

Listening to the Parables

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I'd like to start out with a short story. An ancient king decided to test his subjects. He had a large boulder placed in the middle of his main highway. Then he hid out to see what people would do. He had some of his wealthiest subjects, people that were in his court, that would come along and no one would move that rock. In fact, some of them actually cursed the king for not taking better care of his highways. Then along came a peasant. He had a load of vegetables on his back and he came to the rock. So he said, "I need to move this." He set down his vegetables and he struggled and sweated and finally got that boulder moved out of the road. When he picked his vegetables up and stuck the load back on his shoulders, he noticed that under the rock there was a pouch there. He opened the pouch and it was full of gold. So the king finally came out of hiding. He just wanted to see if anyone would actually go to the effort to take the boulder out of there and then they got a reward. The peasant learned something that most of us never understand. The point of that little story is every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our condition.

Another little story and this is about the frog in the milk pail. The frog is hopping around the barnyard and he sees the pail about half full of milk. He wants a drink of milk. So, he jumps up on the rim of the bucket and then dives into the milk. Then when he tries to get back out he discovers the sides are too steep and they're too slippery. He can't get back out. But he's thinking "I don't want to die like this. I'm not going to drown in this milk. So, he just kicks and he churns and pretty soon that whole bucket of milk turned into butter." Then he just hopped on top of the mound of butter and he jumped on out of the bucket. Of course, there's a simple point to that one: Never give up!

Those are both modern parables. In fact, I found those on www.parablesite.com. The point I'm trying to make here is that parables are stories or illustrations. They always have a point and they always have a lesson. We know that Jesus Christ used many parables in His teaching. One commentator estimated that approximately one-third of Christ's teaching was done through the parabolic method of parables. Another commentator said that His entire Galilean ministry was in parables. That's how he taught people. So, that's what I want to do today is look at some of these parables.

First we need to establish a few things right up front. And I have three questions here.

- 1. Why did He use parables?**
- 2. To whom did He direct those parables?**
- 3. Who are the disciples are?**

So if we establish and identify all those things, we can proceed.

1. Why did He use them?

Of course, we've been all through this before. I'm using the NLT, the New Living Translation. Actually I used to like my old Living Translation but the newer one has come out with some improvement.

I'm going to begin in verse 10 of Matthew 13. The context here is the Parable of the Sower. It's called various things. Some commentators call it The Parable of the Four Soils and then they identify each one of the soils and take that kind of approach. But this parable is also in Mark 4:1-9 and in Luke 8:4-8. In Matthew 13 beginning in verse 10:

Matthew 13:10. *His disciples came and asked him [after He had given this parable], "Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?"*

11) He [Christ] replied, "You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not.

12) To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.

13) That is why I use these parables, for they look, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really listen or understand.

14) This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says, 'When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend. (NLT)

He's referencing a prophecy over in Isaiah 6:9-10 which was given 700 years before.

15) For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes— so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.' (NLT)

We know He's talking about the stubborn Israelites, but this can also happen to us as we well know. In verse 16, Christ goes on and, again, He's speaking to His disciples.

16) "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.

17) I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it. (NLT)

And that's my title for today because it talked about hearing; it talked about listening to the parables, and again, the point being that He's speaking to His disciples. So my title is:

Listening to the Parables

2. To whom did Christ direct the parables?

We know to the crowds, actually secondarily. Primarily, they were directed to the disciples again and that's self-explanatory.

3. Who are His disciples?

This is the third question that we need to establish and define.

Over in Luke 14—we probably don't think about this that much. We assume we're disciples because we've been called; we've been baptized; we've started on the conversion path; and it's an assumption that we make. But in Luke 14 beginning in verse 25 using the New King James.

*Luke 14:25. Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,
26) "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)*

If you look up that word "cannot" in the Greek, it actually is a compound of two different words and it just means that it's just not possible to be Christ's disciple. It's not possible without that approach that He prescribed in this section and in all the New Testament actually. That's why He tells us in Luke 14 to count the cost because it's that serious.

27) And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)

Again, that same word.

