

6) PARABLES IN MATTHEW AND LUKE

Matthew 22. 1-14

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet." ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.'

Luke 14. 15-24

The Parable of the Great Dinner

15 One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, 'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' ¹⁶Then Jesus said to him, 'Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. ¹⁷At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, "Come; for everything is ready now." ¹⁸But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, "I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies." ¹⁹Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies." ²⁰Another said, "I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come." ²¹So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." ²²And the slave said, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room." ²³Then the master said to the slave, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. ²⁴For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner." '

Matthew 25. 14-29

The Parable of the Talents

14 'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the

one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." ²¹His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." ²³His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." ²⁶But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

Luke 19. 11-26

The Parable of the Ten Pounds

11 As they were listening to this, he went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. ¹²So he said, 'A nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return. ¹³He summoned ten of his slaves, and gave them ten pounds, and said to them, "Do business with these until I come back." ¹⁴But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, "We do not want this man to rule over us." ¹⁵When he returned, having received royal power, he ordered these slaves, to whom he had given the money, to be summoned so that he might find out what they had gained by trading. ¹⁶The first came forward and said, "Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds." ¹⁷He said to him, "Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities." ¹⁸Then the second came, saying, "Lord, your pound has made five pounds." ¹⁹He said to him, "And you, rule over five cities." ²⁰Then the other came, saying, "Lord, here is your pound. I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, ²¹for I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man; you take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow." ²²He said to him, "I will judge you by your own words, you wicked slave! You knew, did you, that I was a harsh man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? ²³Why then did you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with interest." ²⁴He said to the bystanders, "Take the pound from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds." ²⁵(And they said to him, "Lord, he has ten pounds!") ²⁶"I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

COMMENTARY NOTES

Matthew 22: 1-14 - The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Matthew's version of this parable is more of an allegory. There is a King, his son, servants, invited guests, and other guests. Clearly the king represents God and the son, Jesus. Jesus has invited Israel, beginning with the religious leaders and people themselves, to enter the kingdom of heaven as he has defined it. The disciples are the servants who also call the guests to come. But the guests refuse to come. They have better, more important things to do. Some even take hold of the servants and mistreat them (persecution).

Two things happen next. The king takes action against the abusive guests. He "destroyed those murderers and burned their city." Remember that Matthew is written after the destruction of the temple, Jerusalem the city, and the religious priesthood. The king also tells his servants to invite outsiders to the banquet. Who are these outsiders? They are both "good and bad" (tax collectors and sinners, non-Jews and Jews).

But upon return to the house, the king sees one guest not properly dressed. At ancient wedding banquets, the host would have a closet full of extra robes for those who could come without one. So, there was no excuse for being improperly dressed. Improper dress would be an act of disrespect, lacking in expression of gratitude to the bride and groom for the invitation. How could that be interpreted allegorically by Jesus at that time? Even those who are welcomed into the kingdom of heaven need to abide by God's call to love God and neighbor, to be a conscientious part of the fellowship and service of the faithful. "Many are called but few are chosen." The invitation goes to everyone, far and wide. Many are called. But those who respond and follow through with their faith, devotion and practice are relatively few. Being chosen is also about making good choices.

Luke 14: 15-24 - The Parable of the Great Dinner

Luke's version of the parable is not an allegory, and there is no final judgment. An unidentified "master" is having a great dinner and inviting specific guests. Like Matthew's version, they all make excuses as to why they cannot come. The master is angry and tells his servants to go out into the streets and lanes of the town and invite the poor and disabled - those who count little in society. They do this and there is still lots of room. So the master tells them to go out again and this time beyond the town to the outer lanes and roads and invite anyone and everyone (this may be a reference to the missionary activity of the church and the call to the non-Jews). The host tells them to "compel" people to come to the feast. This is like begging them. They are to beg the beggars, compel those who have nowhere to go as it is. Does this make sense? How desperate is the master to get the numbers? But isn't this crazy action an astonishing way to dignify those without dignity? How important and special you are when people plead and beg to have you at their party, to treat you like a king or queen. For beggars to be treated as kings and queens is what the kingdom of God in its essence is all about.

But consider this. If the first guests invited had not said no, would the invitations have gone out to the beggars? This is a fascinating rationale for how the kingdom of God is being formed and populated. It is also a fascinating rationale for the kind of focus for the church today. Who are the invited guests? Who are the people who end up coming? The last end up being first while the first end up last.

Matthew 25: 14-29 - The Parable of the Talents

This parable is one given by Jesus before he dies. It is meant to give instructions to his disciples on how they should live between the time of his departure and his second coming. It's about what to do with what you're given.

There are at least five points that can be made.

1) A person's ability determines the number of talents they are given. 2) The talents are given in order to multiply them. A talent was a large sum of money, a lifetime of wages for some. The talents, used well, will produce more talents, more blessings, more riches and benefits. 3) It doesn't take great brilliance or skill to multiply the talents. Basic investment can produce some multiplication. What's required is a willingness to risk, to make some effort, to take some steps. 4) What prevents the talents from multiplying? Fear; neglect, thoughtlessness, indifference; lack of conviction or motivation. 5) The concept of abilities (how we're made) and resources (talents, what we're given) is a helpful one. Both our abilities and our resources/talents are entrusted to us by God. All belongs to God. We belong to God. Jesus' role is to inspire and motivate us to multiply what we're given to God's glory. We can think of talents and their use as multiplying the effects of compassion and service with the particular abilities and opportunities we're given and how we make use of them.

Luke 19: 11-26 - The Parable of the Ten Pounds

This parable is similar to Matthew's version except for a few differences. The currency is pounds rather than talents. Also, everyone gets the same amount to invest (one pound each). Finally, the story is about a nobleman going on a journey in order to receive royal power. It is not clear what reference this has to the history of the time.

What is further interesting in this parable is that the reward of the servants for investing well and multiplying the pounds is that they are given greater responsibility (cities to rule). Using our abilities and opportunities well so that others are helped and blessed means 1) people will trust us more and entrust us with more as a result; and 2) people will consult us, look for us and bless us more and more for what they've received through our ministry to them. The key is not how much we've done or how much we've multiplied our gifts. The person who makes 10 is no better than the person who makes 1. However, some people can handle greater responsibility than others, and that's just the reality of our differences as people and the cards we've been dealt by life. The judgment falls on those who do nothing with what they're given. Judgment falls on them in the sense that people don't look to them for blessings. We reap what we sow.

For next week: Matthew 18: 23-34, Luke 15.