

## The Parables in Luke's Gospel Volume 2

### Introduction

This is the second of the '*Sound Words*' study booklets on the parables in Luke's Gospel. Again, I am indebted to Ron Low, the pastor of Providence Baptist Church, Wetherden, England, for his help with these programmes.

Jesus used parables not simply to tell interesting stories or give attention catching illustrations, but to teach us spiritual truths. In this booklet we have sought to bring those lessons out as we have carefully considered the context in which each parable is found in Luke's Gospel. Where appropriate, reference has also been made to the customs of the day, which would have been very familiar to those who listened to Jesus and, therefore, making the parables all the more relevant.

You will gain the greatest benefit from these studies if you have your Bible with you as you read so that you can look up the various cross references referred to throughout the book.

We need to remember that the parables of the Lord Jesus Christ call us to respond to the truth he taught through them. We must, therefore, be both hearers of his words and doers of them also. May God help us to respond in the right way, and to show that Jesus Christ is indeed our Lord.

Derek French  
March 1995

---

### Chapter 1 Luke 8:16-18 & 11:33-36: The parable of a lamp that is not hidden

#### Introduction

We have an interesting difference between this parable and the others we have considered because Jesus used it on two occasions to teach two different lessons. That itself is significant because it reminds us that whenever we come to a passage of the Bible, whether we are looking at one verse or several verses, we always need to discover the context of that passage. This is very important for our understanding of the Bible because we can easily fall into the trap of making the words mean what we want them to, rather than what they originally meant.

With this parable we are helped because Jesus explained what he was illustrating on each occasion he used the parable. You will notice some very slight differences between the wording of the parables. In Luke 8 Jesus spoke of the lamp being hidden under a jar or a bed, and in Luke 11 of its being hidden under a bowl. But these differences are not important, for they are stating the same basic lesson that no one lights a lamp in order to hide it away.

#### The first use of the parable in Luke 8:16-18

##### 1) Setting

Jesus had just finished teaching the disciples the meaning of the parable of the sower in Luke 8:1-15, and he was still

speaking to them, so this parable is mainly teaching for Christian believers. The parable of the sower was about the different ways we can listen to what God has said in his word, the Bible. How we listen and respond to the message of the Bible is very important. To do so correctly we are to be like the seed that fell on good soil. Jesus explained what that meant in Luke 8:15: *"... the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop"*. This teaching about listening occurs again in the first setting of the parable of the lamp that is not hidden (Luke 8:18).

### **2) The parable (Luke 8:16-18)**

Jesus said, *"No-one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be brought out into the open. Therefore, consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."*

### **3) The meaning of the first use of the parable**

The lamp was usually quite small and made from clay or terracotta. It had a handle at one end and a small hole for the wick at the other. Now, no one would light a lamp in order to cover it up, either with a jar or a bed. The bed was usually a mattress that was rolled up when not in use, so it would not be unrolled to cover a lamp! Instead, the lamp

would be put on a stand, which was usually a small shelf on the wall or central pillar of the room.

Jesus' point was obvious. You light a lamp to let it shine and give illumination in a dark place (Luke 8:16), *"... so that those who come in can see the light"*. A lamp must be put in the right place if it is to be of benefit. So Christian believers must let their light shine. They are to put God's word in its right place, as Psalm 119:11 tells us David did. *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."* It is to have its effect on us so that our lives then display to the world that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he has saved and transformed us. This is similar to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:16: *"... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"*. Jesus' disciples are not to hide the truths of the Bible away, like the religious leaders of his day had done with all their added rules and regulations and traditions. Instead, we are to make them known as widely as possible.

Therefore, if we are the followers of Jesus, we must let the word of God fully control our lives so that they shine like lights. We are to share its wonderful message of salvation with others. What the Lord Jesus has taught us about God's forgiveness and grace, must not be hidden away but shared, and shared without reserve or hesitation. Paul put it like this in Philippians 2:14-16: *"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and*

*depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life...*” It is in this way that others are brought into the light of the gospel and brought to trust the Saviour for themselves.

Jesus then stated that though men may try to cover up things, they will be unsuccessful (Luke 8:17): *“For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.”* This can be applied in several ways.

- i. To the religious leaders of the day who were trying to smother the truth of the gospel by adding their own traditions and opposing Jesus. Not only will they fail, and God’s word triumph in the world, but also their evil and deceitful actions will one day be exposed. And God will call them to give account!
- ii. To men in general who try to cover up and hide their evil deeds. They will not succeed, and God will expose them.
- iii. But in particular this applies to Jesus’ followers. We, too, must be careful to obey the Lord and not disobey, hoping we will not be found out. God will hold us accountable also, especially if we fail to let the light of his gospel shine in our world. We must, therefore, be very careful to do what the Lord tells us.

Jesus then added in Luke 8:18: *“Therefore, consider carefully how you listen”*. If we are going to be light

bearers in our dark world then we will need to listen very carefully to the word of the Lord:

- i. so that it may benefit our own lives as we apply its truths, and
- ii. so that we can pass it on to others accurately that they may benefit too, as they hear of the Saviour and are brought to trust in him.

To emphasise the importance of what he had been teaching, Jesus said in Luke 8:18, *“Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him”*. Those who do listen carefully to the message of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, believe what God has said, obey it and are changed by it, will receive the blessings of God increasingly. They will receive more and more of the Lord’s grace. John 1:16: *“From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.”* Those who truly believe will continue to grow spiritually and make progress, enjoying more and more of God and his presence in their lives. They will know more joy, more holiness, more victory over sin, more likeness to Christ, more fellowship and communion with the Lord, and a greater understanding of the Bible, and much more. You cannot stand still in the spiritual life.

And by solemn contrast, those who do not apply the word of God to their lives, and do not believe it with all their heart, will lose everything. Even what they thought they had will be taken from them. Jesus was warning about the

danger that had befallen many of the people and leaders of his time. They had plenty of religion, but little of God. They had many of their own rules and regulations, but had little of God's instructions found in the Bible. And the tragedy was that they did not want God's word, because they felt their way was better and, therefore, had no need of it!