*28) For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it —
29) lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,
30) saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'
31) Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?
32) Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.
33) So likewise, ... (NKJV)*

And he's referring to the illustrations He just used there—the effort that it takes to build a tower, the commitment that it takes to build a tower, and a war machine. He goes on to say:

33b) ... whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot [same word again] be My disciple. (NKJV)

Over in John 8:31, this is a reference scripture, from the New King James.

John 8:31. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. (NKJV)

Here again is further definition, further criteria for being a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

But in John 15 beginning in verse 1 from the New Living and we read this every Passover. In effect, He's using an illustration here, too, to make His point.

John 15:1. I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. (NLT)

We're going to see those references, those illustrations to Jesus Christ and God the Father later on in some of the parables, which is kind of interesting when you think about the methods and the way that Christ taught.

2) He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.

3) You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you.

4) Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. (NLT)

When you read statements like that, that gives some religionists a really hard time when they believe that all you have to do is make that initial commitment and you can't lose your salvation. So what does it mean that you have to remain doing certain things? This is telling us right here that we need to be not only remaining, we need to be producing fruit while we're there.

5) "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. (NLT)

Again, just being a disciple producing any kind of fruit is impossible if we're not true disciples of Jesus Christ.

6) Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. (NLT)

We know what that's referring to.

7) But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! (NLT)

We read that every Passover.

8) When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples.... (NLT)

I like the way the New Living puts that—"true disciples."

8b) ... This brings great glory to my Father. (NLT)

But did you notice that word fruit in there? I counted it six times in just those eight verses. It's the same Greek word that's used in Galatians 5:22 where Paul's talking about the fruit of the holy spirit. So, the point being there that to produce that fruit, we have to be using, producing something with God's holy spirit that we have that we've been given.

Again, this all this boils down to is if we're going to be true disciples, if we're going to make a difference in the world—and we'll look at a couple of scriptures that said we need to be doing that, we can do that wherever we're at. It doesn't matter what we do. It doesn't matter where we're at. We can do that in our families. We can do that in our communities. We can do it on our jobs, in our church family, anyway or anywhere that we're at.

The main point here in some of these things that we've looked at about being a true disciple it's not because of our own efforts but it's because of what Jesus Christ, what God's holy spirit produces in us. It's not something that we bring with us when we're converted.

Let's go over to Matthew 5 because Christ talks about what His disciples should be doing. Matthew 5:1 from the New King James.

Matthew 5:1. *And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.*

2) Then He opened His mouth and taught them, ... (NKJV)

Again He's speaking; He's teaching His disciples, "saying" and let's drop down to verse 13.

13) "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. (NKJV)

The idea here, again, in talking about making a difference, is that we are supposed to add a different flavor to the world in general. We're supposed to be at least a little bit different. I think in many ways we are and I'll address that a little bit later. He elaborates on that and adds to that.

14) "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

15) Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (NKJV)

You could take that last verse right there and maybe paste it to your bathroom mirror in the morning for when you get up. We're coming into the Passover season and that's a good question to ask ourselves: Is our light shining? Is there any illumination there at all? Because that's what that light means. And, again, what that's talking about is the reflection of Jesus Christ in our lives. That's the light that shines. It's not something that we can produce. It has to come through God's holy spirit. Christ referred to Himself, remember those scriptures where He referred to Himself? "I am the Light of the world." John 8:12; 12:35-36, 46.

Again we can ask another question there. Does that light make any difference where we live? What we do in the world? When we come into the season of the Passover—and I don't know how you are but I think most have been around long enough and we've kept the holy days enough that whenever we come into the different seasons (and we're very fast approaching into the spring holy day season, Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread) the holy day becomes the framework for our thoughts, our thought processes. So in this thought process, we can ask ourselves, "What kind of disciples are we? Are we making a difference?"

And with that thought, I'd just like to look at some of the lessons in Jesus Christ's parables and see if they can help us as we approach the spring holy days—the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. One thing I thought about when I was looking at this subject, don't all the parables, when you distill them down, when you analyze them and look at them very close, don't they all have to do with our salvational relationship with God? I think they do and I hope we can see that as we go through here.

