



Parables of the Kingdom

“Are you in?”

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PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

Entering the Kingdom

Matthew 7:13-27

Introduction to the Series: 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.

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 these things are true of our lives or not. How we answer these questions, will help us to know if we are "in."

Opening Questions

- What does it mean for you and your teammates to be "in" as a member of your team/program?
- What do you do when fellow teammates have a less than full-hearted commitment to the team?

Read [Matthew 7:13-27](#)

Two overall observations of this passage:

1. Jesus says two things about the Kingdom of God:

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).

2. In these verses, there are four contrasting pairs which tell us more about the Kingdom of God:

Two kinds of gates/roads

Two kinds of trees

Two kinds of "believers"

Two kinds of builders

Let's look at the first section...

Discussion Questions

1. What are the two gates/roads and how is each one described (vv.13-14)?

Wide/broad (easy/without sacrifice) → many enter through it → leads to (eternal) destruction

Small/narrow (hard/costly) → few find (choose) it → leads to (eternal) life in 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 (i.e. will enter the Kingdom of God)."

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 does one enter?

Through faith in Jesus and through the giving of their lives in allegiance to Him as King.

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?

Three things in the next three sections...

2. What are the two trees and how is each one described (vv.15-20)?

Bad tree → bears bad fruit → will be cut down and thrown into the fire (destruction, v.14)

Good tree → bears good fruit (cannot bear bad fruit) → (implied) it continues to live

Read Luke 6:43-45.

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks (and our actions show) what the heart is full of."

What do these verses tell us about "good fruit/ good works" and the Kingdom of God?

People who are "in" the Kingdom of God are people who produce "good fruit/good works."

3. What are the two kinds of people here and what can be said about each of them (vv.21-23)?

One "believes" and does "good works" → but will be separated from Jesus

One "believes" and does "good works" → and enters into the eternal and final Kingdom of God

So, what is Jesus saying?

People can "believe" in Jesus and 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.

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?

Those that are "in" 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)

4. And how does one know what the will of the Father is in order to do it? Look at v.24.

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 "few" will enter into the Kingdom of God and that "many" will find out on the day of judgment that they are not in, 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 who will enter into God's future and final Kingdom:

- Have entered through having faith in Jesus and giving their lives in allegiance to Him as King.
- Produce external "good fruit" that comes from an internal (heart) change.
- 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 several 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.”

Opening Questions: If your team doctor or trainer tells you that you need to do something over a long period of time in order to heal/get back to 100% after an injury, how do you typically respond? If you do what they say, do you typically continue doing it to the end? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions

Read [Mark 4:1-9](#)

1. In these verses, we see Jesus teaching a large crowd. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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 verses 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](#)

4. What is the seed that is sown?

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

5. 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 disinterest 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.

6. 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 who do what it says. Therefore, “He who has hears to hear, let him hear.”

Application Questions

- “Are you in?”
- Which of the four kinds of “soil” do you most identify with? Why?
- If you are not characteristically “good soil” but want to be, what needs to happen in your life in order for you to become “good soil”?

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'll see provide for us more evidence of what it means to be “in” God’s Kingdom.

Opening Question: Have you ever made a commitment to something (e.g. a weight loss or strength building program) 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 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” (i.e. the beginning of the future and final Kingdom of God).]

Read [Luke 14:15-24](#) (Jesus' parable)

1. What prompted Jesus to tell the parable?

The comment made by another guest about “the feast in the Kingdom of God” (v.15), which referred to the future and final Kingdom of God.

2. 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 rightly 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, and why might they not have been genuine? (vv.18-20)?

These people let work, possessions and relationships keep them from honoring a commitment that they had already made. And their excuses don't seem genuine. Why? Because people most likely would not have bought a field without first seeing it, nor would they have purchased oxen without first trying them out. Likewise, because getting married in this culture was never abrupt, the person who “just got married” would most likely have known about his upcoming marriage before saying “yes” to the initial invitation.

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

He invited others to his banquet—people who were just like those Jesus had told His own 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.

4. 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 learned in our last study?

Seed that landed on “rocky soil” and “among thorns” initially took root and started growing. But when it stopped growing, it didn’t produce fruit (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 also those who will enter the future and 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.]

5. From verses 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, everything that we have, and our very lives.

6. What additional truth do we learn from the two analogies that Jesus gives in verses 28-32, and what does this practically mean?

