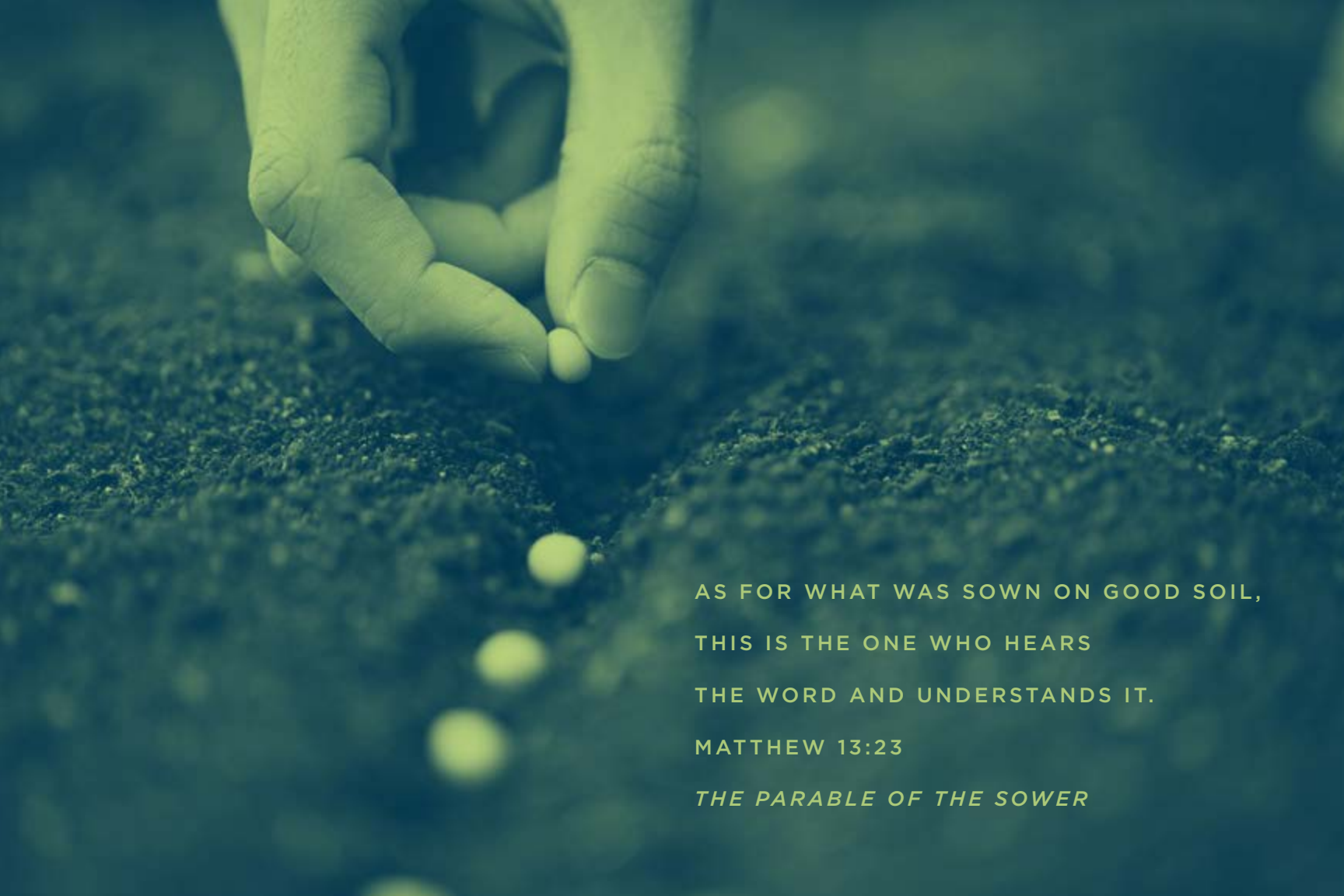




the parables

SECRETS TO SPIRITUAL LIFE





AS FOR WHAT WAS SOWN ON GOOD SOIL,
THIS IS THE ONE WHO HEARS
THE WORD AND UNDERSTANDS IT.

MATTHEW 13:23

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INTRODUCTION

It's summer! Hopefully you have some free time planned in the months ahead. I pray you will take some time with your family and friends and make some great memories.

But don't forget that the Church is your family as well! God always moves His will forward through what His people do. I've learned many things since planting this church in 2003, and one of the biggest is that God moves through his people. So I want to encourage you to continue to press in to what God is doing at your local campus.

Ask yourself if there's anything that God wants you to do in your neighborhood to serve the name of Christ. Use the ease of summertime as a way to step forward spiritually and not backward. God wants to do great things for His kingdom in and through you, even in these months ahead.

Our new summer series on the parables of Christ will be a great way to take your next step. We will take an exciting and practical look at the kingdom of God through the eyes of Jesus.