Notice as we are going through this and looking at the parables how many times the disciples are referenced in the context of the parables—Christ teaching His students at that time and by extension, still teaching us, urging them to listen, to understand. And we'll see that as we go through here. Like in Matthew 13:9, and again this is in the context of the Parable of the Sower, it says:

Matthew 13:9. *Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." (NLT)*

That's a very familiar term that's used throughout the Parables. It's used in Revelation. It's used throughout the New Testament in many different places. That was from the New Living. The New King James says:

Matthew 13:9. *He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (NKJV)*

That's the most common form that we hear. It just means that those who hear should have the understanding. They should be listening and understanding that. Better yet, we might express that by saying "Those who hear, who have been given that understanding, should understand what Christ is teaching through the parable." Again that understanding, that hearing isn't something that we brought to the table when we were converted. Again, my title is Listening to the Parables.

I'd like to back up to verse 1 of Matthew 13, from the New King James.

Matthew 13:1. *On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea.*

2) And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. (NKJV)

And He begins to teach them with parables. He actually goes through a series of seven parables here in Matthew 13 beginning with the Parable of the Sower.

3) Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow.

4) And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.

5) Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth [thin soil].

6) But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.

7) And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.

8) But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

9) He who has [an ear], let him hear!" (NKJV)

If we have God's holy spirit, we should be hearing and understanding what He's teaching. It's a short parable; so let's just see if we're listening as we go through that. We know He's speaking to a crowd, but we know also later on in the chapter He's explaining to His disciples what that parable meant, beginning in verse 18.

In verse 18, the New Living is fine on this, but I like the Amplified Version better.

Matthew 13:18. *Listen then to the [meaning of the] parable of the sower: (AMP)*

And the sower (actually "sowers") are the Father and Jesus Christ because what does it say in John 6:44?

John 6:44. *No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. (NKJV)*

And that's a joint decision by both of them. That was done for you and for me. And it should humble us every time we think of that! Every time we read or hear that, we should appreciate that. Verse 19:

19) While anyone is hearing the Word ... (AMP)

That's the seed of God's truth.

19b) ... of the kingdom and does not grasp and comprehend it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.... (AMP)

We know the New King James for "the evil one" uses the term "birds." But if you look at Revelation 18:2, it talks about every foul spirit, every unclean hated bird. That's talking about Satan obviously. We know that the world in general isn't called right now. They are all subject to Satan. They are all laboring under deception.

But every one of us again—and these are some things that we can glean out of the parable—every one of us was a special case when you think about that. We were called by God. And He only calls and chooses some now. Very shortly we're going to commemorate that Christ gave up His life, He spilled His blood when we take those symbols. The question again for us, "Are we listening to what is being said here?"

19 continued) ... This is what was sown along the roadside. (AMP)

In the King James the term for "the roadside" is "fell by the wayside." That just represents the world. That's what it's talking about. It's interesting that it would use "roadside," "wayside." In some translations, Matthew 7:13, a reference scripture, from NIV says:

Matthew 7:13. *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. (NIV)*

Again, if we're really hearing that and we're really appreciating what we've been called into and called out of, we should deeply appreciate that. We should be appreciative of that every single day when we think about it. Not that we look down on the world, but we've been rescued out of it. That's what we should be appreciative of. The commentators say this is the Parable of the Soils and they try to say that the different soils represent different types of people, but the type of people that it's talking about here when the seed fell by the wayside are just people who are either deceived or deluded. They're indifferent to the word of God. We know that.

Just look at some of the legislation that is going on now. My wife and I were talking about that the other day. She was exclaiming, "How can they do this? How can they promote those kinds of things like that?" I said, "Honey, it is anti-God. If you look at that closely, it's all anti-God, the laws that are being passed and all that."

Again, if these soils are types, that's a type we don't want to be in. We don't want to be part of the world. And that's obviously what's being taught here.

20) As for what was sown on thin (rocky) soil, this is he who hears the Word and at once welcomes and accepts it with joy; (AMP)

Joy is an emotion. It's an emotional response. It's an emotional conversion. We do need some emotion and I'm sure we all had that whenever we were initially called and converted. But we need to grow beyond that. There is a practical side also to our conversion. Verse 21 explains that.

