

Parable Studies

*Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things,
holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

1 Timothy 4:8

This study was written by Sara Schleicher. The theological content was reviewed by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor-emeritus, Pastor David Valleskey.

Parable Study 1

Leader's Guide

Opening Prayer: Dearest Jesus, The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons (1 Tim. 4:1). Keep us spiritually strong and alive by growing our faith in You. How easy it is for us to get distracted by our own ideas and our “busy” lives. Don't let us take this gift for granted. Keep us close to Your Word so we can grow in the knowledge of our Savior and, in turn, scatter the seed of Your Good News. Amen.

Lesson 1

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast (Matthew 13:31-35)

31 He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. **32** Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.” **33** He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.” **34** Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. **35** So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”

1. What are some similar characteristics of mustard seeds and yeast?

They are both very small. Even though mustard seeds are not the smallest of all seeds ever created (some people will argue validity of God's Word because they claim the orchid seed is smaller...but that's not the point. Jesus is using a parable, an earthly story with a spiritual meaning), the mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds that an Israelite might have planted in their garden. Yet, from this small seed would grow a plant large enough for birds to rest in.

2. What can this parable teach us about the kingdom of heaven?

Likewise, God's kingdom here on earth started out in small, unimpressive ways: (some suggestions from Albrecht's People's Bible/Matthew)

1) a tiny mustard seed=Christ coming to this world as a baby, born in Bethlehem to an unknown peasant girl in Nazareth.

2) Only a few shepherds came to worship, but hardly anyone else seemed to notice He had been born.

3) Ordinary Childhood. Jesus spent childhood with Joseph, a carpenter, and Mary in Nazareth. Not a

royal upbringing.

4) Ordinary Disciples. At age of 30 Jesus began His public ministry and who did He choose to be His disciples? Twelve unschooled, ordinary men. Fishermen!

5) Grows rapidly. After 3 years of public teaching, Jesus is captured by his enemies, condemned to death and crucified. Did God's seed fail to produce? NO. After Jesus' resurrection, which proved that He had accomplished His purpose on earth (Rom. 4:25), and after His ascension, the Church grew. And it grew rapidly, beginning with the 3000 people who were brought to faith during Pentecost (10 days later).

Although God doesn't promise such spectacular growth at all times, His Church will never perish. It will continue until the end of time.

3. The parable of the yeast shows the way Christ's kingdom grows in this world.

Yeast works quietly and invisibly, yet it works effectively. The yeast=the power of the gospel of Christ and its method of working. The gospel is the ONLY tool and the ONLY power God has given us for nurturing and extending His Church on earth. We are not responsible for causing Christ's Church on earth to grow, but the Lord wants us to serve as his messengers.

4. Where does the word "church" come from?

The word translated "church" in the English Bible is ekklesia. This word comes from the Greek words kaleo (to call), with the prefix ek (out). Thus, the word means "the called out ones. Even though we often refer to the church as a physical building or place where we gather, "the Church" (capital C) is really those who have been called out, who through faith in Jesus, are part of the body of Christ. The Lord can see the faith in our hearts. We, however, can only see the fruits of faith and not the faith itself. The Church is invisible to our eyes, but it grows as God causes it to grow.

5. Where have you seen evidence of the growth of Christ's Church?

1) Every time a baby is baptized, the Church grows.

2) When people come to church or children to Sunday school or VBS at my invitation and they hear the Word, the Holy Spirit is present to work faith in their hearts; and in this way the Church grows.

3) When I answer people's questions with the Word of God, this gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to create saving faith in their hearts, and the Church grows.

4) When, with my offerings, I help to send missionaries out into the world who bring the gospel to people, the Holy Spirit will be active in people's hearts; and the Church grows.

Introduction to next parable: unique to the book of Mark— it's from the seed chapter in the Bible. Mark chapter 4, "seed stories that show the power of the gospel."

The Parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29)

26 He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. **27** Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. **28** All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. **29** As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

1. What does the seed represent?

The seed represents the power of the gospel. The famous parable of the sower focuses on the soil where the seed (God's Word) is scattered, but here, the emphasis is on the seed itself. A seed is very unimpressive, but inside there is a root and a shoot with growing power that can burst through soil and eventually grow into a living plant.

2. Look at verse 27. The emphasis is not on the work of the farmer, but on what?

The emphasis is on the work of the seed. The seed itself is not dependent upon man. It is the gospel message that has power. Romans 1:16. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." The gospel has power. And its power can work outside of a church building. The Holy Spirit is not constrained by physical locations. It is that mysterious working of the gospel message that strengthens faith and brings believers into maturity.

3. The power of the Word will prompt us to do more scattering of the Word. Where is a good place to do this?

Some might say at church. What would happen to the growth of the Kingdom of God if we only talked about spiritual things at church? Do we sometimes neglect sharing our faith with those who are closest to us...like our own family and friends? We won't want to wait for the people to come strolling in. We will want to go out, invite them. We will want to show them who Christ is and share that peace by sharing the gospel with them. We will want to live in such a way that

people are moved to ask us to “give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet. 3:15). And we will want to pray for them.