Parables are fictitious stories designed to illustrate God's truth by comparison or through some everyday scenario. Why did Jesus tell them? Because stories help us to connect to deeper things.

My daughter loves the movie *Beauty and the Beast*. On the face of it, it's the story of a young woman who loses her father, fails to marry the town hero, and is taken hostage and forced to be the slave of a hideous animal.

But if you've watched it, you know that that's not *really* the story. It's actually about a prince in pain who isn't sure he's worth loving anymore. It's about an unconventional girl who who rejects the obvious charm of the handsome Gaston to find herself captivated by the inner beauty of the Beast. It's about finding true love in the unexpected.

On the surface, it's just a story. Underneath, it's deeper. It's beautiful.

We are entering one of the most significant seasons in our church's story as well. But before I talk about the future,

INTRODUCTION

let's remember and celebrate God's faithfulness to us in the past.

With God's help, for thirteen years, we have faithfully stewarded Christ's Church at Grace. We have seen God at work in amazing ways. We've seen people make commitments to move from spiritual death to spiritual life in Christ. We've baptized hundreds of people. People are becoming true disciples. Many have been healed from broken lives and relationships. We are grateful to be used for God's work in these ways.

Through His grace to us, we have grown more committed to the mission of seeing people take their next step toward Christ. God has built an amazing team of volunteers and staff who love one another and are giving their lives away for the cause of Christ. I am so privileged and honored to lead you. I would rather give my life to this work than to anything else, and I know from talking to so many of you that you feel the same way.

And now, God has blessed us with our first Grace facility. Over the summer, we will begin planning and building out this space, which will serve as a home for Grace Orlando and

a central hub for all of our campus administration. Most importantly, it will become a church planting center, where we train and launch more people to go out into Central Florida neighborhoods with the gospel of Christ. You will hear much more about our future plans and building in the coming months.

On the surface, it's just a story — just plans and projects. But underneath, it's something beautiful that God is doing in our church and our city.

Parables that reveal the kingdom are the same. Just stories to some. To others that see beneath the surface, they are the kingdom of God made present. Our prayer for you this summer is that you will see this, and that the kingdom of God will become an even more beautiful thing to you.

Blessings to you,

Mike Adkins
Senior Pastor

FOR THIS MY SON WAS DEAD,
AND IS ALIVE AGAIN;
HE WAS LOST,
AND IS FOUND.

LUKE 15:24

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON



WHAT IS A PARABLE?

THE PURPOSE OF PARABLES

What is a Parable? And why would Jesus tell so many of them?

The English word “parable” refers simply to a short story, generally with two levels of meaning: the surface and the symbolic — the obvious and the analogical. They are expanded analogies used to make rhetorical points.

But the Greek and Hebrew words for “parable” make the definition broader and murkier. The Greek word *parabole* has a wider meaning in the New Testament than our English word. It is a proverb (Luke 4:23), a riddle (Mark 3:23), a comparison (Matthew 13:33), a contrast (Luke 18:1-8), a simple story, (Luke 13:6-9), and a complex story (Matthew 22:1-14).

The range of uses of the Hebrew word *masal* is even broader. It can be used to speak of a taunt, a prophetic oracle or a byword. It can be used for cut-downs and criticisms. It can be any dark or mysterious saying intended to stimulate thought.

And that is perhaps the central purpose of parables: to stimulate thought.

Klyne Snodgrass, whose book is titled *Stories with Intent*, has it exactly right. Parables are stories with intent, or purpose. They mean something, and it is our job to discern it. “Parables demand interpretation; they point to something else,” he says. “They are not merely stories to enjoy. They hold up one reality to serve as a mirror of another — the kingdom of God. They are avenues to understanding, handles by which one can grasp the kingdom (Snodgrass 597).”

Snodgrass argues that Jesus’ parables are both “works of art” and “weapons” Jesus used to confront His opponents. They are one of the primary teaching methods He used to explain the kingdom of God and to show what discipleship in His kingdom looks like. They are generally short and simple, with images taken from everyday life.

Yet, these stories are also confrontational. They are searching, and they are *not* self-explanatory. To understand them requires work and humility. That is why the question of

WHAT IS A PARABLE?

how we interpret them is one of the most important questions we can ask when studying them.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PARABLES

First, here are some reading guidelines for reading parables that can help you along the way:

- Parables tend to be brief and symmetrical.
- Parables often make use of balanced structures involving two or three movements. Discerning those movements is essential to understanding the parable.
- Parables typically omit unnecessary descriptions, frequently leave motives unexplained, and leave implied questions unanswered.
- Parables usually are taken from everyday life, but they are not necessarily based in reality. Because of their hyperbolic nature, they often are pseudo-realistic and have elements that shock. For example, it is un-

likely that anyone in first-century Palestine would owe a 10,000-talent debt (several million dollars) as in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23-35). The details are meant to shock you.

