

The Message of Jesus Bible Study
Lent, 2025
Session 3 – HE SPOKE TO THEM IN PARABLES

Introduction:

Hamilton defines a parable as “a comparison or analogy, aimed at communicating truth, inspiring the heart, or calling people to action.” Why do you think Jesus used so many parables in his teaching?

What parable touches you most? Favorite parable? Least favorite?

The Parables of Jesus

| Parable | Matthew | Mark | Luke |
|------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| The Purpose of the Parables | <u>13:10–17</u> | <u>4:10–12</u> | <u>8:9–10</u> |
| The Sower | <u>13:1–9, 18–23</u> | <u>4:1–9, 13–20</u> | <u>8:4–8, 11–15</u> |
| The Weeds | <u>13:24–30, 36–43</u> | <u>4:26–29</u> | |
| The Mustard Seed | <u>13:31–32</u> | <u>4:30–32</u> | <u>13:18–19</u> |
| The Leaven | <u>13:33</u> | | <u>13:20–21</u> |
| The Hidden Treasure | <u>13:44</u> | | |
| The Pearl of Great Value | <u>13:45–46</u> | | |
| The Net | <u>13:47–50</u> | | |
| The Lost Sheep | <u>18:10–14</u> | | <u>15:3–7</u> |
| The Unforgiving Servant | <u>18:23–35</u> | | |
| The Two Sons | <u>21:28–32</u> | | |
| The Tenants | <u>21:33–44</u> | <u>12:1–11</u> | <u>20:9–18</u> |
| The Wedding Feast | <u>22:1–14</u> | | <u>14:16–24</u> |
| The Ten Virgins | <u>25:1–13</u> | | |
| The Talents | <u>25:14–30</u> | | <u>19:11–27</u> |
| The Good Samaritan | | | <u>10:29–37</u> |
| The Rich Fool | | | <u>12:16–21</u> |
| The Barren Fig Tree | | | <u>13:6–9</u> |
| The Wedding Feast | | | <u>14:7–11</u> |
| The Lost Coin | | | <u>15:8–10</u> |
| The Prodigal Son | | | <u>15:11–32</u> |
| The Dishonest Manager | | | <u>16:1–9</u> |
| The Rich Man and Lazarus | | | <u>16:19–31</u> |
| The Persistent Widow | | | <u>18:1–8</u> |
| The Pharisee and the Tax Collector | | | <u>18:9–14</u> |

Opening Prayer

O God, by grace alone you bring us into the story of your saving work. As we read and reflect on stories your Son Jesus told, may we find again, or for the first time, the places you would have us be in the plot of your liberating love for your people and for the world. May your Spirit excite our imaginations that we, too, may help others see new possibilities for living in your truth, your justice, and your peace. Amen.

Video Session

- Which of Adam's statements most interested, intrigued, surprised, or confused you? Why?
- What questions does this video segment raise for you?

Book Discussion Questions

The Sheep and the Goats

Matthew 25:31-46

- What about this parable most interests, excites, confuses, or concerns you, and why?
- Why does Jesus compare the King's future judgment to a shepherd's activity?
- Why does the King need to separate the "righteous" from the "accursed?" What criteria does he use to do so?
- Do you think Jesus' parable teaches "the sole criterion for salvation is works?" Why or why not?

The Good Samaritan

Read Luke 10:25-37

- What about this parable most interests, excites, confuses, or concerns you, and why?
- How is the first question the expert in the Law (the Torah) asks Jesus a "test" (verse 25)? How does Jesus respond?
- Skim Leviticus 19. What practical, concrete forms does love for one's fellow Israelites take in this chapter? How do verses 33-34 command love for non-Israelites?
- Hamilton writes, "There's something in most of us that wants to know who we don't have to love." Is it natural for "birds of a feather to flock together?" Do you agree? Why or why not?
- What is surprising about who does and doesn't stop to help the wounded man in the story? How would Jesus produce a similar surprise if he told the parable today?
- Have you ever stopped to help someone? Why? How do you determine when you will stop and help and when you will continue on without stopping?

The Prodigal Son

Read Luke 15:11-32.

- What about this parable most interests, excites, confuses, or concerns you, and why?
- How is the younger son “prodigal” (i.e. extravagant, wasteful, reckless) in this story? How is the father “prodigal?”
- Is the older son justifiably angry about the homecoming reception the younger son receives? Why or why not? What do you think about his father’s response to his anger?
- Jesus’ parable doesn’t tell us whether the older brother finally joined the celebration. Do you imagine he did or didn’t?
- Luke says Jesus told this parable—and two others about being lost (verses 3-10)—to a crowd composed of “tax collectors and sinners” and religious leaders upset about Jesus’ association with them (verse 1-2). How do you imagine people in each of these groups responded to the story and why? How might non-church goers respond to this story today?
- Hamilton finds the father in the story a powerful image of God, the heavenly Father. Do you? Why or why not?
- Does our current justice system ever seem unfair or unjust to you? Any examples that come to mind?

Closing

“Today, Christianity is often more associated with the spirit of the Pharisees [in Luke 15:1-2] and the older brother in Jesus’ parables (The Message of Jesus, p. 75).

Discuss:

- How can we tell who is a Christian or not in light of the parables?
- Who can be a member of a Church in light of the parables?

Closing Prayer

Loving Jesus, without you, we, too, are lost. We thank you for seeking us, finding us, and restoring us to life. We praise you for your extravagant love, and pray your Spirit would help us extend our love to others—even those we think of as “sinners” and especially those whom you call “the least” in your family. Your grace makes us neighbors to all people. Strengthen us to love them as ourselves, and as you first loved us. Amen.

Closing Video for Reflection

“You Are Near”