Digging Deeper:

In Matthew 13:35, we are reminded that Jesus speaking in parables was another fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Though our eyes may fail to see all the prophecies Jesus fulfilled, He did not fail to fulfill a single one! Read Psalm 78:2.

- Why did Jesus speak in parables? Read Matthew 13:10-17.
- Doing the Lord’s work can be discouraging at times because we may not get to see the fruit of our labor, but remember—we are to keep spreading the gospel, regardless of the outcome. Read 1 Cor. 3:6-7 and Isaiah 55:10-12.
- Read the lyrics to Hymn #544 “Preach You the Word.”

Memory passage: *1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

Parable Study 2

Leader's Guide

Opening Prayer: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, You have shown us the signs of the end of the age. You have told us to be watchful so we will not be deceived. You have taught us to be prepared by looking to You and trusting in Your salvation. May Your Holy Spirit come and fill our hearts with gladness and joy, as we await the glorious return of our Bridegroom, in Christ. Amen.

Lesson

Introduction

I have a friend named Becky who was meeting us for Bible study one evening. It was an evening with fresh snow, and I worried about her driving 20 miles out of town when the salt/sand trucks hadn't been out yet. I really didn't think she was going to make it. I thought for sure she would have just stayed home. But she showed up! She explained that she was a little bit late because she had to stop for gas and didn't think it would be WISE to keep going without filling up her tank a bit...\$3 worth! Just enough to get her here.

Have you ever run out of gas? We have these handy little things in our cars called a fuel gauge. It tells us when we're getting low. If you have a really fancy car, it might even tell you how many miles you have left before you run out.

Question: Are you more likely to run out of gas in your car...or in something like your lawn mower, snow blower or gas grill that might not have a fuel gauge?

In tools without a fuel gauge, you kind of have to watch and think about how much gas you've used up. I'm not sure if a fuel gauge helps or hinders our preparedness when it comes to keeping the gas tank from going empty. But I do know that if we were told the day or the hour when we would run out of gas...we might not let that happen. Anyway, our parable tonight really reflects on our preparedness. Preparedness to meet our Savior and what we need to stand firm until the end.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)

1 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. **2** Five of them were foolish and five were wise. **3** The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. **4** The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. **5** The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. **6** “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ **7** “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. **8** The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ **9** “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ **10** “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. **11** “Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ **12** “But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’ **13** “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

1. This parable starts out with 3 important words “At that time...” What time is Jesus talking about here?

Jesus is talking about His second coming, when He will return to judge the world and take His faithful followers with Him. When you get home this week...take a look at the chapter before this parable (End Times) and what follows this parable in chapter 25 (sheep and the goats).

2. True or false? The foolish virgins had never come to faith. Explain.

False. It seems best to consider all the virgins as being Christians. The foolish virgins are those Christians who fall away and do not remain spiritually awake. The parable is applied to the Church, to you and me. Jesus is warning believers not to be like the foolish virgins.

Thinking back to last week’s lesson: Remember our definition of church (little c) and the Holy Christian Church (capital C)? Although we pray that it doesn’t happen...it is true that being physically present in church (little c) does not necessarily mean that person is part of the Holy Christian Church (capital C - all believers of all time). It is possible that one can become “spiritually drowsy” and fall from faith.

3. See verse 6. What is the significance of “midnight”?

It was late. Perhaps the foolish virgins had given up any hope of meeting the bridegroom that evening. We must never think it is too late—or too early for Jesus to return. He has told us to be on our watch! Because we don’t know the day or the hour when He will come again. Midnight is the moment where

there is a change from one day to the next. The moment Jesus comes back, we will be ushered from this life to eternal life.

Read Mark 13:32-37...The Day and Hour Unknown

4. What does the oil represent?

The oil represents the main point that Jesus is making in his parable: Just as the virgins had to be ready at all times, so we need to be watchful and ready since we do not know the day or hour Jesus will be returning.

5. We know faith in Jesus cannot be bought or sold. So what is the meaning of the wise virgins telling the foolish ones to go buy some for themselves?

Good to remember that Jesus makes ONE big point of comparison with his parables. The truth - some will be ready, some not. When Jesus returns, if you're not ready, you can't rely on someone else's preparedness/faith or hope to quickly run off and get ready. Either you'll be ready or not. Be ready. Stay ready.