The goal of the parables generally is to stimulate thought. Twenty-two parables start with a question like, “Who from you ...?” or “What do you think ...?”

Parables generally have one major point that is found at the very end.

A READING METHOD FOR INTERPRETING PARABLES

1. Isolate the parable. The first step in determining the meaning of a parable is simple: determine where the parable begins and where it ends. Sound easy? Well, here is a trick question: Where does the Parable of the Prodigal Son begin? Is it a part of the whole conversation starting in Luke 15:1? Or does it start with the actual story in Luke 15:11? How you answer that — how you see the parable in

WHAT IS A PARABLE?

context — will significantly shape your understanding of the point.

2. Read the parable multiple times. Read it again and again. Read it in different translations if possible. Read it aloud. Read it silently. Read it slowly. Read it fast.

3. Identify the setting and the characters. It is helpful to make a list of the setting and all the characters. Who is here? Where is the story happening?

4. Observe the story. Read it from the perspective of each character. Pretend you are a four-year old, and unleash a barrage of questions upon it: *Why this story? Why is it told to these people? What are the key words? Repeated ideas? Cause-and-effect relationships? Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?*

5. Isolate the different scenes. It is helpful to break the movement of the story into its different scenes. The first generally gives the setting, and the last generally gives the main point.

6. Analyze the story. Identify the rising tension. Identify the climax of the story. Identify the resolution.


7. Summarize the parable. Restate the main point in your own words. Why did Jesus tell it? Why did the Gospel writer put it at this point in his book?

8. Plead with God that you would have ears to hear and eyes to see. Ask yourself:

- What does this story tell me about God or Christ that should lead me to praise?
- What does this story tell me about my sinful condition that I need to confess?
- What does this story tell me about how I should live, rejoice, trust, or change?

Dr. Ben Bailie

Pastor, Grace Lake Nona



ON FINDING ONE PEARL OF GREAT VALUE,
HE WENT AND SOLD ALL HE HAD AND BOUGHT IT.
MATTHEW 13:46

THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

PARABLES & MYSTERY

It's a beautiful day by the sea, and multitudes are crowding up to Jesus on the beach to hear Him speak. To create some space between Himself and the crowd, He crawls into a boat and sits a few feet from shore. The people are hushed so they can better hear the words of this wise Rabbi.

Jesus begins to tell them the story of the sower. He talks about a farmer putting seed in the ground and hoping for a future harvest. He talks about the kind of ground the seed falls on, and its chances for success. For most people, harvest time was the most important time of the year; their future survival depended upon it. Everyone leans in to hear what Jesus has to say.

After Jesus finishes the story, the disciples come to him. "Why do you speak to them in parables?" they ask (Matthew 13:10). And Jesus answers them: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (Matthew 13:11-12).

There are several possible ways to look at this answer. First, Jesus could be speaking of the fact that, while His message is clear, there will always be those whose hearts are resistant to accepting and following the meaning. They are like a child who has had clear boundaries and consequences laid out for them but still chooses to cross the line and disobey.

Or, perhaps, Jesus could be speaking about spiritual election. Perhaps these parables are not plain to the listener because they have not been given the ability to hear by God. While they might understand the point of the lesson, the ability to walk in the truth eludes them. They have not been empowered by the Holy Spirit with the desire to hear and obey.

Another option is that Jesus might be saying both. Listen to His words:

"This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the

PARABLES & MYSTERY

prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive’ ” (Matthew 13:13).

Jesus says the people listening “do not see,” and “do not hear,” and “do not understand.” Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9, a passage in which God tells Isaiah to preach the truth even though he should know that the peoples’ hearts will not turn toward the truth. They are stubborn, and therefore unable to listen to God.

In Matthew, Jesus says the same thing:

“For this peoples’ heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them” (Matthew 13:15).

The responsibility for seeing and hearing is on the people, but their hearts have grown cold. Because of their lack of affection for God and His kingdom, their ability to see and hear and live out truth is muted.

But for those whose hearts are turned toward the kingdom, God’s elect, the ability to see and hear and live the truth of the parable is within their grasp.

“But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Matthew 13:16).

It’s clear that Jesus uses the mystery of parables to bring great clarity and deep truth to those who are in His kingdom. It seems equally clear that the mystery reveals that the truth is hidden from those who have hardened their hearts to the kingdom.

We must seek the Lord while He may be found (Isaiah 55:6), because the very understanding of the mysteries of the parables themselves reveals who has faith and who does not.

Mike Adkins
Senior Pastor

KEY THEMES: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Before Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross, Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus responded, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

Jesus spent his entire earthly ministry teaching and declaring the kingdom of God. One of the most important ways he did that was through parables. Roughly 35% of Jesus’ teaching was done through these symbolic stories, and a unifying theme throughout was a focus on the spiritual kingdom versus an earthly one. Why was this such a central theme in Jesus’ life?

