usually let down from a boat but with a crew on the shore to pull this net – or drag it in. The good fish were kept and the inedible ones were discarded.

Jesus told us quite clearly that in the present state of the Kingdom there is a mixture of good and bad – due to the influence of Satan – but in the future there will be a separation – at “the end of the age” when the angels will “weed” out the bad and they will be judged and punished – cast into a furnace of fire. This was not “new” news to Jesus’ followers – as **He proclaimed that the wicked would be punished** – warning those cities that rejected Him like Chorazin, Bethsaida, and even Capernaum. (Matthew 11:20-24) Jesus spoke of **the condemnation that would come upon His generation** saying: *“The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. “The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”* (Matthew 12:41-42) Jesus warned that the wicked would be condemned – unlike the righteous:

*“for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”* (John 5:28-29) In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught that **the wicked would be separated from God**: *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.”* (Matthew 7:21) To get to the point – plain and simple - Jesus called upon the people to repent! While we preach the Good News of the Gospel – we also need to remind people of the “bad news” for those who reject Him – and it cannot get any simpler than that.

Jesus was masterful in His use of the Parable – drawing comparisons of people of the Kingdom like the “Owner of the House” to the Scribes and the fact that both need to be diligent in protecting the treasure that has been entrusted to them. In fact it goes further than just that comparison because **every disciple is a like a scribe** entrusted with the treasure of the Word of God and **discipleship itself**, called to “make disciples” in the Great Commission. (Matthew 28)

Last week I emphasized that Jesus would describe for us the character of the people: the good, the bad, and the ugly. The Unmerciful Servant is one of the best examples of the bad and the ugly combined! Jesus uses this example to explain to Peter why He told him that forgiveness should not be seven times but **seventy times seven**, meaning that **forgiveness knows no bounds**. Many Rabbis taught that it was fair to forgive only three times. This man begs for mercy from his master to forgive his huge debt. The master cancels that debt for the man, who then goes to someone who owes him a lot less – more like a days' wage – and refuses to show mercy. The master finds out and lowers the boom on this man – not only reinstating his debt but adding to it. **The Kingdom of Heaven is to be made up of people who are both forgiven and forgiving; who have both received mercy and are merciful.**

It would be great to be able to spend time dissecting each and every parable – but this is only a two part series and that's why I gave you the chart – so you can do some exploring on your own. I want to look at some of the more prominent parables that deal with the character of the people – and then we will look at the character of the King, Himself.

Jesus used some of these parables to compare and contrast the religious leaders of the day with how they should be. The parable of the Two Sons looks at two who give their father “lip service” with one agreeing to work in the vineyard and never showing up and the other who said no right away but went and did the work asked of him. Jesus asked which one did the will of the father – and the religious leaders answered the one who went and worked. Jesus hit them right between the eyes saying “*Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.*” (Matthew 21:31) Jesus knew that these people repented – while the proud religious leaders rejected the clear teaching of Christ to repent. Jesus uses both the parable of the Tenants and the Good Samaritan to question their character once more. The landowner (God) rents his vineyard to tenants and they do some despicable things. He sends His Son and they beat and kill Him. This clearly is about the sinfulness of the religious leaders who are caring for the Kingdom and end up rejecting the very Son of God.

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan – the religious leaders pass the injured man by – not wanting to “taint” themselves and become unclean. This parable is in response to the man who is well versed in the Law of Moses – who seeks to ascertain the faithfulness of Jesus to the Law. He asks “*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Luke 10:25) Jesus points him back to the Law and the man asks a loaded question: “*who is my neighbor?*” (Luke 10:29) Jesus describes the hypocritical religious elite who pass by the injured man – a priest and a Levite – and the Samaritan, an enemy of the Jews, who shows incredible compassion. Jesus then turns the tables on the “Lawyer” by asking him not who the neighbor is – but who was the one who was neighbor to the one in need? Jesus was illustrating what it means to “*love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:39) Jesus is challenging all of us to a higher standard of love when He says “*go and do the same!*” (Luke 10:37) That was in its day and still to some extent today – mind boggling – it was counter culture.

In the parables of the Persistent Friend and the Persistent Widow Jesus encourages us to not give up, to not lose heart – especially when praying. He encourages us to ask, seek, knock, receive, find and have doors opened. Especially in the case of the Widow – we are to pray for the persecuted – for we do not serve an unjust judge, but a God who has called us to be His people.

In the parables of the Rich Fool and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Jesus speaks to self-centeredness and points to the need for humility and the willingness to put others first forsaking selfish pride.

