

YT31s

Parables of Our Lord

Student

PARABLES OF OUR LORD

Year 3, Quarter 1
Young People, Pupil

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This book was originally written by Pauline Senter, a missionary who served for many years in Tanzania. Peggy Cummins has adapted that book to the new format for International Publications Services. Mrs. Cummins is a missionary in Kenya. She and her husband, Al, have two grown sons.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SOWER AND THE SEED

Aim: I must hear and obey the gospel to understand it.

Background Scripture: Mark 4:5-20; Luke 8:5-15; Matthew 13:3-23

Verses in Today's Lesson: Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23

Memory Verse: "For nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light. Take heed then how you hear..." (Luke 8:17-18).

A STUDY OF THE LESSON

Introduction

Once there were four friends. They laughed and played and worked together in the warm sun. Life was easy in their village.

Many years passed. The four friends met again in their village. Each talked about his life since they last met. Joseph was a bitter, angry man. He had money and power, but his life held no joy. John was a cynic. His farms had flourished, but the drought came and all was lost. Paul enjoyed life, but he was obsessed with owning things. He felt only material wealth was important.

James had little money or land about which to brag. His life was not complicated. There was one important event to share with his friends. He had become a Christian. James tried to tell them that only things you do for others last.

Once again the friends went their separate ways, but only one went away joyfully.

Interpretation

What is a parable? Parables are simple stories from everyday life which help us understand spiritual truths. A parable usually has one main truth. The parable of the sower and the seed was Jesus' first parable. After he had finished this teaching the disciples wanted to know why he taught in parables.

Parables could reveal or conceal. They revealed the truth to the disciples in the crowd who loved Jesus. The truth was hidden from the ones who hated Jesus. This was not because Jesus wanted to hide his teaching but because unbelievers simply do not understand spiritual truths.

In this parable there are four kinds of soil: hard, rocky, thorny and good soil. Like the Introduction story, these represent four types of people.

The soil along the path was hard. Seed falling there was exposed and birds picked up the grain. Jesus applied this teaching in verse 19. People may be like the hard path. When they hear the Word of God, Satan watches and snatches it away before it has a chance to grow in their hearts and lives.

The rocky soil has rock lying just beneath the earth's surface. Some of the scattered seed fell on that soil. The seed flourished for a while. However, since the roots could not get through the rock, the hot, dry weather caused the plant to wither and die. Some people consider trusting Jesus as their Saviour, but they soon forget about him. Those people are not saved. They are only interested for a short time.

The thorny soil was where the thorns had been cut, but the root system had not been dug up. Some seeds fell where the thorns had been growing. The thorns grew quickly and choked out the sprouting seed. Some people who hear the Word of God do not become fruitful Christians. The bad and secondary things of the world crowd out the good and best things of life and destroy progress toward spiritual maturity.

To "...delight in riches..." (verse 22) is a temptation to all ages. Materialism, like the thorny soil, chokes out spiritual growth.

Good soil is the last mentioned. In verse 23 Jesus said the good soil is "...he who hears the word and understands it...." The "good-soil" Christian will produce fruit.

Application For My Life

Jesus used parables for the purpose of teaching. He used stories from life to illustrate truths that were hard to understand. Teachers and preachers do the same thing today. Jesus painted word-pictures to help hearers understand the Word of God.

The parables of Jesus enable us to learn much about the nature of the kingdom. Our responsibility as earthly citizens of that heavenly kingdom is also made plain.

Jesus' parables were not understood by those who were not disciples. They failed to see the real and full meaning of Jesus' teachings. Matthew 13:13-15 contains the thought of Isaiah 6:9-10. Both Isaiah and Matthew record the spiritual blindness and deafness of those who choose not to let God rule their lives. They could see but they closed the eyes of their souls to God's truths. It is God's purpose for all to hear and understand and be saved. However, God will not save those who refuse to believe.

Jesus makes one point clear. Those who understand and receive the gospel are those who obey it. (Read verse 23 again.) Obedience must follow understanding. Some people will go to church but will not make a personal commitment to Christ and his teachings. Have you made a personal commitment to him?

Or have you been rejecting the teachings of Jesus? Have you been helping other people to understand and accept the message of the good news of Jesus Christ?

Throughout this book we will study about parables of Jesus. Ask yourself this question about each parable: "What does the truth of this parable say to my life?"

Things To Do

Think about the following questions. Try to apply them to your life.

1. Who will understand the true meaning of a parable?
2. Why is it necessary to be able to correctly interpret the parables?
3. Revise the types of soil in this study. As you do this think seriously about which type represents you.
4. What is your responsibility in understanding Jesus' teachings?
5. What are some ways you can share your Christian faith and bear fruit?
6. How can you obey the teaching of this lesson?

CHAPTER TWO

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Aim: I will understand that my life should be lived as an example to others.

Background Scripture: Mark 4:21; Luke 11:33-36

Verses in Today's Lesson: Matthew 5:14-16

Memory Verse: "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'" (John 8:12).

A STUDY OF THE LESSON

Introduction

"You light up my life...." Mary could not get the words of the song out of her mind. She reviewed her life as she walked toward the bus stop. Her university degree would soon be complete. A bright future lay before her. The Scripture she read earlier during her devotional time flashed in her mind. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world..." (Matthew 5:14). Living to bring happiness into the lives of others who are hurting, lonely or sad is being a light for Jesus she thought.

"Lord, use me today to bring your light to others," she prayed as the bus doors opened.

"Good morning," she said as she smiled brightly at the driver and the crowd of people on the bus.

Interpretation

Jesus said, "...I am the light of the world..." (John 8:12). In today's Scripture reading he called Christians the light of the world. This is a great compliment for Christians and also a great responsibility. Jesus demands that Christians be like himself.

Christians are not to produce their own light. The Christian's light comes from God. They must shine with the reflection of his light. Christians are the spiritual lights in a world which is dark because of sin.

In Matthew 5:14-16 we read the purpose of light. Lights are meant to be seen. When Jesus spoke those words perhaps he pointed to a city on a hill. Many cities in Galilee were built on hills because it is a hilly country.

The houses in those cities were often built of a very white limestone which made the city more visible from a distance as well as from many directions. It could not be hidden.

Jesus said Christians are the lights of the world. He meant they are to be seen in the world as lights. One should not want to try to hide the fact that he is a Christian. To do so is falling short of Christ's command.

Your Christianity should be visible in the way you live. Your neighbours should know you are a Christian from what they see in your life. The people with whom you work, go to school, play games and even those who see how you drive a motor car should know you are a Christian. The language you use, the books you read, the places you go, the things you do and the concern you have for other people should show that you are one of God's lights.