The great lesson here is that if we are to know God and enjoy him, then we must come to him in the way he has appointed, and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ (see John 14:6). We must live as he has directed in the Bible and not in a way we think might be better. There is no better way than God's way, and if we think there is, we are guilty of the sin of pride, claiming to be better even than God himself! Jesus was teaching that we must be serious about our spiritual lives. God will not accept a careless or shallow approach. To love and serve him is the most serious thing we can ever do, therefore it must be done as he directs. Failure will mean everlasting loss and ruin! Therefore, let your light so shine for him.

## **The Second Use of the Parable in Luke 11:33-36**

### **1) The setting**

In the verses immediately before this use of the parable we learn that Jesus was talking to the crowds (Luke 11:29). And he was rebuking the people because they did not want to believe what he came to teach them. Instead, they kept wanting some sign that indicated Jesus was indeed sent from God. Of course, they had received many signs in all

the miracles Jesus had performed and the teaching he had given, but they ignored these. In effect they were saying that it was Jesus' fault that they did not believe, as he had not given them sufficient signs! The truth was that they did not want to believe what Jesus taught them.

As a result Jesus said that on the day of judgment they would be condemned for their refusal to believe him. He referred to the Queen of Sheba and the people of Nineveh to challenge them. Luke 11:31f: *"The Queen of the South will rise in judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here."* You can read about the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9. The details about the people of Nineveh are found in Jonah 3.

So it was while urging the crowd to give heed to and believe his teaching, that Jesus then used the parable about the lamp for a second time.

### **2) The parable (Luke 11:33-36)**

Jesus said, *"No-one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they*

*are bad, your body is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.”*

The similarity with the previous use of the lamp in Luke 8:16 is obvious. No one lights a lamp in order to hide it away, and certainly no one would cover it over with a large bowl. (The bowl referred to would hold about 2 gallons.) A lamp is intended to give light to all who are near it.

### **3) The meaning of the second use of the parable**

Jesus openly taught the message of the gospel and the blessings it brings, so that its light was available for all to see, but the people wanted to see more spectacular signs before they would believe. The fault was not with the light that Jesus brought, nor the way he brought it, but with the refusal of the people to recognise it. The problem was that their spiritual vision was so obscured by their unbelief that they did not see the light Jesus brought to them. And worse, these unbelieving people were actually guilty of putting a cover over the light of the good news that Jesus brought.

To help us understand what he was teaching Jesus used the illustration of the eye. Luke 11:34: *“Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body is also full of light. But when they are bad, your body is also full of darkness.”* When our eyes are in good working order they allow light to enter and we can see clearly. But

when our eyes are not working properly our vision is hindered and we cannot see clearly. Indeed, we can lose our sight altogether, our eyes refusing to function at all. Then we live our days in complete darkness, even though the sun still shines brightly, or we enter a room that is lit by many lamps. In the same way spiritually, if we are right inside and welcome the light of the gospel of Christ, it will bring to us the light of his salvation. We shall benefit from all that Jesus gives. We shall know God personally. We shall have peace with him and the assurance of his constant care. We shall know with certainty that our sins are pardoned and we are going to go to heaven one day. We shall enjoy the presence and help of the Lord all our days.

The people to whom Jesus spoke needed spiritual sight. Without it they could not understand the way of salvation, and their hearts remained in darkness.

If our hearts are right towards God then we shall benefit from all that Jesus brings. We shall know him as our Lord and Redeemer and Friend. But if our hearts are closed to him by rebellion and unbelief, then we shall not benefit from Jesus at all. Therefore, Jesus gives a solemn warning in Luke 11:35: *“See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.”*

There was an important change in Jesus’ words at that point. Previously he had been addressing the crowd as a group using ‘you’ plural, but then he uses ‘you’ singular, because he was challenging each one of them individually.

He was urging each person not to be deceived by thinking that they were right in not believing him. The light they thought they had was not true light at all, and their continued refusal to receive Jesus would mean their hearts would become even harder and deepen their spiritual darkness. He was urging them to see if the light of the gospel had brought a real change in their heart and life, to see if they really did love God and their neighbour, to see if they really did have the fruit of the Spirit in them, or whether the light they thought they had was not true light at all. If their entire being was full of the light of Christ, spiritual light, then they would really be illuminated by God, just as when a lamp illumines a room so that you can see its full brilliance (Luke 11:36). They would then have been able to grasp spiritual things and know how to act and direct their lives as God wants. If this had been true of them, they would never have asked for a sign, for they would have known that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

### **Lesson**

We are to let the light of Christ shine in our hearts, and not obstruct it by unbelief as Jesus' critics were doing.

---

### **Chapter 2 Luke 11:1-13: The friend in need**

#### **1) The setting**

This parable and the illustration used with it were spoken to the Lord's disciples (Luke 11:1), to those who truly trusted and followed him, and not to hostile outsiders who were only trying to catch him out. Jesus had been praying

(Luke 11:1a). He considered communion with God the Father both essential and a delight, and we often find him at prayer. For example, he prayed at the raising of Lazarus (John 11:41), then early in the morning before sunrise (Mark 1:35). He spent all night in prayer before choosing his disciples (Luke 6:12). We find him giving thanks before feeding the 5000 (Matthew 14:19), then he prayed in Gethsemane before his crucifixion (Luke 22:39-46). His disciples grasped something of the importance and benefit of prayer to God, so one of them asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. They reasoned that if Jesus prayed, and John the Baptist taught his followers to pray (Luke 11:1), they needed to pray as well.

Now many, if not all Christian believers find prayer difficult at times and feel their need of the Lord's help. Someone has said that, "*The more spiritual an activity is, the more difficult it is to engage in it*" - and prayer is a very spiritual activity. Also prayer is a high privilege that is to be entered into thoughtfully, and we need to be taught how to pray.

In answer to this request Jesus first taught the Lord's prayer (Luke 11:2-4). It was then that Jesus told them this parable with some additional illustrations which encourage us to pray and teach us God answers prayer.

#### **2) The parable**

Jesus said, "*Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves*

*of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’ Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.”*

### **3) The meaning of the parable**

As he often did with his parables, Jesus drew his hearers into the story, including them in it (Luke 11:5&11). This time he was talking about every day experiences but which illustrate and teach spiritual realities. This then drives the lesson home to the listener with greater force.

