

**ATHLETES  
INTERVARSITY**  
CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

**PARABLES**

— OF THE —

**KINGDOM**

# **PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM**

Are you in?

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## INTRODUCTION

The Bible is very clear: People are either in the Kingdom of God or they aren't. It's also clear that only those who are in the Kingdom of God now will be in the final and eternal Kingdom of God when Jesus returns. Jesus, Himself, makes a shocking statement about the Kingdom of God in Matt 7:21: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the Kingdom of God". This statement raises some serious questions: "Who then are in the Kingdom of God?" and "How do we know if we are in?"

In this Bible study series we will be looking at several parables that Jesus told (i.e. stories based on common, everyday situations that illustrated eternal truths) about the Kingdom of God. Each will show us something about what the Kingdom of God is like and what characterizes those who are a part of it. And each will help us to evaluate whether or not these things are true of our lives or not. How we answer these questions, will help us to know if we are "in".

# PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

Entering the Kingdom

Matthew 7:13-27

**INTRODUCTION:** The verses we will be looking at contain important teachings of Jesus, but are not in the form of a parable or include any of His parables. They do, however, provide for us a good introduction to the topic of the Kingdom of God. They also raise an important question for all to consider: “Are you in the Kingdom of God or not?”

## OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What does it mean for you to be a full-fledged member of a group of people or program (team, family, etc.) that you are a part of?
- How do you feel about those who have a less than full-hearted commitment and involvement in it?

## READ MATTHEW 7:13-27

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As you look back over these verses, how does what Jesus says illustrate the “now, but not yet” reality of the Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven?

*He exhorts His hearers to enter the Kingdom now (v.13)*

*He also warns them that some will not enter the Kingdom in the future (v.21)*

Let us look at this first aspect of “entering”...

2. What do vv. 13-14 tell us about entering the Kingdom of God?

*We must choose to “enter”. It is a choice we make.*

*We must enter it “through the narrow gate”. There is only one way in.*

*Entering through this gate puts us on “the road that leads to (eternal) life”*

*Only “a few” enter and “find it” (i.e. the Kingdom of God)*

What is “the narrow gate”?

- *Jesus says (John 10:9): “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.”*

- *Jesus says (John 14:6): “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father (i.e. enters the Kingdom of God) except through me.”*

How do we “enter” through Jesus?

*Through repentance of the sin of running our own lives (and all of the sins that that has caused), through having faith that Jesus’ death on the cross has fully paid the punishment due to us for our*

*sins and has restored our broken relationship with God, through having faith in His ability to rule our lives and through giving our lives back to Him (i.e. giving our allegiance to Him as King).*

3. How do we know that we have entered the Kingdom of God through Jesus and are on the road that leads to eternal life and membership in God's future and final Kingdom? What are the proofs or evidences that this has happened?

*One of the evidences is an internal (heart) change that leads to an external production of good works in our lives.*

4. How do we see this illustrated by Jesus in vv. 15-20?

*"By their fruit you will recognize them" (v. 16, 20).*

*Read parallel verses in Luke 6:43-45*

5. So, does this mean that people can't do any "good works" without faith in Jesus—or that everyone who does "good works" has entered and will enter the Kingdom of God? Look at vv. 21-23. What do these verses tell us about "good works" and the Kingdom of God?

*People can do many "good works"—even in the name of Jesus—and still not be in the Kingdom of God and therefore will not enter into His future and final Kingdom.*

*Turn quickly to a parable that Jesus told in Matt 13:24-30 and that He explained in vv.37-43. We don't have time to study this parable in depth, but note that it is about wheat (i.e. sons of the Kingdom--v.38) and weeds (sons of the evil one--v.38) We're told that the owner of the field did not want the weeds to be pulled while the weeds and the wheat were growing together because it would disturb the roots of the wheat. But there was another reason as well. The weeds and the wheat looked a lot like each other, and couldn't clearly be distinguished from each other until harvest time. And so it is today: There are many people who do "good works" and who look a lot like people who are in God's Kingdom, but they are not. And they—like the weeds in the parable—will not enter the future and final Kingdom of God, but rather will be punished on the final day of judgment.*

6. What then are the distinguishing differences between those who do "good works" and are in the Kingdom of God and those who do "good works" and are not?

*One is what we've seen already: They've entered through the gate through faith in Jesus.*

*Another is that they do "good works" that are in accordance with the will of God.*

*"Only the one who does the will of the Father who is in Heaven" is in the Kingdom of God and will enter into His future and final Kingdom. (v.22)*

7. And how does one know what the will of the Father is in order to do it? Look at vv. 24-27...

*We must hear the words of Jesus (i.e. God's Words) and put them into practice (v.24)*

**SUMMARY:** This passage raises the question “Are you in the Kingdom of God or not?” The fact that Jesus says that many will find out on the day of judgment that they are not in, and that “few” will enter into the Kingdom of God, makes it even more important for us to know what it means to be “in”. Let’s summarize what we’ve learned from this passage to help us begin to answer this question.

People who are in the Kingdom of God and will enter into God’s future and final Kingdom

- Have entered through faith in Jesus
- Have experienced (and continue to experience) an internal (heart) change that produces (and continues to produce) external “good fruit”
- Hear and do what the Word of God teaches in order to know and do the will of God in their lives.

In the coming weeks, we will be looking at 9 parables that Jesus told that will help us to know even more about what members of the Kingdom of God are like and what it means to be “in”.

**APPLICATION QUESTION** (for thought only): “Are you in?”

# PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

The Seed and the Soils

Mark 4:1-9; 13-20

**INTRODUCTION:** The overarching question that we are seeking to answer in this bible study series is “Are you in the Kingdom of God or not?” Starting with this study, we will be looking at several of the parables that Jesus told about the Kingdom of God to see what He had to say about what characterizes members of the Kingdom and what it means to be “in”. In our last study we learned that one of the proofs or evidences that someone is “in” is that they hear and do what Jesus says (i.e. what the Word of God teaches). In this study, we will be looking at a parable that Jesus told that will help make this truth even clearer.