Perhaps those Galilean cities were used by weary travellers as guides to show which way they should go. Christians should be guides to lost people to help them find their way to God. It is often a Christian's duty to take a stand which will give strength to those who have less courage.

Application For My Life

Mark 4:21 and Luke 8:16 make it clear where our lights should shine. In these verses, as well as in verses from Matthew which we have already read, we see Jesus reminding the people that they must put a light in a place where it can help people find their way.

Jesus said we are to live so others will see God in our lives. That means we are to be examples for people to see how God wants them to live.

We are warned not to try to get glory for ourselves, because our light is just a reflection of God's light. The glory is all his. We cannot do anything without him, so we must never try to take glory for ourselves. We should do right and good things, but this is only because of what God has done for us.

It is very important to understand that our good works do not earn salvation. God sent his only Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. He is the only way for us to get forgiveness for our sins. After we are saved he enables us to do good works to bring glory to himself.

Lights are often used as warnings. Many times a light warns us of danger ahead. Sometimes it is a Christian's duty to bring a necessary warning to a fellow man. To be effective this must be done in love.

In conclusion, this parable about light should lead Christians to realize their responsibility and rejoice at their privilege.

If a Christian becomes afraid of the big job before him, he should remember that light has more power than darkness. When even a small light comes into a dark room, the darkness begins to disappear. The stronger the light becomes, the more darkness must flee.

John 1:5 says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

A holy life is the best teaching of the Bible the world has ever seen. The Christian whose light shines is teaching God's Word.

Things To Do

1. Try to memorize the Memory Verse before class.
2. Who is the light of the world? (Name two.)
3. What should others be able to see in the Christian life?
4. Who should receive glory for the Christian's good works?
5. In what way could you let your light shine brighter this week?
6. Make a list of things you can do for others this week which will show you are a Christian.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HOUSE BUILT ON THE ROCKS

Aim: I will understand that obedience to Christ's teachings is the only solid foundation for life.

Background Scripture: Luke 6:46-49

Verses in Today's Lesson: Matthew 7:24-27

Memory Verse: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

A STUDY OF THE LESSON

Introduction

Priscilla quietly packed her bag. Her friends sat on the bed weeping. The hostel was quiet. Everyone knew Priscilla's parents had just been killed in a tragic accident.

"How can you be so calm?" Martha asked. "Who will take care of you now?"

Priscilla turned from her packing and looked at her friends.

"I cannot answer your questions," she said. "All I know is the most important thing my parents gave me is a knowledge of Jesus. My faith in him will guide me."

Her friends knew she would be alright. It was a storm of destruction in the young life, but her foundation in Christ would see her through.

Interpretation

Matthew 5-7 contains Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon was preached to a large number of people from a wide area. Jesus spoke very plainly about the urgency of proper preparation if one would get to heaven.

As a young boy Jesus learnt to be a carpenter in the shop of Joseph, his earthly father. He knew about building houses because he had built them. Therefore in the parable which we study today we see Jesus teaching from his own experience about something which the people could understand.

In this parable he says that obedience to his teaching is the only safe foundation for life. Unless a person takes Jesus as Master of his life, he can look forward to a ruined life.

The house on the rocks is described in Matthew 7:24-27. When Jesus said, "...these words of mine...", he was referring to all he had taught the people in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus then described two houses which may have looked very much alike when they were finished. Even what happened to the two houses was very much alike. Notice the rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat upon both houses. The reason one fell and the other stood was the difference in the foundation.

"...Upon the rock" in verse 25 describes the person who does what Jesus says. The Rock refers to Christ upon whom all must depend for salvation and security. We may also think of the rock as obeying the will of God instead of just talking about it.

The "rock" kind of life has a good foundation. The house did not move when the forces of nature fell upon it.

All people should understand that Christians do not escape testing, trials and troubles. The Bible clearly teaches that Christians will have these. But the blessing of being a Christian is that God gives the power to stand firm when all these things come.

Sand refers to the loose surface of the ground. A house built on the smooth and seemingly firm earth may look good for a time. But when the storms come the top soil around the house washes away. Then, since there is not a good foundation underneath, the house begins to crumble and fall. In these verses it did not take long until the whole house fell.

Application For My Life

To apply this to life today consider the difference obedience makes. Read Luke 6:46-49. Many people heard the words which Jesus taught and some called him "Lord" but did not obey his teachings. Hearing is very important, but it is not enough. Doing is what builds on the foundation which is firm.

Many people will say they intend to obey Jesus someday. Good intentions are not bad. In fact they are the beginning of every good action. Suppose your school soccer team intended to win the big game of the season. Then suppose each team member decided he would not go to practise. What kind of game would the team play when the match day arrived?

Now suppose all the world's Christians intended to live by Jesus' teachings, but they actually lived for themselves instead. What would become of God's purposes for the world? It is important to begin now to live out God's will everyday.

Only you can decide to make the wise choice to build the house of your life on rock, not sand. Christ gives you no guarantee the floods and storms will not come. In fact, things may even grow worse. What he

does promise is that when the storms do come, you have the assurance that your house will stand firm because it is built on God.

Put your hearing into action today. Perhaps you have felt the need to commit your life to Jesus Christ. He wants you to do that right now.

Perhaps he is showing you something you can do to put your intentions to work. If you put it off until later, you may never do it. Begin today. Ask God to help you to carry out your good intentions.

Things To Do

1. What did the wise man do that made him different from the foolish man?
2. What do these two houses represent in this parable? What do the rock and sand represent? What are the storms?
3. How can young people in today's world build on a solid foundation?
4. How can you begin today to carry out some of the good intentions you have had?

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Aim: I will understand that love is helping those in need.

Background Study: Luke 10:25-37

Verses in Today's Lesson: Luke 10:30-37

Memory Verse: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8).

A STUDY OF THE LESSON

Introduction

Suddenly it was raining tiny pieces of glass and metal. It was like the crash was in slow motion. Mark had watched in horror as the bus pulled out to pass and hit an oncoming car. He saw the body of a woman fly through the air. The driver of the tour bus stopped, and Mark ran to the woman to see if he could help. He gave her mouth to mouth resuscitation in an effort to restore her breathing. The other tourists sat on the bus in shock, and many were crying.

"Can you believe with so much disease in this world that that young man would actually touch that woman?" someone asked. Finally the injured woman began to breathe.

"I believe we have just seen a modern good Samaritan," one of the tourists commented.

Interpretation

One day an expert in the law questioned Jesus about how he could obtain eternal life. In the discussion that followed we learn much about the love God expects Christians to show. Read Luke 10:25-29.