Jesus’ first recorded words in the Gospels are “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). With that statement, Jesus made a bold claim — that he was the rightful king of creation, and he had arrived to claim his reign over all things. Jesus said that phrase “Kingdom of God” more than 70 times in the four books that tell the story of his earthly ministry — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — and his monarchical language created controversy wherever he traveled.

His listeners often responded to his parables literally and believed he was orchestrating a national revolution. His teachings caused the most trepidation among Jewish religious leaders, particularly among the Sadducees, who believed Jesus was trying to overthrow the Roman Empire in the region. Jewish leaders wanted Jesus and his coming kingdom to die.

However, Jesus’ parables always got to the heart of the issue. His teachings were never about overthrowing any national government, but establishing a cosmic one. The purpose of his kingdom was not to create a new Jewish state, but to restore order in all creation and in the hearts of men.

Since the fall of man in Genesis 3, our world has been under the reign of Satan — whom the Apostle Paul describes in Ephesians 6:12 as “the cosmic powers over this present darkness.” In our sins, we all once followed under the reign of this enemy in rebellion against the rightful king and his kingdom.

KEY THEMES: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus' arrival was a declaration of war on our rebellion of sin. The kingdom of light had arrived to destroy the kingdom of darkness. Through Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection he did just that — he conquered the dominion of Satan, sin, and death that held us captive.

Parables are about transferring humanity from darkness to light, from rebellion to allegiance, from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God. The Parables of Jesus announce the arrival of the kingdom, tell us who can enter the kingdom, characterize behavior in the kingdom, reveal the power of the kingdom, and call all to submit to the King of the kingdom.

The kingdom of God is not just a future resting place for God's people. It is not an end, it's a way of life. It is not heaven, but heaven is a part of it. All in all, the kingdom is the rule of an eternal sovereign God over all creatures and things (Goldsworthy 620).

As followers of Christ the King, we are to subject ourselves to his authority both today and in the age to come. This is the purpose of parables. Jesus teaches us that the

Kingdom of God is to be sought in our lives now, to be received now, to govern us now, to transform us now. Every parable delivers a simple message that we belong to a king and kingdom that are not of this world, and they have no end.

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’ ” (Isaiah 52:7).

Brian Allen

Pastor, Grace Winter Garden



IT DID NOT FALL, BECAUSE IT HAD
BEEN FOUNDED ON THE ROCK.

MATTHEW 7:25

THE PARABLE OF THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

KEY THEMES: THE NATURE OF GOD

The parables of Jesus are simple yet complex, illuminating yet blinding, physical yet spiritual. Each parable contains a different minor lesson Jesus is trying to teach, but each one also falls under the major theme: the kingdom of God.

Each parable reveals a glimpse into how we as citizens of this spiritual kingdom should think, act, and hope. It also reveals how God, as the King of this kingdom, truly operates. Their main purpose is to reveal another angle into each of these perspectives: the true nature of our King and our right response as His citizens.

In the parables in this sermon series, we are taught four major things about the nature of God: the celebration of God, the mercy and justice of God, the generosity of God, and the economy of God.

THE CELEBRATION OF GOD

In the Parable of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), we see what makes God celebrate — namely that heaven rejoices when what was lost is found. Because the parable comes right after the Parable of The Lost Sheep and The Lost

Coin, many theologians think the better title for this story might be The Lost Son. In each, Jesus is illustrating the tireless pursuit of God to find what is lost, and that God's heart rejoices when it is found.

THE MERCY AND JUSTICE OF GOD

Both the mercy and the justice of God are on full display in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. God is represented in this story by the king. The king's mercy in not giving the man what he deserves is a reflection of God's mercy for us as people who could never repay God what we owe Him. But when the forgiven servant would not mirror this mercy, we also see the justice of the king. The servant is punished until he repays all that he owes.

God is just in giving us what we deserve for our sin, which is hell and His wrath poured out on us. But it is also by His mercy that we have any chance of salvation. Theologian D.A. Carson notes here 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

KEY THEMES: THE NATURE OF GOD

compassion and mercy that he cannot possibly accept as his those devoid of compassion and mercy” (Carson 461).

THE GENEROSITY OF GOD

The title of the Parable of the Vineyard Workers is misleading because the story is primarily not about the workers, but about “the amazing grace and compassion of the employer” (Bailey 355). Jesus teaches here that God does not hold back His generosity; he pours out his grace without end to any and all that come to Him, whenever and however they come. The thief on the cross who was a Christian for a few moments is just as much a son of God as the Christian who has lived faithfully for decades. We are not in a position to stand over God’s shoulder and judge His generosity; we are simply to humble ourselves and receive His generosity with gratitude.

THE ECONOMY OF GOD

The final theological theme about the nature of the King in these parables is that the economy of the kingdom of God is not like the economy of this world. The Parable of the

Vineyard Workers concludes with “So the last will be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16), a summation of the upside accounting of our God. The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus continues this theme.

