

Jesus wanted to introduce his kingdom to the world. He especially wanted his disciples, who later became apostles, to understand what it was like. With them, he not only told parables but he explained the parables they did not understand. One of my Bibles lists 39 parables. I shall not try to discuss them all. I will choose a few of my favorites. I will use more personal examples than usual. Forgive me. I hope each person who studies this lesson will look at all the parables and pick their own favorites.

The first parable in the gospels is found in Matthew 7. It is usually called *The Wise And Foolish Builders*, but I see it as the foundation of the new kingdom. Jesus has just said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*." Matthew 7:21.

Then Jesus tells them this parable to explain why. "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall." Matt 7:24-27. As Jesus told Thomas, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." John 14:6. **There is no other foundation.**

A lawyer wanted to test Jesus, so he asked this question, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup> And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" <sup>27</sup> And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." <sup>28</sup> And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE." <sup>29</sup> But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Luke 10:25-29. Jesus' answer was the story of the Good Samaritan. I included the above discussion because it is the basis of what Jesus will ask of his disciples.

The parable, condensed, is this. A Samaritan was traveling and found a man who was robbed, stripped, beaten and left half dead. A priest and a Levite had passed by and had given him no assistance. But the Samaritan stopped and took care of the man the best he could. He made arrangements with an Inn Keeper to give him further care. Then Jesus asked the lawyer, which one was the neighbor to the man. When the lawyer identified the right man of the three, Jesus told the lawyer "Go and do the same." Luke 10:30-37.

How good are we at identifying our neighbor?

Please read *The Parable of the Soils*. Matt 13:3-8, 13:18-23; or Mark 4:3-8, 4: 11-15; or Luke 8:5-8, 8:11-15. (The second scriptures are the explanations.)

The parable of the soils is one of my favorites because Dad had a piece of ground that had all the problems. It was about the size of a football field. On the left side, as you went through the gate, was a path down to a shed. On the right side, a few yards from the end, there was a limestone ledge that ran under the dirt for a few feet. In the field, there were some locust thorn bushes in three places. When I was about ten, Dad gave me an axe and told me to chop the bushes down as far below the soil as I could. Then we would till the soil, the best we could. Then Dad would sow oat seed from a bag on his shoulder. I would follow on a small "A" harrow to cover the seed. Dad was good. He didn't get many seeds on the road for the birds to eat.

The first oats to come up were from the soil that was over the limestone because some water, from the hillside, would seep under the soil. It warmed quickly from the sun. But when the water dried up that part died. The rest would come up looking good. Then the locust bushes would come back from the roots. First, the oats around the bushes would turn yellow and later die. The rest produced well depending on the richness of the soil and the rain.

When I was in college, my brother bought a good tractor with backhoe. He brought it over and dug out the locust bushes by the roots and put the dirt back in place. What does this have to do with the parable of the soils? The point Jesus was making with his disciples was, go ahead, sow the seed of the kingdom but some will fall away. I think there is a second lesson to be learned. The better you till the soil before you sow the seed, the better your crop. Don't push too hard or too fast with the person you are trying to bring to Christ. If you are successful, have a good follow up program.

To retain your new Christian, there are two things that should be avoided. The first is the overload problem. Sometimes a convert is so excited that they want to be part of everything. That works for a while until they are exhausted and things at home are being neglected. Then they may just give up and quit. I heard a very good sermon one time, *Christian Service is a Marathon Not a Sprint*. Help new members understand that.

The other problem is the Empty House Syndrome. They think baptism is the end of their problems, whatever they were. Jesus said, "When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.'<sup>25</sup> And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order.<sup>26</sup> Then it goes and takes *along* seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first." Luke 11:24-26; Matthew 12:43-45. This is especially true for someone who has an addiction problem. That person will need help in redirecting time and activities. That help must be gentle and caring for some time, maybe forever.

The parables of *The Lost Sheep*, Luke 15:3-7, and *The Lost Coin*, Luke 15:8-10, are both about retaining members. I can remember, in the early nineteen-thirties that any lost coin was searched for immediately. When wages were ten cents an hour, any coin was worth the search.

My main job when I was 11, 12 and 13, was to care for our sheep. Most nights, when I got home from school they would near the barn waiting to be fed and gotten out of the weather. The ewes usually lambled in early February. If one was missing she probably had a new lamb that was not yet able to follow her home. It gets dark early that time of year, so it meant getting a lantern and walking to where they grazed. There was no waiting until later! Too many churches do not check on the missing soon enough. If you wait too long, the wolf may have won the battle.

Several times more than one parable is told to teach the same point. It is called reinforcement. The Hidden Treasure, Matthew 13:44 and The Pearl of Great Price, Matthew 13:45-46 are two such examples. In both parables, someone went to great lengths to own the item. Those examples may not mean as much now as they did in Jesus' day. But suppose someone has bought a Lottery ticket and put it away. When the numbers are announced that person realizes the ticket is worth 250 million dollars. They can't find it. That person would go to great lengths to find that ticket. It has happened.

Salvation and eternal life is worth more than that ticket. Jesus said, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Luke 8:36-37. Don't ever think salvation is not worth the effort.

The following parable was not a favorite of mine, but living in a retirement home with 114 apartments has made me appreciate the parable. We have about 150 people living here. Some are married. The average age is probably between 85 and 90. Our hour is late.

A vineyard owner went out to hire workers. He hired some early in the morning for the agreed wage of a denarius. He added some the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour, some the 6<sup>th</sup> hour, some the 9<sup>th</sup> hour and some the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. (A summary of Matthew 20:1-7.)

"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last *group* to the first.'<sup>9</sup> When those *hired* about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius.<sup>10</sup> When those *hired* first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.<sup>11</sup> When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner,<sup>12</sup> saying, 'These last men have worked *only* one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.'<sup>13</sup> But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?<sup>14</sup> Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.<sup>15</sup> Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?'<sup>16</sup> So the last shall be first, and the first last." Matthew 20:8-16. For those who are not Christians at our age, the reward is still available.

The story of the Prodigal Son had always touched my heart. I had a brother who left home after his junior year in high school to find a job. Mom wanted him to come home and finish school and become a Christian. We could see the railroad, about a mile away, from our front porch. Every day at eleven o'clock, Mom would go to the porch, watch the passenger train from the south go by, and pray that her son was coming home. One day it happened. He finished school a year late and he became a Christian. He was not like the prodigal son, but that memory made me like the parable.

Jesus said, "A man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. <sup>13</sup> And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. <sup>14</sup> Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. <sup>16</sup> And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving *anything* to him. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'" <sup>20</sup> So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; <sup>23</sup> and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate. Luke 15:11-24.

There is more to the story. The older brother was not happy with the celebration. I hope we can be more forgiving. Sometimes it is hard.

Some think there were no consequences of the younger boy's actions. But there was. His physical part of the estate was gone. The father told the older brother, "Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was* lost and has been found." Luke 15:31-32.

I think this parable is the most beautiful one of them all. Our Father loves us enough that he does not want anyone to be lost. John 3:16-17. If we become his son and go astray, he is looking down the road and hoping for our return.