

## **The Parables And The Kingdom**

The following is an overall guide to the parables and is intended to give a framework of understanding as to how the parables all fit together. Not every parable is even mentioned and each one deserves close individual study. The aim, however, is to stimulate readers to just such a careful study of the parables of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The parables are about the "mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 13:11). God's hidden purpose concerning the kingdom is revealed in them. (The usual biblical sense of the term 'mystery' is not something eerie or strange, but God's purpose of the salvation of a multitude of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, a purpose which men could never know expect by revelation from God. It includes redemption accomplished and redemption applied by his Spirit in its various phases in the collective history of the church and in the life of the individual. 1 Tim. 3:16; Eph. 3:3-9; Rom. 11:25, 16:25-26; Col 1:25-27). Some parables deal with the characteristics of the individual true members of the kingdom, others with the overall features of the kingdom and its progress. The categorisation of the parables below is quite general. A number of the parables relate to more than one of the points listed.

### **1. The Characteristics of the True Members of the Kingdom**

The true members grasp the value of the kingdom (The Treasure in the Field, Matt. 13:44; The Pearl of Great Price, Matt. 13:45-46); they are forgiving (Unmerciful Servant, Matt. 18:21-35); they love, impartially, their neighbour (Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37), make their possessions subservient to the kingdom (Unjust Steward, Luke 16:1-9; The Rich Fool, Luke 12:16-21), and humble and penitent before God (Pharisee and Publican, Luke 18:9-15).

They are saved by grace, graciously received by God and rejoice in God's grace shown to others (Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son, Luke 15:4-32). They continue to the end (Importunate Widow, Luke 18:1-8) etc.

### **2. General Features of the Overall Progress of the Kingdom.**

- i) **The first coming of the King does not bring the final glorious stage of the Kingdom.** "And as they heard these things, he added and spoke a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luke 19:11). This verse introduces one of the "delay" parables designed, in part, to teach even the believing Jews that the final stage of the kingdom is not to be brought in by Christ's first coming. They had to learn to distinguish between the "now" and the "not yet", the first coming and the second. These parables teach lessons about what was to take place during Christ's reign at the right hand of the Father between these two events, the period in which we are now living.
- ii) **The Mixed Reception of the Gospel** (The Sower, Matt. 13:3-8 & 18-23 etc.). The time when the Gospel will be beyond contradiction is "not yet". That will only be when Christ returns in judgement. Meanwhile, the Gospel meets with a mixed response of rejection, false profession and genuine conversion by God's grace.

### **3. The Short-Term Development of the Kingdom.**

The rejection of the bulk of Israel from the Kingdom and the ingathering of the Gentiles (The Fig Tree, Luke 13:6-9; the Great Supper, Luke 14:16-24; the Vineyard, Matt. 21:33-44 etc). Note the essential unity of the kingdom from the Old Testament into the New (cf Matt. 8:11-12, Rom. 11:16-24).

### **4. The Long-Term Development of the Kingdom**

- i) **Advance.** The kingdom increases in strength and size (the Leaven, Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20-21; the Mustard Seed, Matt. 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-34; Luke 13:18-19). It does so by the invisible power of the Holy Spirit (the Fruit-bearing earth, Mark 4:26-29).

- ii) **Mixed.** Until the consummation of the kingdom at the Last Day, the kingdom on earth is mixed. In its outward and visible aspect it includes believers and hypocrites (eg The Fishing Net, Matt. 13:47-50). The Marriage Feast of the King' s Son (Matt. 22:1-4) indicates that *not one* false occupant on earth will be tolerated when the king comes. The Wheat and the Tares (Matt. 13:24-30 & 36-43) also shows that the kingdom on earth is mixed until the end once we realise that the "field is the world" not in the sense of the mere globe but the fallen world of mankind from among whom the wheat and the tares arise. This mixed crop is the kingdom in its outward aspect arising from the field of the world.

## 5. The Consummation of the Kingdom at the Last Day.

- i) **Separation.** There will be a perfect separation of true Christians from those who had only a false profession :-
- a) The Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). All professed and seemed to be waiting for the Bridegroom but only some were actually prepared.
  - b) The Pounds (Luke 19:11-27). The professing servant who did not really use the pound (the Word which they were all given) is cast out of the kingdom.
  - c) The Talents (Matt. 25:14-30). The professed servant who did not serve is cast out, because all born-again believers become real servants of Christ. Note that the talents are not just abilities, but God-given opportunities to use these abilities in the service of Christ the king (see v.15). No service to Christ indicates absence of real conversion (see Rom. 6:1-2).
  - d) See also the Fishing Net, the Marriage of the King' s Son, the Wheat and the Tares in 4 (ii) above.
- ii) **All True Members of the Kingdom are Equally Entitled to Heaven.** A title to Heaven is not dependent on length of service, but on the merits of Jesus Christ (Labourers in the Vineyard, Matt. 20:1-16).
- iii) **Gracious Rewards in the Kingdom.** See the ' Pounds' and the ' Talents' above. These terms differ in that the one refers to the right use of the Word, the other to the service to the king that results, but they agree in teaching that while all true service to Christ is by his grace, yet the Lord is pleased to acknowledge such in gracious rewards and degrees of glory in Heaven. Nevertheless, all will be as blessed and happy in God as their varying capacity for the enjoyment of him will be capable of.
- iv) **The Eternal State.** The Sheep and the Goats (Matt. 25:31-46), whilst not strictly a parable, teaches universal judgement and division into two categories only. Those on Christ' s left hand are consigned to eternal misery, whereas those on his right hand enter eternal blessedness and glory. The eternal state of the redeemed is the final stage of the kingdom in which no hypocrites are found (See Matt. 24:42-51, especially v.51 where the ' servant' who was no real servant has his "portion with the hypocrites").

## 6. General Summary

The kingdom of which the parables speak is the "kingdom of grace". This is all the work of God' s grace in the hearts of his people whereby they willingly submit to his Word, beginning with conversion and extending, increasingly, to every area of their lives. This kingdom of grace is distinguishable from the kingdom of Christ' s power. The latter is Christ' s governing all things by his power in providence, whereas the former is the sphere of willing submission and service by his people. Everything takes place according to God' s decreed will (Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11; Rom. 9:19; Jas. 4:15), but not his preceptive will or will of command (Matt. 6:10, 7:21, 12:50; Luke 12:47; John 7:17). The kingdom of grace is that sphere in which men and women and children profess to be Christ' s willing servants (and the true members actually are such).

This kingdom is equivalent to the church provided we mean not only the organised church met for worship, but the people of God in all of their lives lived in submission to King Jesus.

The kingdom has an inner and outward aspect on earth. The outward includes all professed servants of the king. In the Old Testament this was Israel (Matt. 8:12; 21:43), in the New Testament it is those who in every place profess faith in Christ along with their children. This does not exclude the fact that ethnic Israel will, in large measure, be grafted back into their own olive tree (the kingdom) in due time when profess faith in Christ and they and their children are brought into the Church and Kingdom from which their forefathers were cut off. The inner essence consists of only real Christians, this is those who are born again of the Spirit. Only the latter will continue to have a place in the kingdom in its final glory.

"In the second petition (which is, Thy kingdom come) we pray, That Satan' s kingdom may be destroyed; and the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened."

(Shorter Catechism Answer 102)