

# *The Parables of Jesus*



*Bible study series*

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## **Definition:**

A parable is originally a Greek word meaning: “placing one thing beside another for the purpose of illustrating, facilitating, or clarifying a point, a doctrine, or a precept”.

Its equivalent in Hebrew is the word **“Mashal”**, and in Arabic is the word **“Mathal”** which means an example.

So, if one wants to illustrate or facilitate a matter to an audience, he would use something that is known and familiar to them, so that they can identify with it.

For example, I would not talk to a layman about the atomic fission or the atomic reactor. That is what Jesus did with His audience.

So, in order to understand The Lord’s parables, we must go back to the culture and customs of that audience at that time.

A lot of misunderstanding of the Lord’s words and parables is due to the fact that we do not know that much about the culture and customs of people at that time.

For example, when we read about raising the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Mat. 9:18 – 26; Mark 5:22 – 42; Luke 8:49), we find that when He arrived at Jairus’ house, He saw a tumult, commotion and those who wept and wailed loudly. We do not know exactly what all that means, because all those who were crying and wailing loudly were not essentially the Jairus family. And this brings us to their culture, because at every incident of death there was three categories of mourners and wailers:

**1) Obviously first of all is the family** which is not only the household of Jairus, but also all the other relatives who live in the same house or outside. They all mourn and cry and abstain from eating. And since they do not eat, they obviously would not cook, so friends and neighbors bring food for the entire mourning crowd.

**2) Hired professional mourners**, who are experts in lamentation, wailing and crying loudly, slapping their cheeks right and left, sitting in sack cloths and gathering ashes on their heads, and above all they have the ability to utter flammable words of sorrow and anguish which flares up the sorrow, sadness and emotions in the hearts of all who are there. These words usually fit the deceased in age, sex, marital status, and so on. And as the case with any art, the more effective that professional is, the higher is her fees. And the status of the family is measured by whom they hire for lamentation.

**3) The friends and neighbors** who have to share in the act otherwise they will be branded as unsympathetic, and at the same time they would expect a return of the favor when the same happens to them.

In the western hemisphere, we may share some of these customs like bringing food for the mourners although they make a party out of the whole incident. And in some other places, as in New Orleans they hire musicians and dancers to do that job.

Another example is what we traditionally see in pictures and movies about the Lord’s supper, where the imagination of the artists even the very famous ones, puts Jesus and

His disciples on chairs around a long banquet table with a fine table cloth, which was not the case, since the custom was to sit on cushions on the floor reclining usually on their left side which makes each one as if leaning on each others' chest; and now we can understand what the writer of the gospel of John means by the disciple whom Jesus loved was leaning on Jesus' chest in the last supper (John 13:25).

And the setting was in a **U** shaped manner with a little table in the middle and the open end of the **U** is where the maid or servant enters to serve them. And in feasts they sit in ranks with the older first and then the younger, with a special place for the guest of honor. And as a gesture of showing that he is welcomed at the house, the host will kiss the guest on the cheek and in rare cases on the hands if the guest is of very high status. Then he will have his feet washed by a servant or the host, then they bring water for him to wash his hands, then the feast begins. So, what we see in pictures or in movies is far from the truth.

This welcoming rituals are extended to any guest even if he was an enemy. Probably the host may not admit his enemy to his house from the beginning, but once he is under his roof, the host is obliged to extend to him every possible courtesy, the customs permit. Take for example Lot and the Angels who were his guests in Gomorrah. This is but two simple examples of many, by which I do hope that we may get the picture of how important the knowledge of the culture is, that we may understand the parables.

And as we discuss each parable, we shall talk about the culture concerning each one of them.

Some commentators consider that every word uttered by Jesus is a parable in itself, on the basis that the Scripture tells us that “**Jesus without a parable spoke he not unto them**” (Mat. 13:34)

In this study, we are not going to follow this route. We shall limit our study to those parables which fit in the definition mentioned above.

## **The Parable of the unjust steward**

### (Luke 16:1 – 8)

I chose to start with this parable, because it has disturbed me and a good number of my friends and family members for a long time. But at the same time it is a perfect example of the importance of knowing the culture and customs of the audience and people at that time.

The thing that disturbed me is my strong belief that Jesus can never condone a wrong doing or praise it as it falsely appears in this parable to those who are not familiar with the culture at that time. It took me a good number of years to understand the real and correct meaning of this parable.

#### **Setting and background:**

First we must bear in mind that Jesus was talking to a group of Pharisees and scribes as it is evident from chapter 15 verse 2. Please take notice of that because we shall return to it at the end of this parable.

Let us read the story together which goes as follows:

"There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, what is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward. Then the steward said within himself, what shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, how much do you owe my master? And he said a hundred measures of oil. So he said to him, take your bill and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then he said to another, and how much do you owe? So he said a hundred measures of wheat. And he said to him, take your bill and write eighty.

So the master **commended** the unjust steward because he had dealt **shrewdly**, for the sons of this world are shrewder in their generation than the sons of light.

**And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home."**

Now we know the story, so let us discuss the cultural aspects of it:

- 1) The rich masters at that time were business men, and they used to travel a lot to make deals as profitable as they could.
- 2) So they obviously could not take care of their businesses at home themselves.
- 3) So they appointed stewards to take care of their business. And usually that steward would be one of the loyal servants of his household, or an outsider who is usually a professional steward.
- 4) This steward whether of the household or an outsider is paid to do the Job, either by a fixed salary or by a percentage of the annual income as the case may be.
- 5) This annual income is usually a certain amount of the produce of the land agreed upon between the master and the renter through the steward who negotiates his best for the benefit of his master.
- 6) After the negotiation, a contract is drawn and becomes legally effective.

- 7) In some occasions, this contract can only be changed by the master through the steward, and always for the benefit of the renter in disastrous conditions such as drought, very hot burning summer or very cold frosty winter, and sometimes out of the good heart of the master in certain occasions such as having a new born child, wedding of his first born, marriage of his daughter or other similar occasions, and of course the renter would be very grateful, and he goes and expresses his gratitude to the master, and praise the master in the village.
- 8) Now the steward knowing his duties, he also knows that there is no place for mis-appropriating his masters possessions, and that the penalty for this is immediate firing, taking the stewardship from him and giving it to another, and imprisonment till paying all what is due. All the above are the rules according to the **Mishnah**.

Now, putting all that into consideration, let us take the story a bit by bit and see what is happening.

In our story, the master heard about the mis – appropriation, and surely he fired the steward but not immediately. On the contrary he gave him time to give an account of his stewardship. He did not put him in jail either.

Now, what does this mean to the steward? He says to himself, yes my master fired me, and I deserve it. But on the other hand he is very merciful to me because he did not put me in jail, and he gave me time to straighten up my books. And immediately he thought of how he can take advantage of his master's mercy and kindness.

A shrewd idea came to his mind: if I can lower the dues of the renters, the credit will go to my master because they know very well that this relief cannot come except from him, on the other hand, I will be liked by the debtors and be accepted in their homes because they will think that I have persuaded my master to do that, since I am the only link between them.

So quickly before the news spread out that he is fired, he calls on the renters separately and let them change their bills into their favor in their own handwriting, so that his master wouldn't catch him in fraud.

Now the news spread fast in the village not about the firing of the steward but about the generosity and kindness of the master, and everyone is praising him.

But now the master finds himself in a tight corner: he can declare that the whole thing is fraud and illegal because the deal was done by a fired steward who has no legal right to do so, and in that case the joy and the praise of the people in the village will turn to anger against him, and he will be branded as a hard unkind and unmerciful master.

The alternative is to accept the new situation and bear the consequences.

Moreover, in small closed communities like villages or small cities where most dealings are by word of honor, an honorable man cannot go back on his word especially if he is a landlord and every body looks up to him, and if he does, then he will be branded as dishonorable person, and once a man loses his honor, he cannot show his face in the community any more, and he would rather kill himself or leave the village. This means that the rich man is now trapped, and he cannot do anything about it but to accept it.

But now if we think about it: who paid the price for the ill-doing of the steward? It is the master; he lost money for the renters and at the same time he was not compensated for the loss he encountered because of the mis-appropriation of his goods by the steward.

As for the steward he played his trick depending on his full confidence in his master's mercy and good nature. He gambled with all his cards on that fact.

Seeing what had happened, **the master marveled at how smart the steward is and commended his shrewdness.**

Then Jesus turned around and told His **audience who were mostly Pharisees and scribes** (as mentioned above in 15:2): **“And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.”**

Why did Jesus say “by unrighteous mammon” while we expect him to say “by righteous mammon”?

**Because that is how the Pharisees and scribes made their money.**(Luke 11:39b & 16:14)

**Now, what can we get out of this parable?**

- 1) We must notice that Jesus did not commend the unjust steward, it was his master.
- 2) Jesus did not recommend making friends with bad money, but he was addressing those who have gathered their money in an unrighteous manner. So, we should not take this as carte blanche to gather unrighteous money to make friends.
- 3) We may think we are smart and shrewd, and we may play tricks on God; but we must realize that God is not mocked; and it is only out of his unconditional love and mercy, that he pulls us up out of our faulty life (not because we are smart).
- 4) There is no excuse for our sins, and at His judgment seat, we shall stand speechless unable to produce excuses for our sins, exactly as that steward did.
- 5) The proper way to correct our sins is to confess them and repent, and our Lord is kind and merciful enough to forgive our sins and purify us from all iniquities (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9).  
Had the steward done that, his master would have not encountered all these losses and he would have been forgiven.
- 6) The master in this story was cornered and forced to accept that situation created by the steward, but God cannot be forced to accept our crooked ways, although in a way he died on the cross, because there was no other way to redeem humanity; and he did that out of his deep love for us.
- 7) As the steward acted on his complete confidence in his master’s kindness and mercy, though for the wrong motive, so we also should act on complete confidence in God’s promises and trust Him for all what happens in our lives.

## **The parable of the workers in the vineyard And The gracious landlord (Matthew 20:1 – 16)**

### **Setting and background:**

In this parable Jesus is talking to the multitude which also included Pharisees and scribes besides his disciples. He is showing them how things work in the kingdom of heavens.

It goes on like that:

"A landlord went out early in the morning to hire workers to work in his vineyard. He agreed with those he hired on a denarius for a twelve hours day's work which starts from 1 A.M (6 A.M. our time) to 12 P.M. (6 P.M. our time). Then it happened that he went out again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour (9 A.M. our time), and at the 6<sup>th</sup> hour (our noon time), and also at the 9<sup>th</sup> hour (3 P.M. our time) and found others standing there in the market place looking for work so he hired them also telling them that he will give them whatever is right. Lastly he went out at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour (5 P.M. our time) and found others standing there looking for work so he told them to go and work in his vineyard and he will give them whatever is suitable.