One way a person shows his right relationship with God is by the love he shows others.

Jesus agreed with the lawyer. It is necessary under God's law for man to love both God and their neighbour. Jesus even told him to do this and he would live.

Then the lawyer asked who his neighbour was. Jesus answered with the parable in today's study. Read Luke 10:30-37.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho seemed long and lonely. There were many robbers who stayed there. Jesus told about a man who was travelling that way.

Perhaps he was a Jew who had been to Jerusalem on business or to worship. On the Jericho road robbers attacked him, stripped him of his clothes, beat him until he was nearly dead and left him. If any man ever needed a friend, this poor man did.

A priest came along the road. Perhaps he had performed his priestly duties in the temple. Surely a priest would lend a helping hand to a wounded fellow countryman! But when the priest saw the stricken man by the side of the road, he did not even stop to take a close look at him. Was he afraid? Did he not care to get involved with the man's troubles? Was it because he would be ceremonially unclean if he touched a stranger? Did he think the man should have known better than to travel alone with no way to protect himself? We only know he passed by on the other side.

After the priest had gone on his way, a Levite came along. He stopped, looked at the wounded man, and left quickly without helping him.

Surely the robbers had broken the law by robbing and beating a man. However, both the priest and the Levite broke the law of love by leaving the man to die.

The third person who passed down the road was a Samaritan. The Samaritans were Jews who had intermarried with people from other countries. They were no longer considered by the Jews to be related to them. In fact, Samaritans were hated by the Jews. Many Jews would not even speak to Samaritans nor travel through Samaria.

As an experienced traveller the Samaritan man carried items which would prove helpful in case of trouble. He had some oil and wine which he poured onto the wounds of the stricken man. Then he set the man on his own beast and took him to an inn. The Samaritan had evidently stayed at the inn at some other time. The innkeeper knew him, respected him and trusted him to pay the balance of the man's bill.

The Samaritan took care of the wounded man until he had to leave. Before going he paid the wounded man's bill.

Application For My Life

Jesus then asked the lawyer who the neighbour was. Perhaps you would answer, "The Samaritan." But the lawyer would not even speak the word. His reply was, "The one who showed mercy on him." Jesus then commanded the lawyer, "Go and do likewise."

True love for God causes people to have compassion for others. This will only be shown by things we can do for others.

It is not difficult to do nice things for our good friends. Perhaps we could be very helpful to a stranger if he appeared to have plenty of money. This is because we know he might be able to help us in some way.

Jesus wanted us and the lawyer to know that our neighbour is not just the person who lives close to us. Our neighbour is one whom we can help.

What about the risk of helping others? Sometimes it is dangerous to help a person in need. There may be physical danger in helping others. What other people will think may cause serious problems. But if Christians have the love God wants them to have, they will not think of themselves. They will think of loving other people as Jesus himself does.

Read 1 Corinthians 13. This chapter on love has been called a portrait of Jesus. Remember, love is not love until you share it with another.

Things To Do

1. Discuss the following questions with a friend:

- A. Who is your neighbour?
- B. What is your duty to your neighbour when he is in trouble?
- C. If your neighbour's trouble was his own fault, does that change your responsibility to him?
- D. What can you do to be a good neighbour this week?

2. Plan to do one specific thing to help someone this week.

3. Pray that God will help you love someone you do not respect. Pray for that person.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RICH FOOL

Aim: I will understand that only spiritual investments are eternal.

Background Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

Verses in Today's Lesson: Luke 12:16-21

Memory Verse: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matthew 6:33).

A STUDY OF THE LESSON

Introduction

Two men were bargaining. One of them was very wealthy. He owned thousands of acres of land.

"I tell you what I will do," he told the poor man. "I will give you as many acres as you can walk around in one week."

The poor man was so excited. He began to walk. The more he thought about how far he could go, the faster he walked. He ran and walked for six days without resting. He could see the place from which he started. He tried to run, but suddenly he couldn't breathe. He fell on his face just short of the goal he had set for himself. His greed had killed him.

Interpretation

One day while Jesus was speaking to his disciples, a man in the crowd interrupted him. He requested him to speak to his brother about dividing his inheritance. Jesus refused to be involved in the family feud.

"Life is much more than abundant possessions," he told the man. Possessions are not to be totally ignored. In themselves they are not bad. But people often make things too important in their lives.

Read Luke 12:13-15. Jesus spoke to the people there about covetousness. He said all should beware of covetousness because it would ruin their lives.

Let us study the parable Jesus taught about the rich fool.

Read Luke 12:13-15 to see the actions of a selfish man.

This parable describes a covetous man. Jesus did not picture him as a mean, sinful person. The man did not gain his wealth through dishonesty. A person can be guilty of covetousness without realizing his sin.

The rich man was a farmer. Verse 16 says his land brought forth plentifully. He could not consider that to be bad.

The man became worried about how he was going to take care of the increase. He "thought to himself" means he constantly reasoned over his problem of where to store his bountiful harvest.

Because he was thinking only of his own needs and wants, we begin to see what sort of man he was. He began to think of how he could use all he had. He did not think about sharing some of the crops with people who did not have enough to eat.

Once he made a decision about where he would store his crops, he began to think of how he could find happiness. He felt happiness could surely be his because of his wealth.

The rich man thought first about his possessions and then about his soul. This is not the right order to give these concerns. We should be concerned about the soul more than possessions.

The man also thought he would have a long life, enjoying his wealth for many years. He had forgotten man's life has a time limit, and man has no control over it.

In Luke 12:20-21 God spoke to the man, "...Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

The wealth which the man had stored up would be left to others to share after his death. The rich man lost his soul because he was possessed by earthly things. Now, he was left with nothing.

Application For My Life

Jesus ended the parable by saying, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (verse 21). To be rich toward God is to do the things which please God.

How can we be rich toward God? How can we lay up treasures in heaven? First, you must be a Christian. You must trust Jesus Christ as your own personal Saviour and let him be the Lord of your life.

It means you must seek truth and love above all other possessions. It means being willing to suffer for the sake of Christ. And it means witnessing to those who are without Christ, leading them to believe in and receive Jesus as Saviour. If a person's treasures are in heaven that is where his love, thoughts and interests will be.

When a person's treasures are in heaven, he can be sure they are safe and secure. No one can snatch them from God's hand.

True riches can be obtained only from knowing Christ and doing what pleases him. Since both life and earthly possessions are a loan to us from God, we are responsible to him for how we use them.

A person does not have to be rich to be covetous. One who is poor can also put the little he has or the things he wants to get as first place in his life. This is the same as the covetousness of the rich man.

