

6. Parable of the Sower

1. Why are some people more open to spiritual things than others?
2. Read Matthew 13: 1 – 23. How was this parable well-suited to the personal experiences of the crowds gathered around Jesus?
3. In v 10 the disciples ask Jesus, 'Why do you speak to the people in parables?' What do you make of Jesus' answer (vv 11 – 16)?
4. Satanic 'birds' destroy the value of God's word for the first group of people. Why? What did these hearers lack (v 19)? Have you any experience of this type of person?
5. Verses 20 – 21 describe the kind of person referred to as stony or rocky soil. What examples have you seen of people who respond in this way?
6. How can we avoid being choked by the weeds and thorns Jesus mentions (v 22)?
7. Which of the four kinds of soil can you identify with? You can be honest here. None of is perfect!
8. What are some practical examples of how we can become 'good soil' (v 23)?

7. The Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son

1. Read Luke 15: 1 – 32. What bothered the Pharisees and the teachers of the law and why (vv 1 – 2)?
2. When reading stories or parables, it helps to imagine the sights, sounds, smells and feelings. What comes to mind when you read the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin (vv 4 – 10)?
3. Who is represented by the central characters (or objects) in each of the three parables?
4. How do you account for the intense reactions of the shepherd, woman and father to their losses and to their finds? Can you recall a time when you lost or misplaced something of value to you? How did you feel?
5. How might the Pharisees and the teachers of the law have felt about each of the actions of the younger son (vv 12 – 16)?
6. Put yourself in the shoes of the father. How would you have responded when the younger son finally returns home?
7. What do the details in verses 20 – 24 tell us about the attitude and feelings of our Father in heaven?
8. Instead of concluding the story in verse 24, Jesus goes on to describe the reaction of the older son (vv 25 – 32). What additional points do you think Jesus wants to make to the Jewish leaders – and indeed to us?

8. The Wheat and the Weeds

1. Do you have a garden and, if so, do you enjoy gardening? When it comes to weeding, what's your policy? Do you pull up the weeds immediately you see them or do you let them grow for a while before uprooting them or do you just let them grow alongside your plants?
2. Read Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43. What 'crisis' occurs at the beginning of the parable (vv 24 – 26)?
3. The owner's servants offer to pull up the weeds. What alternative does the owner propose, and why (vv 29 – 30)?
4. According to Jesus, what do the key elements of the parable stand for (vv 37 – 39)?
5. What does the enemy's activity in this parable tell us about the devil's plan and influence in the world?
6. How does Jesus interpret the weeds being pulled up and burned in the fire (vv 40 – 43)? Who is given this responsibility?
7. At the end of the age, the outcome for the evil-doers and the righteous is very stark. What is your reaction to this?
8. How does this parable help us understand God's patience and plan for dealing with evil? And what hope does it offer us as Christians?

9. The Parable of the Vineyard Workers

1. Read Matthew 19: 16 -30. What points strike you about Jesus' conversation with the rich young man?
2. The young man implies that he has kept all ten commandments (v 20). How do verses 21 – 22 make plain that he hasn't and expose his true spiritual condition?
3. In Biblical times people thought wealth was a reward for righteousness. How does Jesus challenge this view (vv 23 – 26)?
4. Read 20: 1 – 16. How does this parable arise out of the discussion over the rich young man (see especially 19: 27 – 30 and 20: 16)?
5. Imagine that you had 'borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day' yet were paid the same wage as those who only worked for an hour. How would you feel and why?
6. Although the landowner's actions seem unfair, he claims they are not (vv 13 – 15). Why aren't they unfair?
7. The landowner clearly represents God. How do his values, as seen in this parable, conflict with society's values? Why is it so hard to live by these values of God?
8. How does this passage place our service to God in proper perspective?

10. The Wise and Foolish Virgins

1. Read Matthew 24: 36 – 25: 13. How will the coming of the Son of Man be similar to the days of Noah (vv 36 – 41)?
2. Jesus compares his coming to a thief breaking into a house (vv 42 – 44) and a master returning home (vv 45 – 51). What does each story emphasise about (a) the nature of the Lord's return and (b) our responsibility?
3. If the Lord returned today, what would he hope to find us doing?
4. In the verses we've just looked at (vv 36 – 51), would you say Christ's illustrations about his coming are joyful or fearful events?
5. In Biblical times, the bridegroom would come to the bride's home after dark where the bridesmaids (virgins) were also waiting, and then would take her (and them) to his home for the wedding feast. (a) What are the similarities between the wise and foolish virgins (vv 1 – 5)? And (b) How did the bridegroom's long delay reveal the differences between the wise and foolish virgins (vv 6 – 12)?
6. According to this parable, what constitutes wisdom in relation to Christ's return?
7. It has been two thousand years since Jesus promised to return (note v 5). What effects – negative or positive - might this have on us?
8. What can we do to overcome any negative effects and take Christ's warnings more seriously? (Let's pray that we will take Jesus' warnings with the utmost seriousness.)

11. Parable of the Talents

1. If someone loaned you a million euros, and you had to pay it back in ten years, what would you do with it?
2. Read Matthew 25: 14 – 30. A talent was not a personal ability but rather a measure of money equal to many thousands (!) of euros. How and why does the master entrust his money to these servants (vv 14 – 15)?
3. If you had been the third servant, how would you have felt about receiving only one talent when the others had more? How might our envy or resentment of other Christians inhibit our faithful execution of our responsibilities?
4. Compare the reaction of the master to the first and second servants (vv 19 – 23). What matters to him, and what does not matter?
5. As you look at the statements of the three servants (vv 20, 22, 24-25), what can you infer about their relationships with their master? How might their relationships (with the master) have affected their actions in verses 16 – 18?
6. How does our relationship with God affect our attitude towards what we do?
7. How is the master like God and unlike God?
8. How can we faithfully handle the responsibilities God has given us?

12. The Rich Man and Lazarus

1. Read Luke 16: 19 – 31. How does this parable reveal the rich man's lack of concern for Lazarus (vv 19 – 21)?
2. How would you account for his indifference towards Lazarus? How do some rich people explain the poverty of the poor?
3. How does the parable contrast the state of the two men before their death, at their burial and after their death?
4. Does this parable teach that Lazarus experienced heavenly bliss because of his earthly poverty? Likewise, did the rich man experience torment simply because he had been wealthy on earth?
5. What is the one thing Abraham asks the rich man to do (v 25)? Think of a past mistake you deeply regret. How does the memory affect you? What can you do about it?
6. Why does God not send messengers from the dead to warn us (v 31)?
7. Why did Jesus' resurrection fail to convince people of his day, and why does it still fail to convince people today?
8. If we choose to listen (v 31), what are Moses and the Prophets – and this parable – saying to us?