



# Stories Jesus Told: Unpacking parables in Matthew's Gospel

## **Stories Jesus Told: Unpacking Parables**

The Gospels show us that Jesus taught the crowds through parables. Parables about farming, parables about fishing, parables about families, parables with pictures drawn from everyday life. Each parable points us to a feature of the Kingdom of God or in Matthew's case the Kingdom of Heaven.

This set of readings we will explore a range of parables in Matthew's Gospel. Pray that through each parable God might increase your understanding of God's Kingdom and challenge your life in serving him.

Each study focuses in on a key parable or cluster of small parables. Whether you read it on your own or with a friend or as part of a group the simple questions are just a guide to help you get into each parable in more depth

### **Tim's Guidelines for Interpreting and Applying Parables**

#### **What is a parable?**

Jesus often taught using parables - short stories with two levels of meaning. On the surface, a parable is a short story. Teachers like Jesus, however, used these short stories to represent a deeper, spiritual truth. For example, he famously uses the story of a wayward son and welcoming father to symbolise humanity's relationship to God and God's response to people when they return to him.

#### **As We Apply...**

We need to teach parables in line with their genre. As teachers of God's word, it will be our job to retell these stories. Yes, we

want to be creative and interesting, but we should ensure that we let the power and simplicity of the story do the work.

#### **How do parables work?**

Parables provoke a response from the hearer. They do this through their simplicity, vividness, and the often unexpected or shocking turns in the story. Listeners who were favourable to Jesus would be provoked to reflection and have their consciences pricked through the sharp point of the story. On the other hand, the often veiled meaning of the parables meant that anyone who did not listen closely enough to understand were confirmed in their ignorance and their status as being under the judgement of God. If such listeners did understand, they were often provoked to further reject Jesus. Jesus illustrates this dynamic himself through his parable of the sower, who sows seeds only to find that a small number of them take root and grow fruitfully. In the same way, only some accept Jesus' teaching, while others are confirmed in their hardness of heart and remain under the judgement of God.

#### **As we apply...**

We need to let the parables do their thing! One of the big issues with people today is their apathy towards God and his gospel. They tend not to care. We want these powerful stories to prod and provoke people to respond to Jesus - positively or negatively. In talks and in small groups, don't dull the sharp points, but let Jesus' stories do their work.

#### **How should we interpret parables?**

In general, we should expect parables to contain one, two, or maybe three key points. It is tempting to allegorise the parables of Jesus. This is when you assign meaning to many details of the parable and draw meaning from the parable into many different points. For example, assigning specific meanings to the estate, the far country, the pigs, the pig's food, the hired hands, the cape, the ring, the sandals, and the fatted calf in the parable of the lost son.

At the same time, parables also contain stock metaphors such as kings, sons, servants, vineyards, banquets etc, which would have been known and used in Jesus' time. In using these images, a parable may have several points to make within the framework of its fundamental one or two points.

#### As We Apply...

We need to focus on one or two key points and really drive it/them home. Retell the parable, make the point, apply the point, illustrate the point in modern-day examples, and give examples of it applied. Really let these one-or-two-point sermons of Jesus do their thing.

#### What do parables teach?

In terms of subject matter, Jesus used parables to explain the kingdom of God (the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew), the character of God, and the expectations God has for his people.

#### As We apply ...

We need to make sure they we are applying the big idea that the parable teaches about God, his kingdom, and/or

discipleship. Don't get distracted by other side issues, but focus on these key ideas.

#### How should we exegete and teach parables?

Like a joke Parables often work like a joke, of which there are two main elements: (1) the expected points of reference, and (2) the unexpected turn. The points of reference set up the story, and the unexpected turn, or punchline, give it its cutting edge.

For example, in the parable of the good samaritan, the expected points of reference are all the details that an original hearer would know and expect. A man gets beaten and robbed on the road, yes. A Levite and a priest both avoid him, probably thinking he was dead, yes. The hearers know these things and they sound normal or plausible. Then, there is the unexpected turn: that a Samaritan, an unclean enemy of the Jews, would stop and help this man to such a great extent. This turn drives home the point of what it means to love your neighbour.

#### Who is the audience?

Another element in understanding parables is identifying their audience. When you identify the audience, you can work out what their points of reference would have been (see the previous point), and how they would identify with the story. Parables often act like mirrors, and if you can hold the parable up to the original hearer and then to ourselves and our hearers, they can be very powerful.