#### **a. The friend in need**

The great lesson Jesus teaches is the need for persistence in prayer. To do so, Jesus draws on the strong cultural practices of the Middle East over hospitality. The parable starts with the embarrassment of having a visitor to your home but having nothing to give him to eat. This was a great shame and disgrace if it was not rectified. And the hour of the night was no excuse. Further, not to feed your guest with a completely unbroken loaf and not to offer him more than he would normally eat, would be a great insult to him and bring great shame on the host. In Middle Eastern culture the host **MUST** serve his guest and the guest must eat. Further, the visitor is not only considered a guest of this particular family, but of the community and, therefore,

failure to give him food adequate for the occasion would bring added shame on them as well. Therefore, it was not unusual to call on a neighbour to supply something for the meal providing the request was modest enough, as is the case here. But he was reluctant, all was locked up for the night, his children were in bed, and to get up would disturb the whole household.

However, the man in need was not put off but continued to call to his neighbour for help. He had “*boldness*”, sometimes translated ‘persistence’. This word literally means ‘shamelessness’. The man was asking for bread continually. He unashamedly asked for help, in spite of rebuffs. This made the friend help and so he supplied the bread that was needed.

#### **b. The instruction on persistence (Luke 11:9-10)**

Jesus then said to his disciples (Luke 11:9), “*So I say unto you: Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened*”. What Jesus is saying is that we must keep on doing these things - asking, seeking, knocking. These instructions are commands, not optional extras! All true disciples must pray continually.

“*Ask*” implies humility and awareness of need. It is often used with respect to an inferior person addressing a superior. When we pray, we who are but dust (Psalm 103:4) come to Almighty God who is greater than all. So

“ask” implies faith in a God who can, does, and will answer. Such faith makes prayer warm and personal.

“Seek” is asking plus acting, so that we also do our utmost to obtain the fulfilment of our needs when it is within our power to do so. For example, we should pray to God for a deep knowledge of the Bible, but then give ourselves to diligent study of it to gain that knowledge.

“Knock” is asking, plus acting, plus persevering, and with sincerity and urgency, that is, knocking again and again. We are not to excuse ourselves from prayer, for example, by saying we are too tired or too busy. And we must not give up on prayer, but keep at it, even though the answer is delayed.

Jesus assures us we shall be answered when we pray with this believing persistence for real needs (Luke 11:9-10). (Consider also these passages on persistent prayer. Genesis 32:22ff - wrestling; Deuteronomy 9:25; Matthew 20:31; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:12 with verse 18; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17.) All who persist in prayer will receive, find, and have doors opened.

Therefore, we are to go to God because he is our Friend through Christ, and more, our Father. He is not a miser, reluctant to give, but loves to pour his blessings on his children. Further, he has all resources, therefore is well able to supply our needs. Also we must go to God with all our heart; keep on asking, seeking, knocking. But also go

humbly, being conscious of our need and God’s greatness. Then keep on praying, don’t give up nor despair, nor grow weary, nor become lazy. Believing, persevering prayer will be answered. Remember, with God it is never midnight. He is never too bothered to help. He never lacks anything. He is never taken by surprise.

This is a tremendous encouragement and stimulus to continuing in prayer. What sometimes seems a delay to us is not so to the Lord, so we must be patient and persist. The Lord makes us wait sometimes for these reasons: -

- i. to prove the genuineness of our faith,
- ii. to bring us to depend on him completely,
- iii. to answer at the best time, for our good and his glory,
- iv. to teach us to ask in the right way for the right things (James 4:2-8).

### **c. The illustrations (Luke 11:11-13)**

To encourage the disciples further Jesus said, “*Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him*”.

This needs little explanation, as it is obvious. No normal earthly father gives harmful gifts when his children request needful and nourishing food. The parent/child relationship

is one of love. Every ordinary parent always seeks what is good for his children and certainly not something that will destroy them. And this applies even though all earthly fathers have sinful or “*evil*” hearts. Therefore, how much more will God, our Father in heaven, give that which is good for his children when they ask him. God is holy, the source of all good, free from all evil. Indeed, Jesus speaks of the best gift of all, the Holy Spirit. If he gives us the Holy Spirit, the best gift of all, we can rest assured he will supply all our other needs as well (cf. Philippians 4:19).

#### 4) Additional application

Remember the following: -

- i. This was given to the disciples of Christ (Luke 11:1) - not unbelievers.
- ii. This applies to real needs, not imaginary ones.
- iii. This is for those who totally depend on and trust in God, who believe he will answer and, therefore, persevere until he does.

Jesus ends with Luke 11:12c, “*to those who ask him*”, repeating both our responsibility to pray, and more especially to encourage us to pray, because God is a prayer answering God. Therefore, pray continually, without ceasing.

---



---

### Chapter 3 Luke 12:13-21: The rich fool

#### 1) The setting

Jesus was teaching with a large crowd around him (Luke 12:1). He had spoken of God’s great care so that we ought

not to be afraid. God knows when even a sparrow falls and we are worth much more than sparrows. Then he also taught about the need to unashamedly follow him, seeking his forgiveness.

Suddenly came a demand from someone in the crowd for Jesus to sort out a family quarrel about inheritance (Luke 12:13). According to Deuteronomy 21:17 the oldest son had twice the amount given to a younger brother. The man was clearly very angry with his brother and a division existed between these two men, and he was really calling on Jesus to make that rift final by sorting out the problem. In addition to being angry, the man was also very selfish and totally concerned with material matters - most likely land was the issue here, but money and other possessions must not be excluded. He was not making a request but a demand on Jesus - there was no ‘please’ or ‘can you help me?’, just a blurted out demand. He was so caught up with himself and his material ambitions that even common courtesy was ignored, and he had taken no notice whatsoever of Jesus’ teaching about trusting in God to care for all our needs. It has been said, “*Where there is an inheritance 99% of people become wolves*”.

Jesus’ reply was quite abrupt (Luke 12:14). But it needed to be so for the man to take note of the serious spiritual implications of his attitude. Jesus did not come to deal with such matters. He came to seek and to save the lost, and also to exercise a great ministry of reconciliation between God and men, and men and men. He was not like

an ordinary Rabbi who would often deal with such cases. Therefore, Jesus is telling this man to be changed.