21) Yet it has no real root in him, but is temporary ... (AMP)

It just lasts for a little while.

21b) ... and when affliction or trouble or persecution comes ... (AMP)

The King James says—remember back in the actual parable—that the sun came up and scorched the individuals here.

21 continued) ... on account of the Word, at once he is caused to stumble. (AMP)

The Amplified says he is “repelled and starts to distrust” the one whom he should be trusting. There is no depth there and “he falls away.”

When we do endure those trials, when we survive those things, what does it do for us? If we take the correct approach, if we don't abandon God, if we don't turn our backs and start distrusting saying, “Why am I suffering from cancer?” or “Why am I suffering from” this or that or some job problems or any kind of a trial. When we survive those things and when we come out the other side of a trial that builds stamina in us. Doesn't it? And that's what we need so that we can last until the end. But this talks about a type here that gives up easily and we don't want to be that type.

22) As for what was sown among thorns, ... (AMP)

This is talking about the thorny things, the cares, the distractions of the world.

22b) ... this is he who hears the Word, but the cares of the world and the pleasure and delight and glamour and deceitfulness of riches ... (AMP)

And that's all there in abundance.

22 continued) ... choke and suffocate the Word, and it yields no fruit. (AMP)

It can't. If we're totally consumed by the world and the things that are in the world, it becomes a kind of addiction. It's like alcoholism, drug addiction or anything like that.

Whenever we're consumed by all those things, all the inhibitions go out of us. Living like that will actually strangle, choke, and grieve God's holy spirit to the point where it will just leave us. We don't want to be this type either.

Here is the type we want to be, verse 23.

23) As for what was sown on good soil, this is he who hears the Word and grasps and comprehends it; he indeed bears fruit ... (AMP)

He produces something. He does something with what he's been given.

23b) ... and yields in one case a hundred times as much as was sown, in another sixty times as much, and in another thirty. (AMP)

That's just picturing growth and development. It's interesting when you look at that one hundred, sixty, thirty.

Again these types of people were just different but this last one produced something. And that's the way we should be; we shouldn't languish spiritually. We should be doing something with what we get.

Another thing when we look at hundred, sixty, thirty, another thing we should glean from that: You don't have to be perfect. I know we should be striving to be perfect, to be ideal.

I heard it preached once actually that—this has been a long time ago and I hope the individual has changed a little bit. The message was that the only people who were going to be in God's Kingdom, who were going to be successful were the A students. He was using a reference to A, B, C, D, and F students. Well, the rest of us I guess are going to be on the sidelines. Maybe some B students will be there but they won't be like the A students. That's not scriptural. That's just not.

But the point here is Christ does expect us to do something with what we've been given. Verse 9 of Matthew 13 again: He who has ears to hear, let him hear! Do we get the points in that one parable there? Are we listening with our hearts and minds to that? It's not referencing that something's wrong with the ears. If we're taking these things in, if we're really listening and hearing these things, we'll be doing something with what we've been given. Or hopefully we'll be reminded that we should be doing something.

Again, the point there is that we all won't produce the same thing. The parable of the talents that we'll look at later teaches us that but there needs to be some growth and development.

Here's another parable to look at. Maybe we can see ourselves in. Maybe we can see where we fit or hopefully not fit in some of these parables. This one is still in Matthew 13 down in verse 24 it begins, the Parable of the Tares from the New King James.

Matthew 13:24. Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field;
25) but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.
26) But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.
27) So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?'
28) He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?'
29) But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.
30) Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest [Christ's return] I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (NKJV)

Then down in verse 36, again, Christ explains the parable to who? To His disciples. He's teaching them.

Matthew 13:36. Then, leaving the crowds outside, Jesus went into the house [probably His house]. His disciples said, "Please explain to us the story of the weeds [or the tares] in the field." (NLT)

I'm reading from the New Living Translation.

37) Jesus replied, "The Son of Man is the farmer who plants the good seed. (NLT)

This sounds a little bit like the illustration used here in John 15.