6. What are some practical ways we can keep ourselves ready for the coming of God's kingdom?

*Stay connected to Jesus through His Word. When trials and tribulations come, we can find comfort in Him. Knowing ahead of time what He has taught us will keep us from despair, and help us know where to look in our time of need. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Do not worry, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:33
Practical ways: Bible apps for phone, keep a Bible in your car, carry a Bible devotion book to appointments/kids' activities. Try the \$10 paperback one-year Bibles for getting through your Bible in a year. Attend a Bible study. Set aside time to do a devotion with your spouse.
whataboutjesus.com...subscribe...email devotions.*

Digging Deeper:

- Read the longest Psalm in the Bible! Psalm 119.
- Note the emotional plea of the foolish virgins in verse 11. In love, Jesus gives His people warning before He comes. Read Matthew 7:21-23; Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:31-35.
- Our preparedness for heaven does not depend on our sinlessness, but on God's election. Find reassurance of God's calling by reading 2 Thessalonians.
- Sing Hymn #206 Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying

Memory passage: *Romans 13:11 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.*

Parable Study 3

Leader's Guide

Opening Prayer: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in love, you have chosen us to be Your own. You have invited us to live with you eternally and also enjoy the peace and blessing of fellowship with You here on earth. Forgive us for the times we've put our own earthly pursuits and desires ahead of your plans for us. Thank you for covering our sin, clothing us with Christ, and making us Your radiant Bride through faith in Jesus. Amen.

Lesson 3

Introduction:

- In our first session we talked about the parable of the mustard seed and yeast and learned how God's kingdom grows quietly and invisibly.
- We learned from the parable of the growing seed that it is the GOSPEL message that has power and how God is the only One who can make it grow.
- Then we had the parable of the ten virgins, and we learned to be like the wise virgins—prepared for the Bridegroom when He comes.
- Now, we're going to be at the wedding banquet itself.

Let's talk Weddings: what in particular made your wedding banquet or celebration special? ie. cake in spouses' face, dancing, family and friends all together. Were you overwhelmed by everyone who came? By everyone who took time out of their busy schedules to travel and take part in your day?

Now, let's take a look at THE wedding banquet Jesus has invited us to attend.

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matthew 22:1-14)

1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: **2** “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. **3** He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. **4** “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ **5** “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. **6** The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. **7** The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. **8** “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. **9** Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ **10** So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. **11** “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. **12** ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. **13** “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ **14** “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

1. What is Jesus’ simple point or truth with this parable?

(Let them struggle for the answer a bit here...give plenty of time to listen to responses...think)

*Jesus is usually trying to make ONE point in all of His parables. Often times that point can be seen right up front, or at the end. **Hint: see verse 14. Many are invited, few are chosen.***

2. Who were the first people invited to the banquet?

God first invited the Jews...but they refused to come. So God extended the invitation to Gentiles.

3. How did the Jews show contempt for God’s gracious invitation?

*1. Some paid no attention and went about their business. They were too attached to their worldly life to follow God. **Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2:15***

2. Most Jews depended on their own righteousness and obedience to the law. By doing so they rejected the free invitation to grace that had been extended to them.

3. Others actively mistreated God’s servants and killed them.

4. How did others show their contempt (verse 12)? They didn't wear the wedding clothes given to them.

4. What does verse 9 teach you about God's grace?

It is for everyone. Not based on man's outward appearance of good or bad. God's grace is also not something that can be trampled on...Jesus is no respecter of persons. If people reject Him, He will give his gift of salvation to others. (see Romans 10:19 how God made Jews jealous by giving their inheritance to Gentiles)

5. Think about how often you are willing to share a great deal—a coupon—buy one, get one free! Now, think about the banquet God has prepared for you. How will you share that free gift? *After our last session, TWO people came up to me after class and asked me if I wanted a coupon. And, before class, another friend had shared with me how to save 5 cents per gallon at the local gas station. Look at how eager we are to share these “good deals” with our friends. How much more should we be sharing the good deal we have in Jesus...our sins for His righteousness. Remember, we do not need to be ashamed of the gospel! Go out into the streets and invite anyone you find.*

And don't worry about the results, the Holy Spirit will take care of the rest. i.e. I politely told the first person, no thanks. I don't really need anything from Kohl's right now. But the chipotle coupon...I could use! The same is true when we share the gospel. Some will not be ready for it, but some will receive it with joy. Others may just need to hear the gospel a few times...keep sharing.

6. Martin Luther said: “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel.”

How does his statement line up with God's Word in verse 14?

Note, the text does not say: many are invited, but few chose to come. Rather, it says “few are chosen.” Our faith in God is a gift based on God's calling. (Ephesians 2:8-9...For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.) Where else in the Bible does God remind us it is not our decision, but rather God who chose us? PAUSE Read John 1:10-13. Read John 15:16-19.

Digging Deeper:

- Compare this parable to the Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14:15-24
- Search for Bible passages that speak of being clothed in righteousness. Here's some to get you started: Isaiah 61:10; Isaiah 1:18; Galatians 3:27

- Every sinner who by God's graces accepts this great invitation, confesses that Jesus truly is the Son of God. Read 2 great confessions of faith: The Centurion, Matthew 27:54 and The Thief on the Cross, Luke 23:40-43.

- Read or sing Hymn #54 Where Shepherds Lately Knelt
 "Can I, will I forget how Love was born, and burned
 Its way into my heart unasked, unforced, unearned..."

Memory passage: *Jeremiah 2:32 Does a maiden forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.*