Jesus then took opportunity to address the whole crowd about the great danger of mistaking materialism as the most important thing in life (Luke 12:15). Again his words were strong, but this is because it is a danger so easy to fall into - for the rich to trust and rely on their riches and be greedy for more; for the poor to covetously want what others have. The word “*greed*” in (v15) is literally ‘thirst for more’. For example, it is like salt water which makes you more thirsty the more you drink of it; never satisfied, insatiable, longing for more. We need to remember the wise words of 1 Timothy 6:3-10: “*But godliness with contentment is great gain*”. (cf. Teaching about the danger of loving money and possessions in Psalm 49; Proverbs 30:7-9; Ecclesiastes 5:10; Matthew 6:19-24; 1 Timothy 6:3-10 and 17-19.)

Therefore, we need to search our hearts. Are we joyful in giving? Are we content when others have more than us? Jesus said (Luke 12:15), “*A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions*” - his surpluses. Life is much more than this (cf. Job 20:20, 31:24-28; Psalm 62:10). Further, abundant life is not found in a greater abundance of material goods. To drive this teaching home Jesus then told this parable about the rich fool.

## 2) The parable

Jesus told this parable, “*The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.*”

## 3) The explanation of the parable

This man was rich to begin with, but then became richer. He had an amazing surplus. But this man was greedy and decided to build bigger barns. He never thought of sharing his good crop, nor discovered the joy there is in doing this. He was full of self - note the “I”, “my”, “himself”, etc. Not only was he proud and arrogant, he was also isolated because he did not want anyone to share with. He was empty of God, for there was no thanks and no mention of God at all. He was relying on material wealth to secure his future (Luke 12:19). He also presumed he controlled his own destiny. Further, he considered having a good time as the very height of human achievement. However, he was unwise in failing to remember he would die at some future time. So he did not take any account of having to face God’s judgment. Like so many he acted as if he would live

forever. How short sighted he was, and how wrong he was!

God called him a “*fool*” (Luke 12:20). This is a strong word meaning stupid. In the Bible a fool is someone who lacks wisdom and says there is no God and lives as if there is no God (Psalm 14:1; cf. Psalm 10:4; 74:22; 107:17; Proverbs 10:23). Because the fool lives without God, he also dies without God. So in the face of death he is without any hope at all. How tragic! Then we see with this man how misplaced his trust was. That night his life would be demanded of him. His earthly existence would end. Then he would have to give account to the God he ignored.

Interestingly, the term “*demanded*” in v20 is literally ‘to return a loan’. By this we see that not only were his possessions not truly his, neither was his life. Therefore, he would have to answer for the way in which he used the life God had loaned him. It was not his own even though he thought it was! The result would be the total loss of all he considered important. It would all be left to someone else.

At this point we must be careful. Money and possessions are not necessarily evil in themselves, but our attitude to them can be! This man’s attitude was evil. Further, there is nothing wrong in being successful in business. It was the way in which this man handled his success that was sinful. He was trapped into thinking all was well for him, and this lulled him into a dreadfully false sense of security.

He learned, however, that he did not control his destiny - God did, and his selfish greed would not help him one bit, but would condemn him. His disregard of God was his costliest mistake. He died that very night - suddenly, unexpectedly! He died completely unprepared.

It has been said, “*The only way to be ready to die tonight is to be ready to die now*”. And the only way to be ready is to have our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his atonement for sin. We brought nothing into the world and shall take nothing out of it. This man had many goods given him, made great plans to store them for himself alone, and then had to leave those very goods behind! (See also Mark 8:36-37.)

#### **4) Application**

In v21 Jesus concluded, “*This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God*”. How wide that ‘anyone’ is! This man’s greed and selfishness are not rare but tragically all too common. This attitude can affect rich and poor alike, and those in between. But here a rich man found it so easy to be greedy. Jesus is again teaching us, as he does in so many of his parables, to put God first and seek his kingdom and his righteousness. (See also Psalm 37:4; 1 Corinthians 10:31. Proverbs 11:4: “*Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.*”)

True wealth is found in Christ. Through him we become rich in grace, in faith, and in good works. Only then can

we be rich towards God, for those who follow Jesus seek God, serve God, desire his honour, give to him their all including their time, talents, possessions and very selves. They seek to use all God gives them for his glory and the good of others, and not to satisfy selfish greed. Those who are rich towards God do not lose out. Through faith in Christ they receive an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade (1 Peter 1:3-5). Further, through faith in Christ we become heirs of God (Rom 8:17). And this is an inheritance that even death cannot deprive us of, for it is reserved in heaven.

---



---

#### **Chapter 4 Luke 12:35-40: The watchful servants**

##### **1) The Setting**

The theme of this parable is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth, and the need to be ready for it. That Jesus will return to earth is taught again and again in the Bible. In addition to Jesus' own teaching such as we have here, the Bible has a wealth of material on it. For example, the angels of God promised this to the disciples at Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:10-11). Paul wrote about it in every chapter of his first letter to the Thessalonian believers (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-3; 5:23). And the Bible closes with this same theme in Rev 22:7 & 20. God, who knows the future, wants us to know about and prepare for this coming event. It is most important.

Two things will take place at Jesus' return:

Firstly, all Christian believers who have died will be raised to life, and all who are still alive will join with them and they shall live with Jesus forever. This is an event every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is looking forward to, and its blessings will be great. We shall be with Christ forever, and this will mean we shall finally be free from sin, which will trouble us no more, and finally free from pain, and finally free from sorrow, and finally free from death. For Christian believers there will be unending joy and bliss in the Saviour's presence.

Then secondly, all people who do not follow Jesus will be condemned. Therefore, to be unprepared will be disastrous, and will be so forever. This parable and the one that follows are about preparing for this great event. It requires careful preparation by us.

##### **2) The parable**

Jesus said, *“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand 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, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."*

### **3) The explanation**

#### **a. Jesus begins with a strong command (Luke 12:35-36)**

*"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning."* The fact that this is a command indicates it is vital, a necessity and not an optional extra. At all costs we must be found obedient at this point. What are we to do? Be ready or prepared for the Lord Jesus Christ's coming. We are to be like the servants in a house whose master has gone to a wedding feast and is soon to return. They were to be fully alert for whenever he came back.