## OPENING QUESTION:

- What areas of life are you most interested in learning about, and what characterizes your interest and pursuit of learning more about them?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

### READ MARK 4:1-9

8. Describe the setting and what is going on in vv.1-2
9. Why would the story that Jesus told in vv.3-8 be one that His audience would have understood?

*Jesus was teaching to people in an agrarian society. The scene was well known, and for many, was probably even a part of their own experience—a farmer, walking across a small patch of land, casting seed from a bag cinched about his waist, knowing full well that the seed would fall on many different types of soil and thus have a variety of chances of it growing and bearing fruit.*

10. Describe the kinds of soils mentioned in the story, as well as the corresponding results that came when the seed fell on them.

*“the path” = soil so packed-down by the farmer walking on it that it would be too hard to receive the seed.*

*“rocky places” = a thin layer of soil—that lay on top of stones or rock—that could receive the seed (and in fact, when warmed by the heat that the stones/rock retained, would cause the seed to take root quickly and grow rapidly), but because roots couldn’t grow deep and the mid-day sun was so hot, the plants would quickly die*

*“among thorns” = soil able to receive the seed, but—because it had in it the roots or seeds of competing plants that would rob the seed of the water and nutrients that it needed to grow —would not be able to sustain life for the plant.*

*“good soil” = soil that wasn’t packed-down, deceptively shallow with rock beneath or in-filtrated with the seeds and roots of competing plants; but rather soil that was worked up and ready to receive the seed and cause it to grow and multiply.*

11. Why do you think Jesus says what He does in v.9?

*This ordinary life story illustrated a very important spiritual truth that needed to be understood. Let’s walk through Jesus’ explanation of the parable in vv 13-20 and seek to understand the spiritual truth He desired His hearers (and us!) to know through the telling of this story...*

[Note: We are skipping over vv.10-12 for two reasons: 1) we want to stay focused on the parable that we are looking at, and 2) these verses are very difficult to understand, without taking a lot of time to understand the terminology and original meanings of the words used.]

## **READ MARK 4:13-20**

12. What is the seed that is sown?

*“the seed” = the word = the Word of God (Luke 8:11)*

13. How are the four soils like the conditions of peoples’ hearts—especially as it relates to hearing and receiving the “seed” of God’s Word, and allowing it to grow and produce fruit in their lives? Describe what might be characteristic of each of these types of people.

*“Path soil” people are those who have hard and closed hearts to God’s Word because of dis-interest or unbelief, and who will not (and cannot) receive it when it comes to them.*

*“Rocky soil” people are those who may initially receive the Word, but who have no staying power when things get tough and who quickly “fall away” because they aren’t willing to give what it costs to live in the Kingdom and under the reign of Jesus, the King.*

*“Among thorns” people are those who also may initially receive the Word, but who don’t bear Kingdom fruit in their lives because they are distracted by and drawn to the things of this world, rather than to the things of the Kingdom.*

*“Good soil” people are those who are open and receptive to God’s Word and who do what it says, thus allowing it to transform and shape their lives, which results in doing God’s will and producing Kingdom fruit.*

14. How is understanding this parable foundational to understanding other parables (and teachings) of Jesus?

*If we are to understand what He says (whether through His parables or other teachings), we must be willing to not only hear, but obey—to not only let it enter our heads, but our hearts as well. We need to be “good soil”.*



**SUMMARY:** Jesus tells a simple story, but leaves His hearers (and us) with an important spiritual question: “What is our response to God’s Word?” (or in other words, “What kind of soil are we?”) Knowing this is crucial not only for our understanding of the parables and teachings of Jesus, but also for our understanding of whether or not we are “in” the kingdom of God. For Jesus makes it clear, that those who are in the Kingdom of God are those who receive God’s Word and do what it says. Therefore, “He who has heard to hear, let him hear.”

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

- “Are you in?”
- Which of the four kinds of “soil” do you most identify with? Why? Are there parts of your life that represent different kinds of “soil”?
- What are some practical ways in which we can become “good soil”? How can we help each other to do these things?

# PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

The Great Banquet

Luke 14:15-35

**INTRODUCTION:** In this study, we will be looking at another parable that Jesus told about the Kingdom of God—as well as a teaching of Jesus that drives home the main truth of the parable. The truths that we will see provide for us more evidences of what it means to be “in” God’s Kingdom. Therefore, as Jesus says once again in this passage, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear. (v.35)”

## OPENING QUESTION:

- Have you ever made a commitment to something but then, after finding out what it was going to cost you (time, energy, etc.), you backed out of it (partially or entirely)?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

### TURN TO LUKE 14:15-35

[Context: Jesus was in the house of a prominent Pharisee, and was being carefully watched (14:1). While there, He tells the host that when he invites others to dinner, he should invite those who can’t repay him instead of those who can. If he did, Jesus tells him, he will be blessed and repaid at the “resurrection of the righteous”.]

### READ LUKE 14:15-24 (Jesus’ parable)

15. What prompted Jesus to tell the parable?

*The comment made by another guest about “the feast in the Kingdom of God” (v.15).*

*[Note: Association of “the resurrection of the righteous” and of the future “Kingdom of God” with a feast can be found in many other passages. (Luke 13:29, Isaiah 25:6, Rev 19:9, etc.)]*

16. Why did the owner of the house (i.e. whose banquet it was) become “angry” (v.21)?

*Although the initial invitation had been accepted (which would have been the case according to Jewish custom at that time) and the host was planning that those invited would come, when the announcement that all was ready was given, those who were invited (and had initially said “yes”) made “excuses” and said “no”.*

What was the nature of the “excuses” that were made (vv.18-20)?

