

## The Parables of Jesus

**Resources:** An excellent resource is Craig Blomberg’s *Interpreting the Parables*. The *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* provides a good overview of history and interpretation. For parables in Matthew, read commentaries by Craig S. Keener and Michael Green, and Don Carson’s volume in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. For cultural background, see Kenneth Bailey, e.g. *Through Peasant Eyes*.

**Interpretation:** Historically, the Greek word for parable, *parabole*, has been interpreted too rigidly. It translates the Hebrew word *masal*, representing a range of figures of speech. Don’t allegorize or over-interpret, but allow for more than one point.

### PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

<i>Sower</i>	Mt 13:1-23	The kingdom is spread by spreading a message to individuals, who must understand it. The message can be impeded various ways, including by the enemy, cares of the world, etc.
<i>Weeds</i>	Mt 13:24-43	The kingdom’s arrival doesn’t mean an immediate end to “sin and all who do evil”, given the existence of “sons of the evil one”.
<i>Mustard seed and leaven</i>	Mt 13:31-33	A description of the small, un-dramatic inauguration of the kingdom, which begins small, grows rapidly (the mustard tree is an annual) and to large size and spreads thoroughly (like leaven).
<i>Growing seed</i>	Mk 4:26-29	In addition, the seed of the kingdom grows on its own without our necessarily understanding how.
<i>Pearl and hidden treasure</i>	Mt 13:44-46	Some come upon the kingdom from searching for it, some happen upon it. It is worth sacrificing everything to obtain, and brings great joy.
<i>Children in the marketplace</i>	Mt 11:16-19; Lk 7:31-35	The joyful message of forgiveness should be freely celebrated, not dampened by legalism. The solemn message of repentance shouldn’t be ignored, but taken seriously.

### PARABLES OF GRACE

<i>Good Samaritan</i>	Lk 10:25-37	“Your neighbor” is not exclusive; it crosses ethnic and religious boundaries and includes enemies.
<i>Friend at midnight</i>	Lk 11:5-10	Prayer should be bold or even shameless ( <i>anaideia</i> ).
<i>Widow and unjust judge</i>	Lk 18:1-9	Pray persistently.
<i>Pharisee and tax collector</i>	Lk 18:10-14	Trust in God’s mercy rather than your own righteousness.
<i>Lost sheep and lost coin</i>	Lk 15:3-10	“There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”
<i>Prodigal son</i>	Lk 15:11-32	God’s grace is limitless. Do not respond with jealousy when grace is shown to others. The return of the prodigal parallels Israel’s return from exile. <sup>1</sup>
<i>Laborers in the vineyard</i>	Mt 20:1-16	All disciples are equal in God’s eyes; He will be generous to many seemingly less deserving people.

<sup>1</sup> N. T. Wright and others (e.g. *Jesus and the Victory of God*) argue that Jews felt they were in many ways still in exile despite being in the promised land.

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### PARABLES OF JUDGMENT

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<i>Sheep and goats</i>	Mt 25:31-46	Eschatological blessings are not limited by race or nation; Jesus will judge based on treatment of “the least of these brothers of mine”—in context, the downtrodden disciples. [This does not diminish Jesus’ teaching of compassion for all men and women, a point better made by other passages.]
<i>Talents and minas</i>	Lk 19:11-27; Mt 25:14-30	The servants of the master will be held responsible for use of what they are given. The talents probably refer to anything for which we could be held accountable.
<i>Thief in the night</i>	Mt 24:42-44	“You must also be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”
<i>Faithful and unfaithful stewards</i>	Mt 24:45-51	Servants of the master will be held responsible for their actions in his absence.
<i>Ten maidens</i>	Mt 25:1-13	“Keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour”; be ready for the Son of Man’s return.
<i>Great supper</i>	Lk 14:15-24	Disobedience and faithlessness can lead to forfeiting the privileges which should belong to God’s people.
<i>Wedding banquet</i>	Mt 22:1-14	It’s not enough to respond positively to the invitation—your actions have to reflect your choice. “Many are invited but few are chosen.”
<i>Unjust steward</i>	Lk 16:1-13	“...use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings... If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?” Interpret this in conjunction with the Rich Man and Lazarus (see M. Green’s commentary).
<i>Wicked tenants</i>	Mt 21:33-46; Mk 12:1-12; Lk 20:9-19	Condemns the religious leadership for lack of repentance; alludes to the destruction of the temple; provides a counterpoint to the cleansing of the temple; retells the parable of the vineyard in Is 5.
<i>Lazarus and Dives</i>	Lk 16:19-31	Like Dives (L., “rich”), the unrepentant will experience irreversible punishment. Through his Word, God’s revealed himself and his will so that none who neglect it can legitimately protest their fate.
<i>The unmerciful servant</i>	Mt 18:21-35	To be forgiven we must forgive, as God in his limitless grace has forgiven us.
<i>Two builders</i>	Mt 7:24-27; Lk 6:47-49	Those who respond to the Gospel will survive God’s judgment. Those who refuse to follow Christ will be destroyed on the last day.
<i>Rich fool</i>	Lk 12:16-21	True disciples don’t selfishly accumulate possessions, which are transient.
<i>Tower builder, warring king</i>	Lk 14:28-33	True disciples count the cost.

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