38) The field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the evil one.
39) The enemy who planted the weeds among the wheat is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the harvesters are the angels.
40) "Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world.
41) The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.
42) And the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
43) Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand! (NLT)

Do you see a subtle warning there from Christ? There will be people in the church— Paul talked about that later on, even to the Ephesians elders. We see that in Acts.

There will be people in the church who are not genuine Christians; they're just not. But sometimes and I've heard people do this, we're really quick to label someone as a "tare" especially if they've hurt our feelings, offended us maybe, been mean to us, something like that.

Right here in this little parable we have a clue as to why we need to be extremely careful of being judgmental. Did you notice the reference to Christ and His angels here? Very clearly, they are the ones that do the final judgment. They carry out the sentence. Not any human. The last part of verse 39 there said, "The harvesters are the angels."

What we may not like about another person, and that happens in the church, could just be something that upsets us about another person where we might want to label them as a "tare" because of their behavior, something they're doing. It may just be a human being a human. Isn't it odd that when we're judgmental we expect someone else to be perfect, superhuman instead of just human? And there are sub-humans too. We see some sub-humans in the world. I won't even go there. Sometimes we're just human.

I have to tell this little story on myself. I'm one of these people I grew up this way; I spent five years in the Navy. And I was telling someone this morning I spent a couple of years in the Reserve. We've had a series of little trials. Marie was even laughing the other day. She said, "It's got to be getting close to the holy days. It's got to be." The other day the kitchen faucet went out. So I go out and I buy one. It's not a big deal. I've done that before. It kills you lying underneath the sink, but I've done it before. So, I go down and buy one, bring it back, an expensive one. I'm under there taking the old one out and the old one is trash. And nothing fits; nothing fits. I mumbled a couple of things and then later had to apologize to Marie. I said, "I'm sorry for my mouth. I'll go wash it out or something."

My point there is that some of us have those things. Some of us have those human responses. I told Marie, "You know, honey, when women are frustrated and angry, they cry. When men are frustrated and angry, they cuss. They will say something they're sorry for later." And hopefully we can repent of those things, overcome those things.

Sometimes we just need to remember that brethren are human. We're all just human. We make mistakes. We do all kinds of things. We inadvertently offend people. Sometimes we offend people on purpose. That's the way humans operate. One of these days we won't have to deal with that. Will we?

He's talking to His disciples here. We don't think they're in that category, but they were if we really look closely at the disciples lives. They had a lot of problems. Even some of the prophets of old had problems, some of them with their mouths. And if you look at the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, how many times were they told to repent, to change a problem within the church and within themselves—human beings? Just thinking about those churches in Revelation 2 and 3, look how often in the context they are under Satan's influence. He's in the background. He loves all this stuff.

But what did Christ say to all those seven churches? He that has an ear to hear what's being said to him, and He expects him to do something with what He's teaching them. Lest we think Satan can't get to us, a couple of references scriptures.

1 Corinthians 10:12. *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (NKJV)*

1 Peter 5:8. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (NKJV)*

It even mentions in that one parable that the birds come along representing Satan and devour the seed in the world, along the wayside.

Matthew 13 down in verse 31, the Parable of the Mustard Seed.

Matthew 13:31. *Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, 32) which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." (NKJV)*

Then He goes on right from that one in verse 33 to the Parable of the Leaven.

Matthew 13:33. *Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened." (NKJV)*

Leaven isn't always used in a negative sense. But if you put those two together, you have to consider our position because when God starts something very small and insignificant, which is what it's talking about here, it will eventually grow into something. And it's eventually going to grow into God's Kingdom. It's going to fill the whole earth and eventually the whole universe. We have a part in that.

Again, the point being and the lesson from just those little parables there—one lesson; we could get more—do we fully appreciate the role that we have to become part of God's family? God is building a family. We've been called to be a part of that.

Then down in verse 44, this series of parables ends with three short ones. We have in verse 44 the Parable of the Hidden Treasure.

Matthew 13:44. *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (NKJV)*

Then He goes right into the Pearl of Great Price Parable.

*45) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls,
46) who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he
had and bought it. (NKJV)*

The meaning there should be pretty obvious for us. What we've been called to, what we've been given is absolutely priceless. One commentator said that some people stumble onto the truth. They recognize it. Do something with it. They embrace it as it says here. Others feel a void in their life and they search for the truth. We've know people like that. Of course, God is doing the calling, but we generally fall into one of these categories here.