We must count the cost before saying “yes” to Jesus, i.e. not make a commitment to follow Him knowing that you are unwilling to give Him everything.

7. And finally, what additional point—that connects this teaching to the parable in vv.15-24—do vv.34-35 drive home? What needs to happen after we’ve initially said “yes” to Jesus?

We must continue to say “yes” to Him.

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 needs to be 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?
- If you have, are you continuing to say “yes” to Him in what He teaches and asks of you?

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 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, and our need to count the cost before saying yes to Him so that we can continue to say yes to Him and His will. 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](#)

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

[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). It's most likely that the man asking Jesus this question is a younger son wanting more than what the Law provided for him. Jesus' refusal to give a decision is not a denial of His right to do so. 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)

2. 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 used by the rich man.]

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

[Note: 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.

3. 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 instead of trusting in and living for God.

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

Read [Luke 12: 22-34](#) (Jesus' teaching)

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

They don't think that God knows their needs, and/or they don't 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 [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 the needs of the people who are in His Kingdom (v.30), He deeply loves them (they are more valuable to Him than the ravens and the grass of the fields, vv.24, 28) and He promises to meet their needs (v.31)

5. 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 and trust in His provision

[Note: In a similar passage (Matt 6:33), Jesus commands His followers to seek first God's Kingdom. In doing so, He does not negate that they may have a part in meeting their own needs (i.e. through work). Rather, He is pointing out the difference of priority and importance that the one should have over the other.]

6. What does it mean to “seek first 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.

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 your life that you worry about or desire and seek after more than God and His desires and concerns?
- What do you “treasure” in our heart more than God and what is important in His Kingdom?
- In God's eyes, are you a “fool” (setting your heart on and running after your own wants and needs) or someone committed to seeking first God's Kingdom (trusting in Him for His provision)?

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; starving children that you see on TV or the internet; news reports of people who have been devastated by natural disaster; etc.)?

Discussion Questions

Read [Luke 10:25-29](#) (the context)

1. 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."

2. 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.

3. How might the "expert" have 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, however, was expecting a definition of "neighbor" that was more limited (i.e. that certainly wouldn't include Gentiles, "sinners"—or Samaritans!).

Read [Luke 10:30-37](#) (Jesus' parable and teaching)

4. Describe the setting of the parable that Jesus told (vv.30-35).

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.

5. In v. 36, why does Jesus reverse the question that the “expert” asked? What was He communicating?

The “expert” wanted to “justify” the limits he had on who should be the objects of his love. Jesus’ parable, however, 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.

We see this same pattern of “love” lived out in Jesus’ life:

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

6. How do we see the King’s example and this Kingdom principle summarized in 1 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 what-ever 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)

1. 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,” Peter 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)

2. 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).

3. 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)? Why is this so surprising?

He refused to forgive his fellow servant (even though he had just been forgiven) and punished him for his debt (even though he had not been punished for an even bigger one).

4. 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.

5. 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).]

6. 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. (See 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. (See Eph 4:32 and 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, but instead, 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 Question: 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—should be like.]

Discussion Questions

Context: 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 (and early in the day in order to get paid a full day's wage), since a day's wage was often only enough for a family's daily needs.

1. 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.]

2. 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 (those who committed to work all day) a denarius (v.2)," which was the common day's wage for an unskilled laborer.

"I will pay you (those hired for only part of the day) whatever is right" (v.4), which most likely would have been understood as less than a full denarius.

[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.]

3. 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.

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

“They grumbled,” because they had mistaken grace for injustice/unfairness.

Were their thoughts and feelings right and justified?

The landowner had given them the fair wage that he had promised and that they had agreed to work for. Therefore, he wasn’t being unjust or unfair to them (even though he was being gracious to the others).

5. How does the landowner address their complaint of “It’s not fair!” (v.13)?

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

What does he reveal about them? About himself?

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

6. 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 them that 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 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]

7. What do we learn from this parable about 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 because of 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 whomever and in whatever way 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 of Jesus and a parable that He used 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 Question: Describe a time when you were told, "You're/it's too late." (Maybe you missed an important deadline or appointment; or maybe you were let go from some responsibility 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 24:36-51](#) (Jesus' teaching)

Discussion Questions

1. 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?"]