In this story, the rich man has money, power, and everything one who lives in the kingdom of the world could want. A beggar named Lazarus, however, hopes to catch some crumbs from the rich man’s table while the dogs lick his sores. And yet, we see in the kingdom of God that it is actually Lazarus who inherits heaven and the rich man who winds up in torment, begging for a drip of water and for his family to be saved. This is not an indictment on wealth or a glorification of poverty, but rather an example of what God views as important compared to what we do. We must be careful about not getting caught up in what this world deems as praiseworthy, because in the eyes of God and in His economy, what is praised in the world’s eyes may lead to damnation in His.

Caleb Brasher

Pastor, Grace Clermont

KEY THEMES: THE RESPONSE OF MAN

How should we respond as citizens in the kingdom of God presented in the parables? Jesus teaches both his hearers and readers that the proper response to this inaugurated kingdom is to be sacrificial stewards, loving forgivers, and also obedient hearers.

SACRIFICIAL STEWARDS

At a conference I recently attended, Pastor J.D. Greear pointed out that there are two ways to be wicked. Through the Parable of the Talents, he taught that we can either disobey God outright and be considered wicked, or we can be poor stewards of what he has given us and be considered wicked. Theologian D.A. Carson is helpful here: “Christ’s followers, his slaves, are responsible for improving their Master’s assets. For those of good heart, this will be more than a responsibility; it will be a challenge, a joy, a privilege” (Carson 581). This parable applies to stewarding every area of our lives as Christians, whether it is money, time, abilities, homes, children, or anything else which God has entrusted to us.

But Carson brings out another interesting point — a point at the heart of the Parable of Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price. The sacrifices we make and our stewardship of what God has given us should not be rooted in duty, but in our joyful response in finding something greater. Look closely at what this man does, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then *in his joy* he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matthew 13:44, emphasis mine). This man sold everything because he had found something greater. His sacrifice was driven by his joy, as ours should be when we realize the treasure we’ve found in the gospel of Christ.

LOVING FORGIVERS

The parables mostly teach us that our response should be simply to reflect on the nature of our King. When Jesus tells the story of the unforgiving servant, he doesn’t simply say we should be merciful, although he has every right to demand it. But he instead displays the more extravagant mercy of the king first, and how the servant who has been

KEY THEMES: THE RESPONSE OF MAN

forgiven should then forgive in turn. Part of our role in this inaugurated kingdom is to act as mirrors, reflecting Christ to those who don't believe, so that they can see a dim reflection of our God and King.

Jesus also is teaching that compassion should be innate in a kingdom citizen. The question we should ask is not "Who is my neighbor?" like the lawyer asked Jesus in the story of the good Samaritan, but rather "How can I be a good neighbor?" When we see those who are hurting or suffering, it is our heart as Christians to reach out in love, because God reached out to us.

OBEDIENT HEARERS

Jesus concluded his pivotal Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) by teaching that true disciples must hear *and* obey the commands of Christ. It is not enough to simply hear the teaching on the kingdom in the parables; we must allow it to change the way we shape our work and relationships, spend our time, and use our money. Living as citizens in the kingdom of God should touch

every aspect of our lives, so the question we must ask is this: *will we let it?* When the storms of life come and begin to shake our homes, what will our foundation be? So as we read and hear these parables taught, may we continually examine our hearts and lives to see if we are in fact living as kingdom citizens under the reign and rule of our King.

Caleb Brasher

Pastor, Grace Clermont



WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL
SERVANT. YOU HAVE BEEN
FAITHFUL OVER A LITTLE;
I WILL SET YOU OVER MUCH.
MATTHEW 25:23

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

THE PARABLE IN MODERN CULTURE

The parables of Jesus revealed what we should treasure above all things; and, two thousand years later, modern parables are all around us, trying to do the same thing.

In his book, *You Are What You Love*, James K.A. Smith explores how our culture is saturated with these stories, seeking to infuse meaning and purpose in life, while pointing our affections away from Christ and toward rival kingdoms. Modern parables are subtle; they form and direct our hearts, often without our knowledge.

Brokenness permeates our lives. Sin and destruction are unavoidable. These are the result of what theologians call the *fall*, the moment in Genesis 3 where sin severed humanity's perfect relationship with the Creator.

From that point forward, the human heart has known that something is missing, and throughout history people have attempted to fill this void with success, happiness, pleasure, money, beauty, and power. Although these provide momentary delight, they never truly satisfy the longing resulting from original sin. The ache is deep within

our heart, and culture successfully capitalizes on our desire to be complete by telling us modern parables about how we can be made whole.

Knowing that people are not driven by knowledge, but by affections, cultural storytellers use indirect narratives — like advertisements, movies, books, or television shows — to point us toward their definition of the “good life.” Modern parables are rarely explicit but they have one goal: to help numb the pain of human brokenness by promising fulfillment through a storyline that advances the kingdoms of this world.