At the end of the day which is just one hour after hiring the last group, he asked his steward to pay all of them one denarius beginning with the last ones who only worked for one hour. Of course they were very happy; but the ones that worked for the whole twelve hours were very unhappy and murmured complaining that it is not fair to be paid equal to those who worked only for one hour. Was the landlord really unfair?

The landlord kindly addressed one of them saying: "Friend I have done you no wrong, didn't we agree on one denarius for the whole day's work? Then take what is due to you and depart in peace for I am free to do whatever I like with my money, or do I have no right to do so? Or do you think evil because I am good?"

Then Jesus ends the parable by saying: "So the last will be first and the first will be last; for many are called but few are chosen"

Before we analyze what happened in this parable, we need to know something about the culture at that time.

Those who had no contract or permanent job, used to gather in a certain spot in the market place very early in the morning and wait for someone to hire them on a daily bases, and if they were lucky and pleased who hired them, they may get the job for few more days. And usually they agree about the wages before starting the job. This may seem unique to that part of the world, but the same happens in most of the Middle Eastern countries till today; but I am not sure about the same customs in the Far East. However I saw it also happening here in the U.S.A in Houston, Texas and in Los Angles California, though not exactly in a market place, but the hirelings gather at a specific street corner or in a shopping mole known to those who need a helping hand.

These hirelings as mentioned above may stand there the whole day without being hired. This is very tough and sad, because their families will be waiting for their return at the end of the day carrying something for them to eat. So if he is not hired, this means that he and his family will be hungry for that day till the evening of the next day when he comes back carrying or not carrying any food. An adult may stand a day without food, but how about the children? They will be crying for food with no avail. Add to all that, the humiliation that the hireling suffers standing in the hot sun all day waiting for a kind landlord to hire him, then a promising prospect may come around who looks at his face and then hires someone else.

### **Analysis:**

- 1) Obviously the landlord in this parable, is very kind and compassionate, because why should he go to the market place 5 times in a single day? Didn't he know from the beginning how many workers he exactly needs for the work in his vineyard? Of course he did. Then why would he do that? The answer is: when he went early in the morning he only hired some of the many who were standing there hoping that other landlords will come and hire the rest. But what if not? The hireling and his wife and children will have no food for two days. So out of compassion, he goes out to the market place to make sure that all have been hired, but alas he still finds some standing there waiting, so he hires some and he repeats this process two more times. And at the very end at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour he goes again knowing for sure that he will not find any left, but to his surprise, he finds some more. He couldn't leave these men to despair, and out of his passionate kind heart, he hires them as well knowing that they will not do much in one hour.
- 2) What would have happened if the landlord had instructed his steward to pay the workers beginning with those whom he hired first?  
The first-hired, each will take the denarius with great joy and gratitude and thank or may even praise the Landlord, and hurry to his wife and children.  
So, we conclude that the complaint and murmuring happened only after they have seen that the others were paid the same. Did they look at their fellow workers with compassion as the landlord did? **No**. Did they think about what would have happened to them had they were not hired and think about those who found work at the last hour of the day? **No**. They only thought of themselves and became very angry at the Landlord for his compassion and kindness. Not only that, but they wanted to press the landlord to treat them differently, or treat the others differently.
- 3) What would have happened if the first-hired had some love and compassion to the last-hired?  
They would have been happy for them, and they would have rejoiced together, and praised God for all His unsearchable gifts.

### **Now what can we get out of this parable?**

- 1) The Scripture tells us that Jesus was talking to the multitude including the Scribes and Pharisees who work hard to keep the law all the day (like the first-hired) to earn the reward at the end (which is the kingdom of Heavens), the thing which they firmly believed in. So they were very angry to find out that the kingdom of Heavens was also open equally to those who did not work that hard (The last-hired in our parable);



and they wanted to change God's decision to their own benefit; exactly as the first-hired did with the landlord trying to persuade him to change his mind about their wages.

- 2) The five visits of the land lord to the market place is really a metaphor of what God does being concerned about each one of us till the last hour or minute of our life. He goes in the last hour to see if still someone hasn't had the chance to get fed as the last-hired, so that He can feed him the spiritual food which takes him to eternal life.
- 3) In this parable Jesus is teaching us to be concerned about others who are unfortunate to taste His gracious love and kindness, as it is expected from the first-hired towards the last or even the non-hired, but alas it did not happen  
Look at the concern that the apostle Paul had to his country men in his epistle to the Romans; saying that he has great sorrow and continual grieve in his heart for he could wish he himself were accursed from Christ for his brethren his countrymen according to the flesh (Rom. 9:2, 3); and in Rom. 10:1 he says" Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved."
- 4) This parable teaches us also that we the believers are all equal, no matter when we did confess Him as savior and Lord. And the best example is the criminal on His right who did that at the last moments of his life, and the Holy Scripture tells us that Jesus accepted him and granted him that precious promise that he will be with Him in paradise that same day.(Luke 23:43)

## **The parable of the prodigal son** (Luke 15:11 – 32)

**This** parable is a perfect classical example of the everlasting wide open arms of God to the repentant and Jesus said that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety nine righteous who need no repentance (Luke 15:7).

### **Setting and background:**

A certain rich man had two sons. One day the younger son asked him for his share in the inheritance. Sometime later he departed to a distant country where he spent all his money in an extravagant indulging life. He then worked as a swine keeper to sustain himself, and so much he wished to feed on the food thrown to the swine. One day he woke up to himself and said, how many servant and hireling serving in my father's estate have abundance of food and I am dying here of hunger. I will go up and return to my father, and tell him that I have sinned against him and heaven, and I am unworthy to be called his son, and beg him to take me in, even as one of his hirelings. So he went back, and while he was still far away, his father saw him and ran to him with wide open arms and hugged him and ordered his servants to bathe him and dress him in the best suit and put a ring in his finger and make a big feast and kill the fatted calf and invite all people to come and celebrate the safety return of his son.

Then the story turns to a different direction, for the older son returning from the field at the end of the day, he heard all the music and singing. So he called one of the servants and asked him about what is happening, and the servant told him that his younger brother has returned and that his father is celebrating his safe return.

The older brother full of fury, envy and anger refused to enter the house.

His father heard, so he went out and asked him to come in and rejoice with them, but he answered him that he has been serving him for so many years, and he never gave him even a small goat to enjoy with his friends, but when that son of yours who spent your livelihood with the harlots, came back, you killed the fatted calf for him.

But the loving father told him that he will be always with him and whatever he has is his, but let us now be happy and merry for my son was lost and now found and was dead and now he is alive.

### **Analysis:**

1) The younger son is no good from the beginning. He acted rudely and insensitively towards his father by asking him for his share of the inheritance while he is still alive. This is unheard of in the Middle Eastern culture. No son can dare to ask for his share of inheritance while the father is alive. It is considered a bad omen and puts the son as wishing his father's death.

A father can divide his wealth between his sons in a written will to be effective only after his death, but never while he is alive.

One may ask, since this is impossible to happen, then why Jesus puts the scenario this way. The answer is to show how bad, rude, and insensitive that young son was to his father.

2) The Holy Scripture states that the father divided to them (that is to both sons) his livelihood (vs. 12), but it is not mentioned if the older son took his share or not. As a

- good son in the Middle East and out of respect to his father, he would decline that offer, and wish his father good health and long years to come to be added to him.
- 3) The younger son had bad intentions from the beginning because not so long after, he left his family and his father's house which also does not happen in the Middle Eastern culture, except in case of marriage where the son may choose to leave his father's house, although a good number still prefer to stay.
  - 4) He departed to a distant country. He could have stayed in the same country living in another village or city, and he will be still in his own country. But he chose to go to a foreign country which in this case was a Gentile country. We know that from the fact that after he lost all of his money, he worked as swine attendant. Jews do not bread swine because it is defile, so it must have been a Gentile territory.  
This is a metaphor indicating that he went astray to a different life style away from the father's love and guidance.
  - 5) In those days each family runs a certain business whether working in the field or trading and all the family members are expected to help in that business.  
So, the young son was selfish and very inconsiderate to leave the entire burden on his brother's shoulder.
  - 6) We are not to discuss here how the young son lost his inheritance, suffice to know that he lived in indulgence and extravagance. What matters is that in the end he became needy whether there was a famine in the region or not.  
Again this is a metaphor, for he who goes astray will always be in need for both physical and spiritual sustenance and support.
  - 7) Two beauties are prominent in this story:
    - a- The lost son repented (some theologians say he didn't. I do not agree with them).
    - b- The father opened his welcoming arms.  
**So, the lost son repented and turned 180 degrees in the other direction; and that is what the word repentance means.** The response of the loving forgiving father is nothing else but opening his welcoming arms.  
Let us see how much the father suffered yet he forgave:
      - a- The younger son insulted him in private at his home by asking for his inheritance while he was still alive.
      - b- He also insulted him in public, because soon after, the whole city or village knew, especially when the son wanted to liquidate his inheritance into cash so that he can carry it away. The villagers in the Middle East live as one community, looking after each other. The land they farm is every thing to them. They eat out of its produce and they sell what they do not consume. So when they hear that one of them is selling his land, this means that he is in great trouble, and so each one chips in to save him from selling his land.  
So, we can see that the family's honor is now in the dirt.
      - c- Then he was insulted by his son by leaving the family's home.
      - d- Lastly he suffered the separation of his son whom he may not see again.
- Now let us see what happened: The son took action and the father responded.  
Again this is a metaphor; because once we repent we are accepted back. Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached that.
- 8) The watching and long waiting eyes of the father. He was always waiting for his son to come back. This is also a metaphor; God is always waiting for us to come back

- no matter how long it takes us, although the sooner the better. The beating heart of the loving father is always expecting and looking for the moment when he sees his son coming back so much so that he can recognize him even from far away.
- 9) Would the father stand still? No, he was so happy to see his son again; that he ran and met him halfway, fell on his neck, and hugged him.  
Again this is very unusual or unheard of in the Middle Eastern culture, because highly respected men do not run, partly because of the culture where a dignified man cannot run and partly because of the long robes they wear which hinder them from running.  
The son began to recite the words he prepared in his mind to tell the father, but the father probably did not hear one word of what he said. He was busy rejoicing, which brings me to the metaphoric meaning of what Jesus had said earlier that that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety nine righteous who need no repentance (Luke 15:7).
- 10) The father ordered few preparations for the reception. Let us see what he did:
- a- He ordered cleansing. So also the Heavenly father will do when we come back. Notice that he accepted the son as is. He didn't cleanse him before acceptance. So is the heavenly Father, He accepts us the way we are, then He cleanse us.
  - b- He ordered the best suit. This is for the guest of honor. He did not rebuke him for what he had done, on the contrary he put him in a status of honor, so that he may introduce him to the village.  
So will the heavenly father, He will not rebuke us, He will put us in the status of honor to introduce us to His family.
  - c- He ordered a ring to be put in his finger. This is a middle-eastern gesture of re-instating him as a son. So also our Heavenly Father will do with us (John 1:12).
  - d- He ordered a feast, killing the fatted calf, and inviting all the relatives and friends to come and rejoice with him.  
So will our Heavenly Father, He and Heaven will rejoice as mentioned above.
- 11) **An act of envy:** that was the attitude of the older son. He didn't like it at all. How come that his father welcomes back his brother who wished him dead after all what he had done? What is even worse is that he re-instated him and made a feast for him while he (the father) never gave him a small worthless goat to enjoy with his friends.  
**"I worked hard for you all these years for nothing"** Said he, **"and you make him equal to me"**. And he refused to enter the house. This is again a public insult to the father, but this time it was from the older son.  
Is this an attitude of a good son? Obviously not, he is equally bad as his brother. It is true that he did not ask for his inheritance, and it is true that he did not spend his father's money, and it is true that he did not insult his father and leave the house, and it is true that he was a good son looking after the family business.  
But he is equally selfish thinking only of himself, and bringing sorrow to his father's heart (as did the younger son earlier), by not accepting his brother back.  
If he is a true member of the family then he should rejoice as the rest did.
- 12) My son, said the father, you are with me all the time, and what is mine is yours; but we should rejoice because your brother was lost and then found, was dead and he is alive. I would like to comment on the word **"dead"**.