The character of the King is most exciting for me as He is revealed in the parable of the Wedding Feast with the pain that He must feel when spurned and rejected. He has offered His

best only to be turned down time after time. God offers His finest and all we need do is be willing to be transformed and obedient to His will. At the Parable of the Great Banquet excuse after excuse is made as to why the invitation is turned down – yet the man (God) opens His original invitation to others – as the Apostle Paul says to “the Jew first and then to the Greeks” (meaning the Gentiles) (Romans 1:16)

The character of the King is so precious in the Parables of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son. We see in these that God’s love is a seeking love, not just waiting for those who are lost to find Him. He has and continues to reach out for those who are lost. The image of the shepherd who leaves the 99 to find the one who was lost is incredible and true. Jesus said so Himself in Luke 19:10 “*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*” The image of the father going out to meet his lost Prodigal Son – and then running to him; not waiting for him to come to him. The forgiving father gave his son his ring, his best robe, sandals on his feet and the fatted calf in celebration. God rejoices when sinners repent. This shows a forgiving and compassionate love like no other!

One of my favorite and in my opinion one of the most powerful parables is the Workers in the Vineyard. There are many varied opinions as to the interpretation of this parable in which a landowner hires laborers to work for an agreed upon wage. At different hours of the day he finds more and hires them – for a fair and unspecified wage. At the end of the workday they are all paid the same.

- Some thoughts have been that the various workers are those saints of the Old Testament, and those at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour are the apostles.
- Or the workers called first are the Jews and those called last are the Gentiles
- Some say it refers to different periods of a person’s life in which they may respond to the Lord; some early and others late in life.

I personally have witnessed people receiving Christ late in their life; being saved in the 11th hour. I want to suggest to you what I think the parable is NOT saying: Jesus is not saying that those who **purposely put off obeying Him** until the last minute can be saved. (This is not a game that you can “sow your wild oats” and come to Jesus when you are ready – at your eleventh hour!) Those who responded at the late hour of the parable had not been working, as they said “*because no one hired us.*” (Matthew 20:7) They accepted the offer as soon as they heard it, even though it was late in the day. They were not people who turned down many opportunities to accept the offer only to accept it at the last hour. Whether one can be saved at the last moment of life after lifelong rejection of the Gospel is another question – and one that only Jesus can answer.

I believe the best way for us to understand this parable is when we are called by the Gospel of Jesus Christ we should respond at once. Now, for some that may be early in life; others may not come to know the Gospel until late in life. Once called, as laborers in the vineyard – we should work diligently in service to the Lord, and not with a spirit of “do I get more because I gave more?” It is not about works – but about grateful obedience to the loving and gracious King.

Lastly, I want to talk about John’s Gospel and why it would appear that there are no parables in it. I want to suggest to you that John’s Gospel is rich in allegory. Miriam Webster Dictionary defines allegory as “*the expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truth or generalizations about human existence.*” The allegory does not compare – there is no “like” expressed. John 10:1-16 has an illustration, and while not a parable, it has all of the essential features of a parable. It is often called “the Parable of the Good Shepherd.” In it Jesus explains His character and His identity – “*I Am*” time and time again without comparison. Instead He boldly makes the same proclamation that He did to Moses in Exodus 3:14 – stating “*I Am Who I AM.*” There can be no comparison!

The Parables of Jesus

<u>Parable</u>	<u>Matthew</u>	<u>Mark</u>	<u>Luke</u>	<u>John</u>
Cancelled debts			7:41-43	
Cost of discipleship			14:28-33	
Faithful and wise servant	24:45-51		12:42-48	
Fig Tree	24:32-35	13:28-31	21:29-33	
Good Samaritan			10:30-37	
Great Banquet			14:16-24	
Growing Seed		4:26-29		
Hidden Treasure and Pearl	13:44-46			
Honor at a banquet			14:7-14	
Lamp under a bowl	5:14-16	4:21-22	8:16, 11:33-36	
Lost Coin			15:8-10	
Lost Sheep	18:12-14		15:4-7	
Mustard seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19	
Dragnet	13:47-50			
New cloth on an old garment	9:16	12:21	5:36	
New wine in old wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37-39	
Obedient servants			17:7-10	
Owner of a house	13:52			
Persistent friend			11:5-8	
Persistent widow			18:2-8	
Pharisee and the tax collector			18:10-14	
Prodigal Son			15:11-32	
Rich fool			12:16-21	
Rich man and Lazarus			16:19-21	
Sheep and the goats	25:31-46			
Shrewd manager			16:1-8	
Sower – the four soils	13:1-8	4:3-8,14-20	8:5-8,11-15	
Talents	25:14-30			
Ten minas			19:12-27	
Ten virgins	25:1-13			
Tenants	21:33-34	12:1-11	20:9-18	
Two sons	21:28-32			
Unfruitful fig tree			13:6-9	
Unmerciful servant	18:23-35			
Watchful servants		13:34-37	12:35-40	
Wedding banquet	22:2-14			
Weeds	13:24-30, 36-43			
Wise and foolish builders	7:24-27		6:47-49	
Workers in the vineyard	20:1-16			
Yeast	13:33		13:20-21	