You are wealthy only if you store up the kind of wealth which nothing can take away.

Things To Do

1. Get a pen and paper. Step 1: Consider this situation-- Your house is on fire. If you act quickly, you can save some of your possessions. Make a list of the items you would save in the order of their importance to you. Complete Step 1 before you read farther.

Step 2: Number one on the list is probably your most valuable possession. Were any of the items on the list of value to your soul? What does this tell you about where your treasure is?

2. Answer the following questions:

- A. What is the most important thing in your life?
- B. What goal have you set for your future? Is it based on material or spiritual things?
- C. Does this lesson mean we have to be poor to please God?

CHAPTER SIX

THE PRODIGAL SON

Aim: I will learn that I must choose to accept or reject God's love.

Background Scripture: Luke 15:11-32

Verses in Today's Lesson: Luke 15:11-24

Memory Verse: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

A STUDY OF THE LESSON

Introduction

Year after year the old man sat under the tree waiting. Some little boys passed him, laughed and pointed in his direction. Women burdened with loads of water glanced toward him and trudged on.

"Why do you think he has waited so long?" one of the women asked.

His boy was always useless and no good," another commented.

"How could he take his father's money and never return for a visit or send any money back to his father?"

The old man rose from his bench. He started running down the road. In the distance the women saw a young man running toward them. His arms were outstretched. His eyes were on the old man running toward him. His loving father welcomed him home.

Interpretation

Jesus welcomed the publicans and sinners to hear his teachings. The Pharisees and scribes thought Jesus should not associate with such human outcasts. In response to the rebuke of the Pharisees Jesus gave the three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son.

These parables emphasize the way God lovingly seeks lost, wandering people and rejoices when they are found.

The parable which we are about to study is probably the most famous of all the parables of Jesus. Read Luke 15:11-24, the story of a rebellious son and a loving father.

Think of a young man who wanted to be his own master. He wanted to be on his own. His desire for independence and his attitude of rebellion caused him to go boldly to his father and ask for his part of the inheritance.

The law required that one half as much be given to the younger son as to the elder at the death of the father. There was nothing in the Jewish inheritance law to indicate that a father was bound to divide his property before his death.

Nevertheless, the father did as the son asked. This is a basic Bible truth. Man is a free creature. God never forces anyone to love or obey him. The father did not force his son to remain at home. He did not refuse to divide his property in order to make the boy be what he did not want to be or to do what he did not want to do. The father allowed him total freedom.

"Not many days later" the son was ready to depart from the home of his father and his friends. With his newly discovered freedom and a considerable amount of money, he hurried toward the city of his choice. There he wasted his money.

"When he had spent everything" a great famine arose in the land. He was in a sad condition physically, mentally and spiritually. Jesus' words teach us that this is the state of the person who forgets God and seeks after other things instead of God. The worldly son is the type of sinner who begins to realize there is no true satisfaction for his soul in the ways of the world.

In verse 15 we read that the young Jewish man "joined himself" to one of the citizens of that country who would have been a Gentile. He was given the work of feeding pigs which Jews thought to be a very degrading job. Jews thought of swine as unclean animals. Yet the boy was so hungry he wanted to eat the food of the pigs, but he did not have permission to do even that.

In this condition he began to remember his father's house. He thought of the many hired servants of his father and the fact that they had more than enough to eat. Surely he felt very lonely at that time.

Application For My Life

God expects us to learn from this story today. The son became aware of all he had left. He was sorry for his sin. By an act of his own will, he repented, he arose and he went to his father.

God wants every person to examine his life, to repent and to be sorry for disobeying his Law. The prodigal son set a good example as he repented and returned to his father. Do you need to return to God today?

As the son neared home his father saw him coming. It was as though the father was forever watching and waiting for him. With love and pity the father ran to meet his son.

Disregarding the dirty, ragged appearance of his son, the father embraced him and kissed him. The son began to confess the unworthiness of his attitudes and actions, but the father commanded his servants to bring the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. He ordered them to kill a fatted calf for the feast to celebrate the return of his son who had been "dead" in sin but was alive again. The father shows God's outstretched love toward his children who will return to him. God forgives and forgets. God's giving is shown in his love for sinners. It is as though they had not sinned at all.

God loves every person. His forgiveness is for everyone who repents of his sin. His love is unlimited. He wants all men to repent and come to him. God wants to give his love to anyone who will turn to him for forgiveness.

Things To Do

1. Think about the ways the younger son mistreated his father.
2. How did he misjudge his father's love?
3. Choose today to accept or reject God's love. Accept Jesus, God's Son, as your personal Saviour. To do this you must take the following steps to have eternal life.

A. Understand that you are a sinner. Read Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

B. Read Romans 10:9-10. These verses explain that you must believe that Jesus is Lord.

C. Pray this simple prayer: "Jesus, I believe you are God's Son. Come, live in my heart forever and be my personal Saviour."

D. Confess with your lips, tell someone what you have done and that Jesus is your Saviour.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

Aim: I will honestly evaluate my humility.

Background Scripture: Luke 14:7-11

Verses in Today's Lesson: Luke 18:9-14

Memory Verse: "For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

Introduction

"I will score more points than anyone!" the boy bragged as the team walked toward the playing field.

"My father was the best football player in the nation. I will be better than he ever was." He continued to tell his friends of his achievements. One by one his team mates dropped back to talk to someone else.

"John is a good player," one of them admitted. "His problem is no one wants to hear him brag about it!"

Do you constantly tell others of your accomplishments? Do you suddenly find your friends talking to someone else? We should all try to be humble.

Interpretation

This parable teaches us about humility. Of all the Christian virtues, humility is probably the most difficult to obtain. It is much easier to seek to be first, to achieve and to excel.

The Bible teaches the Christian to be humble. Jesus was teaching humility when he told the parable we study now. Read Luke 18:9-10 for a look at two kinds of men.

"Trusted in themselves" (verse 9) shows why this parable was needed. The statement means the Pharisees had confidence in their own righteousness. The verse also says they despised others and they disregarded others.

To be righteous means to conform to the will of God. Those who think they need no repentance or spiritual renewal belong to the kind of people Jesus referred to in this parable.

In Palestine the religious people prayed three times daily. So at the prayer time many people went to the temple to pray. Jesus told about two men who went to pray.

Both men did these things (1) Both went to pray. (2) Both went to the same place, the temple. (3) Both went at the same time. (4) Both addressed the same God. (5) Both talked about himself.

Without a doubt the Pharisee was a religious man. He went beyond the requirements of the Jewish law. The Pharisees insisted every rite and ceremony handed down by their forefathers should be observed. To them failure to keep all the law and traditions was a sin.