I still think when I reflect on my calling, I was a little bit of both. I was kind of searching in my dumb way and I felt that void in life which is why I was doing that. When God finally put the truth in my path, I stumbled over it. I recognized it and I did something with it. I responded to God's calling. I paid attention. And I'm really thankful to this day and, hopefully, to my last dying breath for that calling. The point, again, for us: Do we still feel that way? Do we see our calling as priceless?

I'm amazed sometimes. We've known people who have actually left the Church of God and the Church of God is not perfect. We've had a lot of problems, a lot of issues. But they go back to the churches of the world—especially the ones that go back to the universal church and get de-programmed from the truth and re-programmed with that stuff. It's just amazing to me.

But Christ concludes the set of seven parables here in Matthew 13 with the last one beginning in verse 47, the Parable of the Dragnet.

*47) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea
and gathered some of every kind,
48) which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered
the good into vessels, but threw the bad away.
49) So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the
wicked from among the just,
50) and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of
teeth." (NKJV)*

He gave all those preceding parables and then this one right at the end. A dragnet is different than a net you just throw out and pull back in that has a few fish in it. If you look at dragnets that modern fishing boats use, they can stretch for miles. They pick up everything.

That's what it's referencing there, but it's referencing the end of the world. It's just my theory. I don't really know this, but I think of the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20 when I think of that dragnet. The 1,000 years are ended; Satan is bound,

but there are still a great number of people that reject God's truth. They have been shown it, but they reject it.

We don't want to be in that place. We want to be in God's Kingdom. Right? Then Jesus goes on to say in verse 51 and He's still talking to His disciples.

51) Jesus said to them, "Have you understood all these things?" ... (NKJV)

All these parables, all the things He's trying to get through to them.

51b) ... They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." ... (NKJV)

They probably didn't really get all of it. They probably understood less than what they were saying.

52) Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old." (NKJV)

That's kind of a mini parable there, I think. The New Living helps that verse.

Matthew 13:52. *Then he added, "Every teacher of religious law who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a homeowner who brings from his storeroom new gems of truth as well as old." (NLT)*

To me that's a little hard to explain, but when we think about the context here and who He is taking to, the gospel of Matthew is directed at those Jews. They had all the old stuff. They had the scribes. They had the lawmakers, the ones that dispensed all the stuff. They had all this stored in their minds, but now they had something new. The real value of the Old Testament was what it pointed to in the New, which is the central figure of Jesus Christ and the truth.

If you look at that a little closer, a "scribe" emphasizes *one who learns*, but a "disciple" emphasizes *"one who learns and applies what he has learned."* There is a difference in those two words. I think the point there shouldn't be lost on any of us. Just learning and knowing is not enough. We need to do something with what we've been shown, what we've been taught, the things we've been hearing, the things we've been listening to. What did James say? You have to be doers not just hearers alone.

We looked at those seven parables in Matthew 13. There are a lot of parables. I'll run down quickly through a list of the parables. You can look these up if you have a good study Bible or a good commentary.

- The Unmerciful Servant, Matthew 18
- The Laborers in the Vineyard, Matthew 20
- The Two Sons, Matthew 21

- The Wicked Vine Dressers, Matthew 21
- The Wedding Feast, Matthew 22
- The Wise and Foolish Virgins, Matthew 25 (We'll look at that one.)
- The Talents, Matthew 25 (We'll look at that one too.)
- The Growing Seed, Mark 4
- The Two Debtors, Luke 7
- The Good Samaritan, Luke 10
- The Friend at Midnight, Luke 11
- The Rich Fool, Luke 12
- The Barren Fig Tree, Luke 13
- Taking the Lowest Place, Luke 14
- The Great Supper, Luke 14
- The Lost Sheep, Luke 15
- The Lost Coins, Luke 15
- The Prodigal Son, Luke 15
- The Unjust Steward, Luke 16
- The Rich Man and Lazarus, Luke 16
- The Unprofitable Servants, Luke 17
- The Persistent Widow, Luke 18
- The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Luke 18
- The Minas, Luke 19

Again, there are applications for us in all of those, in every one of those. Again, we have to ask the question, "Do we have ears to hear what those lessons are saying, what they're urging us to do that's implied in these parables?"