Jesus says this will involve two things. Firstly, to be ready for service. The word Jesus uses here is graphic, for it refers to the long flowing robes that servants wore which were to be gathered up and tied so they were not a hindrance - tucked in the belt so they were ready to serve their master, ready for action. Then secondly, keep your lamps burning - provide the necessary light should it be dark when he arrives. All of this will prevent delay when he comes. Be ready to welcome him and serve him.

What does this actually mean for us? How can we be ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth? There are a number of requirements for us to meet. Firstly, we must ensure our faith is firmly fixed on Christ. We must be trusting him for the forgiveness of our sins, not allowing anything or anyone else to be a rival in our hearts.

Then we must keep our devotion to Christ warm and alive. Also we must ensure our personal lives are pure and holy. John, writing to Christian believers about Jesus' return, says in 1 John 3:2b-3, *"... we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure"*. In addition we must engage in whatever we do - at work, at rest, during recreation, in public, in private - with the aim of glorifying God. And also all our plans for the future are to be influenced by the fact that Jesus is coming again. We must live each day as if it were our last; constantly looking forward to seeing the Lord who loved us and gave himself for us; ready to leave at a moment's notice. We are to be heavenly minded and not earthly minded.

#### **b. Jesus promises a great reward (Luke 12:37)**

Those who take care to be ready for his coming will receive a wonderful reward from Jesus when he returns (Luke 12:37): *"It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes"*. Again Jesus stresses the need to be ready by using the term *"watching"*. We are to be attentive, vigilant, anticipating, looking forward to the Master's return. For such *"it will be good"*, literally 'blessed' or 'O the happiness of'. Amazingly they will find the Lord will come and serve them (Luke 12:37b): *"I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them"*. He will treat them as honoured guests at a feast! These are astonishing terms. That the Lord Jesus Christ,

whose name is above every name, should treat his followers in this way is beyond description - what favours will be theirs! What joys! (See also Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27; John 13:4-5, 12-16.) We should serve him, yet he promises to serve us! He will ensure all our needs are met. He will welcome us into heaven. He will fill us with everlasting joy. He will secure our everlasting wellbeing. What grace and condescension this is! This is an immeasurable kindness that the Lord Jesus promises to show us. And we can be sure this will take place because he has already denied himself and taken the form of a servant (Philippians 2). Such will be his loving care and eternal provision for us, that in the parable he describes himself as the master who serves his servants (Luke 12:37)! Unless we think this is too wonderful to be true, Jesus begins by saying in Luke 12:37, *“I tell you the truth”*. How marvellous this is!

### **c. The suddenness of Jesus’ return (Luke 12:38-40)**

Jesus reminds us that we do not know when he will return (Luke 12:40). *“The second or third watch of the night”* (Luke 12:38). But whoever he will find ready will be blessed. Again he returns to the theme of being prepared. Being prepared is something we must actively engage in every day. For example, if you are going on a train journey you need to have packed and be at the station for the time the train departs. If you sleep you will be too late and miss the train. As we do not know the precise time Jesus will come again, we must be ready all the time.

To drive this home Jesus uses an illustration (Luke 12:39). A house owner would never have gone away from home if he knew the precise time a thief would come. He would have stayed to protect his property. He would have made everything secure and made sure he was ready. So spiritually, as we do not know when Jesus will come, we need to be ready now and always. By using this illustration of the thief Jesus is warning us that failure to be ready will mean permanent loss. There is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. Therefore, we need to be sure we are indeed true Christian believers, trusting in Christ alone for pardon for our sins, living close to him every day, and preparing for heaven.

Are you ready?

---

## **Chapter 5 Luke 12:41-48: The faithful and unfaithful servant**

### **1) The setting**

As with the parable of the watchful servants in Luke 12:35-40, this parable is about the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this world.

This parable is introduced by a question from Peter (Luke 12:41). He wanted to know if the teaching about being ready for the return of Jesus applied only to Jesus’ followers (his disciples), *“us”*, or was it something everybody needed to take note of? Who will this great and coming event affect? Was Jesus’ teaching about suffering loss (Luke 12:39) applicable to his true disciples or

unbelievers? Peter was asking if Jesus meant that even among his disciples some would not be ready.

Jesus did not answer his question directly, but asked another question and gave another parable. In effect, Jesus says, “Peter, make sure you are ready and are serving me faithfully”. For those who have received spiritual privileges also have spiritual responsibilities. How we respond to these indicates if we are faithful or unfaithful servants of Jesus.

## 2) The parable

Jesus said, *“Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth; he will be put in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.*

*That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be*

*demand; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”*

## 3) The meaning

Before coming to the parable consider the following three things.

**Firstly**, some think that the manager in the parable applies to the apostles, and by extension to the ministers of the churches. While this is true, it seems too restricted a point of view because all believers are called on to serve Christ and do good to others. (See Galatians 6:10; Titus 2:14; Proverbs 3:27.)

**Secondly**, a principle in this passage is that the greater our spiritual privileges, so much greater is our responsibility and, therefore, our accountability. This will result in greater or lesser reward or punishment as applicable.

**Thirdly**, we must remember the Bible teaches that while no one is saved by the good works they do, everyone who is saved will do good works. They are the evidence that someone has become a true follower of Jesus. And their absence is evidence that someone is not a true follower of Jesus.

With these in mind we now turn to the parable.

### a) The faithful and wise servant (Luke 12:42-44)

He was put in charge of his master's household while he went away. This especially included looking after the rest of the servants. He would treat them well and provide adequate food for them. This in turn would enable them to serve the master well. Jesus described him as "*wise*" (Luke 12:42). The term means considerate, thoughtful, prudent and discreet. He was not only kind, but also faithful to his master's trust in him. He was reliable, honourable, dependable and trustworthy. And his wisdom influenced him because he knew he would be held accountable to his master and, therefore, acted accordingly.