The other man who went to pray was a publican. The publicans were tax collectors. They were despised by most Jewish people. At that time good men would not accept the position of collecting taxes for the Roman government. If they did it was easy to fall into the practice of cheating.

Application For My Life

To learn from this parable notice the difference in the two men's prayers. Read Luke 18:11-14.

Both men stood as they prayed in the temple, however the Pharisee stood proudly. A proud man enjoys hearing good things about himself. Verse 11 says he prayed "with himself."

The Pharisee's thanks to God were for his own virtues, not for God's mercies to him. He was thankful he was not as the rest of men were. He was thankful he was better than other people, and he took all the credit himself. He was telling God about his goodness in order to be rewarded. Also it made him feel better to point out the sins of others. Can you see your own actions in any of the actions of this man?

The tax collector's prayer was different. As a tax collector he was considered a robber. Most tax collectors in that day cheated the poor people by charging higher taxes than necessary. They kept the extra money for themselves. But this publican was not happy with his life. He was in need of God's forgiveness and sincerely asked for it.

He stood to pray, as the custom was, but he was so ashamed he could not lift his eyes toward heaven. Also, he did not come close to the others. He felt so unworthy he stood afar off.

Observing the men and knowing their attitudes, Jesus made a judgement. The Pharisee failed, but the tax collector was made right with God and went home a changed man.

Jesus was saying that those who think they are good will not be in God's favour. Those who are not self-righteous will be in favour with God.

No person who is proud can truly pray. No person who despises his fellowman can pray.

What is the purpose of prayer? The purpose of prayer is to put God in the centre of attention. Prayer is supposed to change the person who prays. Certainly the Pharisee remained the same after his prayer, but the tax collector went away a different man.

God condemns pride and requires humility in those who would receive his blessings. God answers the prayer of a person who admits his own need and trusts in him.

Things To Do

1. Consider these questions:

A. Why do you think the Pharisee's prayer was not acceptable to God? Revise the Pharisee's prayer.

B. How was the publican's prayer different from that of the Pharisee?

2. Honestly evaluate your prayer life. Do you brag on yourself like the Pharisee?

3. Make a list of attitudes in your own life you need to change in order to communicate better with God.

4. Pray that God will help you to seek after the virtue of humility.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

Aim: I will understand that I must forgive.

Background Scripture: Luke 7:40-43

Verses in Today's Lesson: Matthew 18:21-35

Memory Verse: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

Introduction

Do you know some person you cannot forgive? What did that person do to you?

Can you think of some sins you have committed against God? Have you asked God to forgive you? Do you believe God has forgiven you?

God forgives the most horrible of sinners. The greater the sin, the greater the forgiveness.

Christ commands his followers to be forgiving toward one another.

Interpretation

Jesus had been teaching his disciples about the proper way to act toward a brother who was guilty of some personal offense. Jesus taught that forgiveness should have no limits. He said as many times as a person asks forgiveness, that is how many times he should be forgiven.

It is easier for us to forgive others if we remember the many times God has forgiven us. Think of all the sinful thoughts, words and deeds you have committed against God. He has freely forgiven you. Do you forgive others?

Jesus told this parable about forgiveness in Matthew 18:23-27. A king with absolute power had complete control over the persons and property of his officers. He had the right to call to account every one who served under him. The king made it known he was going to settle accounts with his servants. The books would be examined. Each had to account for his stewardship.

During that time one appeared before him owing a large sum of money amounting to ten thousand talents (worth 15 years work for a labourer).

Because of this debt, the king ordered the man, his wife, his children and all he owned to be sold and the proceeds applied to his debt. In some countries it was common to include a wife and children in the punishment inflicted on a man. Jesus knew of this practice, and he included it in the parable. Debt affects the entire family. Sin touches many lives, not just the offended.

When the king demanded that the man and his family be sold, the debtor fell down before the king and pled for mercy.

Think of the debt this man owed. It was a large amount of money, and he probably could not ever pay it in his lifetime. This is also true of sin. We can never pay for our sin. Only God in Christ can pay for sin. The money debt was too much to repay. The sin debt is also too much for any person to pay.

The king's decision seemed almost too merciful. He not only cancelled the debt, but he also set the man free. The man should have been grateful and humble, but he was not. The forgiven debtor refused to forgive the debt of a fellow servant who owed him a small amount of money (one day's wage for a labourer). He took the man by the throat and said, "Pay me what you owe me." He even had the fellow servant thrown in jail.

Other people saw what happened and reported it to the king. The king was angry because of the unforgiving spirit of the man. When the man first stood before the king, he was not called wicked. However when he refused to show compassion and forgiveness the king said, "You wicked servant."

The king had granted forgiveness because it had been requested. On the same basis the man should have shown pity and forgiveness. The man was then taken to jail until his debt could be paid.

Application For My Life

This parable teaches that Christians must forgive as God forgives. Our forgiveness must come from the heart, and we are to forgive as many times as it is sincerely requested.

The main truth of this parable is that God requires each person who has asked for and received his forgiveness to willingly forgive his fellowman. It teaches that we must forgive as God forgives and as often as a person sincerely requests it. How far should our forgiveness go? It should go as far as God's forgiveness goes.

What about you? What are some sins you have committed? Now think about some people who have done something against you. Have you forgiven them? Until you forgive other people for whatever they may have done to you, you cannot receive God's forgiveness for your own debts to him.

Of course it is hard to forgive someone who has really hurt you. Real forgiveness is not easy. But the price is far greater if you do not forgive.

Ask God to help you forgive someone who has wronged you.

Things To Do

1. Consider the following questions:

A When you have been hurt by someone, what are the ways you can act toward that person?

B. What should lead us to forgive others of their wrong toward us?

C. Why is it wrong to refuse to forgive others?

D. Will you begin today to forgive those who hurt you?

2. Think about it: Jesus gave his life to pay the debt of your sin.

3. Pray that God will give you an attitude of forgiveness toward others.

CHAPTER NINE

THE VINEYARD

Aim: I will examine my motives for serving God.

Background Scripture: Matthew 19:27-30

Verses in Today's Lesson: Matthew 20:1-16

Memory Verse: "So the last will be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:16).

Introduction

The mother carefully divided the candy among her children. Each received five pieces.

"Why does James get as much as I got? He just came to help you an hour ago. Mark and I have worked all day," Joseph grumbled.

"You know James could not come early. You must not be greedy. I love all of you. The candy is for your willingness to work, not the number of hours you were here," the mother carefully explained.