These rival kingdoms flourish in places like the mall, where people are enticed by consumerism as a means to this “good life,” where we can no longer feel the effects of our sin. A simple stroll by Gap or the Apple Store can reorient our hearts and desires toward a worldly kingdom that is promising to fulfill us in ways only Jesus can. The windows and displays bombard us with advertisements of attractive, wealthy, successful, and happy people enjoying life. These visual parables of success, happiness, pleasure,

THE PARABLE IN MODERN CULTURE

and fulfillment deliver an unspoken problem in the middle of their solutions: the realization that *they're not me* (Smith 47). Subconsciously, the thought is implanted: *These people enjoy the good life. They have what I want. They appear to have no problems, and they have nice accessories to go with all that. Maybe part of the reason they are happy has to do with what surrounds them, what they have, wear, and do.* The modern parable creeps in to reorient our thoughts and desires.

It's the same with stories in books or movies, or even social media. We consume parables of romantic love or triumph or pleasure, comparing the reality of our lives to promises on the page and screen. These parables are meant to show us a path to wholeness, but they only magnify the knowledge of our brokenness through the lens of comparison.

Smith describes this process brilliantly: “Do you see how the images of happiness, fulfillment, and pleasure are actually insinuating something? ‘This isn't you,’ they tell us. ‘And you know it. So do we.’ What is covertly

communicated to us is the disconnect and difference between their lives and our own life, which often doesn't look or feel nearly as chipper and fulfilled as the lives of the people in these images do. The insinuation is that there's something wrong with us, which only exacerbates what we often already feel about ourselves” (Smith 48).

These wordless parables diagnose the illness — our brokenness — correctly but offer a false cure. The “solution” to our problem is a product or a behavior. We purchase that pair of shoes or the latest phone, or we engage in this kind of relationship or activity because it assures happiness, only to find out any joy we experience is fleeting. We're soon back at square one with our sin, because what is inside us cannot be fixed by something outside of us. We vow not to be seduced by false modern parables, yet we are continually tempted to give in, and the cycle continues.

Can true fulfillment be found? The answer is Yes. The gospel of Jesus Christ invites us into a different kind of Kingdom, the one we were created for, the one described by Jesus throughout His parables. The Kingdom of God

THE PARABLE IN MODERN CULTURE


is where our relationship with the Creator is restored, not through success, happiness, pleasure, or power, but through our trust in the gospel of Jesus.

The gospel reorients our affections and desires to pursue after Christlikeness. The more we understand that we were created to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever, the less attractive modern parables tend to be.

When we realize that this life is not for us or about us, we are less tempted to believe the lies that fulfillment comes through the stuff we own or do. With each step we take toward Christ, we become better equipped to reject the modern parables of our day, and fully immerse ourselves into the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Bobby Raulerson

Pastor, Grace Oviedo



SO THE LAST WILL BE FIRST,

AND THE FIRST LAST.

MATTHEW 20:16

THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD WORKERS

THE GOSPEL STORY IN THE PARABLES

The gospel is good *news*. It's information. It's the story of what's already been accomplished.

It's not something we have to do, or something we obey — it's something that has happened, and something to be celebrated. It's Christ trading places with us, giving us the freedom we could never attain on our own by taking our sin upon himself.

As we read the parables, it can sometimes be tricky to discover the gospel in them. They can seem moralistic, simplistic, and sometimes just downright confusing. Even the disciples hearing them firsthand found this to be true (John 10:6; Mark 4:10). There is no formula for uncovering the gospel in each of these passages. Each story is unique, showing a different angle, offering a specific insight and exposing another facet of the kingdom of God.

Yet, there are a few questions we can ask of any passage to help us find the gospel: *Where do I find myself in this story? Where do I see Christ?* At the intersection of these

two points, we will often locate the gospel and begin to understand with greater acuity what Christ has done for us.

Let's apply these questions to two of the parables we'll be learning about in this sermon series to find the gospel implications behind them.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

In this parable (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus tells the story of a Jewish man beaten by robbers and left for dead on the side of the road. Two upstanding Jewish characters — a priest and a Levite — pass by this man on the opposite side of the road, unwilling to trouble themselves with his suffering. They leave him in misery and continue on their journeys.

Then a Samaritan, a man from a culture despised by the Jews, stops and not only helps the man, but safely delivers him to one who will provide further care and time for healing. The Samaritan pays the man's present and future debts, ensuring a full recovery.

THE GOSPEL STORY IN THE PARABLES

First, we ask where we can find ourselves in this story. Perhaps we are convicted by the busyness of our lives and realize that we — like the priest and the Levite — have been guilty of being too busy to help others, of not being a good neighbor, of being a well-respected but unkind individual. Or perhaps we can see ourselves as the Samaritan — a good neighbor who has a history of helping others, even when it's not convenient.

