

Parables of the Vineyard

Key Verse:

“Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him.”

Acts 7:52

Extra: What can you find out about parables?

Level 5 lesson 29

Read: Matthew 21:23-46

Further: Luke 20:9-19

PHARISEES’ QUESTION

As we have looked at the life of Jesus so far, we have seen that He was often surrounded by huge crowds of people, and very popular with the common people. We have also seen that the Pharisees, the religious leaders, did not believe that He was God in human form. This was what they would eventually crucify Him for - Jesus claimed to be God.

Consequently, they were always arguing with Him, trying to catch Him out in some way: trying to prove Him to be the imposter they thought He was. So it was, that four days before His crucifixion, the Pharisees again questioned Jesus, as He taught in the Temple. “By what authority do you do these things and who gave you this authority?” they angrily asked. Jesus replied with a question, which though simple, proved His Godly wisdom. “The baptism of John: was it from heaven or of men?” He asked.

They knew straightaway they were outwitted; if they said “from heaven,” then Jesus could quite properly ask, “So why did you not believe him?” [You will remember that John testified most clearly that Jesus came from Heaven and spoke words given to Him by God].

On the other hand, to say “of men” would make John the Baptist a liar and not a prophet of God! They were afraid to say this, because it would have started a riot; all the people rightly believed that John the Baptist was a prophet, a man of God. So they gave the cowardly reply, “We cannot tell” (v.27). Jesus then said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

PARABLES TOLD

Having silenced them momentarily; Jesus spoke two short parables which were a strong rebuke of their scheming behaviour.

“A man ordered his elder son to go and work in his vineyard,” He began. The boy said, “No! I will not go,” – but later, he changed his mind and obeyed his father’s command. Next, the father ordered his younger son to go and work in the vineyard. This boy responded willingly, “Yes Sir! I’m on my way!” - BUT - he didn’t go.

Jesus looked the Pharisees in the eyes, “Which of the two did his father’s will?” He asked. Of course they had to answer, the elder son. The Lord then explained that the outwardly and openly wicked people were like the elder son, because they at first refused to obey God, but hearing John’s message of repentance, many of them changed their minds and obeyed.

On the other hand, the Lord told these priests and elders that they were like the younger son; they professed to do God’s will, but did not really do so. Jesus continued with a second parable, which condemned them even more severely.

A landowner planted a vineyard, erected a fence, a winepress and a tower. He then leased it out to certain men and left the country. These men were to pay rent in the form of fruit to the owner. In due course the owner sent servants to receive the rent of fruit: but the tenants beat one servant, killed another, and stoned another. The owner then sent his son, thinking that he would be treated with more respect.

However, when he came, they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. “Now,” asked our Lord, “What will the landowner do to those wicked tenants?” They replied, “He will destroy those wicked men and let out the vineyard to others who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

THE PARABLES EXPLAINED

Once again Jesus explained His story in no uncertain terms! The Jewish people were God’s ‘vineyard.’ The tenants were the leaders who were responsible to look after the nation for God, so that they might produce fruit for His glory. The servants who were sent and ill-treated, were the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and others. The Son, of course, represents our Lord, who was God’s Son. Jesus knew that in fact within a few days, these wicked men would seize and kill Him.

The judgement which they so clearly thought the men in the parable worthy of, would in fact fall on them, just as Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a people who will produce its fruit.” In v45 & v46, we see that the Pharisees knew Jesus was talking about them in this parable - but they were so blind they continued doing the very things that would fulfil the parable and seal their doom!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What did the people believe about John?

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2. Why were the priests and elders like the second son in the parable?

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3. Who are represented by the tenants of the second parable?

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4. What fate was going to overtake them for their conduct?

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5. Who is represented by the son?

.....

My Name is: _____ Age: _____

Parable of the Marriage Feast

Key Verse:

“Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.”

Acts 13:46

Level 5 lesson 30

Extra: Explain the key verse (Acts 13:46)

Read: Matthew 22:1-14

Further: Luke 14:15-24

Like the two previous ones, the parable we are about to look at, was spoken by the Lord to the Pharisees and religious rulers in the Temple. It was a prophecy of the punishment that was about to fall upon them, because of their unbelief and hostility to His message.

GRACIOUS INVITATION

Our Lord spoke of a King who loved his son and wanted to honour him. On the occasion of His son’s wedding, He made a great feast and sent out His servants to invite people to come. Strangely, these people did not respond! The King sent another invitation, but again “they would not come.” In fact, they showed no respect or love for the King and rudely refused to come!

The King, instead of dealing with them severely for their terribly rude and ungrateful behaviour, graciously sent yet another invitation. This told them all what a splendid and expensive feast it was. “Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: the oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet!” it read.

Sadly, instead of this third invitation being accepted, it was treated even worse than the others! We read, “They made light of it” - just treated it all as a big joke, some even with contempt - and then “went away.” A few very wicked ones even ‘bashed up’ the servants who brought the invitations and killed some of them!

They hated this good and gracious King and his son and wanted nothing to do with his gracious invitation. Finally they were punished for their despicable behaviour; the King sent his army, and destroyed the murderers and burnt up their city! This vividly portrayed the present and future conduct of the hostile Jews in Jerusalem.