According to the Middle Eastern culture, a son who insults his father and wishes him dead as the younger son did, is considered dead at least by the father if not by the whole family, and probably by the whole village.

So according to this, the son was considered dead.

Spiritually it means dead in sin and away from the heavenly family of God.

So, all of us are spiritually dead so long as we are away from the father.

We are dead in our sins.

### **Now what can we get out of this parable?**

- 1) Like the younger son, we sometimes go astray, but what matters is repentance, then we shall be accepted with open arms.
- 2) God will accept us no matter what status we are in. Satan always tries to convince us otherwise. But Jesus said: **“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”** (Mat. 9:13).
- 3) He who is away from the Heavenly Father is always in spiritual need.
- 4) God always re-instates us as children when we repent and come back.
- 5) Once accepted back we are all equal because we are members of one family. There is no place for envy in the kingdom of God.
- 6) We should rejoice for every one who repents and finds his way back.
- 7) We should not grieve or insult our heavenly father by rejecting Him, and Paul said: **“Quench not the Spirit.”** (1<sup>st</sup> Thess. 5:19)  
And he also warned the Ephesians: **“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”** (Eph. 4:30)

Against all belief, this parable is a true metaphor of how much our Lord Jesus Christ had suffered because of us, yet He opened His arms to receive us in His kingdom.

## **The parable of Lazarus and the rich man** (Luke 16:19 – 30)

### **Setting and background:**

All through this parable, Jesus paints to us a beautiful precise masterpiece of contrast. So here we have a very rich man who probably lives in a palace or a mansion, and we know that by the gate mentioned, because houses at that time had doors and not gates. The rich man was very rich and we know that by the Purple clothing which he wore every day. Purple was very expensive in those days because it was not artificially produced but it was a natural extraction from certain snails; and it has been a symbol of royalty in ancient times and even till now in the countries which still hang on monarchy. Thyatira in Asia Minor was famous about purple in the Pauline era, and we all know of Lydia of Philippi who was a merchant of purple and who was rich enough to host Paul and his companions during their stay in Philippi (Acts 16:14 - 15).

This rich man did not only cloth himself expensively in purple on certain occasions, but every day, and he also lived expensively, making parties and banquets every day; and this explains why Lazarus the poor man chose to be placed there every day, hoping to get some alms from this man's rich guests if not from the host himself; and as it turned out later, neither him nor his rich guests cared; not because they didn't know of his existence, but because they didn't have any mercy in their hearts, because later in the parable the Holy Scripture tells us that the rich man recognized Lazarus by face and name and asked Father Abraham to send him with little water on his finger tip.

By contrast, there was a poor man named Lazarus who was sick enough not to be able to walk himself to this destination every day, but was put there by some one who could be a friend, a relative, a fellow capable beggar (beggars and homeless are known to help each other), or a complete stranger who felt compassion towards him.

What was his condition? He was unclothed or perhaps clothed with some rags, very sick, full of sores, and very hungry. He entertains a different kind of guests and these were dogs which he probably befriended over the time.

Isn't it amazing that the very poor and homeless who has hardly anything to eat and struggles hard for survival, usually keeps an astray dog or two which usually shares with it the very little crumbs which he gathers from garbage bins and other unhealthy sources! Perhaps they want to share the misery with or feel sorrow or show compassion to that animal, or it could be seeking companionship in animals which they have been denied from fellow human beings.

Now, pets are the product of our present civilization, but it wasn't so in the ancient era. Dogs were wild, scavengers, undomesticated, and considered nearly as defile as pigs though this is not quite clear in the Old Testament regulations. And they were used only for guarding properties, and in this case they are fed by those who use them, but the rest were astray and were not encouraged to live in the community.

Now we do not know if they were around Lazarus for the purpose of scavenging when the opportunity comes when he becomes helpless unable to defend himself, or he befriended them as he sat there all the day having nothing to do. But the fact remains

that they used to lick his sores. Dogs like most of the animals whether wild or not, are known to lick their sores and wounds, and usually the sores heal, the thing which prompted researchers over the years to find the secret, and they found that the dog's saliva contains a certain peptide which was found to be both antiseptic and promotes healing. And in this case it may have been useful for Lazarus.

Obviously neither the rich man nor his rich guests cared for Lazarus, because the Holy Scripture tells us that Lazarus wished and hoped to feed on the fallen crumbs off the rich man's table. But this he didn't even have the luxury to obtain; and probably it was better and beneficial to throw it rather to the dogs because they serve the purpose of guarding the premises.

Time passed and Lazarus died perhaps of his sores or could be of hunger, and having no one to bury him, but God took care of that and sent His angels who carried him to the bosom of our father Abraham. The rich man likewise died and having the means and the friends, he was given a decent burial.

While in Hades tormented in the everlasting fire, the rich man looked up and saw Lazarus happy and content in the bosom of our father Abraham. So he called on father Abraham saying "Father Abraham, let Lazarus dip the tip of his finger in water and send him to cool my tongue because I am tormented here in this flame."

In the Arabic translation, it says "**my** father Abraham" which is more appropriate since it carries the meaning of personal relationship, since he is addressing the founder and leader of the nation or race or clan of Israel and the rich man is considered to be one of his children, and he should expect help from him. But is he really a son of Abraham? Certainly not, otherwise he would have extended a helping hand to Lazarus since he is also a son of Abraham.

Then Abraham responds by calling him "my dear son". So Abraham acknowledges the rich man as his son, and certainly he could have helped him while on earth, but he is sorry he cannot help him here, and then he reminds the rich man by the contrast mentioned above: While on earth, you received good things but Lazarus received bad things. Now in the present time, you are tormented, and he is comforted, moreover there is great chasm between us, we cannot reach each other.

So, I feel sorry for you but I cannot do anything about it.

O.K. father Abraham, since you cannot reach me here, then send Lazarus to my five brothers who are still alive to warn them so that they would not end up here as I am.

I am sorry son, I still cannot oblige, because they have Moses and the prophets.

Yes father Abraham, but if they hear one of the dead, they will listen.

Assuredly I tell you, if they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not listen to one of the dead either.

### **Analysis:**

1) Jesus chose to call the poor man Lazarus; but if we look closely at all His parables, we find that without exception Jesus never gave a name to any of characters, why then in this parable? Because it demonstrates one of His attributes as a helper in need.

Lazarus in Hebrew means "He whom God helps". Yes, Lazarus suffered on earth, but God sent His angels to carry him to the comfort of the bosom of father Abraham, and he had eternal comfort which cannot be granted except by God.

What he lacked on earth was given to him in abundance in heaven.

- 2) The rich man was so indulged enjoying his life in his own way that he forgot to realize that all his wealth is from God and that he should have been generous with others as God was with him. He lived in abundance, but in Hades he couldn't even have a drop of water.
- 3) God does not look at the faces; the wealth and status of the rich man on earth did not help him in his eternity. At God's judgment seat, every one will get what he deserves. Nothing can help man after death.
- 4) The rich man never showed remorse neither before nor after he died, not even say a word of apology to Lazarus or to father Abraham.
- 5) **Ironic Reversal:** Isn't it ironic to see the reverse happening: the beggar became rich, and the rich became the beggar? The Holy Scripture tells us that the rich man begged father Abraham twice: first for water how little it may be, and second to send Lazarus as a messenger from the dead to his family.
- 6) The parable does not tell us about the time elapsed between the death of each one of them and his judgment. But it implies that it happened immediately after their death, because the rich man still had relatives living on earth which means that the end of time was not there yet. And I do believe in immediate judgment after death.

However let us not be hasty and jump into conclusions because there are other verses in the Holy Scripture which indicate that Judgment will happen collectively to all people at the same time in the last day or end of time or what is also called the Day of Judgment. In my humble knowledge, I cannot give a firm answer to that, and perhaps one day God will reveal it to someone of His choice. Moreover this is not the subject of our study here.

### **Now what can we get out of this parable?**

This parable confirms a lot of facts which a good number of people do not believe in:

- 1) That there will be resurrection of the dead.
- 2) That there will be judgment.
- 3) That there will be eternal life and eternal death or hell.
- 4) That our eternity is determined by our faith while we are alive, because there is no such thing as a faith to a dead body.
- 5) Nothing can help us after death, no prayers, no fasting, no mass, no baptism, nothing at all. Our only chance and hope is while we are alive.
- 6) All our possessions are the Lord's. We are only stewards. So as good faithful stewards we should wisely use what we are given to please our master.
- 7) There is no such a rule as the rich will go to hell and the poor will have eternal life. It all depends on how we deal with what we are given, whether wealth or poverty, health or illnesses, comfort or suffering and we should remember that all of us are **Lazarus**, because God helps each and every one of us.



## **The Parable of the good Samaritan** (Luke 10:25 – 37)

### **Setting and background:**

First, he who thinks that the Scribe is sincere in his question, is grossly mistaken.

A Scribe is an interpreter and teacher of the law. So, he does not actually want to know anything because he thinks and feels that he knows it all.

Then one would say: “why does he ask then?”