Then we must ask where Christ is in the story. As we think about what happens, we see Jesus as the good Samaritan. He has rescued the dying and paid our debts in order that we might be healed. Theologian D.A. Carson has called Jesus “the ultimate Good Samaritan who comes to broken people condemned to death and binds their wounds and saves their lives and frees them forever from slavery because he pays it all” (Carson 2013).

When we see Jesus in this way, we begin to understand that, while Jesus teaches this parable to help us consider how we treat others, he ultimately wants us to realize what we have received. When we see Jesus as the Good

Samaritan, we see ourselves not as the priest or the kind savior, nor as the hero or the villain of the story, but rather as the helpless man, beaten on the side of the road by our sin. We, through grace, have been rescued and healed, and we are now compelled and empowered to go and serve others.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

In the brief Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:44-46), a man discovers a valuable object and then joyfully goes to sell everything he has to obtain it. When we ask ourselves where we are in this story, we will quickly wrestle with the question: *am I willing to give up everything to gain the greater treasure of heaven, Jesus, and the kingdom of God?*

While this is a great question to ask ourselves, we must also stop and see where is Christ in this parable. With only one character to think about, we realize that he too, is the one who gave up in order to gain.

THE GOSPEL STORY IN THE PARABLES

Jesus, God the Son, gave up his heavenly kingdom, entered the physical world as a man to suffer and die on the cross, and bore the weight of sin and separation from his father, so that he could gain salvation for his people. And the Scriptures tell us he did this joyfully (Hebrews 12:2; Philippians 2:1-11).

These parables help us see the value of the kingdom of Christ not just because whatever we lose to gain the kingdom is worth it. The kingdom is valuable because of what Christ has already given up and paid to purchase it for us.

So as you read any parable, employ these two questions: *Where am I in this story? Where is Christ in this story?* Then look to find the gospel application as you wrestle through the answers.

Rick Garrett

Executive Pastor

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WEEKLY MESSAGE NOTES
& QUESTIONS

WEEK 1: *THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
AND DISCUSSION

1. Who does the sower represent in this parable? What does the seed represent? Who are the plants? What about the soil?

2. What is the goal of Satan in this passage? What tools does he use to accomplish this goal?

3. Just as a farmer regularly tests his soil to make sure his crops will grow healthy, what actions can we take to maintain a heart of good soil?

4. Describe times when you or someone you knew showed to be one of these soil types.

5. Does the sower know how each seed will sprout? How then should we respond?

6. Who among your family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers can your Grace Community be praying for, as you seek to share the gospel with them?

WEEK 2: JUNE 19TH
THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON
LUKE 15:11-33

Message Notes:

WEEK 2: *THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
AND DISCUSSION

1. Why did the younger son leave? What do you think he was expecting?

2. It's easy to see how the brothers differed, but in what ways were they the same in this story?

3. Which person in the parable do you identify with, and why? Is it always that person, or do you sometimes vary between multiple characters?

4. How are you challenged by this parable?

5. What characteristics of God can we learn from this parable?

6. Describe a time when you experienced God's grace.

WEEK 3: JUNE 26TH
THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD WORKERS
MATTHEW 20:1-16

Message Notes:

WEEK 3: *THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD WORKERS*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
AND DISCUSSION

1. Who are the laborers, and who is the master in this parable?

2. Were the laborers treated fairly? Why, or why not?

3. What does this tell us about God's kingdom?

4. At what stage in life were you called into God's kingdom? How does that impact the way you share your faith?

5. We see some of the laborers respond with envy and jealousy. Where does this come from, and how can we avoid having the same attitude?

6. Do you ever struggle with comparing your work to the works of others around you? Do you feel like others deserve more or less than you?

WEEK 4: JULY 3RD
THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS
MATTHEW 25:14-30

Message Notes:

WEEK 4:
THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
AND DISCUSSION

1. What can we learn about God and his character from this parable?

2. Why was the master angry at the man who hid his talent? What does the man's speech reveal about his character?

3. If you had the opportunity to speak to the man with one talent before the master returns, what would you say to him?

4. What gifts has God given to you? How are you using those gifts for the good of His kingdom? Which gifts are you not employing for His kingdom right now?

5. What action is God telling you to take at this moment? How can your Grace Community help you take this step?

WEEK 5: JULY 10TH

THE PARABLES OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

MATTHEW 13:44-46

Message Notes:

WEEK 5:

THE PARABLES OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
AND DISCUSSION

1. Is this parable more about the cost of the kingdom, or the value of the kingdom?

2. What is keeping you from seeing the value of God's kingdom right now?

3. Does your life display a high value of the kingdom? Why, or why not?

4. Just as the men in these stories sold everything to buy something else — what can you “buy or sell” this week?

5. What circumstances in life would cause you to be willing to sell everything? Why?

WEEK 6: JULY 17TH
THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN
LUKE 10:25-37

Message Notes:

WEEK 6:

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
AND DISCUSSION

1. Why does the lawyer ask Jesus who his neighbor is?
What answer do you think he expected?

2. What is the significance of both the Levite and the priest passing the man first?

3. Think of a time when you both needed a neighbor
and were a neighbor to someone in need. How can both
instances be used to witness to the person?

