

Lifebyte 54

Kingdom Living (Part 4)

Our Lord's Purpose For His Kingdom Parables

Jesus Proclaims A Kingdom



*For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?
Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)*



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The Nature Of Parables

Many of the parables our Lord Jesus used concern some aspect of the Kingdom of God, such as its nature, its coming, its value, its growth, and even the suffering entailed in entry.

Parables are set in the storytelling style of allegories, proverbs and comparisons. The word *parable* means “putting things side by side.” Jesus taught in parables to enlighten *Kingdom-hearted listeners* with illustrations from which they could draw out insights concerning His Kingdom. For those who had “*ears to hear*”, parables made it easier for them to understand the spiritual truth He was conveying (see 1 Corinthians 2:13,14).

Parables helped the listener remember the point He was making. Our Lord was verbally conveying a Kingdom that would *rule in the unseen spirit* of a person. Therefore His audience had to take the illustration in each parable and digest the essence of thought and principle in order to discover how it applied to them.

Jesus was well aware that for over two hundred years before His coming the Hebraic Stream of rabbis had taught that people must experience *spiritual rebirth* in their relationship with God. It is *His Spirit* Who beckons the spirit of those who have “*ears to hear*”. So parables functioned like the voice of a Shepherd calling for His flock.

A specific sequence appears through Scripture to convey God’s truth: that which is in the natural realm *precedes* spiritual truth, as Paul sums up: “*the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual*” (1Corinthians 15:46).

As we’ve shared in previous writings, 89% of what you learn about the natural world is through your eyesight. Our Creator employed a “pictorial pattern”

through His parables of the Kingdom He came to establish. To convey spiritual truths to those who would understand, He often used nature as an illustration, as in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-9); the mustard seed (Mark 4:26-29); the tares (Matthew 13:24-30).



Other parables depicted commonplace items: the parable of leaven (Matthew 13:33); the lamp set on a stand (Mark 4:21); the lost sheep and the lost coin (Luke 15:3-10); the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

Jesus Taught In Parables To Divide His Listeners

Like most people who read the parables of our Lord Jesus, you probably enjoy their picturesque representation of truth. Parables were the “DVD’s” of their day, visual to the mind’s eye and seemingly easy to understand. But there was a deeper meaning to His use of this teaching technique which may expand your appreciation of them.

Parables compare familiar facts with spiritual truths and were a common way of transmitting values in the Middle Eastern culture of Jesus’ day. The familiarity of the situations were readily identifiable and helped the hearer retain a mental image of the story being told.

However, the parables of our Lord Jesus were intended to do more than entertain or transmit information! His parables were aimed at *distinguishing* those who were His from those who weren’t. Only those who had “*ears to hear*” could perceive the spiritual truth behind the familiar life situation that was being presented.

Everything that Jesus taught was

founded upon truths and life principles that were grounded in God's Word, the Hebrew Bible. And His parables were spiritually powerful for those who realized they were commands to be obeyed!

*For the word of God is **living and powerful**, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the **thoughts and intents of the heart** (Hebrews 4:12).*

Our Lord knew that His coming would be a point of *division* rather than universal unity. Man's natural tendency toward disunity is so strong that He had to pray to His Father that even His own would be unified in heart and spirit! The division which would inevitably arise over His Person would separate and distinguish specific categories of people:

- 1. Those who related to His Father by obeying His commands because they loved and trusted Him;**
- 2. Those who practiced religion without relating to Him, seeking to justify their own righteousness;**
- 3. Those who denied Him in both heart and action.**

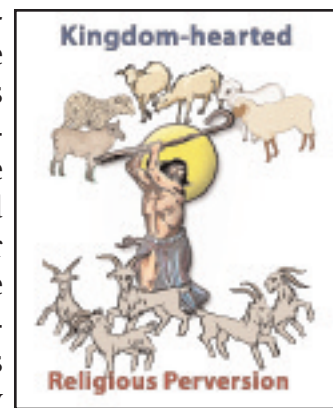
In our Father's sight, these last two groups are the same. Why? Because both are *anti-Christ*! Those who do not walk with Lord Jesus and in Him are *against* Him (see Luke 11:23).

Matthew chapter 25 is replete with vivid illustrations that warn of a poignant separation of those who are for Jesus and those who are against. This series of parables is a rapid-fire delivery of the separation between those who obediently serve their King and find eternal life, and those who disobediently serve themselves and reap eternal destruction.

Chapter 25 recounts three different parable scenarios to emphasize the essential message Lord Jesus is sharing: there WILL be a final separation personally delivered by the King.