2. Jesus gives four illustrations that show what the day and hour of His coming will be like. What are some common truths in all of them?

Noah and the flood (24:37-39)

The flood came suddenly and was unexpected by some.

Some who expected its coming were prepared and saved.

Others who didn't expect its 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 carries out his master's responsibilities, is ready for the unexpected return of his master, and is rewarded.

The "wicked" servant—who thinks that his master's return is a long time away—doesn't carry out his master's responsibilities, is not ready for the master's return and is punished.

Read [Matt 25:1-13](#) (Jesus' parable)

[Note: The background to this parable is 1st 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 parent's home for the wedding, the feast and joyful celebration. The festivities often lasted for a week or more.]

3. Describe why some of the maidens were "foolish" and some were "wise." What did they do or not do? What were the outcomes for each?

The five "wise" maidens were prepared when the bridegroom suddenly came after a long time of waiting. Therefore, they entered into the wedding/feast/celebrations with him.

The five "foolish" maidens 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.

4. From this parable (and from what we learned from the four illustrations in Matt 24:36-51), summarize what Jesus is telling His disciples about His (second) coming?

It may seem to some like His 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, but for some it will be unexpected.

It will bring judgment: blessing/reward for some and punishment/loss/separation for others.

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

"Keep watch" (24:42 and 25:13; see also 24:43) → spiritual alertness, excitement, and expectancy

"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

6. 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.

There will be no second chances; His coming will bring final judgment.

7. 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, we will discover yet another characteristic of those who are in the Kingdom of God now and who will enter into the final Kingdom of God when Jesus returns. This study builds on the parable that Jesus told in Matt 24:45-51 (which emphasizes being responsible in carrying out the Master's will while He is away), by highlighting a certain important aspect of that responsibility.

Opening Question: Think about a time when someone (e.g. a parent, an employer, a 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](#)

Discussion Questions

1. 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 (25:1).

The parable starts out with a certain man (a master) about to go away on a journey.

2. What does he do before he leaves?

"Entrusted his property" = gave responsibility to others for what belonged to him (v.25)

"Each according to his ability" = no one was given more than 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, finances, material possessions, opportunities (e.g. college education), etc.

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

Two servants used what had been given to them to double it for their master; the third servant hid what he was given and didn't use it for his 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). The master, however, calls him "wicked" and "lazy"(v.26). In any case—whether it was fear, willful disobedience, or laziness (or possibly even 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 for his master.

How do these examples parallel what people today 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.

“After a long time” (v.19) the master returns...

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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 an appropriate and 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.]

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 love for the Master and 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:

- Receive Jesus’ teachings (and all of God’s Word), obey it, and bear “fruit” as a result.
- Have counted the cost of giving their entire lives to the King and have done so with a commitment to follow through by continuing to say “yes” to Him and His will.
- 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.
- Expect Jesus’ return and are ready for it because they use what He has entrusted/given to them for Him and His purposes.

There are, of course, many other characteristics that we could have looked at in other parables and teachings of Jesus. However, with each one we’ve looked at, we’ve done so 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 will be revealed about us—and it will have 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 had convinced yourself wasn’t even there (e.g. anger towards a coach or resentment towards a fellow teammate)—was suddenly made known to others. How did you feel?

Read [Matt 25:31-46](#)

Discussion Questions

1. 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 (Matt 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 the 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.

2. In verses 34-45, what does the King say to those on His right (the sheep) and to those on His left (the goats)?

The “sheep”

*“Come” (to be with Him)
“blessed by my Father”
“your inheritance, the kingdom”
“prepared for you”*

↔

The “goats”

*“depart from me” (to be separated from Him)
“cursed (by my Father)”
“eternal fire”
“prepared for the devil and his angels”*

What reasoning/criteria does the King use in making these decisions?

His decisions were based on what they did or did not do for others in need. However, their actions were actually the fruit of what had been/was in their hearts (i.e. their actions showed whether they were already in the Kingdom of God or not).

Look at Luke 6:43-45. "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks (and our actions show) what the heart is full of."

[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.]

3. 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.

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 the introduction to our series, and Jesus' shocking words in Matt 7 that not all who call Him "Lord" will enter the Kingdom of God (Matt 7:21).

4. 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 God's future and final Kingdom 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" the Kingdom of God (or you know for sure you're not), do you want to be "in"?