Do you often look at other people's lives and ask yourself, "Why does God give him so much and me so little?" Do you feel God is unfair? Perhaps you need to check your attitude, purpose and motive for serving God. Do you serve for love or for greater rewards?

Interpretation

In Matthew 19 Jesus spoke concerning spiritual rewards to everyone who forsakes or leaves anything for Jesus' sake. Jesus promised the disciples he would give back far more than the disciples could ever give. Besides spiritual rewards for the disciples, Jesus promised the gift of eternal life, which comes by the grace of God, not by the effort of man.

Concerning the judgement the Bible teaches that some persons who seemingly are first in life for rewards will be last and the last first. Jesus had answered the question, "What then shall we have?" Then he gave a warning to those who listened. That warning is found in Matthew 19:30 and again in 20:16. This parable helps us understand the warning, but we can understand it only in terms of God's grace. We should serve God because we love him and not because we expect to get a lot of benefits.

Read the parable concerning the workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16.

The story Jesus told about labourers in the vineyard helps us to understand the kingdom of heaven. A "householder" refers to one who is ruler of a household. This householder not only owned a house but also a vineyard.

It was the time of year to harvest the ripened grapes. In order to secure labourers, the householder went to the marketplace early to hire some men. In Palestine at that time a man would go to the market place and wait there until someone hired him.

The householder and the labourers entered into a wage agreement in the early morning. They agreed upon a denarius, or about twenty U.S. cents, for a day's work. This was the normal wage for a day's work at that time.

At various times throughout the day, the householder returned to the marketplace and found other men standing idle. They were not necessarily lazy, they just had not been hired. They, in fact, had waited a very long time hoping for work which may indicate they were eager to work.

This time the agreement was simply, "Whatever is right." This may have been haste on the part of the employer, or the fact that the men were so glad for work they did not ask how much they would be paid.

Application For My Life

Studying the attitudes of the labourers being paid should help us examine our own attitudes and motives.

The working day ended and the labourers were ready to be paid their wages. The householder requested his steward to give each man his hire, "...beginning from the last unto the first" (Matthew 20:8). This was done so those who were hired earlier could see that all were paid alike.

Those hired an hour before sunset received a denarius. They were pleased with the generosity of the householder. He paid them the equivalent of a full day's wage.

The labourers who had worked all day assumed their wages would be more than the agreed upon denarius, but they got only that.

Those men grumbled at the householder and protested against his injustice. The grumbling labourers sought to compare their long day of work with those who had worked for only one hour. They pointed out the heat of the day and the hot east wind which they had endured.

The householder replied, "Friend, I am not doing you wrong. Did you not agree to work with me for a denarius?"

The householder went on to ask, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?"

God's grace is like that. He gives men a chance they don't deserve. The only reason the men got to work at all was because of the kindness of the vineyard owner.

Verse 16 reveals that everyone will have an equal reward with reference to salvation as a gift of God. Regardless of when a person is saved, he will receive the reward of eternal life in heaven. However, the Scripture that teaches spiritual rewards will not be the same for all people. Both salvation and spiritual rewards are based on the grace of God.

In conclusion we must understand that we cannot earn God's love. His love demands our joyful service. God does not reward us for how long we serve him but for our motive or why we are serving him. We should work for God because we love him and not for what he might give us.

We are saved because of the grace of God. Grace is undeserved, unearned love which God gives to man. He loves all men and wants all to enter into his kingdom.

No matter when a person becomes a Christian, he will receive eternal life, but those who come early can do productive work for Christ.

Things To Do

1. Make a list of right reasons for serving God. Make another list of wrong reasons for serving God.
2. Think about it:
 - A. If we will be saved anyway, why should we not wait until we are old to begin serving God?
 - B. What are your motives for serving God?
 - C. Do you serve God for great rewards or because you love him?

CHAPTER TEN

THE WICKED HUSBANDMAN

Aim: I will understand that I must accept or reject Christ.

Background Scripture: Luke 20:9-18; Mark 12:1-12

Verses in Today's Lesson: Matthew 21:33-44

Memory Verse: "...The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner..."

(Matthew 21:42b).

Introduction

Do you accept or reject Jesus?

According to the dictionary "accept" means to agree to take whatever is offered. "Reject" means to put aside or throw away because it is not fit to keep or to refuse to accept.

God loved the children of Israel. He cared for them lovingly and helped them grow.

The nation of Israel chose to reject God's Son, to kill him. They refused to accept eternal life through Christ.

To accept or reject Jesus is a choice which faces every person today. Which do you choose?

Interpretation

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem was like a claim to be king. Then he did a shocking thing. He cleansed the temple driving out the money changers and the sellers of doves.

The priests and scribes went to him saying, "...Tell us by what authority you do these things..." (Luke 20:2).

His answer included the parable in Matthew 21:33-44 which is a picture of wickedness.

Jesus spoke to the Jewish rulers, but many other people were listening. Surely all who heard knew Jesus was talking about the nation of Israel when he spoke of the vineyard of God.

In Jesus' day it was common in Palestine for an owner of a vineyard to let his vineyard (rent it to someone else) and go to live in another country for a while. Perhaps the story was true. Husbandmen did refuse to pay rent. They did beat the people who were sent by the householder to collect rent. Sometimes they tried to get possession of the vineyards which were not rightfully theirs.

The husbandmen in the parable pictures the leadership of Israel. God's servants, the prophets, repeatedly appealed to kings and priests to forsake their evil ways. But instead of heeding the message, the

leaders turned against the prophets and mistreated them. The execution of John the Baptist was an example of the treatment some of God's faithful messengers received.

Some who heard the parable did not hesitate to condemn the husbandmen and pronounce their fate. Because of the failure of Israel's leaders, God used others to fulfil his purposes.

In verse 42 Jesus said the stone which the builders rejected would become the head of the corner. This stone refers to Christ. Those who reject Christ will also be rejected.

Now sum up the meaning of the parable. The vineyard is the people of Israel. The Master of the vineyard is God. The husbandmen are the priests and rulers who controlled the affairs of Israel. The servants who were sent and were ill treated are the prophets whom God sent. The Son is Jesus himself.

Therefore we can see God's care for Israel, his long, patient pleading with his people, Israel's rejection of God's way, the coming of Jesus, the death of Jesus and his triumph and final victory.

Application For My Life

The main truth of this parable is that Jesus was rejected by Israel, his chosen people. The truth is valid today. The message is the same. God chooses to save every person. The choice to accept or reject is every person's privilege and responsibility.

The Jews killed the Owner's Son, but they did not end his life. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Christ became the living Lord of the whole world. God's vineyard is now the whole world. Its tenants are no longer the Jews but everyone of every race. You are God's tenant. Will you reject Jesus also?