And here comes in the importance of the background:

From the time Jesus started His ministry, and the authorities felt that He is a threat to their power and authority, they started to find a way to catch him in a fault so they can get rid of Him. Who were these authorities? They fall into four categorical parties:

**1) The Saducees:** This is the party of the high priests and followers.

**2) The Pharisees:** This is the party of the strict law observers.

**3) The Scribes:** This is the party of lawyers who interpret and teach the law.

**4) The Herodians:** This is not a spiritual leadership party, but a political party following Herod as the name implies.

We shall study these parties in detail later on.

So, this Scribe is not in the scene for knowledge, but to test Jesus that he may catch Him in a fault.

Let us study his question: “**what shall I do to inherit eternal life?**”

”**What shall I do?**” This is a typical Jewish thought and trend. It is the works of the law. There is nothing free. You have to do what the law says; that is called the works of the law. You have to earn it. Here is the difference: We believe, and believing is not working (Rom. 11:6). We are granted a free salvation, we do not work or pay for it because someone else paid for it and that is Jesus; and as I always say, God is not in the habit of collecting the price twice.

”**to inherit**” A person inherits his father or mother, and in rare cases he may inherit a distant relative or a friend; and there is no work in that, because a person may choose a friend but he cannot choose his father or mother or relatives. So being an heir is not by work it is a gift and this is against the Jewish thought.

Now **eternal life** belongs to God. We inherit it because we are His children by adoption. And Paul says in Rom. 8:17 “And if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” And in John 1:12, He calls us his children. So you and I are His sons and daughters. But do the Jews believe that? The answer is “**NO**” although God Himself called Israel His son as it is written in Exodus 4:22, 23 “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, thus says the Lord: Israel is My son, My first born. So I say to you, let My son go so that he may serve me”. And also in Hosea 11:1 “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son”. **Remember, they killed Jesus because He claimed to be the son of God.** Go back to Mat.26:65; Mark 14:63 & Luke 22:70, 71 at the trial of Jesus, the Scripture tells us that the high priest tore down his cloths when Jesus said He is the Son Of God, and said “He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses.” So they counted Him as blasphemer because He called himself

the son of God making himself equal to God, and a blasphemer is punished by death. So, from all that is mentioned above, it is quite clear that this scribe is asking for something that he firmly believes he is not entitled to since he is neither a son of God nor is he an heir; even more he cannot inherit eternity by the work of the law.

Jesus knowing all that, he asks him what does the law say. As if He is telling him, you are a teacher of the law, then tell me what the law says. Also, Jesus wants to tell him that the law is good and valid, and that it is still in effect, and that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. (Mat. 5:17)

And the scribe feeling the gravity of this question, and to prove his status as an established teacher of the law, answered Him correctly, but at the same time, wanting to save the sweat of his face, he shoots back a question, “**and who might be that neighbor?**” although once again he knows the answer from the Scripture in Lev. 19:18, 34.

And here is where the parable begins.

As if Jesus is saying: fine, since you do not understand the Scripture, which you should, being a teacher of the law, I am going to demonstrate it to you by an example, “*mashal*” or a parable: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him and departed leaving him half dead. Now it happened that a certain priest came down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the scene, came and looked and passed by on the other side.”

We shall stop here to discuss this passage before we get into the next passage.

The parable says “**a certain man**”. All commentators assume that this certain man was a Jew. There is nothing in the Scripture that indicates that he is a Jew, but there is nothing also that indicates otherwise. So there is no reason for us to dispute that. Moreover, he must be a Jew otherwise there is no sense in the parable according to the moral of the parable as we shall see later.

“**Went down from Jerusalem to Jericho**”. Jerusalem being built on a mountain, is higher than other cities, and it is always referred to as going **up** to Jerusalem or going **down** from Jerusalem, no matter which direction is the traveler going.

“**Fell among thieves who stripped him of his clothing wounded him and left him half dead.**” That road as were most of the other highways, was infested with robbers and thieves, but usually they were after money and other precious possessions like the beast of transportation, and they do not harm the person unless he resists and does not want to part with his possessions.

“**A priest came by and passed by on the other side**”. Now, this is a very tricky situation. Was the priest so unmerciful and unsympathetic to leave a wounded man who needs help? It may have been that he didn’t care; or that he may have weighed the consequences in his mind and decided that it is better for him to leave the man alone. These consequences are:

- 1) If he stops he may expose himself to be robbed also, since no body knows if the robbers are still hiding in the vicinity, waiting for another prey to fall in their hands.
- 2) The man could be dead, and in that case it is too late to offer a helping hand.
- 3) If the man is certainly dead, then he cannot touch him, because the corpse of the dead defiles (numbers 5:2), and one has to pass through a lengthy ceremonial rituals in order to be purified or cleansed, which ranges from offering certain sacrifices to

certain ceremonial washings for the lay person, while it takes a whole week of purification for the priest.

Whether any of the above crossed the priest's mind or not, we do not know, yet Jesus wants to point out that being absorbed in observing rituals so often leads us to neglecting others who are in need.

The priests at that time were rich and well to do. So he must have been riding a donkey or a horse, and he could have easily put the wounded man on his beast and took him to the nearest village where someone can take care of him.

**"Likewise a Levite....."**

What is said about the priest holds good for the Levite.

Then the next passage tells us that a certain Samaritan saw him and had compassion, bandaged his wounds with oil and wine, set him on his animal and took him to an inn in the nearest village (the thing which the priest or the Levite should have done), and took care of him. And in the morning he paid the inn keeper two denarii and told him to take care of the man, and if there is any balance due, he will pay it on his way back.

We shall stop here to discuss this passage.

**"A certain Samaritan"** Here is the essence of the parable, because at that time there was a lost love between the Jews and the Samaritans. They hated each others' guts, and there was a call for blood between them.

Nevertheless the Scripture tells us that he had compassion, and I think that Jesus mentioned this word specifically to point out the contrast between the attitude of both the priest and the Levite who are considered to be of the same blood as the wounded man, while the compassion came not only from a stranger but from an enemy.

I am sure, as the priest weighed the consequences in his mind, so did the Samaritan.

Let us now see the consequences for any action the Samaritan may take:

- 1) He may risk his life since no body knows if the thieves are still around.
- 2) The wounded man is a Jew while he is a Samaritan, and any one who sees him handling the Jew will think that he is the aggressor.
- 3) Even if he risks his life by attending to him on site; yet he cannot pursue the matter any further, because he cannot risk his life again entering a Jewish village or city carrying a wounded Jew. The stakes are very high putting himself in a very dangerous situation if he tries to help that wounded Jew; yet he overcame all these obstacles, and decided to do what the priest and the Levite previously failed to do.

He risked his own life, while the priest and the Levite chose not to risk cleansing rituals which will not cost them anything except time and may be the price of a couple of turtledoves as a sacrifice.

Now let us see what that Samaritan did. **"He bandaged his wounds and poured oil and wine on them."** That was the best and only remedy at that time.

Now we know that Jesus is all omnipotent, all omniscience, and all omnipresent. So He must have known penicillin two thousand years before it was discovered or invented.

Then why didn't He say **"and he poured penicillin on his wounds?"** Yes, He could have, but no one would understand Him. And it will not fit in the proper meaning of a parable because it is not simplifying or clarifying the matters for his audience. So Jesus

talks to the crowd from their own culture. He talks about something they know and can identify with.

**This** takes me to another important observation, because some Christians still anoint their sick with oil, because Jesus did or said that. Let us not hang on rituals like that, because that remedy was the best available at that time, and we must also take advantage of the best that medicine can offer in our time. Any thing different from that I call it negligence and crime against the rights of the patient.

Yes, God commanded us to pray for our sick and anoint them with oil (James 5:14); that we must do , but we should not neglect the other.

What the Samaritan has done so far, is not sufficient. So he took the man to the nearest village and took care of him in an inn there. Not only that but he paid for all the expenses till he became well.

Now comes the big question which Jesus fired back at the scribe and demanded an answer, **“So, which of these three do you think was neighbor to that unfortunate man?”** And I would imagine that the scribe did not wish to answer this question, because it is against his dignity to admit that an enemy could do that, because in his law he was taught to love his neighbor and hate his enemy. Listen to the words of Jesus: **“You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”** (Mat. 5:43, 44 & Luke 6:27, 28)

Had that Scribe heard the sermon on the mountain, he would have had no need to ask that question which practically put him at the spot. But who knows, he may have heard it but hardened his heart as most of them did.

Any way his answer, though correct, yet he showed resentment because he did not wish or he found it difficult to his pride to utter the word Samaritan. Jesus mentioned the words **priest, Levite** and **Samaritan** by their ethnic origin, yet the scribe in his answer, elected not to utter the word **“Samaritan”** but said he who showed mercy. And as if Jesus is saying: **“I said that before and I say it again: Go and do likewise.”**

#### **Now what can we get out of this parable?**

- 1) Eternal life is a free gift granted by God. No one can earn it by works.
- 2) No one is entitled to inherit eternal life unless he is a Child of God.
- 3) Obviously the Scribe asked the wrong question.
- 4) Love should not be limited to relatives or neighbors only but to the enemy as well.
- 5) Observing rituals most of the time takes us away from noble actions.
- 6) The Good Samaritan’s action demonstrates Christ’s costly unconditioned love.
- 7) Mercy and compassion are beyond any law. The letter kills, but the spirit gives life (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 3:6).

## **The parable of the rich fool** (Luke 12:13 – 21)

**Against** all belief, the rich rather than the poor are the most insecure. They live all their life worried about what will happen if they loose their wealth for any seen or unseen reason, while the poor are not going to loose anything since they have nothing, so they are not worried about anything; No one is interested in their “nothing”. So, the rich are always looking for a way of security, and the more they have the more they look for more with no end. This alone makes them feel in themselves that whatever they have is achieved by their own actions and God has nothing to do with it; so they gradually part away from God because they are self-dependant and they do not need God, ignoring that all what they have is God's. This parable paints a good vivid picture of this scenario.

### **Setting and background:**

It starts by a man asking Jesus to intervene between him and his brother who refuses to give him his share of the inheritance. Apparently their father died without leaving a verbal or written will. And according to the culture of those days, the older son has the legal right to do what he did, for there can be no division without his consent. Here from the very beginning, money has caused animosity between the two brothers, and caused division in the family which was living in harmony while the father was alive. And Paul tells us that the love of money is the root of every evil thing.(1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 6:10) Jesus simply answered him that he cannot make or cause that division. But He did not let the matter pass without teaching the complainer and the multitude around him what is the real meaning of loving money and its consequences. So He starts by saying: “the ground of a certain **rich** man yielded plentifully, and he thought within himself saying “what shall I do since I have no room to store my crops? I will do this, I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul; you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” But God said to him” fool this night your soul be required of you; then whose will those things be”. Then Jesus ends by saying” so is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

### **Analysis:**

- 1) Notice that Jesus said “the ground yielded”. He didn’t say that the rich man worked hard. Obviously since he was rich, he had servants and hirelings who worked hard to produce plentifully. But the fact remains that he did not work for what he harvested.
- 2) Then Jesus says that he” thought within himself”. This is very unusual in the Middle Eastern culture especially in the farming regions, where the farmers usually live in a closed community, each one cares for the other and give advice to each other, and practically there is no secrets among them. So in this case either the rich man put himself on a higher level than the others isolating himself from them, or he was known to be selfish living for himself and so no one cared for him or give advice.