This is how Jesus' followers are to behave. We are to fulfil the will of the Lord in our lives. The words "*faithful and wise*" (Luke 12:42) describe a lovely character. Someone who will not let you down. Someone trustworthy, who will do their task. Someone kind, gentle, and diligent in their care of others. This certainly would apply to Peter and the other apostles, to pastors whose task is to feed the flock of God, to church officers, Sunday school teachers and others who have responsibilities in the church. This is how they ought to be in fulfilment of their duties. But also all Christian believers are included, because all followers of Jesus are to be faithful to him by living their lives for him and having a concern and care for other believers, the lost, and even their enemies.

Jesus supplied the answer to his own question as to who is this faithful and wise servant. It is the one actually doing what his master requires; the one doing what Jesus requires

(NB. "*master*" is literally Lord), serving him, and not leaving it to others nor following their own selfish and sinful desires. A true Christian is one who begins to obey Christ at conversion by repenting and believing, and then continues to do this in life-long obedience to him. True believers do not give up serving and obeying Christ once they have become his disciples. Instead, as they wait expectantly and patiently for his return, they spend all their time actively obeying his instructions which are contained in the Bible, especially in this context by seeking to meet the needs of others, which may be material and spiritual. Christian believers are to use this time to serve the Lord, and not as an excuse to be lazy (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:6-15).

"*It will be good...*" (Luke 12:43) is literally 'blessed', being the object of his master's special favours. Just as the faithful and wise servant in the parable was rewarded with promotion (Luke 12:44), so Christ will reward his faithful followers upon his return (cf. Luke 19:17&19). One Christian writer suggests that in heaven (the new heavens and new earth) there will be areas of service entrusted to us, each task being a matter of pure delight, bringing complete satisfaction and being perfectly suited to each believer.

#### **b) The unfaithful and unwise servant (Luke 12:45-48)**

This was the self-centred and self-indulgent servant, the person who was not Christ-centred. He reasoned that as the master was taking a long time in coming, he did not

need to worry about serving him. Peter tells us there will be many who will assume that Jesus will never return and who live accordingly (2 Peter 3:3ff). So this unfaithful servant did the very opposite to that which was expected. He treated unkindly those he was given to care for - beating them, while he satisfied his own self-indulgence by eating, drinking and drunkenness. This was because he had no love for Christ, no love for his neighbour, no concern for needy Christians, no concern for the lost. In the parable, this man did not work for his master, and did not obey him, but served self. So it is with those who make no preparations for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such people live as if the Lord's return and Day of Judgment will never happen. Tragically, they will be caught out suddenly and unexpectedly, for the Lord will return when they least think he will come. (See also 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3; 2 Peter 3:10.) The result will be severe punishment for this unwise, unfaithful and disobedient life. In Luke 12:46, "*cut him to pieces*" is a graphic description of the severity of the punishment. Assigned a place with unbelievers in hell, they will be lost forever. So it will be for all those who are not ready when Christ returns.

These are amongst the most solemn words Jesus ever spoke, and they contain a severity that is very dark and serious. Such unfaithful ones will be lost forever. They will not receive the heavenly reward, but their just

condemnation. Their conduct is sinful and therefore indicates they are not among Christ's true followers. Many of these may well claim to be Christians, but they are not genuine. Some may be even pastors, Christian workers, members of churches, church attendees or Bible readers. But all of that will be of no avail for they were never truly converted.

**c) Jesus tells us there will be degrees of eternal punishment (Luke 12:47-48)**

Those deserving more will receive more, for example, those who have heard the good news about Jesus, but reject it. And those deserving less will receive less. But all who are disobedient will be justly punished by God. The greater our privileges the greater our responsibility, and the greater our failure if we are unfaithful, and the greater our condemnation. (NB. Those who have not heard the gospel will still be punished because God has spoken in creation [Romans 1:20], and in their consciences [Romans 2:14-16] - but they ignore both.)

We may well ask, "*Why did Jesus speak in such a solemn and terrifying way?*" This is because hell is a reality from which there is no escape; because all deceivers need to repent before it is too late; because of his great love for sinners to warn us so that we might flee to Christ urgently for forgiveness. Then we will be new people, no longer disobedient and unfaithful, but who do his will. His words are like a whip which makes a horse run faster. These

solemn words from Jesus are intended to spur us on to seek him and obey him more.

From this parable we learn that simply to claim to be Christ's servants is not enough, we must furnish the evidence for it. (See Matthew 3:8; Matthew 6:15-23.) Also, Christ's judgment will be fair and just. No one unfaithful will escape. No one unfaithful will have any excuse. All who are faithful to Christ will be rewarded when he returns. (See 2 Timothy 4:6-8.) Reader, are you ready for Christ's return? Will he say to you, "*Well done good and faithful servant*" (Matthew 25:21) or "*Depart from me...*" (Matthew 25:41)?

---

### **Chapter 6 Luke 13:1-9: The parable of the barren fig tree**

The lesson of this parable is this: God is patient with sinners, but his patience is not to be abused. A day will come when, if sinners have not repented, they will perish under the mighty hand of God. Therefore, we need to repent now.

#### **1) The setting**

It was quite a common view in the days of Jesus that if you suffered some great tragedy it was thought to be because you had committed some great sin or sins. Indeed, this was a common view even in Old Testament days, and prevails in many people's minds today. The Bible quotes a number of examples of this way of reasoning. When Job suffered the loss of his children, his wealth and his health, one of his

friends named Eliphaz falsely accused him of wrong doing as the cause of his suffering. This was at first by inference in Job 4:7: "*Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?*" And later more directly in Job 22:5: "*Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?*" Then even Jesus' own disciples thought the same when a blind man was brought to Jesus for healing. They said in John 9:2, "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" Both Eliphaz and Jesus' disciples were wrong. These tragedies had not come because of the serious sin of those who suffered. The danger with this type of thinking is that we can be unduly cruel in our comments to those who suffer, thus increasing their distress. We can also be guilty of pride by thinking we are better than those who are suffering, thus blinding ourselves to our own sinfulness.

Jesus took up this theme to correct the people's thinking and to emphasise that we are all sinners, and all need to repent. He did so by quoting two tragic incidents that had happened, probably a short while before he spoke. Though we have little detail of these tragedies, they were certainly well known to his listeners, and were probably the topic of many conversations. Certainly some came and told Jesus about one of them (Luke 13:1).