This parable teaches some things to people of this time too. First, it tells that you will be judged as God's tenant. God looks for the fruits of faith, love and obedience. He requires us to be good tenants. Can you say you are producing good fruits?

Secondly, the parable speaks to you with a challenge. Like the owner of the vineyard, God leaves man to make his own choices. He trusts every person to make the right decision. God gave us his Son and a chance to accept him. He is saying to you, "Here is my Son. Will you accept him and obey him?"

Finally, the parable gives hope. The owner of the vineyard said, "They will respect my son." Even if you do not respect him now, there will be a time when Christ will openly and triumphantly return to claim his full inheritance. On that day, will you be judged a faithful tenant in your Master's vineyard?

Things To Do

1. Learn the Memory Verse.

2. Invite a friend to study this parable with you. After the study discuss the following questions:

- A. What does this parable tell you about men? What does it tell you about God? What does it tell you about Jesus?
- B. What kinds of fruits should the Master get from your life?
- C. Are you rejecting Jesus or bearing fruit for him?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE GREAT FEAST

Aim: I must allow nothing to prevent my accepting Christ as Saviour.

Background Scripture: Matthew 22:1-10; Luke 14:1-14

Verses in Today's Lesson: Luke 14:15-24

Memory Verse: "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

A STUDY OF THE LESSON

Introduction

"No, because we are cooking beans for supper," she overheard her husband's words as he came into the house.

"What did James want?" she asked.

"He wanted to borrow our plough. You know he never returns anything," her husband answered.

"But why did you tell him the reason he could not use it was because we are cooking beans for supper?"

What does that have to do with borrowing the plough?"

"Nothing," her husband replied. "You know how it is with excuses. One makes about as much sense as another."

Interpretation

Jesus was at a feast in the home of a Pharisee. He rebuked the guests when he observed their pride. He rebuked the host for his selfish spirit. (Read Luke 14:1-14 for background on today's lesson.)

One of the Pharisees mentioned the kingdom of God. Jesus taught that only those who accept his invitation will have a part in the kingdom. In order to teach the people more, Jesus told this parable.

It took much work to prepare a feast. The day of the banquet was fixed, but the hour was not. This was according to the custom of that particular country. On the day of the banquet those who received invitations were to be ready when called.

At the proper time a servant was sent to inform the invited guests that the great supper was ready. Let us think of the great supper as the gospel feast to which all are invited by the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the banquet preparations were finished and all was ready, the servant went to call the guests to come. But those who had been invited began to make excuses for not coming. Luke 14:18-20 records the guests' excuses. They were not honest reasons. They could have come, but they did not want to come.

One man said he had bought a new piece of ground and he wanted to go see it. Who would buy a piece of ground without seeing it before the purchase? And what could he see at night, the time suppers were usually held? The field was just an excuse. The second reason was similar. Who would purchase oxen without examining them?

The third had just married. He said he could not come. His, too, was just an excuse.

The servant did as he was told and so he reported to his master. The master knew the invited people had made excuses. He was very angry. This was an insult. Likewise, when men reject God's invitation and turn from him, they will experience the holy God's anger.

In verse 23 and 24 we learn how the blessing of the kingdom of God would go to the Gentiles who would receive Christ. The gospel was first presented to the Jews, but most of them rejected the kingdom of God.

Therefore, God invited others to come into his kingdom and welcomed all who accepted the invitation.

Application For My Life

The cross, the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit opened the kingdom of God to all men with faith. But men continue to make excuses.

Many people are busy with their material possessions or working to get more things. They have no time to hear God's call. Worldly possessions, jobs, motor cars and homes are still the things which deafen men to God's call.

This parable teaches us that nobody is excluded from God's kingdom except by his own choice. God's invitation, through Christ, is given to all. It also teaches that you must accept the invitation before it is too late.

Accepting the invitation of God into his kingdom is more important than anything else we will ever do. Is the kingdom of God worth your life?

God is still inviting people into his kingdom through Jesus. You can accept or reject his invitation. What you do with Jesus will be your life's most important choice. If you accept God's rule in your life, you will have his guidance in all your decisions. You can be assured you fit into God's purpose for the world.

Best of all, you can start now as a young person to know the joy of God's love for you.

Will you let God come into your life? Will you gladly give up whatever stands in the way of God's will for you?

Things To Do

1. Seriously consider the following questions:

- A. What did the excuses of the banquet guests tell you about those people?
- B. What are some excuses people give today for not accepting Jesus Christ as their Saviour?
- C. What earthly things do you value most? Would you give it up if it stood between you and God?

2. Pray that God will help you see the things in your life which keep you from total commitment to Christ.

Pray that God will help you put Christ above all else.

3. Meditate on the Memory Verse. Let God use these words to speak to you.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE TEN VIRGINS

Aim: I will understand that I must be ready for Christ's return.

Background Scripture: Mark 13:28-37

Verses in Today's Lesson: Matthew 25:1-13

Memory Verse: "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42).

A STUDY OF THE LESSON

Introduction

Paul searched through the village. Everyone had disappeared. Fires were burning, but no one was tending them. Goats nibbled, chickens scratched and clucked for their chicks, but there were no people in sight.

He heard Joseph shouting his name. He ran outside the hut and saw his friend running toward him.

"Where are all the people?" he shouted.

"They were taken up into that cloud." Joseph began moaning and crying, "Oh, Paul, why did we not believe that preacher when he told us about Jesus?"

Paul's heart was pounding. He could not breathe. Suddenly he opened his eyes. His wife was lying in the bed beside him. It was only a dream. He gave a sign of relief.

"Tomorrow I will talk to that preacher," he promised himself.

Interpretation

One of the major doctrines of the New Testament is the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. Following the death of Jesus on the cross and after his resurrection from the dead, he ascended to heaven. Forty days after Jesus emerged from the tomb, he and his disciples went up on Mount Olivet to talk together.

While talking with them, Jesus slowly ascended from the earth. The disciples watched Jesus as he went up into space. Two messengers declared that Jesus would return in the same manner as the disciples saw him go. One of the sure events of the future is Jesus' return to this earth. However, his return will be a surprise to many people.

Beginning with Matthew 24:29 Jesus used five illustrations to show the surprise of his coming back to earth. The fifth story is the parable of the ten virgins. Read Matthew 25:1-13.

Jesus said the kingdom of heaven was similar to ten maidens who went to meet the bridegroom. The ten maidens represent all those who await the coming of the bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. All have a responsibility to be ready when Jesus comes at the end of the age.