- 3) He did not even give thanks to God for the plentiful crops. There is great number of people nowadays who feel “why should they thank God?” It is by their own effort that they achieved that success, so if any one deserves praise it should be themselves. And that is where the big mistake lies. One should at least thank God for the power and energy which He has given him to reach what he achieved. When we do work we never think that a disaster or an accident or an illness may befall us which may render us completely useless and helpless.
- 4) Then his limited way of thinking brought him to this bright idea that he should put down his present barns and build greater ones instead. But who is going to do that for him? Here again he depends on others to do his work. Did he put them in consideration? Did he try to reward them for their hard work? Had he done that, he would have not been worried about his small barns and about building greater ones. This again is a classical example of utter selfishness. The Holy Scripture tells us that he is rich, so he is in no need for more, but he wanted more and this brings me to the fact mentioned above that the more the rich acquire the more they want.
- 5) He forgot that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord (Duet. 8:3; Mat. 4:4; Luke 4:4). He was only keen for the bodily sustenance but not for the spiritual growth.
- 6) **Act of laziness:** I shall put all this plentiful crops in my new barns, said he, and I shall tell my soul to be at ease, eat and drink and be merry for many years to come. What is wrong with sharing the surplus with others who are needy, and then work next year and the year next and all the years to come and make others to eat and drink and be merry every year?  
**Jesus** said that “I ought to work while it is day”. (John 9:4) And He also said “My Father has been working until now and I have been working (John 5:17). We are created in His image; why don’t we emulate Him and do some work? God does not promote laziness.
- 7) He failed to realize that all what he has is a loan from God including his soul. In our human dealings, we know that when we borrow money from any financial institution, that what we owe is expected to be recalled and fully repaid on demand, but we fail to realize that this is the case with God; He can recall what he loaned us on demand as He wishes including our souls. I am sure that the rich man in his eternity wherever his soul landed was so surprised to find that his soul was recalled and demanded from him though he was preparing to please it for several years to come.
- 8) Since what we have is a loan, then we should act as good and faithful stewards taking good care of what was put in our trust knowing that one day we shall give an account, and we are expected to return it as is or even better (Like the talents).
- 9) I am sure that after the last comment of Jesus, the complainer realized that whether he gets his share of the estate or his brother takes it all, the whole thing belongs to God and not to him or his brother, so why should he fight.

### **What can we get out of this parable?**

- 1) We must realize that all what we have including our souls belong to God.

- 2) We are going to give an account of our stewardship.
- 3) Be always ready, for at an hour which you don't expect and at a day you are not aware of, your soul will be demanded of you, so what are you going to do?
- 4) Store for yourselves treasures in heaven, so when time comes, you will find them.  
"We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out" says Paul (1<sup>st</sup> Tim.6:7). So why don't we store our treasures in a safe place; in heaven where we can find them later?
- 5) Do not worry about tomorrow; for morrow will worry about its own things (Mat. 6:34).
- 6) If He can take care of the birds in the sky and the beasts on the earth, wouldn't He take care of us? Just trust in God and he will provide.
- 7) Whatever you do with one of My little brothers, you do it for me, so said the Lord.

# The parable of the wise and unwise virgins

(Matthew 25:1 – 13)

## **Cultural consideration:**

Wedding ceremonies in the old times used to run in a certain pattern.

In the wedding night all relatives, friends, guests of honor, and maids of honor gather in the groom's house which is usually the family house and wait for the groom to arrive.

The maids of honor were usually virgins amounting from four to twelve in number according to how big the family is and how many friends they have (in this parable they are ten which is a pretty good size wedding). These virgins carry lamps as a gesture of celebration and honor exactly as they carry candles or flowers nowadays.

The streets were not lit, and most of the nights are pitch dark except when there is full or nearly full moon.

The procession goes as follows: earlier in the night the groom and few of his family and close friends leave his father's house to the bride's house where he takes his bride and heads back towards his father's or family house. But the parade goes slowly passing by every street in the city or village where they receive applause, words of congratulations and good wishes from the different houses they pass by; and so no one knows how long the procession will take. Consequently the virgins should secure enough oil for their lamps lest they snuff out before the groom and his bride arrive.

## **The story:**

It happened that the virgins in this parable were not all wise enough to secure oil for their lamps, and so five of them were wise enough to do so and the other five were not.

And as the groom and his party were late in arrival, the virgins fell asleep and may be some of the guests as well. When the noise came from the close by streets indicating that the groom is near by, every one woke up and the virgins attended to their lamps.

The unwise ones found out that their lamps are fading away, so they begged the wise ones to give them some of their oil, but they replied that their oil is not enough for them all and suggested to go and buy or borrow some from the near by neighbors.

While they were fetching the oil, the groom and his party arrived and the door was closed. When they came back, the virgins knocked on the door asking the groom to open the door and admit them, but his answer was to go away for he does not know them.

Then Jesus puts a final comment: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming".

## **Analysis:**

- 1) Certainly this wedding was not the first one in the village, so the virgins should have known that the groom may arrive late and be prepared for that. Unfortunately only five were wise enough to be aware of this fact.



- 2) The groom was late in arrival and they fell asleep. Had they been awake, they would have noticed the shortage of oil in their lamps and they would have done something about it before the groom's arrival. They were caught in a disadvantage.
- 3) Yes, sometimes friends may give a helping hand, but how about if they don't have enough to give? One should not rely on help all the time, because one may not find it when he needs it.
- 4) The door of the groom's house and family was open all night till the arrival of the groom then it was closed. He who wanted to enter had plenty of time to do so, but not so after the door was closed.
- 5) As previously noted, the arrival time of the groom is unknown and all who were invited should have been awake waiting for him, but that was not the case for some of them fell asleep. That was not an honorable or respecting attitude of them.
- 6) The groom arrives after a joyful tour in the streets of the village receiving good wishes and congratulations from those who were not invited, and he was expecting the same from his invited guests on arrival, but he was disappointed to find some missing and some asleep.
- 7) The parable does not say if the unwise virgins were admitted later on. Perhaps they kept requesting to be admitted, but the fact remains that the door was closed.

### **What can we get out of this parable?**

Obviously Jesus is talking here about the kingdom of heaven, as noted in verse 1. There are many points mentioned here for our teaching:

- 1) If we look closely at this parable, among a lot of things the lamp or light is the center of the story. Light is important for our guidance in our spiritual life, and the Psalmist says: "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path" (119:105).
- 2) Five maids were ready and five were not. How does it look when Jesus on His second coming finds that only 50% of us are ready? Wouldn't He be sad and heart broken?  
Let us make sure that all of us will be ready.
- 3) We may be disappointed in friends when we don't find help from them when we need, so we must put all our hopes in Christ for He will not disappoint us.  
"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:16)
- 4) The day of the Lord is like a thief, no one knows when he comes; the virgins and some of the guests fell asleep. So, let us be awake and ready for His arrival.
- 5) Once he arrives, there will be no time to put our acts together; the door will be closed, and there will be no admission no matter how long we knock on the door.
- 6) The groom was offended to find some of his guests asleep, and half of his maids of honor are missing, are we going to offend Him?
- 7) The door is open and all are invited. It is our own problem if we don't enter.  
Jesus said: "many are called but few are chosen" (Mat.20:16).  
We should also notice that there is **only one door**; there is **no other way** to get in.  
So follow Him and you will enter into eternal life.

## **The parable of the great supper** **(Luke 14:15 – 24)** **(Matthew 22:1 – 10)** (With some variations)

### **Biblical consideration:**

Like most of Jesus' parables, this one discusses the kingdom of God.

In Is. 25:6 – 9, the prophet Isaiah prophesied that at the end of times, the savior Messiah will come and make a great banquet for all nations, and will wipe away the tears from their eyes.

This prophesy was not well accepted by the Jews, because they couldn't dream of sitting at the same table with the Gentiles, especially at the end of times in a banquet hosted by the savior Messiah, for they believed and still believe that the kingdom of God is for them only. So over the years, this prophesy took many different versions omitting this part of the banquet, the last of which was the Qumran (the dead sea scroll) version. Here in this parable Jesus among other things is putting everything straight.

### **Setting and background:**

At the beginning of Chapter 14, the Holy Scripture tells us that on the Sabbath day, Jesus was invited to the house of one of the Pharisees to eat bread. It happened that one of the audience had dropsy, and Jesus healed him in spite of their protest. Then He talked unto them with parables which ended by one of the audience saying; "blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God" reflecting their belief in Isaiah's prophesy.

Then Jesus told him:" A certain man made a great supper and invited many; and sent his servant at the supper time to them to come for everything is ready. They all made excuses: the first said that he bought a piece of land and is going to inspect it; the other said that he bought five yoke of oxen and he is going to test them; and the third excused himself for he got married. The servant delivered the messages and his master became angry and told him to go out into the streets and lanes, and bring in the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. The servant did as he was ordered and there was still plenty of room in the house. So the master told him to go out into the highways and hedges and compel all people to come in so that his house may be filled, because none of those who were invited will ever taste his supper.

### **Analysis:**

- 1) The master has chosen certain many elect people to come to his supper.
- 2) They should have come on their own. There was no need to send them another invitation. But as a gesture of hospitality and care for those chosen people he sent them a second invitation.

- 3) The master was shocked when he heard the different excuses. And I can imagine him asking his servant again and again if what he had heard is correct, because no body ever heard of such absurd excuses:
- a- No one can buy a property without having inspected it several times at first, and it is the custom everywhere in the world that an earnest money is paid at first as a gesture of good will, where thereafter the rest will be paid after thorough inspection and full satisfaction by the buyer.
  - b- No one buys five yoke of oxen without examining them first, and making sure that each pair pulls together and works in harmony.
  - c- No one gets married on the spare of the moment. There are always certain arrangements that have to be made before the marriage happens.  
Moreover if that person is a real friend of the master, we would assume that he would have invited him for the wedding long time before.
- After hearing these three absurd excuses, the servant himself found it useless and undeserving to go to the rest of the guests, so he went back and delivered the messages to his master.
- 4) These excuses are not plausible at all to anyone in general and to the host in particular. He realizes that they are bunch of lies, and this is a great insult and a public humiliation and a slap on the face.
- 5) The master becomes very angry; and I don't blame him for I would do the same. He feels that those who were considered elect and chosen for the supper, do not deserve it after all. But he does not retaliate for his shed down honor which he could do. He did not do that. He turns his anger into grace and orders his servant to open the door and let everyone in.  
Notice that the master in his anger did not tell his servant to throw the food in the garbage, or throw it to the dogs, or at best to give it to the poor. Instead he invited everyone to his supper which reflects an absolute and equal replacement for those who rejected him.  
Notice also that the first group invited after rejection was from the streets and lanes; that is from the same village; and the second group was from the highways and hedges, meaning the travelers and foreigners.  
In other words he has accepted those whom the Jews and the Qumran community had denied access to that supper or banquet.
- 6) When he says everyone, he means those who were originally unworthy to be invited otherwise he would have invited them from the beginning.
- 7) His decision is final, and there is no place for forgiveness for those who rejected him.