#### **Tragedy 1. Luke 13:1-3: Those killed by Pilate in the Temple**

Some people who lived in Galilee had been to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices in the Temple. While doing this they

were killed at the command of Pilate, the Roman Governor, the result being that their own blood was mixed with that of their sacrifices. We know from other sources that Pilate was a very cruel man and what took place in this incident fits in with his general character. We are not told why this atrocity took place, but clearly the people who learned about it, and who now told Jesus, thought this was God's judgment on those who suffered, for being very wicked. They reasoned that if not, then they would not have suffered so dreadfully.

The assumption that lay behind this way of thinking was that others were worse sinners than themselves. And this can quickly turn into, "I'm not too bad at all", and which very easily turns into, "I have no need to repent". This is because the human heart is basically proud and thinks of itself more highly than it ought. The Bible states that all are sinners (Romans 3:23), and all need to repent (Acts 17:30). So Jesus dealt with this by asking a pointed question and making an even more pointed application (Luke 13:2&3).

Jesus refuted this false idea of equating personal disaster with personal sin, by saying "No!" to the question, "Were those who died worse sinners than others?" But he went much further and addressed the sinfulness of all his listeners, who, like us, were all sinners. They needed to repent of their own sins. Failure to do so would result in them perishing, just as suddenly and terribly as those whom Pilate executed!

Jesus was never led astray by trick questions or false thinking, nor did he let people be led astray either. He always saw through such thinking and corrected it. These people were using this incident in the wrong way. They should have examined their own hearts and made sure they were right with God before it was too late. They must not be lulled into thinking they would escape God's judgment.

'REPENT' means to have a change of mind about the wrong we are guilty of. It means to acknowledge that we are guilty sinners, and to turn away from our sinful way of living, to hate sin, and to turn to God, determined with his help to follow him in righteousness and truth. Repentance is vital if we are to have eternal life.

### **Tragedy 2. Luke 13:4-5: Those killed by the tower at Siloam**

Jesus used another tragic incident. Eighteen people had died when a tower in Siloam collapsed and crushed them to death. Jesus asked a similar question to the one asked before (Luke 13:18). Did the people think those who died were more sinful than the rest of the people in Jerusalem? Again he said, "No!" and pressed the point that all his listeners must repent or they would perish also. (Note the personal application and the solemn significance of the word 'ALL' in Luke 13:5!) It is at this point he used the parable.

### **2) The parable of the fig tree (Luke 13:6-9)**

Many in Galilee and Judea in the time of Jesus thought they would automatically be accepted by God and go to be with him when they died. However, they had never once shown any evidence of truly following God. They did not love him. They did not obey him. They did not repent. They just assumed God would forgive them - after all, they were Jews. So Jesus challenged them by telling this parable.

Jesus said, *“A man had a fig-tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ‘Sir’, the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig round it and fertilise it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”*

Fig trees normally have fruit on them for 10 months of the year in favourable climates. This tree would be taking up valuable room, moisture and nutrition, thus depriving other plants.

### **3) The meaning and application**

The fig tree really represented Jesus’ hearers, though some think it referred to the nation of Israel as a whole or their leaders. However, God had bestowed great favours on them all and shown great care over them. He had sent them his servants to call them back to God in repentance, and then had sent his Son Jesus. But like the fig tree there was no fruit, even though ample time had passed for this to

appear. There was no evidence that their lives were changed and that they did indeed love God and, therefore, were living as he wanted them too. There was nothing to indicate they desired to please God at all. They did many wrong things, and failed to do many right things. They were spiritually and morally barren, even though God had been patient with them, like the vineyard owner who had waited three years for his tree to fruit.

(Remember that John the Baptist called for similar fruitfulness from those to whom he preached in Luke 3:7-9: *“John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say within yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.’”*)

However, though the fig tree deserved to be cut down because it was fruitless, a final plea from the man who cared for the vineyard gave the tree one more year in which to become fruitful. Failure then would mean it would be cut down and perish.

So it was with those who heard the teaching of Jesus. God had been patient with them. Many times he had called them to leave their sinful way of living, but they refused,

and there was no fruit. So they were given one more opportunity to repent. Failure would spell everlasting disaster for them. They could not presume on God's patience any more. A radical change was called for. God would not tolerate their sins forever. Soon it would be too late. They needed to be converted immediately - to repent and follow Jesus.

There is great urgency in Jesus' words, and great solemnity. Eternal issues were at stake, and only fools would ignore him. But what about you and me? God has been patient with you so far, for he has spared you and you are still alive. Today may be your last opportunity to produce that fruit which is in keeping with repentance. Therefore, do not delay. Repent now. Seek the forgiveness of your sins which only Jesus can give.

Consider these Bible verses from the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel 18:23: *"Do I take pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?"* Ezekiel 18:32: *"For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!"* Ezekiel 33:11: *"Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'"* And also this verse in Isaiah 55:6-7: *"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man*

*his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."*

Those who refuse to be repentant now, bring inevitable judgment on themselves for eternity. God is gracious and calls all men everywhere to repent. The delay in God's judgment and the failure to respond leave everyone who fails to do so without excuse. So repent today and live.

---

## **Chapter 7 Luke 13:18-21: The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast**

### **1) The setting**

The theme of these parables is the growth of the kingdom of God among men. In Luke 13:10-17 Jesus had experienced strong opposition for doing good on the Sabbath day. This was the seventh day of each week which God had given to the Jews so that they could rest and worship him (Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus had healed a woman in the synagogue who was crippled and bent over. The synagogue was the place where the Jews met to worship God. The synagogue ruler objected to this because he considered this as work (Luke 13:14), and there were others who agreed with him (Luke 13:17a). This same thing happened again and again throughout Jesus' ministry, and many times in the history of the Christian Church. Men always have and always will oppose the work of God. (See Romans 8:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 1 Corinthians 1:18; James 4:4.)

Now, when such opposition exists, and it can be severe at times, there is a great danger that the people of God have to be aware of. We can be tempted to think that wicked men and the devil will succeed. It is very easy for us at such times to become so discouraged that we not only stop telling others about Jesus, but also lose the desire to tell others about him, and even feel the work of the gospel will fail. But in these parables Jesus teaches us very plainly that these enemies of his kingdom will not succeed. Therefore, this is very encouraging, especially for those being opposed for their loyalty to Jesus today.