For example, the parable of the lost son is told to people who are grumbling about Jesus welcoming sinners

## **Study 1 A Story about a Sower Matthew 13:1-23**

and tax collectors. Jesus tells the story to convict the hearers of God's love for the lost and their need to join with God in their rejoicing over the salvation of the lost. In the parables of the lost coin and lost sheep, this invitation is implicit, by simply demonstrating God's love for the lost. In the parable of the lost son, the character of the older brother obviously symbolises the Pharisees, drawing them explicitly into the parable.

Now but not yet

A good chunk of the parables teach about the nature of the kingdom of God.

As with other New Testament teaching on the kingdom, they present the kingdom as both now and not yet. That is, the kingdom has arrived in Jesus, and the kingdom has not arrived yet. Many parables teach the urgency of things because the kingdom of God is at hand. Others teach that the kingdom will grow from small things (e.g. the parable of the mustard seed).

The primary thrust of the kingdom parables is the kingdom as already here. These parables have a two-fold thrust - a negative side and a positive side: (1) the kingdom is here, judgement is coming, disaster and catastrophe are at the door and (2) there is good news, salvation is freely offered to all. In both of these cases the point is that the hearers need to respond to the impending kingdom to avoid disaster and receive salvation.

**Tim Escott**

13:1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.

3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: 'A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 Whoever has ears, let them hear.'

10 The disciples came to him and asked, 'Why do you speak to the people in parables?' 11 He replied, 'Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.'

14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:  
' "You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.  
15 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."

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

18 ‘Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 when anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 22 The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. 23 But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.’

Big Idea: How does God’s Kingdom Come ?

What is the place of the Bible in the growing of God’s Kingdom?

What are the different reactions to the Bible in our Community?

When have you had to defend the Bible?

### **Take a closer look at the parable**

13:1-3 Set the scene what do we learn about the context?

13:3-9 What’s the parable about ?

13:10-17 What does Jesus teach the insiders about parables? How Does Isaiah 6 help us to understand how parables work ? Why does Jesus teach in parables? How does it help us understand the parable of the sower?

13:18-23 Not all parables are explained, but we get Jesus explanation for the sower. What does **the seed** represent? How does this unlock the parable for us? What do the four different soils represent? What does that look like for us?

What does the parable mean for us ?

What do the four soils look like in our days?

What does it mean to bear fruit?

How can we apply the parable Today

What warning and encouragement is here for us?

How is it challenging me to think about the big idea?

How is it challenging me to live in the light of the parable?

What does it challenge you to pray about?

## **Study 2 A Story about Weeds and Seeds**

**Matthew 13:24-43**

24 Jesus told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared. 27 ‘The owner’s servants came to him and said, “Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?” 28 ‘“An enemy did this,” he replied. ‘The servants asked him, “Do you want us to go and pull them up?” 29 ‘“No,” he answered, “because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”’

31 He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.

32 Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.’

3 He told them still another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about thirty kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.’

34 Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. 35 So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.’

36 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.’

37 He answered, ‘The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

40 ‘As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

**Big Idea:** Why do people shy away from teaching about Judgement? How do you answer the person who asks ‘What is God doing about the problem of evil people?’

### **Take a closer look at the parable**

What are the three parables about ? V.24, V.31, V.33

What do they teach us about the Kingdom of Heaven?

13:34-36 How does Jesus explain parables to the insiders? How do they work? Read Psalm 78:1-8, how does this add to our understanding of the parables of Jesus? Why does Matthew quote it?

13:37-42 How does the explanation of the story about weeds help? What does it teach us? What does the parable mean for us ? Who is wicked who is righteous?

What is the hope of the righteous?

What do you find challenging about the parable of the weeds?

How can we apply the parable Today ?

Why does the master wait to deal with evil? What do we learn?

How is it challenging me to think about the big idea?

How can we help people escape judgement?

How is it challenging me to live in the light of the parable?

What does it challenge you to pray about?

### **Study 3 A Story about a treasure, a pearl, and a net**

#### **Matthew 13:44-58**

<sup>44</sup> ‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. <sup>46</sup> When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. <sup>48</sup> When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down

and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away.

<sup>49</sup> This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Have you understood all these things?’ Jesus asked.

‘Yes,’ they replied. <sup>52</sup> He said to them, ‘Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.’