Here are the last two parables we're going to take a look at because there are messages in those too. We know Matthew 24 and Matthew 25 go together. I don't know if you've ever noticed in Matthew 25 that Christ gave two parables in the same week that He was taken, arrested, beaten, and crucified. It was generally in that timeframe there. It might have been a little longer than a week, but He gave two parables right towards the end of that. It's what the commentators and the religionists call the passion week." We should know where I'm going. We're going to talk about the wise and foolish virgins.

This has been in the past in the church that I can remember one of the most used parables. It's the way it was used. My point is not really to downplay the teaching of the church, but in the approach I'm taking I tried to sift out the lessons and the points of these parables that Christ gave, again, to His disciples and to us too. I'd like to go through these two last ones then without any motive other than that—just to look at some of these points. Matthew 25, beginning in verse 1, the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. I'll use the New Living which adds a little more drama to the narrative here.

Matthew 25:1. *"The Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids [the ekklesia, the prospective bride] who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom [Christ]. (NLT)*

It's very obvious what this parable is talking about.

2) Five of them were foolish, ... (NLT)

If you look that word up in the Greek, it is *moros*. That's where we get our English word "moron." The Greek really implies that it has more to do with the heart and the character of someone. It's someone who is just heedless, maybe morally bankrupt, maybe spiritually bankrupt. In Matthew 5:13 and Luke 14:34, the same word is used but it refers to salt that has lost its flavor and becomes tasteless.

Then it goes on to talk about the five foolish and then the five wise. That's where we have the half and half teaching that you may be familiar with. But it goes on in verse 3:

3) The five who were foolish didn't take enough olive oil for their lamps, (NLT)

And we know that symbolizes God's holy spirit. That's where we get our spiritual energy which we need to use to honor and to glorify God the Father and Jesus Christ. We don't want it to be in short supply and the way we maintain that is by using the holy spirit. The implication here is that it wasn't being used by the individuals that Christ is illustrating here.

4) but the other five were wise enough to take along extra oil.

5) When the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. (NLT)

I know the teaching used to be from this parable and I think the design was to instill a bit of fear in us that we would be in the bad half instead of the good half. It was teaching about the end-time dysfunctional church, the Laodiceans.

You have to remember though that a parable is not a true story. It is an illustration. I don't think it's a prophecy either. That's not saying that Christ wasn't thinking of things in His mind because I have no idea. The reference here is to "drowsy" and "sleepy" and I think it's talking about a church that is just not paying attention.

Christ is taking longer than we thought and we've all been there. It's an approach of "It's okay to let down because I've got plenty of time." And that can affect all of us. We're forgetful. We're human. We'll tend to do those things. Unfortunately, that's also reflected in the way some folks conduct their lives.

But the context of this not being drowsy, not being sleepy is back in the end of chapter 24. I'll just read that as a reference, Matthew 24:42-44 from the New Living, where He's telling them:

Matthew 24:42. *"So you, too, must keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming.*

43) *Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into.*

44) *You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected. (NLT)*

We have to be alert. We have to be aware at all times. He's talking about spiritual conditions here, but continuing back in chapter 25 and verse 6:

Matthew 25:6. *"At midnight [a very unexpected hour] they were roused by the shout, 'Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and meet him!'*

7) *"All ... (NLT)*

This means everybody picked up on "This is it!"

7b) *... the bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps.*

8) *Then the five foolish ones asked the others, 'Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.'*

9) *"But the others replied, 'We don't have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves.'*

10) *"But while they were gone to buy oil, the bridegroom came. Then those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was locked.*

11) *Later, when the other five bridesmaids returned, they stood outside, calling, 'Lord! Lord! Open the door for us!' (NLT)*

The whole point here should be obvious for us. Each one of us has the responsibility. No one, no minister, no organization, no one no matter what they claim can give you this. They can't live your life for you. And this is talking about people who are not living their lives the way they should be. No one can give you that. It has to come from God. It has to come from Jesus Christ. It has to come through using God's holy spirit. There are no substitutes allowed. There just are not.