### **What can we get out of this parable?**

Obviously Jesus is talking here about the rejection of the Jews to enter the Kingdom of God, and the acceptance of the Gentiles.

- 1) The invitation was originally for the chosen, the elect.
- 2) They elected to refuse, and gave ugly absurd excuses which were insults and humiliation to the host. So everyone who rejects this Royal invitation insults the Host. And when Jesus said that he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation (Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10), He meant those who rejected faith in Him and consequently salvation

- 3) The master did not cancel the supper because of their refusal.  
God does not change His mind or persuaded by people's actions and decisions.
- 4) He turned his anger into grace and invited the unworthy.  
Jesus suffered insults and humiliation on the cross, so that we may be covered by His Grace.
- 5) He still keeps the door open for who ever wishes to accept his invitation.  
"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 3:7, 8).  
"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 6:2).
- 6) Judgment is misunderstood by many. They take it as synonym to punishment, which in itself means taking revenge. God does not do so. Judgment is self-inflicted by man. The message is clear:" **Come to my supper**" says the Lord. So he, who accepts the invitation and comes, will enjoy the supper. Those who do not accept it, cut themselves off from the fellowship of the Host, and will not enjoy His supper. There is no punishment here. It is mere and utter choice, nothing else.
- 7) Salvation for **all** nations **was** or **is** God's Divine purpose from the beginning of His creation. Simply because He foreknew that Adam will fall into sin, and consequently all his descendants. So He promised salvation in so many occasions, few of them will be mentioned here:
  - a- "**In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed**". That was God's promise to Abraham. (Gen 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:16).
  - b- Paul talks about the "**Mystery kept secret since the world began, which is salvation for all nations including the Gentiles**" in Romans 16:25, Ephesians 3:9 and Colossians 1:26.
  - c- Many believe that preaching the good news of salvation to the Gentiles, happened only in the post- ascension era. This is not so, for **Jesus** Himself preached the **Samaritan woman** and her village (Gentiles) (John 4:7 – 43). And in the gospel according to Luke 8:26 - 37, we are told about the preaching and miracles of Jesus in the country of **Gadarenes** which is a Gentile country. We know that because they were herding swine, and the Jews do not bread swine because they are defile. We also know about Jesus healing the daughter of the **Syrophoenician woman** who was a Gentile (Mat. 15:21 - 28).

One may then ask, if salvation was or is in God's Divine purpose from the beginning, why do we get the impression from this parable that the Gentiles were invited to the great supper only after the chosen's or elect's rejection.

It is true that we get that impression, but Jesus here is retailing an everlasting fact which the Holy Trinity discussed and was well fore-known to Him even before creation. Exactly as in the case with Jacob and Esau, God foreknew what Esau will do, and so He told Rebecca before they were even born that the older shall serve the younger (Gen. 25:23).

**Isaiah in the old prophesied about that:**

- 1) About the Gentiles, he said" I was sought by those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. I said, here I am, here I am to a nation that was not called by My name." (Is. 65:1)
- 2) About the Jews he said" I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts; a people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face." (Is. 65:2, 3).

## **The parable of the widow and unjust judge (Luke 18:1 – 8)**

In this parable, Jesus teaches that one should ask and keep asking till he gets what he asks for. And in the sermon on the mountain, Jesus says” ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you” (Mat. 7:7; Luke 11:9)  
One should pray and not loose heart

### **Setting and background:**

The parable goes as follows:

There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city, and she came to him saying, get justice for me from my adversary. And he would not for a while. But afterward he said within himself, though I do not fear God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me..

Then the Lord said:” Hear what the unjust judge said; and shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?

### **Analysis:**

1) As it was explained in the parable of the unjust steward (please refer to page 5 of this study), honor was everything to the people at that time, so much so that he who loses his honor would not show his face in the community any more, and he would leave the city forever or even kill himself, because it is not only his honor but also the honor of his family, which means he dishonored his family and so he deserves not to live. And the reason for this is that whether living in a city or a village, they lived in a closed community where everyone knows the other, and they were usually called and recognized by their family name. And there was always a prefix attached to the name like Ben or Bar (which means son of), as in Ben-Gurion or Bar-Timaeus who is the son of Timaeus, a blind man whom Jesus cured. (Mark 10:4 – 6).

Nowadays, because of the prevailing selfishness in-between people, no body or very few care about their own or family honor.

The judge in this parable is one of those; he doesn't care, he doesn't fear God and has no respect for anyone much less for his own or his family honor.

2) In the parable, we have two Characters:

a- The judge who is described as not fearing God, and do not care for people.

There are two appealing phrases which are frequently used in the Middle East; and these are” For God's sake” and “for my sake”. So when appealing to him, one cannot

say for example “for God’s sake” because he does not fear God, nor one can say “for my sake” because he has no respect to man. So no one can reason with him in any way.

- b-** The widow who is so helpless. She has no one to appeal on her behalf. She lost her husband, and obviously she has no male relative to stand for her in court, because in her time, women do not appear in court. So she is standing alone in front of the judge who surely does not care for men, much less for a woman on her own. Obviously the odds are very much against her.
- 3)** But a man, who does not care for any body, usually finds it annoying to see the face of the same person every day especially if he or she is demanding the same every time, and that is the only card she has. So she persisted and kept asking every day. At last he yielded not for any reason except for causing him persistent headache, so he got rid of her, not by putting her in prison as he would do if it was a man, but by giving her what she wants.
- 4)** Obviously the woman was in the right; otherwise he would have dismissed the case from the beginning. But because he doesn’t care for his honor, he may have been bribed.
- 5)** Now, Jesus turns to the multitude and says; “If persistence gives the person what he or she wants from the unjust, how much more would the righteous and just God give to those who cry to Him day and night. Then He says “Also He is slow to anger with them, I tell you, He will vindicate them speedily. The phrase that is translated in English “slow to anger” is originally in the Greek “pushes anger far away”. This phrase is somehow difficult to understand, and in order to grasp what it means, one should know the following:  
Most believers, who are oppressed by others, feel that he who oppresses them is evil, and consequently they are automatically righteous since they are suffering, but this is not true, they are still sinful and God still bear with them as He bears with all other sinners. That is why Jesus continues saying” when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth implying that he who is self righteous though believer is weak in faith.

#### **What can we get out of this parable?**

- 1)** The widow here is a good example for us to persist in prayers and not to loose heart.
- 2)** What is said about the individual is also true about the church as a whole. When persecuted, the church should fervently pray for help, believing that God with no doubt will look at their oppression and pull them up, and grant them victory at the appropriate time.
- 3)** Prayer should be persistent till there is an answer. This answer could be “Yes” or “No” as it happened with Paul when he prayed to God to lift up the thorn in the flesh. He prayed three times and the answer came to him “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 12:9).
- 4)** God may choose not to answer immediately but later for a certain reason we don’t know presently, but we often realize that it was for our benefit that He did not answer immediately
- 5)** God is love and he will not permit unnecessary suffering, and He will vindicate His elect.
- 6)** Even if we fail to see this fact, He will put His anger far away as a loving Father.
- 7)** We should examine ourselves, lest He comes and find no faith in us.

## **The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9 – 14)**

Like all other parables uttered by Jesus, this parable has deeper meaning than it looks on the surface. It is not about how much or how little or how one should pray as most people think; but it is about works and God's grace.

There is no doubt that the Pharisee in this parable shows arrogance and criticizing attitude, but the main problem is that he thinks that his works make him pious and righteous.

And since that is his belief, he acts as such even when praying to God.

He stands in the presence of God showing Him his credentials, and at the same time exposing and despising others like the tax collector.

### **Setting and background:**

Jesus starts by saying: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one is a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

### **Analysis:**

1) In the ancient Greek, the word righteous meant a civilized person, who observes customs and legal standards, and of good reputation; a definition that is adopted by so many even in our days. And in the Old Testament Era, it also meant all of the above, adding to it, a person who prays five times per day, fasts twice a week, observes the law and the customs of the fathers, pays alms to the poor, and put money in the temple treasury. Needless to say that most of these were done for a show off, like praying at the street's corners and synagogues, fasting, giving the poor and putting money in the treasury, the things which Jesus warned about in Mathew 6:1 – 6; Mark 12:41 – 44; and Luke 21:1 – 4.

In the New Testament Era, it means he who is on right relationship with God, which means accepted by God, and it has nothing to do with observing a particular code of ethics.

In other words, the old Greek meaning deals with the relationship between man and man, while the Old Testament meaning deals with the relationship between man and both God and man controlled by works and not as a free gift controlled by the Grace of God, although God has shown His requirement which is to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8), but as usual no body listens,

because they were very busy thinking that God cannot help but loving them not because of His Grace but because they are good lovable people.

And lastly the New Testament meaning deals with the relationship between man and God

So, according to what is mentioned above, the Pharisee felt in himself that he is a righteous and pious person (Old Testament thinking), and that he has rightly earned it by merits of his works . On the other hand, the tax collector did not feel that at all (New Testament thinking). He felt there is nothing in him that entitles him to that term.

- 2) The Holy Scripture tells us that the Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself or better translation is by himself. This is typical because usually the Pharisees separate themselves from the rest of the people because they consider themselves ceremonially clean (regarding washings and other rituals), so being careful not to defile themselves they don't mix with others who are considered unclean.

Usually those who consider themselves clean or righteous, fail to see themselves sinful, so obviously there is no sin there to confess to God about it.

Moreover they look down at those whom they consider unclean and even despise them.

Pharisees were also known to pray in a loud voice, so that when they are heard, they would be recognized as pious or righteous. Jesus mentioned that in Mat. 6:6.

But the question here; is he really praying? The answer is **No**, because the sincere from the heart prayer, is to humble ourselves in the presence of God, thanking Him for His unsearchable gifts, confessing our present sins, and petitioning for ourselves and others.