In this story the maidens carried lamps which were fed with oil. Each lamp held only a small amount of oil. It had to be refilled often from vessels of extra oil that the wise carried with them. All went forth with lamps containing oil, and their lights were burning.

Five of the maidens not only took their lamps but they took an extra supply of oil. They were wise. However, five of the maidens were foolish. They did not take an extra supply of oil.

The bridegroom was delayed, and while the maidens waited they all went to sleep. They were awakened by the cry that the bridegroom was coming. At this point it became apparent that the lamps of the foolish ones were going out. Their supply of oil was gone and they had brought no more oil.

Application For My Life

There are important truths to learn from this lesson. Many of the parables of Jesus plainly state that there will be a time when the wise will be separated from the foolish. The foolish maidens requested oil from the wise, but the request was quickly denied. There was not enough to share. Likewise, saving grace is a personal possession. No one else can get it from you.

The wise maidens who had oil and life, went in with the bridegroom to the marriage celebration and the door was shut.

The foolish maidens tried to find oil and after a while returned to the house of the bridegroom and requested permission to enter. The bridegroom answered, "I do not know you."

"Watch therefore," teaches the return of Christ to this earth. You should always be ready. The parable teaches that time for receiving Christ is limited. Each person is responsible for his own life. Preparation to meet Christ is personal and individual. That is, no one else can do it for you.

Jesus was saying he is like the bridegroom whose coming may be delayed. Yet the time of his coming will be joyful like a wedding.

When he comes, only those who are ready will be able to share in his joy. The wise ones will put their faith and hope in God.

Jesus will return to this earth. He taught us to be prepared because everyone's life will be judged.

Perhaps you do not like to think of the end of time, but that time is coming and no one can predict when it will be. To be prepared you have only to put your faith and hope in Jesus Christ.

Not only will the wise want to be prepared, they will want to help other people to know how to prepare.

Waiting for the Lord's return does not mean we should be idle. Christians should be very busy working, praying, studying and worshipping the Father. In this way, the Lord can use them to bring lost people to himself.

Things To Do

1. Answer the following questions:

A. Why would Jesus use a wedding to compare to his second coming to earth?

B. What preparation can we make to be sure we will be ready for his coming?

C. Are you ready for his coming? Would you be ready if he came back today?

2. Write the Memory Verse on a small piece of paper. Take it with you in your pocket or bag. Memorize the verse when you have time to spare (waiting on the bus, for a friend or for class to begin).

3. Think about it: Live your life as though you were expecting Jesus to return any moment.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE TALENTS

Aim: I will commit one of my talents to God's work.

Background Scripture: Luke 19:12-27

Verses in Today's Lesson: Matthew 25:14-30

Memory Verse: "Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (1 Corinthians 4:2).

A STUDY OF THE LESSON

Introduction

Dorcas and Mary walked away from the church.

"I wish I could sing like Martha. If I could I would dedicate my voice to God," Dorcas' voice broke the silence.

"The pastor was talking about all talents, Dorcas, not just singing or teaching," Mary replied.

"But I am not able to do anything," Dorcas replied.

"You are wrong about that. There are many ways to help people. You have a gift of loving concern for people, and you always pray. Those are wonderful talents God has given you to use in serving him," Mary encouraged her.

"Do you really think prayer is an important way to serve God?" Dorcas asked.

"Without a doubt," Mary answered.

The friends smiled at each other as they climbed the hill to their village.

Interpretation

The disciples of Jesus asked him about a sign of his coming and of the end of the world (Matthew 24:3). All of Matthew 24 and 25 is Jesus' reply to their question.

Jesus repeatedly emphasized the need to watch and be ready. Following the warning Jesus told the parable of the talents.

This parable begins with a wealthy man preparing to leave on a journey to a far country. Before departing he called his own servants into his presence. He gave them his goods and commanded them to do business while he was absent. Read the assignments given to each servant in Matthew 25:14-30. In the same way Jesus committed his gospel to all his followers.

Today we think of talents as natural abilities of a person, but in Palestine a talent was a weight. The value of a talent was different according to whether it was silver, copper or gold.

The master gave his servants money with which to engage in some business while he was away. Each slave received an amount of money in keeping with his own ability. "His ability" meant his capacity for preserving and increasing the funds entrusted to him. The master did not require more of his slaves than they were capable of doing. Therefore he gave talents according to each man's ability.

God gives talents to his children. Talents can be wealth, influence, knowledge, health, memory, time or any opportunity for service that glorifies God. Each one of God's children is entrusted with responsibility according to his ability.

As soon as the master left on his journey, two of the slaves went to work. They engaged in some type of business and doubled the amount given to them. The man with one talent did not use the money entrusted to him. When he buried the talent he showed his real attitude toward the gift and the giver. He buried both his responsibility and his opportunity. But he was still accountable for the talent. Remember, the master would not have given it to him if he had no ability to use it.

Application For My Life

To apply this lesson to life today the important thing to consider is how the servants used or did not use what they had. The amount given to each one was not important. Christians are not equal in talent, but they can be equal in effort.

When the master returned he settled accounts with his servants. He commended the two servants who had doubled their talents, "Well done, good and faithful servants." The master then gave them more responsibility. Notice he did not allow them to rest. He invited them to enter into the joy of their master.

What was the reward given to the slothful servant? He was called wicked by his master. The talent was taken from him, and he was cast out of the presence of his master. Instead of promotion, he received punishment.

From this parable we learn that God gives all Christians certain talents to use in his service. All Christians will be rewarded according to their use of those talents.

Everyone does not have equal abilities. Notice the two talent servant received the same reward as the five talent one. Why? Because each used what he was given faithfully.

The talent of which Jesus spoke was an amount of money, but we can apply the story to any of the gifts with which God has blessed you: money, possessions or abilities. Each person is accountable to God for the way he uses his gifts from God.

As a young person you are at an especially good age to develop your abilities.

Fear was the main problem of the one talent man. He lacked the faith to try. Will you be like him? Look at your own talents, abilities and interests. Try to discover just what your talents are. God created you for a purpose, and he has given you talents to use. What is your special gift? Praying? Witnessing? Teaching? Preaching? Helping those in need? He wants you to use your ability in his service. He wants your love and faithfulness more than anything else.

Things To Do

1. What are some talents young people possess?
2. In what way can Christians today refuse to use their talents?
3. What are your talents? Make a list of your talents. Beside each talent on the list put a way in which it may be used to serve God.
4. Choose one special talent you have. Pray for God's guidance in using and developing this ability. Commit this one talent to God.
5. Think of all the students in your class. Be prepared to tell each one a talent you feel they have.