<sup>53</sup> When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. <sup>54</sup> Coming to his home town, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?’ they asked.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?’

<sup>56</sup> ‘Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?’ <sup>57</sup> And they took offence at him. But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honour except in his own town and in his own home.’ <sup>58</sup> And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

**Big Idea:** How do you value being part of God’s Kingdom?

What does your use of time and money say about what is important in your life?

Where does God and his Kingdom fit in your life?

#### **Take a closer look at the parable**

What do the 4 parables teach us? V.44, V.45, V.47, V.52

What surprises you about these parables?

13:52 58 How did the crowds respond to Jesus and his teaching?

How do they challenge you to think more about the Kingdom of Heaven? What do the parables mean for us ?

How can we apply the parables today?

How is it challenging you to think about the big idea?

How does your life show you value being a member of God's Kingdom?

How is it challenging you to live in the light of the parable?

What does it challenge you to pray about?

'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times'

22 Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. 23 'Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 'At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." 27 The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go. 28 'But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded.

29 'His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back." 30 'But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 'Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

#### **Study 4 A Story about an unforgiving Servant Matthew 18:21-35**

15 'If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. 18 'Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 'Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.' 21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked,

## **Big Idea : What does forgiveness look like in action ?**

When have you had to forgive?

When have you had to ask for forgiveness?

What makes it hard to forgive?

### **Take a closer look at the parable**

18:15-20 What's the context for this parable?

V.21 What question is the parable addressing ?

What is the parable teaching us about forgiveness?

What is it teaching us about God's forgiveness?

What is the King's response to his servant? Is it too harsh?

What does the parable mean for us ?

What issues is this challenging you to deal with ?

What does this teach us about God's forgiveness?

How can we apply the parable today?

Where do you need to seek forgiveness and reconciliation?

What makes this difficult? How is it challenging me to think about forgiveness?

How is it challenging me to live in the light of the parable?

What does it challenge you to pray about?

"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us "

## **Study 5 A story about a boss and his help**

### **Matthew 20:1-19**

20 'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. 3 'About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the market-place doing nothing. 4 He told them, "You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." 5 So they went. 'He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. 6 About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"

7 ' "Because no one has hired us," they answered.

'He said to them, "You also go and work in my vineyard."

8 'When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first."

9 'The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. 10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 "These who were hired last worked only one hour," they said, "and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day."

13 'But he answered one of them, "I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

16 'So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

17 Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, 18 ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19 and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!’

**Big Idea:** How would you describe what grace is?  
How is it different from law or karma?

What's so amazing about grace?

#### Take a closer look at the parable

Why do you think Jesus told this parable?

20:1-15 What is this parable about? Who is it for?

Why are some of the workers disgruntled at the end of the day?

Why does the Boss give the same pay to all? Is this unfair?

What does the parable mean for us ?

How can we apply the parable today

How is it challenging me to think about the idea of God's generosity? How is it challenging me to live in the light of the parable?

Why is grace hard to receive?

What does it challenge you to pray about?

#### Study 6 A Story about some Bridesmaids Matthew 25:1-13

25 ‘At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

6 ‘At midnight the cry rang out: “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!”

7 ‘Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.”

9 ‘“No,” they replied, “there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.”

10 ‘But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

11 ‘Later the others also came. “Lord, Lord,” they said, “open the door for us!”

12 ‘But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.”

13 ‘Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

14 Then John’s disciples came and asked him, ‘How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?’

15 Jesus answered, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. **Mt 9:14-15**

30 ‘Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. **Mt 24:30–31.**

**Big Idea::** How do different people respond to the teaching of the second coming of Jesus? Where does the Bible use wedding pictures to illustrate this Kingdom truth?

#### **Take a closer look at the parable**

How is the Kingdom like bridesmaids? What do you know about ancient near eastern wedding practises? How does this help us here?

Who was wise, Why? Who was foolish, Why?

Who does the bridegroom represents?

What is the waiting picture illustrating?

What does the parable mean for us ?

What does it mean for us to be ready?

How can we apply the parable today?

How is it challenging me to think about waiting for the return of Jesus ? How do the other passages assist our understanding?

How is it challenging you live in the light of the parable?

What does it challenge you to pray about?

#### **Study 7 A Story about bags of gold**

##### **Matthew 25:14-30**

14 ‘Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. 15 To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. 17 So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. 18 But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

19 ‘After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. “Master,” he said, “you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.”