The Pharisee in this parable failed to do that. So he was not actually praying. He was showing off his credentials reminding God in case God didn't know or notice or forgot.

Then he shifts to attack and show his despise and resentment to others in general and to that tax collector in particular. And here he is comparing himself to others whom he considers of lower quality and less pious than him. Had he compared himself with God's standards, he would have realized how sinful he is and would have asked forgiveness.

But that is the core of the problem with the human being. One compares himself with those whom he considers less than him, so that he feels good about himself. But the question again is; would he look good in God's eyes?

- 3) As for the tax collector, he was much wiser, realistic, and down to earth, not living in phantom or ivory tower like that Pharisee. He is humble not even raising his eyes toward heaven. He realizes that he is a sinner and confesses that. He is burdened and crippled by the weight of his sins and beats his chest which is a sign of deep sorrow and remorse (this picture is vividly painted in Luke 23:48, where the Holy Scripture tells us that the crowds beat their chests having seen the horrible things which happened to Jesus on the cross). He asks for forgiveness and mercy. He does not show off, because he knows that whatever credential he may produce, will not lift him up in the eyes of God because all our works are but filthy rags which cannot cover us in front of God. And lastly he does not criticize others or tell God that he doesn't show off like that Pharisee.

- 4) Lastly, Jesus announces a very ironic statement against all beliefs of that time; **"The Pharisee went home unjustified"**

The irony here is that the Pharisee who was highly esteemed in his own eyes went back home downgraded from righteous to unrighteous, while the tax collector who was unrighteous in the Pharisee's eyes, went back home upgraded to righteous not in his own eyes but in the eyes of God



Then Jesus ends by saying:” He who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. And by that He means not the one who humbles himself to the others, but he who does that to God; for true exaltation comes from God not from men. Jesus talked about that in Mat. 18:4, 23:12 & Luke 14:11. Paul also talked about that in 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 4:5, and so also Peter in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:6.

**What can we get out of this parable?**

- 1) Righteousness has nothing to do with works. It is the right relationship with God. It is not earned by our efforts or deeds. It is a free gift granted to us by the plentiful grace of God. Paul talked about that in most of his epistles, and it is the basic foundation of what he has always preached which is **“Salvation is by grace not by works”**.
- 2) As a result, he who depends on his works does not give place to God’s grace to work.
- 3) When we pray, we should not give information to God, or remind Him, or show Him our credentials; first because He knows everything, and He wouldn’t need our help, and secondly because it is considered rudeness towards those who know more than us, how much more would it be towards God?
- 4) Self-righteousness blinds us from seeing God’s grace.
- 5) Humility is the root of all virtues. I am talking about humility in front of God.
- 6) We should always measure ourselves by God’s standards rather than by our fellow humans for theirs is always short of perfection.
- 7) God always accepts those who confess their sins with sincere contrite heart.

## **The parable of the talents (Mat. 25:14 – 30)**

### **Setting and background:**

Jesus was sitting with his disciples telling them about the kingdom of heaven: “For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them, and to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability, and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received the two gained two more also. But he who received one went and dug in the ground and hid his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought other talents, saying, lord, you delivered to me five talents; look I have gained five more talents besides them. His lord said to him, well done good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter into the joy of your lord. He also who had received two talents came and said, lord, you delivered to me two talents; look I have gained two more talents besides them. His lord said to him, well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter into the joy of your lord. Then he who had received the one talent came and said, lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent into the ground. Look, there you have what is yours. But his lord answered and said to him, you wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed; so you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents; for to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

### **Analysis:**

There are four phases in this parable which we shall discuss separately.

#### **A) Distributing the talents:**

First we should notice that Jesus mentioned two words “Goods and Talents”.

Certainly both belong to the Lord; but obviously they are not the same.

The goods of the Lord are magnificent, among which are: the complete revelation of God Himself as given in the bible, the glorious gospel of redeeming love and grace, His spiritual gifts to the church (us) which Paul wrote about ( in both his epistles to the Romans and to the Corinthians), and the faith committed to the saints. These are the goods which are God’s and that is what we should trade in.

As for the talents they are also God’s possessions and He loaned them to us according to each one’s ability. This also means that ability is not talent. The talents are the means of

trading which God gifted us with or bestowed upon us; but still each according to his or her ability as how to use it. This also means that God never expect from each of us more than we can do; and this is very clear in verse 15 where Jesus said” to each according to his ability”. So the talents bestowed upon each one of us are different; and Paul talks about that in great detail in his first epistle to the Corinthians chapter 12 (please read it).

### **B) Working with the talents:**

The Holy Scripture tells us that Immediately after their master’s departure, two of the servants (who received the five and two talents) started trading, while the one who received the one talent did not go to work and trade like the others; instead he dug a hole in the ground and carefully wrapped the talent in a handkerchief and hid it.

Now let us look at the results. The one who had the five talents trade it all and profited five more; so also the second who profited two over his original two. So actually each one of the two worked hard and doubled the principal. That is 100% profit for each one of the two. So in actuality they were equal even though the gain seems to be unequal.

Now let us see what the third servant gained. He gained nothing. So his profit was 0%.

Yes he didn’t loose the principal but on the other hand he profited nothing.

And if we look at these results in its spiritual significance, we find that all who work for the Lord equally gain the same thing which is bringing others to the knowledge of God’s truth no matter what talents or abilities they were given. Sure we know of some evangelists who won thousands to Christ, but that is because they were originally given more talents (principals) than others each according to his or her ability as Jesus mentioned in the parable.

Those who do not work simply bring none.

### **C) Giving account of the talents:**

The master came back from his long trip, and asked his servants to give account for what they have done in his absence.

The 1<sup>st</sup> said, Lord, you gave me five talents; here they are, and five more I gained by trading.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> said, lord, you gave me two talents; here they are, and two more I gained by trading.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> said, lord, you gave me one talent, here it is, and nothing more because I didn’t trade

Now, the first two worked, but the third did not work. In other words, he robbed his master, first because he was fed and sustained all that time without working, and secondly he did not produce any fruit for the principal remained as it was. So, in essence he was lazy, fruitless, and caused loss to his master. Not only that, but he was also rudely blaming his master for his failure. So he told his master that because he is a hard man, I failed.

Isn’t that typical of human nature to always put the blame on others for their failure?

That wicked servant did not want to admit that he was lazy and that he betrayed his master’s trust, but he had the guts to blame his master.

### **D) The rewards:**

The first two were given equal rewards. The master gave them both equal ruling over many things, and permitted them to enter into his joy.

The third was rebuked by his master for his laziness, rudeness, and for causing that double loss; not only that, but what he had was taken from him and given to the one who had more. And Jesus says:” for to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. But that is not all, for

the master gave orders to cast that wicked servant in the outside darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

**What can we get out of this parable?**

Jesus was talking about the kingdom of heaven. So let us see who and what the characters in the parable represent.

The master is our Lord Jesus Christ.

The servants are originally His disciples who were given the great commission as is stated in Mathew in Mat. 28:19. These of course were followed by the early church, and by every believer after that.

The goods as mentioned above, are the complete revelation of God Himself as given in the bible, the glorious gospel of redeeming love and grace, His spiritual gifts to the church (us) which Paul wrote about ( in both his epistles to the Romans and to the Corinthians), and the faith committed to the saints. These are the goods which we should trade with in our life.

The talents are the spiritual gifts of God to each and every one of us, each according to his or her ability.

The long trip of the master is Christ's ascension after his resurrection, which tells us that He is alive and will return.

The return of the master is the second coming of Christ.

Giving the account is the Day of Judgment, where everyone will stand at the judgment seat, and will be asked what he have done with the talents entrusted to him or her.

The good servants are the faithful believers who used the talents entrusted to them.

The wicked servant is the believer who have never traded or used the talents entrusted to him.

**Now**, the choice is ours. Who will be the happy servant who will hear His master's voice praising him saying well done you good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things, enter in your Master's joy?

**The parable of the sower**  
**(Mat. 13:3 – 23)**  
**(Mark 4:3 – 9)**  
**(Luke 8:4 – 15)**  
**(With slight variations)**

This is one of several parables Jesus mentioned concerning the Kingdom of God, and the most detailed of all.

It has been given the privilege of appearing in 3 of the 4 gospels as stated above.

**Setting and Background:**

Matthew 13 starts as: On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitude were gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Then the Holy Scripture tells us that the multitude did not understand the parable, but Jesus explained it in private to His disciples later on.

**Analysis:**

I do not intend to pretend to be smart and try to explain what Jesus had already explained to His disciples as shown in verses 18 to 23 (please read it).

But my intention here is to explain the culture and its relation to the parable.

Jesus did not explain that, because he was talking to them from their own culture which they know; but to us who are living two thousand years after, it is important to know.

Let us start from the beginning. When the children of Israel entered the promised land, the land was divided by Joshua into lots one for each tribe except for the tribe of Levi, who were not given land as per God's instructions, because they were consecrated to serve the Lord, and hence they will not plant the land.

The tribes differed in number, but on average, each tribe was composed of about 50,000 men beside the women and children; and he who was counted as man, was to be over 20 years old capable of fighting and carrying a weapon. We know that because

the Holy Scripture tells us that the children of Israel were 600,000 men beside the women and children when they left Egypt.

So, obviously each tribal lot was divided between its men. Division was done by placing lines of stones between each piece of land and its neighbor. Now, obviously not all the pieces of land were on the main road. Consequently, the ones that are not on the main road had no way to access. So each of the neighboring land owners had to give part of his land as a leeway to be used as a common path for access for him and his neighbor. These paths are the wayside which Jesus is talking about in verse 4

We now also know what are the stony places which Jesus talks about in verse 5.

As for the thorns in verse 7, these grew wildly between the stony places.

I guess, now after explaining that part of their culture, we can now understand the parable as Jesus explained to His disciples.

I have nothing else to say about this parable.

## **The parable of the wicked vinedressers** **(Mat. 21:33 – 45)** **(Mark 12:1 – 12)** **(Luke 20:9 19)**

This parable is one of the most remarkable parables mentioned by Jesus, appearing in three of the four gospels as stated above.

### **Setting and Background:**

This parable was mentioned by Jesus in the temple to the chief priest and the elders of the people who confronted Him as by what authority he was doing these things and who gave Him this authority.(21:23). Then Jesus answered them in verses 24 – 27.

Then He told them the parable of the owner of the vineyard and his two sons (one did his father's will and the other didn't), to which we shall refer later.

Then He told them this parable which goes on as:" There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower, and he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers; that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying they will respect my son. But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, this is the heir, come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.

So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?

They said to Him, he will destroy these wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never heard in the Scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore I say to you the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken, but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitude, because they took Him for a prophet.

### **Analysis:**

Certainly this parable was about them.