The closed door separates the 5 prepared virgins from the 5 who were unprepared. The outer darkness is the well-deserved fate for the mean-spirited, unprofitable servant, while the obedient and faithful servants enter the joy of their master.

And finally, the faithful and loving sheep—the *Kingdom-hearted*—are rewarded with His praise and welcome while the goats who looked out only for their own interests are cursed with everlasting fire. As we'll momentarily discuss, many of these practiced *religious perversion*.



The King's judgment is final. He Who examines the heart knows those who are faithful and are motivated by their love for Him and for people who could never pay them back for their kindness. In essence, those who will be welcomed into heaven lived on earth as if Jesus were living *through* them. These are the Kingdom-hearted; they understand the parables of Jesus and respond in obedient trust.

However, we don't need to wait for the end of time to discover if our hearts are willingly following the Lord of life and living according to His Word! The Gospels reveal that our Lord has set into motion already the division that separates those who have ears to hear and obey from those who either ignore His

truth or entertain it as another random teaching. Note His zealous desire that sin be consumed and His sacrificial love be established in those who respond to Him:

*I came to **send fire on the earth**, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am **till it is accomplished!** Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, **not at all, but rather division** (Luke 12:49-51).*

The division Lord Jesus brings comes because some have *ears to hear* and others *refuse to hear*. Don't be surprised when that division penetrates even your own family! Then as now, children whose lives are turned upside down by the Spirit when they enter the Kingdom will be confronted angrily by parents who don't know what's happened to their kids but don't like it at all! And the same response might take place to separate newly-believing parents from their clueless adult sons and daughters (see Luke 12:52,53).

Our Lord prophesied *division* among those who heard Him, and this prophecy applies to all people for all times.

The Kingdom parables were shared during a period in which opposition to His teaching was growing. And through this teaching device, the *receptive* who intended to receive and apply its truth were separated out from the *unreceptive*, who intended to maintain the religious status quo.

The receptive, who responded favorably to His parables, were of the Hebraic Stream. They sought through their obedient trust to lovingly relate to their God.

In contrast were those who were imprisoned by the religious system with its intermediaries before God and its fences around the Law. While they were bombarded as we are today with reli-

gious teachings and interpretations, they were unable to hear the truth or to perceive the God behind it (see Matthew 23:15).

Therefore, with calloused hearts which were closed to the transformational purposes Lord Jesus intended for His parables, many refused to *repent* — to turn away from their sinful unbelief so that they might see, hear and understand in a way that would bring about spiritual reconciliation and healing.

Jesus applied a prophecy that was well-known among all Jews of His day, leaving no doubt that their refusal to hear *from God's perspective* targeted them:

*In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but **never understanding**; you will be ever seeing but **never perceiving**. For this people's heart has become calloused; they **hardly hear** with their ears, and they **have closed their eyes**. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts **and turn**, and I would heal them'* (Matthew 13:14,15; apperceived from Isaiah 6:9,10).

Just a note: [Mike] When we were finishing our time of research in Israel, we traveled to a small, rustic retreat center near Latrun, just outside Jerusalem. About 4 AM on our final morning there I climbed up to the rock-hewn chapel to gripe to God about why He had chosen me to share the Hebraic foundations.

I poured my heart out to my Lord Jesus as the darkness was swallowed by the dawn, reminding Him of how much I had failed Him. "Why don't you use my two brothers?" I lamented. "They're really reliable, while I've been like a yoyo to you." Suddenly, the Spirit of Jesus diverted me to a little devotional on a nearby stool. I opened the book-

let to the lesson for that day:

'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.' Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' (Isaiah 6:5-8).

Only the grace of our King can open blind eyes that are focused on inner guilt and widen them to see His forgiving love and purpose for His selection. Sobbing uncontrollably, I whispered, "You do this to *every-one* you recruit!"

As a result of this I've made an important discovery in my walk with my Lord Jesus: My own unworthiness has stirred in me a greater determination to encourage others to be *prepared and available* for God's use of them! A repentant heart makes all the difference to our Lord.

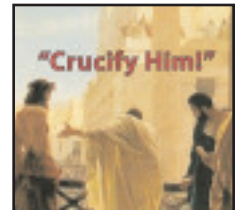
The above passage from Isaiah directly precedes the verses apperceived by Jesus in Matthew 13:14,15. As our Lord so often summed up at the end of His parables, "*if you have ears to hear, then hear!*" This repeated phrase is an imperative, a command, a non-optional directive that means to listen intently, then *take action* according to the will of our Father!

So many believe that because they've read or heard something, that's all the "action" they need to take. Not so! Our Lord never spoke unless it was for a purpose: that His words be **applied** in the lives of those who heard.