*Work, finances, possessions, relationships, etc.*

17. What was the response of the owner (vv.21-23)? What did he do?

*He invited others to his banquet—people who were just like those Jesus had told His host to invite (14:13).*

What happened to those who were initially invited, but who later said “no” to coming (v.24)?

*They were not allowed to join in.*

18. What truth about the Kingdom of God does this parable illustrate?

*Not all who initially say “yes” will enter it*

How does this relate to what we’ve seen in the last two studies?

*“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt 7:21)*

*Seed that landed on “rocky soil” and “among thorns” started out growing, but didn’t produce (Mark 4: 16-19)*

**READ LUKE 14:25-35** (Jesus’ teaching)

[Note: The phrase “cannot be my disciple” is used three times in this section (vv. 26, 27 and 33). Since Jesus’ true disciples are those who are not only “in” the kingdom of God now, but those who will enter the final Kingdom of God, the phrase “cannot be my disciple” can be replaced with the phrase “cannot be in the Kingdom of God” without any change of meaning.]

19. From vv. 26, 27 and 33, what is necessary to be Jesus’ disciple (i.e. be in the Kingdom of God)?

*We need to give everything to Jesus*

- *Our relationships*
- *Our comforts*
- *Everything that we have*
- *Control of our own lives*

20. What additional truth do we learn from the two analogies that Jesus gives in vv.28-32?

*We must count the cost before saying “Yes” to Jesus*

21. And finally, what additional point—which connects to the parable in vv.15-24—do vv.34-35 drive home?

*We must continue to say “yes” to Jesus*

**SUMMARY:** Jesus both illustrates and teaches in these passages that if we want to be His disciple (and therefore be “in” the Kingdom of God) we must give Him everything (i.e. our entire lives). Before we do this, however, He tells us that we must “count the cost” of what this means so that our initial “yes” will be followed by successive “yesses” throughout our lives. As one person has said: Giving our lives to Jesus and becoming His disciple starts with one big “Yes”, but is followed by a whole lot of little (and sometimes not so little) “yups”.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

- “Are you in?”
  
- Have you counted the cost and said “Yes”—giving your life to Jesus?  
[Note: This is in part what it means to “enter through the narrow gate” (Matt 7:13)]
  
- If you have, are you continuing to say “yes” to Him in what He teaches you and asks of you? [Note: This is in part what it means to “do the will of the Father” (Matt 7:21)]

# PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

The Rich Fool  
Luke 12:13-34

**INTRODUCTION:** In this Bible study series we've been learning important things about what it means to be "in" God's Kingdom; things like 1) our need to enter through faith in Jesus and to give our whole lives to Him, 2) our need to count the cost before saying yes to Him so that we can continue to say yes to Him and His will, and 3) our need to hear and do what the Word of God teaches in order to know and do the will of God in their lives. In this study we will be looking at another characteristic of what it means to be in the Kingdom of God; one that goes straight to the heart.

## OPENING QUESTION:

- What do you treasure most in your heart, and how does your life (i.e. how you spend your time, energy, money, etc.) reflect the importance of this/these things?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

### READ LUKE 12:13-15

22. What is the setting for the parable that Jesus is about to tell? What was going on?

- *There was a very large crowd around Jesus (v.1)*
- *A man asks Jesus a question (v.13)*

*[Note: People often asked rabbis (teachers) for decisions about disputed points of the Law. In this matter, the Law stated that an elder son should receive double of what the younger son receives of their father's inheritance (Duet 21:17). Jesus' refusal to give a decision is not a denial of His right to do so, nor a lack of His concern for social and ethical matters. Rather, He uses the opportunity to speak about a "heart" issue, and another very important aspect of life in the Kingdom of God.]*

### READ LUKE 12:16-21 (Jesus' parable)

23. The parable that Jesus tells here centers on the topic of "greed" (v. 15). Define greed.

*Greed = "Selfish desire to acquire more than one needs or deserves" (Webster's Dictionary)*

In the parable, how do we see greed lived out in the man's attitudes and actions?

*[Notice in particular the number of personal pronouns]*

What is God's response toward the rich man's greed? Why?

*[The word "fool" is not lightly used; in the OT, it referred to those who reject the knowledge and ways of God as the basis for life and are punished for it (i.e. they receive the consequences of their foolishness.)]*

In contrast to storing up things for oneself, what does it mean to be “rich toward God” (v.21)?

*Using what we have and gain for His purposes and glory.*

24. At the heart of greed is self-centered living. List other areas of life besides money and possessions that people strive after and end up living for themselves instead of trusting in and living for God.

*Relationships (friends, marriage, family), vocation, future plans, status, grades, etc.*

How might Jesus have told the parable addressing one of these areas of self-centered living?

**READ LUKE 12: 22-34** (Jesus’ teaching)

25. Why do people worry about the needs spoken of in vv. 22-28 (food, clothing, etc.)?

*They do not acknowledge that God has given life and body, or they don’t think that He knows their needs, and/or believe that He cares, and/or they don’t think He is capable of meeting their needs—or maybe they just don’t think about God at all in relationship to their daily needs.*

What does it mean to “set your heart” on things like these (v.29) and to “run after” them (v.30)?

*Set heart on = focus on or to be consumed with its importance*

*Run after = strive/seek [Note: The word used is a strengthened form of the word “seek” in v.31.]*

What reasons does Jesus give for not doing these things?

*God knows their needs, He deeply loves His people, and He promises to meet their needs.*

26. People also often have wants or things of this world that they “treasure” (v.34), which become things that they set their hearts on and run after as well.