21 ‘His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

22 ‘The man with two bags of gold also came. “Master,” he said, “you entrusted me with two bags of gold: see, I have gained two more.”

23 ‘His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

24 ‘Then the man who had received one bag of gold

came. "Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you."

26 'His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. 28 'So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. 29 For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Big Idea: What does it mean to live fruitfully for God?

What are the marks of a fruitful Christian life?

#### **Take a closer look at the parable**

How is the Kingdom of heaven like a man who entrusts his house to his servants?

What is the expectation of the master with his servants?

What did each servant do with his gold?  
How do you feel about the master's response?

Why is the last servant condemned?

What does the parable mean for us ?

What are we responsible for in the present life?

How can we apply the parable today ?

How is it challenging you to think about the big idea?

How is it challenging you to live in the light of the parable?

What does it challenge you to pray about?

#### **Study 8 A Story about sheep and goats**

#### **Matthew 25:31-46**

31 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 'Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me

in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

37 ‘Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you ill or in prison and go to visit you?”

40 ‘The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

41 ‘Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was ill and in prison and you did not look after me.”

44 ‘They also will answer, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or ill or in prison, and did not help you?”

45 ‘He will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” 46 ‘Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.’

Big Idea: How do you get ready for the day of judgment?

### **Take a closer look at the parable**

How do V.31-33 set the scene for the action

V34-38 What do we learn from the conversation with the sheep?  
Why are they commended? What do we learn from V.40

V. 41 –45 What do we learn from the conversation with the goats? Why are they condemned ?

What does the parable mean for us ?

What do we learn about God as Judge?

If we are saved by faith in Jesus, how does this parable reconcile with that truth?

How can we apply the parable today

What marks you out as a sheep or a goat?

How is it challenging me to think about the big idea?

What does this teach us about judgment?

How is it challenging you to live in the light of the parable?

What does it challenge you to pray about?

### **Study 9 Stories about two Sons, and ungrateful tenants Matthew 21:28-46**

28 ‘What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, “Son, go and work today in the vineyard.” 29 ‘ “I will not,” he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. 30 ‘Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, “I will, sir,” but he did not go.

31 ‘Which of the two did what his father wanted?’

'The first,' they answered.

Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.'

33 'Listen to another parable: there was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall round it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

35 'The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them in the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. "They will respect my son," he said.

38 'But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance." 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40 'Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?'

41 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,' they replied, 'and he will rent the vineyard to other

tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.'

42 Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures:

' "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes"

43 'Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.'

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them.

46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

**Big Idea:** What does it mean to honour Jesus as the Son of God?

### Take a closer look at the parable

V.28-32 What is the point of the first parable?  
Who is commended ? Who is condemned?  
How does this challenge your Christian life?

V.33-46 This parable is directed to Pharisees, how does the context help us to understand the parable? What is the point of the parable of the tenants ?

V.42-45 How does Jesus apply the Old Testament's idea of the 'cornerstone' to himself? How does this sharpen the punchline of the parable?

What does the parable mean for us ?

How are we challenged to respond to Jesus ?

How can we apply the parable Today

How is it challenging me to think about the big idea?

How is it challenging me to live in the light of the parable?

What does it challenge you to pray about?

## **Study 10 The Story about the Wedding Feast**

### **Matthew 22:1-14**

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

22 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 'The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

4 'Then he sent some more servants and said, "Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet."

5 'But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

8 'Then he said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.

9 So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 He asked, "How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?" The man was speechless.

13 'Then the king told the attendants, "Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

14 'For many are invited, but few are chosen.'

**Big Idea : How does a person enter the Kingdom of God ? How does a person become a Christian?**

**Take a closer look at the parable**

V.45-46 what is the context for the parable how does this shape the way we read the parable?

V1-7 What is the first response to the King's invitation to the wedding feast? How does the King respond to them? Why is this shocking ?

V.8-10 Who is further invited?

V.11 –14 Another shocking moment , Why does the King respond this way to the poorly dressed man?

What does this teach us ? What does Jesus mean by V. 14

What does the parable mean for us ?

How does the immediate context help us to interpret the parable? Who are you in the parable?

How can we apply the parable Today?

What does it mean for us to accept God's invitation?

What does it mean to reject God's invitation?

Who is cast out of the Kingdom of God?

How is it challenging me to think about the big idea?

How is it challenging me to live in the light of the parable?

What does it challenge you to pray about?