Let us see together all the personnel in the parable and what or who do they represent.

**The landowner:** represents God.

**The vinedressers:** represent the nation of Israel and its leaders.

**The vineyard:** represents the kingdom of God.

**The servants:** represent the prophets before Jesus.

**The son:** represents Jesus Christ.

**Killing the son outside the vineyard:** represents killing Jesus outside the city of Jerusalem. or as prophesied in the Old Testament, outside the camp.

**Leasing the vineyard to others:** represents calling the Gentiles.

**The corner stone:** represents Jesus who was rejected by the Jews and accepted by the Gentiles.

**As we see, the parable is self explanatory.**

### **What can we get out of this parable?**

- 1) Verse 33 states that the landowner planted a vineyard and set hedge around it. This indicates safety. So when we are in the kingdom of God we are safe.
- 2) In the same verse, it is stated that the landowner dug a winepress and built a tower. Nothing is needed more than that in a vineyard. This also indicates that when we are in the Kingdom of God, we shall need nothing.
- 3) The landowner expected fruits, but the tenants did not produce fruit. So we are also expected to produce fruits.
- 4) The servants were sent by the landowner to claim what is legal for their master. But they were insulted, beaten, stoned and killed.  
So also most of the prophets sent by God if not all, suffered such persecution. "They were stoned, they were swan into two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented- of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth." (Hebrews 11: 37, 38)
- 5) Though Jesus at the time of this parable was not yet killed, yet he was persecuted, and more than twice there were attempts on his life before the crucifixion (Luke 4:28 – 30; John 10:31 – 33 and 11:8).
- 6) Jesus was rejected by his own (The Jews), and the kingdom was given to the Gentiles.
- 7) Notice in verse 41 that they themselves condemned themselves, demanding that those wicked men should be destroyed miserably, and the vineyard should be leased to other vinedressers.
- 8) For those who claim that God cannot reject his elect, verse 41 is a solid proof that He can. Otherwise, how can they explain why Paul mentioned twice that he has great sorrow and continual grief in his heart for his countrymen and kinsmen the Jews and wished that he could be accursed of Christ for their sake, and prayed to God that they may be saved (Romans 9:1 – 3 ; and 10:1 – 4). Moreover in Romans 11:7, Paul states the following: "What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks, but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded". This shows beyond any doubt that Israel is not the elect.



**The Parable of Love and forgiveness  
Or  
The precious Perfume  
Or  
The Two Debtors  
(Luke 7:36 – 50)**

Here is a perfect example of a parable uttered by the Lord after the action. Comparing this to the parable of the Good Samaritan, where we find that The Lord utters the parable to explain who is supposed to be the neighbor, but here the action had already happened and then the parable comes along. It is also a perfect illustration where understanding the Middle Eastern culture would shed a clear bright light on what the parable actually means

**Background and setting:**

Jesus is invited to a dinner in the house of Simon (a Pharisee) with other guests (most probably Pharisees because they do not mix with the common).

A woman described by Simon as sinner (verse 39), stepped in towards Jesus and started a very unusual action. She brought a box of Alabaster ointment (a flask of expensive perfume), stood behind Him weeping, kissing and wetting His feet with her tears, wiping them with the hair of her head, and anointing them with the ointment. The host talking to himself, said, if that man is really a prophet, he would have known that this woman is a sinner.

Jesus knowing his thoughts told him that he would ask him a question:

And here is the parable:

**”There were two men who owed a debtor money, one for five hundred Dinarii, and the other for fifty, but since they had no money to pay him back, he forgave both. Tell me who of the two would be more grateful? I suppose he who was forgiven more, answered Simon. Jesus answered that it was rightly so. Then, He turned to the woman and said you see this woman? I entered into your house, and you did not give me water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I say unto you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven because she loved much; but to him little is forgiven, the same loved little.**

**Then He said unto her, your sins are forgiven. And they that sat at the dinner with Him began to say within themselves, who is this that forgives sins also? And He said to the woman: Your faith has saved you, go in peace.”**

### **Analysis:**

- 1) Obviously Jesus suffered a series of calculated intentional insults from His host:  
Please refer to the rules of Middle-Eastern hospitality mentioned in the introduction on page 3.
  - a- He was not given a kiss of welcome on entering the house.
  - b- He was not given the seat of guest of honor as shown by the fact that the woman stood behind Him. Had he been in the seat of honor, the woman would not have access to stand at his back.
  - c- His feet were not washed by his host or one of his servants.
  - d- His head was not anointed with oil by the host.
  - e- He was not given water and oil to wash his hands before giving the grace and eating as the custom and tradition dictates.That was an intentional public humiliation
- 2) The woman heard that he is invited to the house of Simon for dinner, so she went and waited for His arrival. This is obvious from the fact that Jesus in verse 45 said that this woman since the time He came in, she has not ceased to kiss His feet. So she witnessed all the calculated successive intentional insults of the host.
- 3) Why did the woman do that? Or why did she come in from the very beginning? According to the Holy Scripture, she was a sinner. She was rejected by the community in general and by the Pharisees in particular. According to their tradition; for the sinner to be accepted in the community again, he or she must repent meaning show remorse and promise not to sin again, and repent meaning turning 180 degrees away from sin, but the most difficult part is to financially retribute (Exod. 21:32 – 22:14) or compensate those whom he or she done wrong. This may seem easy in most instances, but how a prostitute for example can fulfill this required restitution or compensation?  
In the Rabinic laws, this is quite impossible for how can she remember those men whom she slept with in order she can compensate for her deeds? So, actually in their laws, a prostitute can never be forgiven. We do not know what type of sin the woman in this story, has committed; so we do not know if she could be forgiven or not. However till she is forgiven she is a sinner to them. This may seem not important to some, but it is, because if she is in the unforgivable category, then her only hope is in Jesus. And so, one can understand why she was so eager to be forgiven by Jesus, and one can imagine the Joy that filled her heart when she was forgiven.  
And being a sinner she was obviously uninvited and most probably she sneaked in without being seen.  
But why would she go into all this trouble?  
She heard about Jesus that He loves sinners and does not reject them.  
So she came to seek the love and acceptance which she was denied by the people in general and the Pharisees in particular. And in meekness and contrite heart she came weeping to show remorse and repentance and seek forgiveness.  
Or we may say that she was sad, grieved and angry at the way the host has treated his guest who does not deserve all these intentional insults.
- 4) But why should she wipe His feet with the hair of her head? The most logic thing is to use the tail of her garment which in those days was long enough to do the job.

A respectable woman in those days would not uncover her head. If she does, then she is considered a loose woman who has no respect to her husband if she is married or to her family if she is not, or to the tradition of her people; for by uncovering her head she declares defiance to their authority, and to the traditions of the community she lives in.

And if we look at Paul's opinion about uncovered hair, we find that he says that the woman's hair is glory for her (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 11:15).

So by doing this, she has put her glory at the feet of Jesus Christ.

She didn't care about how men especially that Pharisee and his guests would judge her but about how Jesus would.

- 5) The mere fact that she brought the box of Alabaster ointment with her indicates a predetermined will; and by her action she defied the Pharisees' authority in their own home, and brought shame on their actions.
- 6) By comparing the actions of both the host and the woman, Jesus proved to the host his lack of courtesy of extending the accepted traditional hospitality, and how the woman has compensated for that lack. Not only that, but what she has done was a gesture of great love for which she should be rewarded, and what else is more precious than forgiveness?

After all, isn't that the love which Jesus recommended to that scribe who asked Him about the greatest commandment in the parable of the Good Samaritan?

And she was forgiven more because she loved more.

Why is that? The person, who is aware of his sins, will seek forgiveness, while he who is unaware of his sins will not seek forgiveness. To him, he has done no wrong. The best example for this is the two thieves on each side of Jesus at the crucifixion: The one who was aware of his sins rebuked the other telling him, don't you fear God? As for us we deserve the punishment, in other words he realized he has done wrong and so he asked for forgiveness even though he didn't put it quite as such, but he confessed Jesus as Lord and asked to be remembered. The other, being unaware of his sins mocked at Jesus and so didn't ask for forgiveness and didn't get it.

So also is the host in our story. Simon was a Pharisee, and as we said before, the Pharisees segregated themselves from the others because they feel they are righteous because they obey the law even to the tiniest detail, so Simon does not see that he is a sinner, and so he would not seek forgiveness.

- 7) If anyone thinks that Simon invited Jesus as a gesture of hospitality, he is mistaken, because he did not extend to Jesus the due honor as we have seen above. Then why did he invite Jesus? As all the others whether his fellow Pharisees or Saducees or Scribes, they all wanted eagerly to catch Jesus in a fault or a slip of the tongue. So obviously he was so offended to see Jesus accepting the sinful woman.
- 8) Was the woman disappointed? Of course not; she found what she was looking for. She found love and forgiveness as she expected.
- 9) Under normal conditions, a Pharisee would not look at a woman face to face, much less a sinner woman. But Jesus tells him to look at this woman, as if he is telling him, You Hypocrite, you avoid looking at the woman because you think you are righteous; you are as sinner as she is. Open your heart for My grace as she did.

### **What do we get out of this parable?**

- 1) Contrary to popular thoughts, the cross was not the only thing that Jesus suffered, but he suffered lots of public humiliation and insults amounting to several attempts on His life all through His ministry. This story is just one example of several. He was invited to be insulted and humiliated.
- 2) Christ's love for us is amazing; it is unconditional no matter what we are. He also accepts our love no matter what we are. He graciously accepted the love of this woman whom the Scripture describes as sinner.
- 3) Christ accepts sinners, after all He said:” **I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance**” (Mat. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). He accepted Matthew the tax-collector (Mark 2:14 & Luke 5:27), the Samaritan woman at Sychar (John 4:5 – 42), Zacchaeus a publican and the chief tax-collector (Luke 19:2 – 10), and he was described as friend of publicans and sinners (Mat. 11:19; Luke 7:34), and many others, but the last one was the thief on the other side of the cross (Luke 23:43).
- 4) As mentioned above, our love to Christ is in proportion to our awareness of our sins. It is true that a man who has spent thirty years in prison can appreciate his freedom more than a man who spent only one night. But it is a misunderstanding to suppose that one must be forgiven of great sins in order to have a great love for Christ.
- 5) Love is so important, the woman had it but Simon did not.
- 6) We notice that Jesus mentioned that the two debtors had no means to pay their debts. So all humanity, we cannot pay our debts; Jesus paid it on our behalf. He forgave our debts.
- 7) Simon being a Pharisee, considered himself a law-keeper (self-righteous), yet Jesus proved him to be a law-breaker in every respect (unrighteous).  
If we just realize that we are sinners and confess it, God is just and faithful to make us righteous.

*God Bless You All*

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