What does Jesus tell us that we should do instead of setting our hearts and running after these needs and wants?

*Seek God’s Kingdom, believing that He will give them what they need*

*[Note: In Matt 6:33, Jesus commands His followers to seek first God’s Kingdom as a way of not negating that they may have a part in meeting their own needs (i.e. work), but also of pointing out the differences of priority and importance of the one over the other.]*

27. What does it mean to “seek God’s Kingdom” (v.31)?

- *to seek first and foremost to know His will (i.e. what’s important to the King and in His Kingdom) and to give themselves (time, energy, money, etc.) to these things.*

What might it look like in the areas of life we have been considering?

**SUMMARY:** All of us have needs and wants. Jesus instructs us through this parable and teaching that people in God’s Kingdom shouldn’t set their hearts on these things or strive after them—especially in greed and self-service. Instead, they should trust God and seek first and foremost to know His will (i.e. what’s important to the King and in His Kingdom) and to give themselves (time, energy, money, etc.) to these things. People, who are in God’s Kingdom, set their hearts on the desires and concerns of the King, and run after these things.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

- “Are you in?”
- What are the things in our lives that we worry about or desire and seek after more than God and His desires and concerns?
- What do we “treasure” in our hearts more than God and what is important in His Kingdom?
- In God’s eyes, are we a “fool” (v. 20) setting our hearts on and running after our own wants and needs or someone committed to seek first God’s Kingdom, trusting in Him for the rest?

# PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

**INTRODUCTION:** In our last study, we learned that people who are in the Kingdom of God do not seek to live for themselves, but rather trust God and seek first and foremost to know His will (i.e. what's important to the King and His Kingdom) and to give themselves (their time, energy, money, etc.) to these things. In this study, we will see what is at the heart of self-less Kingdom living, identifying yet another aspect of what it means to be "in".

## OPENING QUESTION:

- What is your typical response to needs that you "encounter" (e.g. homeless people begging for food or money on the sidewalk; starving children that you see on TV; news reports of people who have been devastated by natural disaster; etc.)?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

### READ LUKE 14:15-37

28. What prompts Jesus' interaction with the "expert in the law"?

*The "expert in the law" asked Jesus a question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (i.e. What must I do to have life in the Kingdom of God forever?)*

Who is this man? Why did he ask Jesus his initial question?

*As an "expert in the law", he knew the Jewish law well both as a theologian and as a teacher*

*According to the understanding of most Jewish leaders, Jesus kept breaking the law. Therefore they were always looking for ways to trap him (e.g. Luke 6:11). This was at least a "test".*

29. Jesus answered the man's question with a question. Why?

*He was pointing to the authority of God's Word, which was exactly what the man quoted.*

In what sense did the "expert" answer "correctly"?

*The Bible says in Lev 18:5, "Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live". However, the Bible also says that no one will be justified (have life in the Kingdom of God forever) by works of the law (Rom 3:20) because no one lives out the demands of the law perfectly (Rom 3:23). In fact, it says that if we could, "Christ died in vain" (Gal 2:21)*

What then did Jesus mean when He said "Do this and you will live" (v. 28b)?



*Loving God and loving our neighbor are to be the ways of life for someone in God's Kingdom. They ought to be the fruit of seeking God and His Kingdom. However, they cannot earn us life.*

30. How might the "expert" felt about Jesus' answer? Why does he ask Jesus his second question?

*As a law-keeper, he probably felt that he was already doing these things. Therefore, he may have wanted to be commended ("justified") for this. He most likely was expecting a definition of "neighbor" that was more limited (i.e. that wouldn't include Gentiles or "sinners").*

31. Review the parable that Jesus told (vv.30-35). Describe the setting.

*The distance from Jerusalem to Jericho was about 17 miles, descending sharply from about 2500 feet above sea level to about 800 feet below sea level. The road ran through rugged, rocky terrain, which provided places for robbers to waylay defenseless travelers.*

How do the three people respond to the person (who most likely was a Jew) who falls into hardship?

*The priest (who was one who served in the Temple and offered sacrifices) and the Levite (who assisted in the Temple services)—religious people, who one might have thought would help—see the man in need, but don't stop to help. However, the Samaritan—who, as one despised and hated by the Jews, and therefore a person who one might have thought would be the last person to help—not only sees the man in need, but felt compassion for him and acted to help.*

In what ways did the Samaritan show love in his actions?

*He risked his life; he made personal sacrifices of time, possessions and money; etc.*

32. In v. 36, why does Jesus reverse the question that the "expert" asked in v.29? What was He communicating?

*The "expert" wanted to "justify" the limits he had on who should be the objects of his love. Jesus' parable showed that neither the objects of love nor the extent of one's love to others should be limited for those in God's Kingdom. It also showed that true love not only sees those in need, but also feels compassion for them and acts in love by seeking to meet their needs (even if it means sacrifice to oneself) with the resources available to them.*

33. How do we see this same pattern lived out in Jesus' life in the following examples?

*Matt 14:14 He saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them, He healed their sick (and fed them)  
Mark 6:34 He saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them, He taught them (and fed them)  
Matt 20:34 He had compassion on two blind men, He healed them (i.e. He restored their sight)  
Mark 1:41-42 He was filled with compassion for the man with leprosy, He touched and cured him  
Luke 7:11-15 He saw the woman, His heart went out to her, He raised her son from the dead*

34. How do we see the King's example and this Kingdom principle summarized in I John 3:16-18?

*"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions (or any other resources) and*

*sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them (i.e. feels no compassion for them), how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not (only) love with words or speech but (also) with actions and in truth."*

**SUMMARY:** People in God's Kingdom follow the example of "the Good Samaritan"—as well as the example of their King—by not only seeing those in need, but also feeling love for them and acting in love toward them by seeking to meet those needs (even if it means sacrifice to themselves) with whatever resources they have.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

- "Are you in?"
- In what ways do we put limits on who we will love and how much we will love them?
- Are our lives characterized by seeing needs, feeling compassion for those in need and acting to meet those needs—even at cost to ourselves?

# PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

## The Unmerciful Servant

### Matt 18:21-35

**INTRODUCTION:** In our last study, we learned that people who are in the Kingdom of God follow the example of the King (Jesus) of loving others by not only seeing those in need, but also feeling love for them and acting in love toward them by seeking to meet those needs (even if it means sacrifice to themselves) with whatever resources they have. This Kingdom value parallels another value that we will be looking at in this study, and this value will give us yet another evidence or proof of whether or not we are “in’ God’s Kingdom.

#### OPENING QUESTION:

- Why do we find it so hard to forgive others who wrong us, especially if they do it repeatedly?

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

##### READ MATT 18:21-22 (the context)

35. What prompts Peter’s question to Jesus in v. 21?

*Jesus had just been teaching about what should happen “if your brother sins against you” (vv.15-17). Peter’s question gives Jesus further opportunity to teach on this subject...*

Why does Peter suggest forgiving others who sin against him “up to seven times”?

*Peter must have believed that there was a limit as to how often one should extend forgiveness. [Note: The Pharisees taught that there was a limit of three times.] By suggesting “up to seven times”, he must have thought that he was suggesting a number that was extremely generous.*

What does Jesus’ answer in v.22 imply?

- *There is no limit as to how many times one should forgive.*

##### READ MATT 18:23-35 (Jesus’ parable and teaching)

36. What is significant about the debt owed by the servant in v.24 and his plea to his master in v.26?

*1 talent = \$1,000+ (see footnote on Matt 25:15). Therefore, 10,000 talents = \$10+ million!*

*1 talent = 20 year’s wages. Therefore, 10,000 talents = 200,000 year’s wages!*

*Bottom line: The debt was so large that it could never be repaid.*

How does the master respond (v.27)?

- *He took pity on the servant (loved him)*
- *He cancelled the servant’s debt (forgave him of his debt—at great cost to himself)*
- *He let the servant go (had mercy on him; i.e. did not give him the punishment he deserved)*

37. Given what just had happen to him, what is surprising about what the forgiven servant did in v.28?

- *He found one of his fellow servants...(indicates that he went looking for him)*
- *He grabbed him...choked him...and demanded repayment of his debt*  
*[Note: 100 denarii = \$17 = 100 days wages, which was relatively small and more able to be repaid compared to the debt that the forgiven servant owed their master.]*

What was the fellow servant's plea in v.29?

- *It was exactly the same as the plea given by the forgiven servant to their master (v.26).*

How does the forgiven servant respond (v.30)?

- *He refused to forgive his fellow servant and punished him for his debt*

38. When the master found out about what the forgiven servant had done (v.31), he calls the forgiven servant "wicked". Why?

- *He had been forgiven much, but wasn't willing to forgive even a little*

What is the master's response to this wickedness?

- *He gave the man the punishment he deserved for the debt that had been owed*

39. What warning does Jesus give in v.35 to those who do not forgive others?

- *We must forgive others or else we will not be forgiven by God—and be punished by Him*

*[Note: Matt 18:35 is a hard teaching of Jesus to understand; as is a similar teaching of His in Matt 6:14-15. It's clear, however, that "Jesus sees no incongruity in the actions of a heavenly Father who forgives so bountifully and punishes so ruthlessly, and neither should we. Indeed, it is precisely because He is a God of such compassion and mercy that He cannot possibly accept as His those devoid of compassion and mercy...Those who are forgiven must forgive, lest they show themselves incapable of receiving forgiveness" (D.A. Carson).]*

40. How is it that people who are "in" the Kingdom of God can (and should) forgive others?

- *We have been forgiven of the debt of our sins that we could never repay*  
*Acts 10:43*  
*1 John 1:9*  
*Eph 1:7*
- *Our response to the forgiveness we have received should be to forgive others in the same way*  
*Eph 4:32*  
*Col 3:13*

**SUMMARY:** People in God’s Kingdom are characterized by their forgiveness of others who have sinned against them—with no limits as to the extent of sin or how many times they may have to forgive. They are able (and want) to do this because they have been forgiven by God for their sins (a debt that they could not repay) and have been spared the punishment that they deserved for their sins. People who are unwilling to forgive others who sin against them will not be forgiven by God and will be given the punishment that they deserve for their sin against Him.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

- “Are you in?”
- If so, who in our lives do we yet need to forgive?
- How can we—with God’s help—truly forgive these people “from the heart” and show forgiveness to them in word and action?

# PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

## The Workers in the Vineyard

### Matt 20:1-16

**INTRODUCTION:** We've been looking at parables that have been showing us what people in the Kingdom of God are like. And although the emphasis of this study's parable is actually more on what the King is like (a common feature of many of the Kingdom parables), it isn't void of giving us understanding of Kingdom people characteristics. So again, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

### OPENING QUESTIONS:

- As a kid, you probably said more than once, "It's not fair!" comparing what you got (or didn't get) to what someone else got. How important is "fairness" to you now? Why?

### READ MATT 20:1-16

[Note: This is a parable about God's compassion, generosity and grace. We see this in how He treats those who have no work (i.e. those outside of His Kingdom) and those who come and work for Him (i.e. those who are "in"). These are important truths for us to know and to think about. However, as we look more carefully at the parable, let's give our attention to learning more about what people who serve such a King—and who are in His Kingdom—are like.]

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

[Note: Labor pools in early Palestine were common. Men would gather in the marketplace, waiting and hoping to be hired for work. Sometimes there were more workers than jobs, and this made it even more important to get hired each day, since a day's wage was often only enough for a day's needs.]