Again, it's not possible to be Jesus Christ's disciple unless we are committed to this, unless we understand this, unless we apply this to our lives. Verse 12:

12) *"But he called back, 'Believe me, I don't know you!' (NLT)*

There was no relationship. It just wasn't there.

13) *"So you, too, must keep watch! For you do not know the day or hour of my return. (NLT)*

The whole point of that parable is that we have to always be ready.

The last parable He gave prior to His death is the Parable of the Talents, which should not be confused with the Parable of the Minas over in Luke 19. It is similar but there are different points. I'd like to read what a commentator said. I liked the way he put this. He's fairly close, but here's what he says about Jesus' Parable of the Talents and I quote:

This parable focuses primarily upon the useless servant. Gifts that are not used are lost. The title "talents" is unfortunate in that in our language we use the word "talent" to refer to natural aptitudes or abilities that people have.

And sometimes, unfortunately, in the past I think we looked at this parable like that. And that's not the point of the parable at all.

The "talent" in this parable was a weight. And its value depended upon whether the object's weight was copper, silver, or gold. In the story, talents were given to the several men according to their abilities. It would be best to interpret the talents as opportunities. And in the parable each of the men is given opportunity according to ability and expected to serve faithfully. This is a parable on responsibility.

But in Matthew 25 down in verse 14, still from the New Living Translation:

Matthew 25:14. *"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip [Jesus Christ]. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. (NLT)*

"Delivered his goods," one translation says. That's God's holy spirit. That's what He gives us. That's what we use to produce fruit with.

15) He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities.... (NKJV)

Or their "strengths" and we all have different strengths.

15b) ... He then left on his trip.

16) "The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. (NLT)

He did something with what he was given.

17) The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more.

18) But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money.

19) "After a long time their master [Jesus Christ] returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. (NLT)

That is, what they had been given. Settle accounts. "What have you done with what I've given you?"

20) *The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, 'Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.'*

21) *"The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities.... (NLT)*

The New King James says, "Enter into the joy of the Lord." They finally got the reward!

22) *"The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.'*

23) *"The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant.... (NLT)*

We've read this many times before. Note here that it's the same reward, but not all have the same abilities, not all have the same strengths.

24) *"Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, 'Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. (NLT)*

Note the attitude there: A poor relationship with God, with Jesus Christ. In a sense here that individual is actually blaming God for his own lack of abilities. It's like, "Why did You call me? Why did You call me now and give me this responsibility? Give me these opportunities that I never took?"

25) *I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. [You can have] your money back.'*

26) *"But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops I didn't cultivate,*

27) *why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.' (NLT)*

"Why didn't you do something with what I gave you? Then you would have something to show for it."

28) *"Then he ordered, 'Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver.*

29) *To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, ... (NLT)*

And that's a promise of God.

29b) *... and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away.*

30) Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (NLT)

This is the final judgment again. There is a similarity in a lot of these parables.

The whole point is that this parable couldn't be plainer. It is all about the responsibility we have to use what God has given each one of us individually. It doesn't matter who we are and it doesn't matter what we are. It's what God expects of us.

We have opportunities each and every day of our lives. We have opportunities today; all the time. As long as we have breath, we have opportunity, if you want to look at it that way. In some ways, we're only limited by our imagination. Aren't we?

To sum it up, I briefly touched on eight or nine parables. And I tried to show in those that there is an application for every one of us. These are not just words to read over and forget. There are not just "nice" stories in the parable. These should be things that we hear, that we listen to, that we understand.

I would just like to encourage everyone to reflect on these words, these lessons in our lives and let us say with the psalmist in 119. This is a reference, Psalm 119:105, from the New King James.

Psalm 119:105. *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (NKJV)*

This is a very simple statement. The light of God's Word—we just looked at a little bit of it—these are the teachings of Jesus Christ to His disciples. And I hope we've seen some of that light in these parables. And I hope it helps us to see how we should be conducting our lives, reflecting on our lives during this upcoming spring holy day season as we approach the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread.