

PARABLES





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Chalice Year—Primary, Unit II
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CHAPTER 1

Jesus Taught in Parables

Among the Jewish people, *rabbi* was a name for a respected teacher. Rabbis knew the Law of God. They were kind and gracious to others. They helped the needy. They preached in the synagogues.

Rabbis were good storytellers. They shared the stories of all the great men and women of the Scriptures.

Rabbis helped men and women to keep the commandments of God. Wherever they went, they taught people.

Jesus was called a rabbi. When he taught, everyone listened. His teaching was very special.

One day a great crowd was following him. He went up and sat down on the side of a mountain. His disciples came near, and Jesus began to speak.

He said, “Do not worry about what you will eat or wear. Look at the birds flying up there in the sky! They do not pick food and store it away. Yet God feeds them. Are you not more valuable than the birds?”

He added, “Why do you worry about clothing? Look at the lilies growing in the field. They do no work. They do not spin to make cloth. But even King Solomon, with all his gold and fine garments, did not look as beautiful as those flowers! If God takes care of plants in this way, you can be sure God will take care of you.”

Jesus said that his followers are lamps that make light in the world. He said that his disciples are salt that gives flavoring to things.

Most of the time, Jesus taught with *parables*. Many rabbis used parables, but Jesus told the best ones.

A parable is a short story about people doing everyday things. The story shows how God wants us to think and live. Each time we hear a parable of Jesus, it seems fresh and new—as if we had not heard it before.

In this book we will read about nine of Jesus' famous parables. They help us to remember what is truly important. They teach us what God is like.

CHAPTER 2

The Two Houses

Jesus sat down on the side of a mountain to teach. His disciples and crowds of people were there to hear him. His words are written in *Matthew 5:3* through *7:27*.

As he finished speaking, Jesus told a parable. He wanted the people to take his words to heart and do them. He said, “Everyone who hears me and does what I say will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock.”

The people listened. They wondered, “What does he mean?”

In Jesus' day, most houses were made from mud and stone. The floors were made of dirt, clay, and chips of stone. The roof was clay packed tight over wood beams and branches.

Jesus said, “The rain fell. Floods came. Winds blew hard against the house. But the house did not fall. It was built on a solid rock.”

The people nodded. They knew about storms. Sometimes the rains would wash away the floors and walls of their houses. Everyone would have to work hard to repair the damage.

Then Jesus said, “Everyone who hears me and does *not* do what I say will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell. Floods came. Winds blew hard against the house. It fell down with a great crash!”

“Yes,” the people thought. “That is what would happen. Water would seep under the house. The floor would sink into the sand. The walls would crumble. The whole building would tumble down.”

The people had never heard anyone teach this way. They were astonished. Jesus was strong and sure about what he said. He was different from other teachers.

CHAPTER 3

Three Servants

In the last days of his life, Jesus was teaching his disciples about the time to come—when God would rule over everything in heaven and on earth. He told a parable:

A rich man went away on a journey. Before he left, he called three of his servants and asked them to take care of his property.

One servant received five talents, another two talents, and another one talent. (A talent was a very large sum of money.)

The first servant took the five talents and did some trading. He made five more.

The second servant did the same thing. He traded and made two more talents.

But the third servant dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time, the rich man came back home. He wanted to know what had happened to his money.

The first servant said, "Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more."

The master said, "Well done, good servant. You can be trusted. I will put you in charge of many things. Rejoice."

The second servant said, "Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more."

The master said, "Well done, good servant. You can be trusted. I will put you in charge of many things. Rejoice."

Then the third servant came. He said, "Master, I knew you were a harsh man. I was afraid. So I hid the talent you gave me in the ground. Here it is."

The master replied, "You are a wicked and lazy servant! You should have put my money in the bank so it would earn interest."

Then the master took the third servant's one talent and gave it to the first servant. He sent the lazy servant away with no kind words.

We can read this parable in *Matthew 25:14-30*.



The rich man wanted to know about his money.

CHAPTER 4

The Sower

Many, many people wanted to hear Jesus teach.

One day he got into a boat at the edge of the sea. A great crowd gathered on the shore. Jesus turned to them and shared many parables. Here is one that everyone remembered:

A person went out and sowed seed.

- Some of the seed fell at the side of the path. Birds swooped down and ate the grains before they could sprout and grow.
- Other seed fell on ground that was filled with rocks. The earth was not deep. The seed took root and grew for a little while. But its roots were weak. The sun burned the plants. They withered and died.
- Other seed fell where there were big, thorny plants growing. The new sprouts were choked out. They did not produce anything.
- Other seed fell on good ground. It grew and grew. At the time of harvest, there was a good crop: thirty, sixty, or a hundred times as much as the seeds that were planted!

When Jesus finished this parable, he said to the crowd, “Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!”

After the people went away, Jesus was with his twelve disciples and a few other people. They asked him to say more about the parable of the seeds that were planted.

Jesus explained that the seed is God's word. People who hear are like the different kinds of soil:

- Some hear God and turn away.
- Some hear God and are full of joy, but then they turn away.
- Some hear God, but they would rather be busy and make money.
- And some people hear God's word and let it sink deep into their hearts. They grow and serve. Their lives are fruitful.