41. Review back through verses 1-7. What might each of the men who were hired by the landowner to work in his vineyard felt as they were hired—or not hired—as the day went on?

[Note: *In these labor pools, the reputation of each potential worker would have been known by the potential employers, and therefore the best workers were naturally chosen first.*]

42. How would each of them felt about what was promised them for their work, and what might they have expected for their pay?

*"He agreed to pay them a denarius (v.2)" = the common day's wage for an unskilled laborer*

*"I will pay you whatever is right" (v.4) -- All of those hired for only part of the day most likely expected less than a denarius, which was promised to those who worked all day.*

[Note: *The denarius wasn't the smallest Roman coin, so the landowner could easily pay each worker the proper fraction of a full denarius that corresponded to how much of the day they worked.*]

[Note: Common practice at this time for the payment of workers—and what was also mandated in Jewish law (see Lev 19:13; Deut 24:14-15)—was that they were to be paid at the end of each day. It was also common practice to pay first those who were hired last. This is what happened in v.8.]

43. What surprising thing happens, however, in v. 9? What might those who had only worked for one hour felt about this demonstration of generosity by the landowner?

- *Very grateful, but undeserving*

Why did the landowner do this for them?

- *He had compassion for them; he wanted to show grace because of their need*

44. How did those who had worked all day think and feel about this in comparison to what they received (vv.10-12)?

*“they grumbled” → they had mistook grace for injustice/unfairness*

Were their thoughts and feelings right and justified?

- *The landowner had given them what they had agreed to work for. He wasn't unjust or unfair to them, but he was gracious to the others.*

45. How does the landowner address their complaint of “It's not fair!” (vv.13)?

- *With a gentle, but firm rebuke, and through rhetorical questions that revealed things about them and about him.*

46. What does he reveal about them? About himself?

- *They were envious; maybe even prideful and contemptuous*
- *He was compassionate, generous and full of grace*

47. Jesus follows up His parable with the statement, “So the last will be first and the first will be last.” What was He communicating to His disciples (and to us)?

*[Note: To answer this question rightly, it needs to be seen that this same statement was also said by Jesus immediately before telling the parable (Matt 19:30), and that this parable—sandwiched in between these two statements—is told in response to his dialog with His disciples about rewards in the Kingdom of God. Peter, speaking for the disciples, had exclaimed that they had left everything to follow Jesus (19:27). Jesus' response is that they will be rewarded. “But” (v.30), Jesus warns, they needed to be careful to understand that—contrary to the principle of the world that says that rewards are based on merit—the principle of the Kingdom is that rewards are based on the God's grace alone, and are given according to His sovereign choosing. Bottom-line: Some that are invited first to enter the Kingdom of God will—because of pride and envy (like that of the workers who had worked all day)—end up being last, while some that are invited last to enter the Kingdom of God will—because they feel undeserving and grateful (like the workers who had worked only one hour but received a full day's wage)—end up being first. Cf. Matt 21:31]*

48. What do we learn from this parable about the characteristics of people who are in the Kingdom of God?

**SUMMARY:** People in God’s Kingdom understand that it is only by the invitation of the King—and His grace—that they are “in”. They serve the King with joy, believing in His promises and rejoicing in His fairness and goodness to them. They also serve without comparison and envy towards others, rejoicing in the King’s compassion, generosity and grace to whoever He chooses.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

- “Are you in?”
- Do you live as if God owes you more (or will give you more) because of your merits, or do you serve Him with joy and with a willingness to accept whatever He gives you because you know Him to be fair and good?
- Are you more apt to be envious of others who seem more blessed by God than you (especially those who you feel don’t deserve it), or to rejoice with/for them?



# PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

The Wise and Foolish Maidens

**Matt 24:36-25:13**

**INTRODUCTION:** In this study, as in some of the other studies that we've had, we will be looking at a teaching and a parable that Jesus uses to make an important truth clear. Studied together, they will show us yet one more characteristic of what people in the Kingdom are like.

## OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What are the thoughts and feelings that you have when a professor gives a "pop quiz"?
- How about when you realize that you've missed an important deadline or appointment?
- Describe a time when you were told, "You're/it's too late" (Maybe you were let go from something, and were told that it was too late to try harder; or maybe you hurt someone in a relationship and were told that it is too late to make amends, etc.)

## READ MATT 24:36-25:13

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

49. These verses speak many times of "that day or hour" (24:36, see also 24:24, 42, 44, 50; 25:13) What do these refer to?

*The return of Jesus = "the coming of the Son of Man" (24:37, 39, 44); i.e. "the Lord" (24:42)*

*\*It would be good to say something about the fact of Jesus' second coming...e.g. John 14:3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me"*

*[Note: These verses are part of Jesus' response to the question that the disciples asked Him in Matt 24:3; "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"]*

50. Jesus gives five illustrations that show what the day and hour of His coming will be like. What can we learn from each and all of them about the day and hour of His coming?

*Noah and the flood (24:37-39)*

- *The flood came suddenly and was unexpected by some*
- *Some who expected it's coming were prepared and saved*
- *Others who didn't expect it's coming weren't ready and therefore were destroyed*

*The men in the field and the women at the mill (24:40-41)*

- *The Son of Man will come suddenly and unexpected*
- *Some people will be taken to be with Him*
- *Some people will be left behind (separated from Him and others)*

*The thief at night (24:43)*

- *The owner of the house was unprepared*
- *The thief came unexpectedly*
- *The house was broken into (i.e. the owner suffered loss)*

*The servant in charge (24:45-51)*

- *The “faithful and wise” servant will carry out his responsibilities, will be ready for the unexpected return of his master, and will be rewarded*
- *The “wicked” servant will think that his master’s return is a long time away, will not be responsible or ready for the master’s return and will be punished for it.*

*The ten maidens (25:1-12)*

*[Note: The background to this parable is 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish wedding custom. When everything was set (which in this parable may explain why the bridegroom was a long time in coming), the groom would come to the bride’s home to claim her, and bring her in procession (which in this parable, was to be lit by the light of the maiden’s lamps) to his parental home for the wedding, the feast and joyful celebration. The festivities often lasted for a week or more.]*

- *Five of the maidens were “wise” because they were prepared when the bridegroom suddenly came after a long time of waiting. Therefore, they entered into the wedding/feast/celebrations with him.*
- *Five maidens were “foolish” because they were not prepared. They were left out of the feast/wedding/celebrations, and separated from the other maidens and the bride and groom. They were not given a second chance.*

*Summary regarding the coming of the Lord:*

- *It may seem to some like coming is a long time away, but it will come. It is certain.*
- *It is unpredictable as to when He will come; no one knows the day or hour*
- *It will come suddenly for all and for some it will be unexpected*
- *It will bring judgment: blessing/reward for some and punishment/loss/separation for others.*
- *There will be no second chances; His coming will bring final judgment.*

51. What are we instructed to do in light of these things? What might this look like in our lives?

*“keep watch” (24:42 and 25:13; see also 24:43) → spiritual alertness, excitement and expectancy — at all times*

*“be ready” (24:44; see also 25:10) → be prepared; be found doing what the Lord has instructed; be found doing what is pleasing to the Master*

52. What are the outcomes for those who don’t “keep watch” and who aren’t “ready”?

- *There will be punishment.*
- *They will not enter the Kingdom of God.*
- *They will be separated from the Lord forever.*

53. What are the outcomes for those who do “keep watch” and who are “ready”?

- *There will be blessings/rewards.*
- *They will enter the Kingdom of God.*
- *They will be with the Lord forever.*

**SUMMARY:** People in God's Kingdom believe that Jesus will return to bring them into His final Kingdom. They are "watchful" as they wait for His return with spiritual alertness, expectancy and excitement. They also are "ready" as they wait by faithfully serving Him; i.e. doing the things that He has told them to do.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

- "Are you in?"
- Do you live as if Jesus could return at any time?
- Are you ready for His return and judgment?

# PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

## The Talents Matt 25:14-30

**INTRODUCTION:** In this study—as in our last—we will again be reminded of our need to be ready for Jesus’ return and will discover characteristics of those who will enter into the final Kingdom of God (and those who won’t). This study builds on the parable that Jesus told in Matt 24:45-51 about the servant in charge (which emphasized being responsible in carrying out the Master’s will while He is away), by highlighting a certain important aspect of that responsibility.

### OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Think about a time when someone (e.g. a parent or an employer, captain or coach) handed over a responsibility of theirs to you for a period of time. How did you feel about having this responsibility? How did you do in carrying it out?

### READ MATT 25:14-30

[Note: Jesus told a similar parable in Luke 19:11-27 (The Parable of the Ten Minas). Because of their differences, however, the two should not be seen as the same one.]

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

54. What does the “it” in v. 14 refer to?

- *It refers to the time of Jesus’ return and of the coming of the final Kingdom of God (see 25:1)]*

55. The parable starts out with a certain man about to go away on a journey.

What does he do before he leaves?

- *“entrusted his property”= gave responsibility to others for some of what belonged to him (v.25)*
- *“each according to his ability”= no one was given more than what he could do something with*

What is his expectation of what ought to happen with what he has entrusted/given to others?

- *Although not stated in the opening lines of the parable, we see later that he expected that they would use what he had entrusted/given to them for him and his purposes.*

What kinds of things (“talents”) has Jesus entrusted/given to us that He expects us to use for Him and His purposes while we wait for His return?

- *Abilities, financial resources, material possessions, time, opportunities (e.g. college education), etc.*

56. In the parable, what happens while the master is away?

- *Two servants used what had been given to them to double it; the third servant hid what he was given and didn't use it for the master.*

Why did the third servant hide what the master had given to him?

- *He says that it was because the master was "a hard man" (v.24) and therefore he was "afraid" (v.25). However, the master calls him "wicked" and "lazy" (v.26). In any case—whether it be fear, willful disobedience or laziness (or possibly resentment for having received the smallest amount, or selfishness because he believed he wouldn't receive anything in return for his work) —he was unwilling to work and/or to use what had been entrusted/given him.*

How do these examples parallel what people do with the "talents" that Jesus has given to them?

- *It seems that because in most cases people believe that what is theirs belongs to them (instead of acknowledging that they belong to God and have been entrusted to them), they end up using their "talents" for themselves and not for God.*

57. "After a long time" (v.19) the master returns.

How does he respond to what the first two servants did? What did they receive from him? Why?

- *Because these servants were "good and faithful" with what had been entrusted/given to them, the master commended them and invited them to share in his presence and blessings. [Note: The word used in vv 21 and 23 ("happiness") can also be translated "festival" or "feast", which reminds us of the invitation given to the great banquet in Luke 14:16 and the wedding banquet in Matt 25:10.]*

How does he respond to what the third servant did? What did that servant receive from him? Why?

- *Because the servant didn't do anything with what he had been entrusted with (not even acting on what he "knew" to at least put it into the bank to earn some interest), the master calls him "worthless", puts him out of his presence and has him punished.*

How does this "settling of accounts" (v.19) parallel what will happen when we die and/or when Jesus returns?

