



STORY TIME

Discovering the Parables of Jesus

Why is it important to study the Parables?

- One-third of the recorded sayings of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels are in parables.
- If we do not understand the parables, we miss what may be known about the historical Jesus. One must understand parables to know Jesus.
- The parables are designed to portray a reality. In a world of metaphorical redescription, the reality behind the parable is dramatized in word-pictures. (Brad H. Young)
- The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording. They stand in contrast to John, whose content is largely distinct. (Wikipedia)

39 Parables of Jesus

PARABLE/LESSON	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE
Wheat and tares	13:24-30		
Barren fig tree			13:6-9
Children in market	11:16-19		7:31-35
Budding Fig Tree	24:32-36	13:28-32	21:29-33
Lamp under basket	5:14-16	4:21-23	8:16-18
Dinner guests			14:15-24
Divided Kingdom	12:24-30	3:22-27	11:14-23
Faithful servants			12:35-40
Feast invitations			14:12-14
Friend at midnight			11:5-13
Good Samaritan			10:25-37
Great physician	9:10-13	2:15-17	5:29-32
Groom's attendants	9:14-15	2:18-20	5:33-35
Growing seed		4:26-29	
Hidden treasure	13:44		
Humbled guest			14:7-11
King's war plans			14:31-32
Laborers in vineyard	20:1-16		
Leaven	13:33		13:20-21
Lost coin			15:8-10
Lost sheep			15:4-7

PARABLE/LESSON	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE
Marriage feast	22:1-14		
Mustard seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
Net of fish	13:47-50		
New cloth	9:16	2:21	5:36
New wine	9:17	2:22	5:37-39
Pearl of great price	13:45-46		
Persistent widow			18:1-8
Sower	13:3-23		
Rich man			12:13-21
Talents	25:14-30		
Minas			19:11-27
Prodigal son			15:11-32
Steward and rich man			16:1-8
Ten virgins	25:1-12		
Great Supper			14:15-24
Two sons	21:28-31		
Merciless servant in debt with his master	18:23-35		
Wicked Vinedressers	21:33-46	12:1-11	12:35-48

Hebrew noun mashal מִשָּׁל

- Definition: a parable, proverb, riddle, anecdote, allegory
- It defines the unknown by using what is known.
- The mashal begins where the listener is, but then pushes beyond into a new realm of discovery.

Greek noun parabole παραβάλλω

Definition: a comparing, comparison of one thing with another, likeness, similitude, juxtaposition

The unmerciful servant

Matthew 18:21-35

Then [Simon] Peter came and said to Him [Jesus],
“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me
and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said
to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but
up to seventy times seven.” Matthew 18:21-22

*Peter was being generous here, for the traditional Rabbinic teaching was that an offended person needed to forgive a brother only three times. Jesus’ reply was that forgiveness needs to be exercised to a much greater extent. Jesus meant that no limits should be set. Then to complete the idea, He told a parable.

Jesus also said to His disciples...

“Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

Luke 17:3-4

“True forgiveness is choosing to release the debt another person owes you. It doesn’t erase what happened. It doesn’t condone their behavior or words.”

“In the cultural context, the sacred calendar of the Jewish people may provide the setting for this parable. The ten-day period between the Hebrew New Year (Rosh Hashanah) and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) was designated for seeking forgiveness between individuals. A person was not prepared to seek divine mercy during the great fast on the Day of Atonement if she or she had not first sought reconciliation with his or her neighbor. The Day of Atonement was the experience of the community as every person participated in the fast. The preparation for this experience focused on the necessity to forgive one another on a personal level so as to approach God without a bitter heart. Mercy from above depended upon showing mercy to those below... While the Gospel of Matthew does not mention the time of the year in which Jesus taught this parable, it does mention the question of Peter, which is fitting for the issues concerning reconciliation during the ten days of Awe. Quite likely, Jesus told the parable during this time, when Judaism focused on the task of interpersonal reconciliation.” – Brad H. Young

“For transgressions that are between a person and God, the Day of Atonement effects atonement, but for the transgressions that are between a person and his or her neighbor, the Day of Atonement effects atonement only if one first has appeased one’s neighbor.”

—Yoma 8:9 in the Mishnah

*The Mishnah is the first major written collection of the Jewish oral traditions that are known as the Oral Torah. It is also the first major work of rabbinic literature.¹ The Mishnah was redacted by Judah ha-Nasi probably in Beit Shearim or Sepphoris at the beginning of the 3rd century BC. – Wikipedia

Why did Jesus say “70 times 7”?

- What is the significance of that number? It equals 490. That is how many years Israel stayed in the Promised Land without obeying the Sabbath year. God forgave Israel 490 times before He finally sent them to exile in Babylon.
- Also compare angel Gabriel’s prophecy given to Daniel.

“Seventy weeks [sevens] have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place.” Daniel 9:24

- God is going to forgive Israel for 490 more years - 70 weeks of years.
- God does not ask us to do anything that He isn’t willing to do.

Lamech said to his wives, “Adah and Zillah, listen to my voice, you wives of Lamech, give heed to my speech, for I have killed a man for wounding me; and a boy for striking me; if Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech **seventy-sevenfold**.”

Genesis 4:23-24

- Our willingness to forgive should be as limitless as the extravagant vengeance of which Lamech once boasted.
- Seventy-seven times is a more natural rendering of the Greek in Matthew 18:22 than ‘seventy times seven’ and is the clear meaning of the Hebrew in Genesis 4:24.

Jesus said, “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.” Matthew 18:23

- The banking motif is a powerful image of financial accountability, which conjures up the concept of God’s reckoning of each person’s transactions in the course of a human life. – Brad H. Young

- In the story of the unforgiving servant, Jesus equates the king with the Heavenly Father. The king is reviewing his books, or 'taking account of his servants.' Like a manager going through the books in a business, the king is checking each servant to see that they have been good stewards of the resources made available. He is the judge, adjudicator, and jury of this process.
- It was this 'taking account' that brought the servant to the king's attention.
- When the servant's account became known to the king, he called the servant in for judgment.

John the Apostle wrote...

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and **books** were opened; and another **book** was opened, which is the **book of life**; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the **books**, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the **book of life**, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:11-15

“When he [the king or ruler] had begun to settle them [the accounts], one who owed him ten thousand talents [Greek τάλαντον *talanton*] was brought to him.” Matthew 18:24

* In the New Testament, the “talent” was used as a unit of weight but otherwise, it was a unit of money. Different cultures had different talents, but most scholars believe Jesus would have been referring to the Attic/Athenian talent.

How much is 10,000 talents?

- A denarius was a day's wage for a common workingman. In today's world, at \$7.25 minimum wage, it would be \$58. In antiquity, a denarius could buy 15 pounds of wheat.
- A talent was 6,000 denarii [plural], or 20 years of daily wages for a six-day workweek. Today, one talent would be worth \$348,000.
- 10,000 talents was 200,000 years of labor! It was 60,000,000 working days. In modern American money, it was worth **\$3.48 billion**.

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people (Jews) scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king’s laws, so it is not in the king’s interest to let them remain. If it is pleasing to the king, **let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver** into the hands of those who carry on the king’s business, to put into the king’s treasuries.” Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. The king said to Haman, “The silver is yours, and the people also, to do with them as you please.” Esther 3:5-11

“But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord [Greek κύριος *kurios*] commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.” Matthew 18:25

- “Why is the debt to God represented as so enormous? Partly as a true contrast to offenses between man and man, and partly because every sin is an act of rebellion, and thus small acts, which attract little or no attention, may be great sins.” – Alfred Plummer
- “Our debt to God is one we could never repay. That is why hell lasts for eternity.” – Hampton Keathley IV

What is our spiritual debt to God?

- and He Himself **bore our sins** in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 1 Peter 2:24
- and He Himself is the **propitiation for our sins**; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. 1 John 2:2
- It was for freedom that Christ **set us free**; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

Sold as a slave because unable to repay debt

- Now a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord; and the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.” 2 Kings 4:1
- Thus says the Lord, “For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its punishment, because they sell the righteous for money and the needy for a pair of sandals.” Amos 2:6

“So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’”

Matthew 18:26

* The unforgiving servant did not admit his inability to repay.

Q: How did a person incur such a large debt?

A: Maybe accumulated interest on a defaulted loan or a case of embezzlement. Maybe it was a generational family debt.

“And the lord of that slave **felt compassion** and released him and **forgave him the debt** [Greek δάνιον *daneion*].” Matthew 18:27

*As the servant begs for mercy, his lord does not give him more time to prolong the agony of his inability to pay. Instead he is moved with compassion and forgives the entire debt. Only an extremely noble and generous king or landowner was able to demonstrate such an unexpected display of compassion. The servant and his family are spared lifelong slavery. – Brad H. Young

What should the forgiven servant do next?

- He has the opportunity to start his life over
- He has the opportunity to release his worry
- He has the opportunity to be thankful
- He has the opportunity to be a gracious person
- He has the opportunity to be a forgiving person

“But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred [100] denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’” Matthew 18:28

- A denarius was a day’s wage for a common workingman. In today’s world, at \$7.25 minimum wage, it would be \$58. In antiquity, a denarius could buy 15 pounds of wheat.
- 100 denarii was four months’ wages. In modern American money, the second slave owed a debt of **\$5,800**.
- The first slave had been forgiven a debt of **\$3.48 billion**.

“So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’ But he [the first servant] was unwilling and went and threw him [the second servant] in prison until he should pay back what was owed.” Matthew 18:29-30

*The first debt was 600,000 times as large as the second debt

There is no precedent in the Bible for a debtor paying debts from prison. However, there is an aspect of Roman law that may have been the cultural reference this parable is built around considering the Judeans of Jesus day were ruled by Rome. In the Roman Constitution known as the Laws of the 12 Tables, there is a detailed set of laws on debtors that shows a great deal of similarity to the parable. A debtor who does not pay can be taken to court and put in chains and forced into a number of arrangements whereby they work off the debt through servitude. Others can come and pay the debt on their behalf, thus releasing them from prison. A debt that cannot be paid resulted in slavery to the creditor or sale on the slave market. – Wikipedia

“So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved [Greek *elypēthēsan*, “grieved or sad to the point of distress”] and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.” Matthew 18:31

*When you have been shown grace, even the unbelieving culture expects you to show grace.

“Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you **all that debt** because you pleaded with me. ‘Should you not also have had mercy [Greek verb ἐλεέω *eleeo*] on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers [jailers] until he should repay all that was owed him.”

Matthew 18:32–34

- In this parable the unforgiving servant is sent to the torturers by the king (God) for his unwillingness to forgive others. In the broader context of understanding the law of love, and the immediate context of forgiveness, I think this means that if we are unwilling to love well and forgive others, God will “torture” us. I interpret torture as causing us to live and fail by our own efforts, to face our evil, recognize our sin and appreciate God’s forgiveness of us. - Hampton Keathley IV
- Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and **He will have compassion** on him, and to our God, for **He will abundantly pardon**. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:7-9

Did the King who was compassionate and gracious revoke His forgiveness? Does God go back on His Word? Did He forgive an insurmountable debt and then change His mind and have “torturers” wring every last cent from the first slave? If so, that’s a terrifying God. And yet, that’s how most of us read the story, because the truth is that this IS something we would do to, and desire for, someone who was ungrateful for our kindness. But the Greek showcases another possibility that does not compromise the nature of Adonai. What if (and the Greek easily allows this) the Lord handed the first slave over to the torturers until he repaid all that the second slave owed him? In other words, what if the King required the first slave to be “tortured” until he forgave the second slave’s debt? When we are in a state of unforgiveness, who is imprisoned? Who is tortured, embittered, and in turmoil? The one we haven’t forgiven, or us?... The word “torturers” conjures visions of the Greek god Hades and his hellhound Cerberus. But the Greek word actually means a prison keeper or jailer. Unforgiveness is a jailer, and forgiveness opens the door to the cell.

- Kisha Gallagher

Then the Lord [Yahweh] passed by in front of him [Moses] and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, **slow to anger**, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who **forgives iniquity**, transgression and sin; yet **He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished**, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” Exodus 34:6-7

“The lord is sovereign in the story, which first and foremost reinforces the Jewish understanding of God as a compassionate and just judge, who will show limitless mercy as well as pronounce severe judgment.” — Brad H. Young

Jesus said, “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.” Matthew 18:35

*The Lord was teaching that forgiveness ought to be in direct proportion to the amount forgiven. The first servant had been forgiven all, and he in turn should have forgiven all. A child of God has had all his sins forgiven by faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore when someone sins against him, he ought to be willing to forgive ... from the heart no matter how many times the act occurs. - Bible Knowledge Commentary

*Unforgiveness in the realm of personal relationships will cast a person out of God's presence forever. – Brad H. Young

- Jesus taught, “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

Matthew 6:14-15

- For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:13
- The first servant represents everyone. We all have a massive debt that God has forgiven. We are expected to model this forgiveness, out of thankfulness and appreciation, by forgiving others of their much smaller debts towards us.

- <https://www.messiah-of-god.com>

- Hurt people hurt people
- Loved people love people
- Forgiven people forgive people

“The close similarity between the two mini-dramas of the parable portray how each person must strive to be like God. The first dramatizes God’s love, when the lord forgives his servant. The second exactly re-creates the first mini-drama except for the change in roles between the merciful lord and his unforgiving servant, which shows how much every human being is like God. Every individual is created in God’s image and must seek to understand and imitate His ways. Being made in His likeness, people must love and forgive in the same way, which God shows mercy, those who have done wrong.” – Brad H. Young

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Ephesians 4:32

Jesus taught, “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.” Matthew 5:23-24

“Forgiveness and reconciliation should precede prayer and worship.” – Brad H. Young

Lessons For Us

- When we are injured by another, it establishes a debtor relationship. We forgive by canceling the debt someone owes us for wrong done. We don't expect them to pay us back. We don't try to get even.
- My motivation to forgive is my own forgiveness. I can never repay God what I owe. When someone else does evil to me, they can never repay either. But when I recognize my forgiveness, I won't hold them accountable for their evil. When we refuse to forgive someone else, it is the same as saying, "I would never do such a thing." When we realize our own evil, we know that we can and will do the same things to others.
- Misery is assured if I fail to forgive.
- What about the person that does not come seeking forgiveness and repent? Jesus forgave the people while He was on the cross and they had not repented. They did not know what they were doing. Until they repented there could be no remission of sin and no relationship, but what forgiveness does is release the other person from me. It turns the problem over to God. I no longer hold it in my power to judge. - Hampton Keathley IV

What about our debt to God?

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, **having canceled out the certificate of debt** consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:13-14

Jesus teaches that forgiveness should be in proportion to the amount forgiven. The first servant had been forgiven all, and he then should have forgiven all. A child of God by faith through Christ has had all sins forgiven. Therefore, when someone offends or sins against us we should be willing to forgive him from a heart of gratitude for the grace to which we ourselves are debtors.

- He paid a debt song
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijoDkateYL8>