We can read this parable of Jesus in *Matthew 13:1-9* and *Mark 4:1-9* and *Luke 8:4-8*.

CHAPTER 5

Lost Sheep, Lost Coin

In Jesus' day, people hated the men who collected taxes for the Roman government. Some of them were dishonest. They took people's money for themselves.

But the tax collectors liked to hear Jesus teach. They came to listen as he told about the kingdom of God. Other people who had done wrong things also wanted to be with the Teacher.

The good, religious people did not understand. They grumbled about what Jesus was doing. They said, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

When Jesus heard what they were saying, he told these parables:

I.

If you had a hundred sheep, and you lost one of them, what would you do? Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine sheep and go out to look for the one that was lost? Wouldn't you keep looking until you found it?

A shepherd who finds a lost sheep is full of joy. He takes the animal on his shoulders and brings it back. When he returns home, he calls all his friends and neighbors. He says, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost."

Jesus added: There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who turns back to God than over the ninety-nine people who were always good.

II.

If you were a woman who had ten silver coins, and you lost one of them, what would you do? Wouldn't you light a lamp and sweep the house to look for the missing coin? Wouldn't you search carefully until you found it?

A woman who finds a lost coin calls out to her friends and neighbors. She says, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin I lost."

Jesus added: There is joy among God's angels over one sinner who turns back to God.

We can read these parables in *Luke 15:4-10*.

CHAPTER 6

The Prodigal Son

After Jesus told about the lost sheep and the lost coin, he shared another famous parable:

A man had two sons. The younger son said, "Father, give me my share of the property." So the father divided his property between the two.

The younger son took all that he had and went to a far country. He lived wildly and wasted everything.

Then came a famine. There was not enough to eat. The young man was hungry and had no money. He had to take a job feeding pigs on a farm. No one gave him anything. He wished he could eat the pigs' food.

He sat up straight and said to himself, "My father has servants who are better off than I am! I am dying. I will go home and tell my father I have sinned. I will ask to be one of his hired men."

The young man traveled toward home. As he came, his father saw him. The father ran to meet him and put his arms around his son and kissed him. The son started to make his speech, "Father, I have sinned. I am not worthy to be your son."

The father interrupted. He said to his servants, "Bring the best robe and put it on my son. Put a ring on his finger. Kill a calf, and let us have a great meal. My son was dead and is alive. He was lost and now is found." Everyone began to celebrate.

The older brother was out in the field. As he came to the house, he heard music and dancing. A servant told him what had happened and why everyone was so glad.

The older brother was very angry. He would not go in. As his father came out and begged him, he said, "I have stayed here and worked hard. I have obeyed you all these years. You never had a celebration for me! Now you are doing it for this son who wasted everything and lived wildly."

The father said, "You are always with me. All that I have is yours. We had to celebrate. Your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found."

We can read this parable in *Luke 15:11-32*.

CHAPTER 7

The Good Samaritan

A lawyer decided to give Jesus a test. He asked, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus said, “Well, what does the law say?”

The lawyer answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus said, “That is the right answer. Do this, and you will live.”

The lawyer wanted to find a way to make himself seem like a good and thoughtful person. He said to Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?”

Then Jesus told a parable:

A man was traveling the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Robbers attacked the man. They took his clothes, and they beat him. They left him by the roadside, half dead.

A priest came along. He looked at the man, crossed over to the other side of the road, and walked on.

Next came a Levite, a religious leader. He, too, passed by the injured man.

But a Samaritan traveler came close. He looked at the man and felt very sorry for him. He bandaged the wounds and poured on wine and oil.

Then the Samaritan lifted the man onto his animal and took him to an inn. He stayed all night to care for him.

On the next day, the Samaritan gave money to the innkeeper. He said, “Take care of this man. When I come back, I will pay you for any other expenses.”

As Jesus finished this parable, he asked, “What do you think? Which of these three people (the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan), was a *neighbor* to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The lawyer said, “The one who was kind.”

Jesus said, “Go. Do the same thing yourself.”

We can read the parable in *Luke 10:30-36*.

CHAPTER 8

Workers in a Vineyard

Jesus' disciples asked him what the kingdom of God is like. He told them this parable:

A man who owned a vineyard went out early one morning to hire people. He agreed to pay them the usual amount for a day's labor among the grapevines. They went right to work.

Around nine o'clock, the man went to the market area and saw people standing around idle. He said, "You can work for me, and I will pay what is right." So they went to work.

At noon, the man found more workers and sent them into the vineyard.

At three in the afternoon, still more workers were hired and put to work.

About five o'clock, the man found some more people just standing around. He said to them, "Why have you been idle all day?"

They answered, "No one hired us." So the vineyard owner hired them.

That evening as the sun was going down, the owner said to his manager, "Call all the workers. Pay everyone. Start with the ones I hired last and then pay the ones who were first."

The workers who were hired at five o'clock received a full day's pay.

The ones who were hired first thought they would get more, since they had worked so much longer. But they got the same amount as the others. They grumbled to the owner, "These people came at five o'clock and worked only an hour. You paid them just as much as you paid us. Yet we worked all through the day in the hot sun."

The owner said, "Didn't we have an honest agreement about what you would receive? Take what is coming to you, and go. I decided to pay everyone the same. Can't I do whatever I wish with what belongs to me? Do you envy me because I am generous? So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

We can read this parable in *Matthew 20:1-16*.

CHAPTER 9

The Banquet

Jesus was invited on a sabbath day to have a meal at the home of a Pharisee (a religious leader).

He noticed the guests all wanted to sit in the best seats. Jesus told them, “When you go to a wedding, do not sit in the place of honor. Someone more important than you may come, and then you will have to move. You will feel ashamed. It is better to take a lower place at the table. Then your host may ask you to move up. If that happens, you will feel honored.”

Jesus said, “If you try to act important, you will be made humble. If you are a humble person, you will be made important.”

He turned to the man who invited him to the meal. “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not just invite friends and relatives and rich people. They can pay you back by inviting you to their homes. Instead, invite poor people—people who are crippled, lame, or blind. You will be blessed for having them.”

A dinner guest said, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

Then Jesus told a parable:

Someone invited many people to a great dinner.

On the day of the dinner, the host sent his servant to tell the guests, “Come. Everything is ready now.”

But all the guests had excuses.

The first one said, “I have bought some land and must go to see it. I am sorry.”

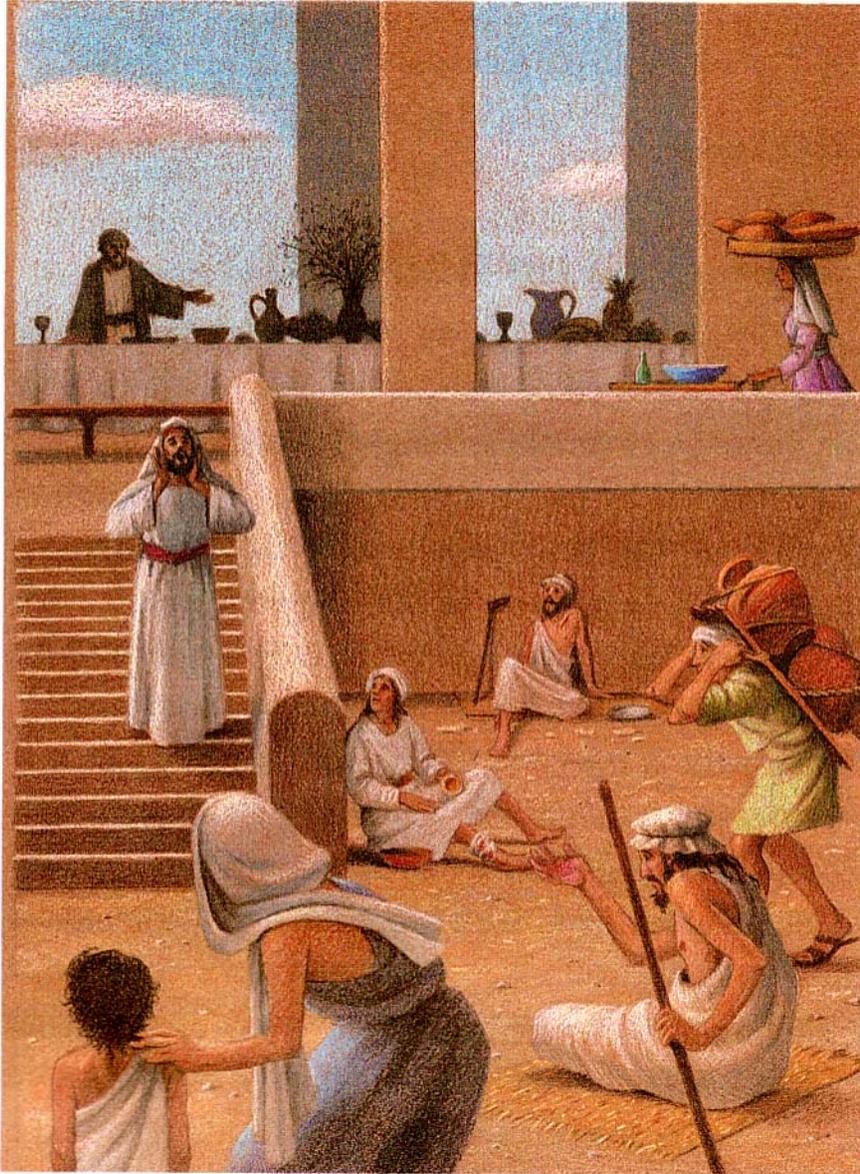
Another said, “I have bought some oxen. I am going to try them out. I am sorry.”

One said, “I have just been married. I cannot come.”

The servant told his master what people had said. The man grew angry. He said, “Go out into the streets and lanes. Bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.”

The servant did as he was asked. But still there was room for more people. The master said, “Go out into the roads and lanes and bring more people so that my house will be full. I tell you, those I invited at first will not taste my dinner.”

We can read this parable in *Luke 14:16-24*.



Many were invited to the banquet.