The invitation was repeatedly given to them to share in the blessing of the Kingdom. During our Lord’s life they were invited and again after His resurrection. The apostles, whom they persecuted, and in some instances killed, also invited them. The resulting judgement being the destruction of Jerusalem, their city in A.D.70, about 40 years later!

GRATEFUL GUESTS

So does this mean that the feast was cancelled? Not at all! The King then sent his servants elsewhere - out to the highways and alleyways, bringing in any and all who would accept the gracious invitation until, “The wedding hall was filled with guests.”

And so from the highways and byways of the Gentile world, those who will accept the Kingdom message, and participate in the Kingdom blessing, will yet be found, in place of those Jews of our Lord’s Day, who rejected the invitation. God will honour His Son; He will see that the wedding feast of the Kingdom is filled with guests!

The same thing is true regarding the blessings of the Gospel for people today. We too, are invited to partake of God’s wonderful forgiveness of sins, eternal life, peace, joy, etc. If we refuse them, then someone else will accept them and enjoy them, and we will be left outside. If this happens to us, we will have only ourselves to blame!

GREAT ERROR

During the course of this great feast, the King himself arrived to greet the guests. His keen eyes immediately spotted a man who had no wedding clothes on - a serious lack in the East on such occasions. We can assume that all the guests had been given wedding clothes as they entered, as none would have had their own. Yet no-one seemed to have noticed that this man had joined the guests without being properly dressed.

The King questioned him but the man could offer no excuses; he was speechless. The solemn sentence is given. “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth!” (v13) What a terrible fate! This man typifies those who want to be part of God’s Kingdom, but do not want to claim Christ’s shed blood as the covering for their sin. They feel they can cover it up with good works, or other things.

It is sad to think there are many who profess to be God’s people today who are not properly prepared to meet the Lord. They have no wedding clothes; they do not have Christ as their Saviour and are not ‘clothed in His righteousness.’ [Philippians 3:9 & 2 Corinthians 5:21] Nothing less will do to meet the King when He comes! Are you wearing the wedding clothes of Christ’s righteousness? Is He YOUR Saviour?

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did the King make a marriage feast for his son?	.....
2. What did the conduct of those who refused the invitation show?	.....
3. What blessings are brought to us through the Gospel?	.....
4. What did one guest not have at the wedding feast?	.....
5. How may we be prepared to meet the Lord when He comes?	.....

Shut Out and Shut In

Key Verse:

“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful....”

Revelation 21:27

Extra: Can you find other references in the Bible about Judgment Day?

Level 5 lesson 31

Read: Matthew 25:1-13

Further: John 5:24-29

GLORIOUS ROMANCE

The first three words of our reading, “At that time” are quite important; they tell us the future time when the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to the ten virgins etc, of the parable. This point of time is when Jesus returns to establish His Kingdom on earth, with great power and glory, as described in the previous chapter. We must not isolate our lesson from what goes before, because it is simply a continuation of that teaching. The Kingdom of Heaven then, at the time of Jesus’ return is, “Likened to ten virgins (or bridesmaids) who took their lamps (or torches) and went to meet the bridegroom.”

This relates to the Jewish custom, on the night of the last day of marriage festivities, when the bridegroom came with his friends in a large procession to the house of the bride’s parents to collect his bride, and take her to his own home. The girlfriends of the bride would go out to meet this procession and then go in with them to join in the wedding feast.

GRAVE RISK

In the parable, we see this taking place. Ten virgins (bridesmaids) with their oil-lamps went out to meet the bridegroom and his friends, who were expected to arrive soon. No-one knew exactly when, however. Five of them are described as being “wise” because they took some oil for their lamps, while five of them are described as being “foolish” because they didn’t.

The ten girls were apparently waiting together, but due to the delay of the bridegroom’s procession they became tired and fell asleep. At midnight however, the watchers, seeing the lights of the approaching procession in the distance, raised the cry, “Look! Here comes the bridegroom. Go out to meet him!” (v6).

Awakened from sleep, the ten virgins immediately got busy and attended to their lamps. The five wise ones were soon able to get their lamps burning brightly, topped up with the oil they had brought with them. The foolish ones, having no oil, found their torches simply smouldered and went out. Realising they were

now in danger of missing the wedding feast, they appealed to the wise virgins, saying, “Give us some of your oil - our lights are going out!”(v8). The answer was, “No, we have none to spare; go and buy some for yourselves.” Distraught, they rushed away to buy some oil somewhere, but in the meantime the Bridegroom’s procession was quickly approaching! Soon the wise virgins were able to join in, and in no time they reached the house where the wedding feast was held. All in the joyful procession went in with them to the marriage feast and “THE DOOR WAS SHUT.”(v10)

Those ones who were ready were shut in to participate and enjoy the feast inside. But what about the foolish virgins? Having found some oil somewhere, they finally turned up at the door and began crying out to be let in, “Lord, Lord, open to us” - but the Lord refused, saying, “I don’t know you.”(v12) They were shut out! It was too late; they’d missed the wedding feast! The same hand that shut the wise virgins inside also shut the foolish virgins outside.