We were warned by our Lord while we were at Latrun that what we'd be sharing

would not be readily embraced by those who were satisfied with religious systems and practices. In fact, only a few would have ears to hear about the Hebraic foundations until the "Dark Days of Chastisement" come on the United States. There's little doubt that these days are soon coming, and may even be commencing as we write!

The apostle John apperceives Isaiah's admonition against blind eyes and hardened hearts to explain the disbelief of so many regarding Jesus "*although He had done so many signs before them*" (John 12:37). His many miracles couldn't overcome the hardness of heart of the religious leaders and their adherents because the inner core of their being refused to understand and repent. They still cried out, "Crucify Him!"



Signs and wonders and miracles *don't change* people. It's something deeper in the spirit of a person that His parables are aimed for. So ask yourself, ***Are you one who understands the parables of Jesus with your heart?***

Please realize that the Lordship of Jesus and His parables about the Kingdom of God are inseparable. To fail to understand our Lord Jesus as *King of a Kingdom* is to fail to comprehend His parables. No matter how many parables they may hear, those who remain dull to His Lordship and the mysteries of the Kingdom will remain perplexed.

Let's simplify the role between the loving King of the Kingdom and His faithful, beloved servant. What is your responsibility to your glorious Savior, King and Lord?

***Our Lord will not save a man
He does not command.***

**In other words, being a “Savior”
is what our Lord came to do.
But to be a King is *Who He is*.
We gratefully love Him
for what He did,
yet we honor and obey our Lord
for Who He is — King of kings.
We evidence our honor in
our loving actions to carry out
the commands of His Kingdom.**

Do you understand the *honor* you owe our Lord and King? Ask yourself:

- Do you regard Jesus from *your* vantage point in what He *does for you*?
- Or, do you see yourself from *His* perspective, as King of the glorious Kingdom in which you are one of *His beloved to command*?

Let’s expand on this point:

A child is commanded to honor his or her parents (Ephesians 6:1-3) for the *position* God gives a father and mother, not for what the parent *does* for the child. If a child honors them only for the good things they do, then a child evaluates his parents in light of the benefit the child receives from them—a self-centered, self-gratifying motivation that causes a child to go through life always seeking personal benefit and fulfillment.

On the other hand, a child who honors his or her parents regardless of any benefits received, perceives his parents from a heart of humility. From such motive, a parent is truly honored by his child. Out of this heart a child gladly obeys his parents, and as a result will go through life seeking to serve others.

This same distinction applies to how people see our Lord Jesus and His role in their life. So many have boxed Him into a limited position as “Savior” *apart from* any consideration of His Lordship. They confess their belief in His sacrifice on their behalf but live as “lord” of their own

life, indistinguishable from those whose heart has been captured by the world.

They want only the *benefit* they believe they’ll receive from His death and resurrection, but aside from participation in organized religious events, their regard for Him as Lord and King is minimal. Tragically, most of these who focus only on what they think is their “fire insurance” will fall away under persecution and trial (see Mark 4:17). [We’ll discuss this more in our next Lifebyte.]

People who gratefully know Jesus as their beloved and awesome Lord and King relate to Him out of devotion for *Who He is* rather than for what He does. These will bear fruit for the King (see Mark 4:20) with humble heart, readily embracing an accurate Kingdom view of themselves: “*We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do*” (Luke 17:10).

It’s important for you to recognize that the parables of Jesus test the type of “soil” of your heart. The first three types noted in Mark 4:1-20 were fruitless. But the seed sown on good soil hears, accepts and bears fruit, “*some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.*”

- **Describe what you’ve previously believed to be our Lord’s purpose in using parables. Has your view changed at all by these insights? How?**

- **When you think about Jesus, how do you perceive Him in your heart? Are you more concerned with what He *does for you*, or for *Who He is*? Describe yourself.**

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- **When you consider your own life, are you more interested in the *benefits you derive through relationships, or in serving other people?* Describe your motives.**
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Parables: Jesus' Exposé Of Religious Perversion

Jesus said, 'The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand' (Luke 8:10).

A vital stipulation of the Covenant our Father offers you through Jesus is to *love Him*. Love in the Spirit produces a dependent and personal relationship with your Father. Failure to love, however, brings reliance on religious services and rituals.

The element of a love relationship to move them to obedience was overlooked by many of the Jewish people who heard Jesus' parables, especially the religious leaders. Instead, numbers trusted in the ever-expanding religious practices and obligations of their forefathers.

Today, many who call themselves "Christian" are perishing because they refuse to compare the religious practices with the teachings found in the parables of Jesus. To those who are spoonfed ideas from others about what and how to believe, the Kingdom of God is foreign —

just as it was to the Jews imprisoned within religious walls that separated them from fellowship with God.