**2) The parable of the mustard seed (Luke 13:18-19)** (see also Matthew 13 & Mark 4)

Jesus said, *“What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.”*

The parable was Jesus’ answer to his own rhetorical question about the kingdom of God which was designed to gain the people’s attention. The mustard seed was the smallest of seeds used by farmers in the time of Jesus, and yet it grew to be the biggest of all kinds of plants that they grew from seed. In favourable conditions, such as in the Middle Eastern climate, this seemingly insignificant and small seed can grow into a plant between 3 and 4½ metres high, so that the birds can rest in it and find shelter. Jesus said the kingdom of God will spread like that throughout

the world and have its branches in every nation. This is most encouraging.

Small beginnings are no obstacle in the purposes of God. He can and does accomplish much through what is counted little in man’s eyes. The kingdom began with Jesus, just one individual. Then it included the 12 disciples. We go on to read of 120 in Acts 1:15, and 500 in 1 Corinthians 15:6, 3000 in Acts 2:41, and 5000 in Acts 4:4. And within 30 years of Jesus’ death the kingdom had spread as far as Rome, and today is worldwide and growing. Jesus declared in Matthew 24:14, *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come”*.

The work is irresistible and will grow like the mustard seed, in spite of man’s and Satan’s opposition. The work of Jesus will succeed in the world and there will be the complete frustration of his enemies’ evil designs. Consider the assurance given to Joseph when told to give Christ the name Jesus. (Matthew 1:21) *“She (i.e. Mary) will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”* Note the certainty there. Jesus will save, not might save, or perhaps save, but will. Then consider Jesus’ own statement in Matthew 16:18: *“... I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”* Again note the same certainty. Only God can make such statements and he has done so for us in the Bible. He has all power, therefore is well able to do what he declares.

The kingdom will contain millions of people. We read in Revelation 7:9-10, *“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”* Jesus also tells us in Luke 13:29: *“People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.”* Then in Isaiah 53:10-11, as Isaiah prophesied about the sufferings of Jesus, we read, *“Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and **the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.**”*

The kingdom will grow gradually, over a period, just as the mustard seed takes time to grow. Therefore, patience must be mixed with anticipation. We must not let our discouragements dim our vision of the final size of the kingdom of God. It will grow.

All this is because Christ is the King of this kingdom, and its life. And this kingdom brings rest for all its citizens. Just as the birds find rest in the mustard tree, so Christian

believers find rest for their souls, pardon for sin, freedom from guilt, lasting peace, joy in believing, assurance in the face of death, and security forever. The Lord Jesus Christ will bring many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10).

### **3) The parable of the yeast (Luke 13:20-21)**

Jesus said, *“What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”*

Yeast is something which works **within** the dough. It works on the inside. At first it is hardly noticeable, but quietly and surely it permeates through the whole batch and makes it rise, affecting every part. *“Large amount”* (Luke 13:20) is about 22 litres.

So it is with the spread of God’s kingdom and its influence. It is something that begins in the heart of a man or woman, and is unseen to human eyes. It is a spiritual matter. God’s Spirit plants new life in the heart (John 3), and the person is born again. The Holy Spirit gives new life, spiritual life (Ephesians 2:4-5). Christ becomes King in the sinner’s heart and his influence begins to increase and spread, affecting more and more of the saved sinner’s life. More and more he is being transformed. God’s great purpose is to make him perfectly like Christ (Romans 8:29), and this will be accomplished finally when Jesus returns (1 John 3:2&3).

The work of God’s kingdom has these three effects:

### **i. It produces holiness of life**

The result of this ‘inner’ work soon becomes visible. Bit by bit old sins are overcome and new victories achieved. Bit by bit new virtues are produced in us and begin to show. 2 Peter 3:18 becomes a reality as the Christian believer begins to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The follower of Jesus begins to go about doing good, because this is what Jesus did in his life (Acts 10:38), and the Christian believer is growing into Christ’s likeness. What James describes as true religion begins to be seen in the disciple’s life. James 1:27: *“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”* The lists of qualities in these passages begin to blossom and show in the life of Jesus’ true followers (Romans 12:9-21; Ephesians 4:20-5:5; Colossians 3:1ff, especially 12-14).

### **ii. It is irresistible**

Like the yeast, it spreads throughout the believer’s life. God has his way in the heart of his child. Sometimes a great struggle goes on within the believer as he is reluctant to let go of old sins and to humble himself under the mighty hand of God, and to serve and obey God as he ought. **BUT** Christ assures us he will have his way, and the believer will experience increasing victory over the three great enemies - the flesh, the world and the devil.

### **iii. It makes followers of Jesus into light and salt**

Those who are being transformed in this way act as light and salt in the world (Matthew 5:13-16), hence spreading the influence of the kingdom of God even further as they penetrate society. They become used by the Lord as a power for good. For example, they display honesty in business, industry and commerce, and say “No!” to corruption. They are diligent in toil, faithful workers. They become compassionate and caring, helping the needy. Consider how Christians have spearheaded things such as the abolition of slavery, care of orphans, the rights of women, educating the illiterate, medicine and the care of the sick, famine relief, and much more. Throughout history the people of God have been doing this in whatever sphere God has placed them. His kingdom is spreading, and will continue to do so.

### **4) Application**

These parables give us encouragement to take the good news about Jesus to the lost in our needy world. They help us to realise our labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). Jesus will use us, in spite of opposition.

They also place before us a challenge. Are our Christian lives showing the evidence that Christ is our King because we are living for him? Are we growing more and more like Jesus?

Finally, they bring a warning. Do not resist the kingdom, for you will be resisting God and you will fail and suffer greatly.

---

---

**This book is supplied by Grace Baptist Mission and other titles are available in e-mail format at the address below:**

**Grace Baptist Mission  
12 Abbey Close  
Abingdon  
OXON  
OX14 3JD  
UK**

**e-mail: [radio@gbm.org.uk](mailto:radio@gbm.org.uk)**