GRACIOUS REMINDER

Senior members, Jesus likened the Kingdom of Heaven to this. When He establishes it at His return, some will find themselves SHUT IN to enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom with Him, while others will find themselves SHUT OUT; never able to enter. It is true that all the virgins slept, but the wise ones possessed the necessary oil; the foolish ones did not. The wise were prepared, the foolish were not; that’s what made the difference.

There is a very sober lesson for us here. We too need to be ready, prepared for Christ’s coming. The necessary thing to have is SALVATION THROUGH FAITH IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. If He returns and we are not ready we will be shut out. If He comes and we are ready – we will be shut in. Don’t be like the foolish ones who thought there was plenty of time to sort things out when they saw Him coming; remember what happened to them. Jesus told this parable for a very real reason; this is a solemn lesson, think it over well and be wise and not foolish! “NOW is the accepted time; NOW is the day of Salvation!” [2 Corinthians 6:2]

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. When will the parable of the ten virgins be fulfilled?	.....
2. What did all the ten bridesmaids do?	.....
3. Why were the five shut in, and the other five shut out?	.....
4. How can we be ready when the Lord comes?	.....
5. (a) If we are shut out, will we have another opportunity? (b) When is the right time to accept the Lord’s salvation?	.....

In the Guest Room

Key Verse:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”

1 John 3:16

Extra: How will we be recognized as one of the Lord's disciples?

Level 5 lesson 32

Read: John 13:1-30

Further: Luke 22:7-23

WONDERFUL ACTIONS

Luke 22 tells us that the Guest Room where today's story takes place, was in Jerusalem. There, the Lord spent the evening of the last night before His crucifixion with His disciples. They of course, did not know what was about to happen, but Jesus did. He used this solemn occasion before the Passover, to teach His disciples some 'last lessons' through some words and actions of amazing humility and wisdom.

WASHING FEET

While at the supper table, Jesus suddenly got to His feet, and to the surprise of the disciples, proceeded to wash their feet, the job of the lowest servant! Slowly, He worked His way around to Peter who had been watching the proceedings with amazement. Peter simply couldn't understand such humility on the part of his Lord and felt he must resist.

"Lord, are YOU going to wash MY feet?" he asked, incredulously.

"Yes" said the Lord, assuring him that he would understand why later on. It was unthinkable to Peter that the Lord of glory should wash his dusty feet - it should be the other way round; Peter kneeling at the Lord's feet, washing them. "No" he said emphatically, "You'll never wash my feet!" Jesus replied lovingly, "Peter, if I do not wash you - you have no part with Me."

Immediately Peter gave in; "No part with Me" was far worse! The thought of being separated from the Lord like that, was more than he could bear. He went to the other extreme saying, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Dear Peter loved the Lord, and meant well. Jesus told him that there was no need to wash his whole body, his feet would suffice. So He washed his feet and the feet of the others that remained, and then told them the meaning.

His action was an example in humility for them to follow. If He, their Lord and Master, was humble enough to wash their feet - how much more humble

should they be towards one another! This doesn't mean we are to begin again the Eastern custom of washing feet; it has a much wider, more profound meaning. In humility, we are to be prepared to do any service, however menial, for the good of our Christian brothers and sisters.

WICKED 'FRIEND'

Jesus resumed His place at the table, but seemed deeply troubled by something. Finally He told them what it was. "I tell you the truth - one of you shall betray Me!" (v21). Shocked, the disciples looked at one another; which of them would do such a thing? Deeply concerned they each asked the Lord, "Is it me?" [Matthew 26:22] Peter couldn't stand not knowing.

"Ask Jesus who He means," he requested of John. John did so, and Jesus told him, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it." Breaking off a piece of bread, He dipped it in the bowl of soup, and passed it to Judas Iscariot.

Luke 22 tells us that Judas had already been in touch with the chief priests and agreed to betray Jesus to them for 30 silver coins. The Lord again showed His deity by correctly identifying His traitor. Judas took the bread and we read that "Satan entered into him." Judas' lust for power and money had seen him sink so low as to betray Jesus and become the servant of Satan himself!

"What you are about to do, do quickly!" Jesus told him. The appointed time for the Son of God to submit Himself to the authority of sinful men and to be put to death on the cross, had almost arrived. Without a word, we read, "As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night." The other disciples were not all aware of what had just happened. Because Judas looked after the money bag, they thought Jesus had asked Judas to perhaps buy some further supplies or give a gift to the poor. [v29].

We know however, that he hurried through the dark streets, straight to the priests. With Judas now gone to do his vile work, the Lord is relieved; and able to speak freely and tenderly to the remaining eleven. He calls them "My children" and tells them He won't be with them much longer. He pleads with them to 'love one another' and promises that the world will recognise them as His disciples in this way.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did Peter object to Jesus washing his feet?	.....
2. What made Peter change his mind?	.....
3. What was the meaning of the act of washing their feet?	.....
4. Why did Judas' presence trouble Jesus?	.....
5. How did the Lord point out the traitor?	.....