Perhaps you're unable to see the *anti-Christ* nature of your religious rituals, practices and duties. An illustration may be helpful.

Roman Catholics teach about a post-death place called "purgatory". Purgatory is a sort of short-lived 'hell' where people suffer for their sins but then can go to heaven when they've paid the price. However, this belief *nullifies* everything Jesus accomplished on the cross through paying the penalty for our sins! If each person must pay the penalty for their own sin by suffering in purgatory, then the Cross has availed nothing. If anything, purgatory is *anti-Christ!*

If you're not Roman Catholic, you may be thinking, "I'm glad *I* don't believe in purgatory!" But wait — your trust in your *religious creeds and form* can be greater than your trust in the Person of Jesus Himself. You may be trapped in **religious perversion**.

If you're honest with yourself, you may admit that you're more devoted to religious services and ritual than you are to daily obeying the Lord Jesus in your spirit. Just as with many Jews of Jesus' time, our Lord's parables may be no more than moral, entertaining stories for you. If you're ignorant of how to serve the King in His Kingdom, your very life is *anti-Christ!* You may be inadvertently blaspheming His name through choices that belie His Word.

Consider this:

If you leave a "church service" and feel better about being there than you are about daily obedience to our Lord's *rhema*, you're trapped in religious perversion. You've exchanged an *obedience-based relationship* with Jesus by which His Kingdom is lov-

ingly expanded through your daily actions, for *self-pleasing religion* which brings Him no praise. This is *anti* the Person of Christ!

Religious perversion is at the heart of many so-called “Christian” faith communities. You find it wherever people are deceived into trying to *gratify themselves* through religious participation. The true fruit of this trap? They fail to fulfill the will of our Lord Jesus on a daily basis. No one who knows these people sees *Kingdom purposes* being fulfilled in their lives.

- **Have you given in to religious perversion? Really, do those who know you well consider your life totally dedicated to serving King Jesus? Or, do you display religious perversion and live *for yourself*?**

If you give in to religious perversion, you hinder any viable relationship with King Jesus. Your decision demonstrates that His parables are meaningless to you. You’d rather embrace the teachings of man than serve the King of Kings in grateful obedience. As long as you do this, your heart will never be at peace because religious practices can never satisfy your spirit.

An essential truth to practice:

Repentance—turn away from your sinful ways and thoughts, and acquire the way of our Lord by His Spirit. This changes the soil of your heart. You may have lived thus far a life of religious perversion. You may have even been a leader in an ungodly *anti-Christ* system. Through His grace at work in you, *repentance* can change everything.

The adulterous murderer King David clearly understood this all-important truth: “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise*” (Psalms 51:17). Allow the King to break your willful heart and cleanse you thoroughly so that you WILL understand and apply the truths in His parables as your way of life. If you’ve shied away from serving your part in the Kingdom our Lord Jesus is establishing — repent!

Do You Have Ears To Hear?

“But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples” (Mark 4:34)

If you’re twice-born, the Spirit of Jesus dwells in you. The King Himself will explain the meaning of His parables to you and those who are your faith family. But ask yourself: Do you *truly* want to know the Kingdom meaning of His parables as His first disciples did?

There’s a responsibility attached to understanding—and that’s *obedience* to apply His truth to your life! Are you ready to respond without hesitation? In other words: Do you have *ears to hear*? And is *one step of faith* enough for you, or must you struggle to see the whole picture first?

Below we’ve listed several parables and declarations that pertain to your walk of loving and obedient trust in the Kingdom. In your own words write the understanding the Spirit of Jesus gives you regarding each one and how it applies to your life. List anything you need to change in your life in order to fulfill your response to the parable. Discuss your answers with others who spur you on in trusting obedience.

• **Luke 12:52,53; 8:21**

• **Luke 13:20,21**

• **Luke 13:23-30**

• **Luke 20:9-19**

• **Luke 8:4-15**

• **Luke 8:16**

• **Luke 18:9-14**

• **Luke 18:16,17**

• **Luke 18:18-29**

• **Matthew 20:1-16**

• **Matthew 13:24-30;36-43**

• **Matthew 13:44-46**

• **Matthew 13:47-50**

• **Matthew 13:52**

If Jesus has given you His understanding of these parables and you now know what your King expects of you as His beloved servant, **do it**. Press on in earnestness to bring Him glory!

*Not that you have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but you **press on to take hold** of that for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of you. Brothers and sisters, do not consider yourself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing you must do: **Forget those things which are behind and reach forward to those things which are ahead.** You must **press on toward the goal** for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14, paraphrase).*