- *Hebrews 9:27 → "...man is destined to die once, and after that, to face judgment"*
- *2 Corinthians 5:10 → "For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad", which includes how we used or didn't use for Him and His purposes the various resources and opportunities that were given to us by Him.*

*[Note: It might be helpful here to mention that there is a needed "fear of the Lord" that we must have. According to the Bible, the "fear of the Lord" means to acknowledge and respond appropriately to the Lord (in worship, obedience, holy living, service and—in the case of this parable —using what He has entrusted/given to us for Him and His purposes) because of who He is and because of what He will do if we don't.]*

58. In your own words state the main spiritual truth that comes from the parable of the talents, and what is necessary now for those who want to enter the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns.

**SUMMARY:** People who are in God’s Kingdom now, and who will enter the final Kingdom of God when Jesus returns, know the Master, expect His return and are ready for it. They also acknowledge that He has given them (and continues to give them) various resources and opportunities to use for Him and His purposes while He is away, and they use these things out of a right understanding of who He is and what He is like—as well as out of a right “fear” of what He will do if they don’t.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

- “Are you in?”
- What are some of the “talents” that Jesus has given to you, and how are you using them (or not) for Him and His purposes.
- How does the thought of “giving an account” to Jesus affect the seriousness of how you live your life now and your being ready for His return?

# PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

## The Sheep and the Goats

### Matt 25:31-46

**INTRODUCTION:** Throughout this entire Bible study series we have been discovering what people who are in the Kingdom of God and who will enter into God's future and final Kingdom are like. Since this is the last study in our series, let's review what we've learned so far:

People who are in the Kingdom of God and who will enter into God's future and final Kingdom

- have entered "through the narrow gate" by placing their faith and trust in Jesus, the King
- have experienced (and continue to experience) an internal heart change that produces (and continues to produce) external "good fruit" for the Kingdom
- hear and do what the Word of God teaches in order to know and do the will of God in their lives
- receive Jesus' teachings (and all of God's Word) and do what it says
- have counted the cost of giving their entire lives to the King and have done so
- trust God and seek first and foremost to know His will (i.e. what's important to the King and in His Kingdom) and to give themselves (time, energy, money, etc.) to these things
- see those in need, feel love for them and act in love toward them by seeking to meet those needs with whatever resources they have (even if it means sacrifice to themselves)
- forgive others who have sinned against them—with no limits as to the extent of sin or how many times they may have to forgive
- serve the King with joy; believing in His promises and rejoicing in His fairness and goodness to them, serving without comparison and envy towards others and rejoicing in the King's compassion, generosity and grace to whoever He chooses
- are "watchful" as they wait for His return, waiting with spiritual alertness, expectancy and excitement; and are "ready" as they wait, faithfully doing the things that He has told them to do
- know the goodness of the Master and "fear" Him, using the various resources and opportunities that He has given them (and continues to give them) for Him and His purposes while He is away

We've considered all of these characteristics with a desire to know for certain whether or not we are "in" the Kingdom of God or not. Why? Because one day, the answer to that question for us will be revealed and there will be significant and eternal consequences. This is the focus of our final study.

### OPENING QUESTION:

- Think about a time when something that was going on inside of you (something that you had maybe worked hard not to show, or maybe even convinced yourself wasn't even there; e.g. sorrow, bitterness, anger, etc.) was suddenly made known to others. How did you feel?

### READ MATT 25:31-46

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

59. In verses 31-33, who is this "Son of Man"? Where is He? What's going on around Him? What is He doing?

*"Son of Man" = Jesus ("What will be the sign of your coming?", Matt 24:3) = the King (25:34, 40)*

*King Jesus is sitting on His throne separating all the peoples of the earth who are being gathered before Him into two different groups. [Note: Jesus uses the analogy of a shepherd separating his sheep from his goats. For although sheep and goats often grazed together during the day, they were normally separated by the shepherd at night because goats needed to be inside and warm while sheep could stay outside in cooler air.]*

What is the significance of being put at the King's right and His left?

*The right side was the side on honor*

60. In verses 34-45, note the similarities and the contrasts between what is happening with the two groups of people.

What does the King say to those on His right (the sheep) and to those on His left (the goats)?

*"Come" (to be with Him) ↔ "Depart from me" (to be separated from Him)*

*"blessed by my Father" ↔ "cursed (by my Father)"*

*"your inheritance, the kingdom" (what is rightfully theirs) ↔ "eternal fire"*

*"prepared for you" ↔ "prepared for the devil and his angels"*

How do each of these groups of people respond?

*Almost the exact same response*

What is the King's reply to each one?

*The "blessed" ones did something; the "cursed" ones didn't*

*[Note: The phrase "brothers of mine" in v.40, has led some to believe that Jesus is referring to His disciples or His people. However, most believe that he is referring to all people who are poor and needy.]*

61. In v.46, what more do we see about the outcomes of the King's decisions for each of these two groups of people?

*The judgment is final and eternal. There are only two alternatives: either eternal separation and punishment or eternal life and blessing.*

62. Looking back over the entire passage, we see in this picture of judgment that both groups of people refer to the King as "Lord" (v.37 and v.44). We are reminded of what we saw in our first study in Matt 7 where Jesus said that not all who call Him "Lord" will enter the Kingdom of God (Matt 7:21).

What does this passage tell us about who will and who won't enter the future and final Kingdom of God—and why?

*People who will enter the future and final Kingdom of God are those who are already in it, and who are already living as people in the Kingdom. This passage uses the example of how Kingdom people treat the poor and needy. However, any of the things that we have learned in this Bible study series about what is characteristic of those "in" the Kingdom could have been used as well.*



**SUMMARY:** Although we've seen it in other passages we've studied, this passage especially shows us the seriousness of being "in" God's Kingdom now because of what it will mean for us at the coming of the final Kingdom of God when Jesus returns. We must be sure. The stakes are too high.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS:**

- "Are you in?"
- If you don't know for sure whether or not you are "in" (or you know you're not), and you want to be "in", what do you need do now to be sure?