4. How can you care for a neighbor in need this week?

5. Spend some time discussing future possible service
projects with your Grace Community.

WEEK 7: JULY 24TH
THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT
MATTHEW 18:21-35

Message Notes:

WEEK 7:

THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
AND DISCUSSION

1. Are you quick to forgive others when they sin against you? Why, or why not?

2. Who are the people represented by the characters in this story? How does it reflect our understanding of sin?

3. What does the servant reveal about his heart when he demands the money that another servant owed him?

4. How can reflecting on the forgiveness we received from God fuel our own forgiveness of others? (see Luke 7:41-50)

5. What kind of behavior should we expect from people who have been forgiven of their sins? Why do you think some Christians have trouble forgiving others?

6. How can you show forgiveness to someone who has wronged you? What steps can you take this week?

WEEK 8: JULY 31ST
THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS
LUKE 16:19-41

Message Notes:

WEEK 8:

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
AND DISCUSSION

1. As the story starts, most would believe the rich man was favored by God — that his wealth was a blessing. Does this parable say that wealth is bad?

2. Was Lazarus taken to heaven because his life on earth was hard? Or was he taken to heaven for a different reason?

3. Do you have something in your life that is keeping your attention away from Christ?

4. Why does Abraham not send Lazarus to warn the rich man's brothers of hell?

5. Have you ever wished for a miracle to happen so you might believe? What does this parable tell us about such things?

WEEK 9: AUGUST 7TH

THE PARABLE OF THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

MATT. 7:24-27 & LUKE 6:47-49

Message Notes:

WEEK 9:

THE PARABLE OF THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
AND DISCUSSION

1. What does the foundation of the rock represent? What about the sand?

2. If you could describe one area of shifting sand in your life, what would it be?

3. What do the rains represent? Have you ever experienced a time of flooding in your life?

4. How can you ensure your foundation is on the rock instead of sand this week? This month? This year?

5. Some of your friends may be building their houses on sand. How can you help them change locations?

6. Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. How does this shed more light on our building? How can your Grace Community help you build your house?

ABOUT GRACE

Grace is one large church in many smaller communities, with a mission to help people take their next step toward Christ.

Our local, neighborhood campuses worship in Orlando, Oviedo, Winter Garden and at Edgewood Children's Ranch (and coming in Sept 2016, in Clermont and Lake Nona). Each of our campuses shares a central vision and organizational structure under the leadership of Senior Pastor Mike Adkins, but each campus also has its own pastor-teacher and leadership team. We believe this is the best way we can keep church feeling like family and also reach the vastly diverse neighborhoods of Central Florida.

Our teaching pastors and our worship pastors work together week by week, bringing many voices into unity to plan our ministry and our worship services. They take common scriptures and ideas for each weekend and bring them to life around songs, challenges and themes that reach our unique communities.

Our teaching and worship pastors also trade campuses every so often, too, allowing our people to hear from a plurality of elders and keeping Grace from being built up around one central person.

WHAT WE'RE ABOUT

Expository, gospel-centered teaching, both in Sunday worship and in regular classes and workshops.

Modern worship woven with liturgy and creedal confession, focusing on the work of Christ and not ourselves.

Corporate communion, personal confession and prayer every week.

Spiritual friendship and connection through sacrificial service and Grace Communities.

Gospel-focused family ministry that centers around what God has done for your kids through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Celebration of ancient seasons like Advent and Lent to prepare for holy days.

CAMPUS LOCATIONS

GRACE ORLANDO

Meets at Edgewater High School
3100 Edgewater Drive, Orlando
Services Sundays at 9:15 & 10:45a
Senior Pastor Mike Adkins

GRACE OVIEDO

Meets at Indian Trails Middle School
415 Tuskawilla Road, Winter Springs
Services Sundays at 9:15 & 10:45a
Pastor Bobby Raulerson

GRACE WINTER GARDEN

Meets at Whispering Oak Elementary
15300 Stoneybrook W Winter Garden
Services Sundays at 9:15a & 10:45a
Pastor Brian Allen

GRACE EDGEWOOD

Meets at Edgewood Children's Ranch
1451 Edgewood Ranch Road, Orlando
Service Sundays at 3p

COMING IN SEPTEMBER 2016

GRACE CLERMONT

Pastor Caleb Brasher

GRACE LAKE NONA

Pastor Dr. Ben Bailie



I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES;
I WILL UTTER WHAT HAS BEEN
HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.

matthew 13:35



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