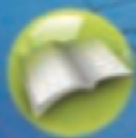


HEARING THE WORD



NIGEL BARGE

**Parables in Matthew
Leader's Guide**

Hearing the Word, Parables in Matthew, Leader's Guide

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(See separate file for parables only in Luke)

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Nigel Barge, April 2020

Scripture Quotations taken from

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Resources

The New Bible Dictionary 3rd edition, published by Inter Varsity Press
The New Bible Commentary 21st century edition. A commentary on every Bible book, IVP

www.blueletterbible.org

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Only in MATTHEW'S Gospel

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For similar studies on Parables found only in Luke's Gospel see
Hearing the Word PARABLES Luke LG on the Website:

<https://hearingtheword.org.uk>

Hearing the Word: A Tool for Bible reading

Here is a pattern you may use to study a passage of the Bible. It helps if you then write down your own questions and answers in a notebook.



LOOK – What does it say?

- 1) The Text
 - a) What questions does it raise -
Who, What, When, Where, Why, hoW?
 - b) What surprises you?
- 2) The Context?
 - a) the surrounding text
 - b) the Book of the Bible
 - c) the whole Bible
 - d) the place in the Bible Story



LEARN – What does it mean?

- 1) What type of writing is it?
- 2) Answer the questions
- 3) Summarise the passage



LISTEN – What is the message?

- 1) Which is the main point?
- 2) Which is the key verse?



LIVE – What is the response?

- 1) What does it show about God, (*Father, Son, Holy Spirit*) :
 - a) His nature and character?
 - b) His grace *
 - c) Jesus / his salvation **
- 2) What should I do?

* God's undeserved generosity is evident throughout the Bible, and it is perfectly expressed in Jesus.

** The Bible, from 'the Fall' onwards, describes God's plan of salvation through his Son. Thus, all the Scriptures speak in some way of Jesus (Luke 24:27).

Sharing the Word

*After carefully reading a passage of the Bible, and using the Hearing the Word Tool (p4) yourself, here is a pattern you might use to **share your thoughts with others**.*

Use

'Hearing the Word' can be used alone, with one other person, or in a group

Preparing for a group

Time put in alone beforehand will greatly benefit time spent together.

Work through the stages - LOOK, LEARN, LISTEN, LIVE.

Write down your own questions and answers

Format

- a. LOOK - Any questions? (If answer is known or not!)
Relevant cross references in rest of the Bible?
- b. LEARN - Answers to questions?
- c. LISTEN - Key verse and Main Point?
- d. LIVE - What does it show about God /His grace/ Jesus?
What should I do

n.b. Leave plenty of time for the LIVE section!

By also eating together and a time of prayer, you will have shared something of the life of the early church! (Acts 2:42-47)

Remember

As we gather round God's Word -

- a. Listen to the views of others.
- b. Make room for the novice. (They can join in too when you start by listing 'Any questions'.)
- c. Don't let the 'knowledgeable' dominate. Encourage everyone to think for themselves.
- d. Try to include others, especially 'seekers', in your time together.

* The **process** is explained and practiced in a four-hour course, suitable for all, called '**An Introduction to 'Hearing the Word'**

<https://hearingtheword.org.uk>

READING THE PARABLES

What is a parable?

A parable is a story told to make a **single main point**. There may be other things to learn from it but these are secondary to its purpose. This is unlike an allegory in which everything has a meaning and an application.

e.g. 'Aesop's Fables' are parables

'Pilgrim's Progress' is an Allegory.

The details of the story of a parable are set out to emphasise the main point and do not necessarily correspond to reality *e.g.* The parable of the persistent widow is told to encourage us 'to pray and not to give up'. (Luke 18:1) The unjust judge is not meant to reflect God or his justice but rather to underline that if the widow received justice by persisting with a fallible, human judge, how much more will God, who is truly just, hear and respond to our prayers for justice and 'His Kingdom to come.'

The subject of Jesus' parables

Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the Good News of God. 'The time has come', he said. 'The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News!' (Mark 1:14,15)

In all the preaching and teaching of Jesus,

- a) The subject was the Kingdom of God.
- b) The message was 'the King comes'.
- c) The command was to believe in and accept His benevolent rule.

Jesus taught about the Kingdom in Parables. Some are prefaced by the words, "The Kingdom of God is like" (literally, 'thus is the Kingdom of God'). However, in a general sense, all parables are 'of the Kingdom' in that they all describe in some way the relationship between God and people – the King and his subjects.

So it is possible to find God and ourselves within *all* Jesus' parables, and to identify the subject as some aspect of our relationship to 'the King'. Sometimes it is obvious, but other times it is more obscure. *For instance:*

a) Parable of the Talents
(Matthew 25:14-30)

1. Jesus = the master
2. Us = a servant
3. Subject = stewardship of what God has given us

b) Parable of the two builders
(Luke 6:47-49)

1. Jesus = the rock
2. Us = one of the builders
3. Subject = foundation/priority of our lives

The purpose of the parables

In using parables, Jesus had three intentions:

1) to teach

The Gospel writers tell us – *He taught them many things by parables and in his teaching said: “Listen, a farmer went out to sow...”* (Mark 4:2//Matthew 13:3)

Jesus spoke all these things to them in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. 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” (Matt 13:34).

Parables formed the backbone of Jesus’ teaching. They were an effective teaching method, simple, direct and memorable, referring to everyday life, often using tangible objects to convey thoughts and concepts.

2) to disguise (!)

The meaning of the parable was not, in the first instance, intended to be plain to all. Strictly speaking, not all parables are ‘illustrations’, for illustrations are meant to shed light. After Jesus told the parable of the sower, Mark says:

When he was alone, the twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, “The secret of the Kingdom has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that “they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven” ’ (Mark 4:11,12, quoting Isaiah 6:9,10).

This was probably to delay a superficial response; Jesus needed time to show that the long-awaited, all-conquering Messiah of Psalm 110 would not be the Roman-government-removing type of king expected, but would serve, suffer, die and be raised. (Matthew 16:16 with 16:21-23; Mark 10:42-45; Isaiah 53). Similarly, when the disciples first recognised he was the Messiah, he told them not to tell anyone *yet* who he was. Matt 16:20 // Mk 8:30 // Luke 9:21.

3) to encourage a response

The Kingdom of God is the unchallenged rule of Jesus. It comes when he is acknowledged and obeyed. This is what we ask for in the Lord’s Prayer – *Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.* (Matthew 6:10)

Every parable of the Kingdom encourages its hearers to identify with the parable personally and to respond to the ‘King’ in the appropriate way. The parables are meant to put the hearers on the spot.

For those who *can* understand, who acknowledge the King, action is expected. After he told a parable Jesus said, ‘He who has ears, let him hear’ (Mark 4:10). In other words, ‘If you understand what I am saying, act on it.’

The listeners heard and remembered the stories - but for the most part were unable to act on the parables because they did not yet acknowledge the secret of the Kingdom – Jesus *Himself* is King.

The context of a parable

Parables are often similes. ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is *like*...’

But quite often bits of the story work in reverse: ‘The Kingdom is *not* like....’

They can be metaphors, often referring to an easily imagined situation.

Sometimes Jesus begins, ‘Suppose...’ Luke 11:5, 15:4,8, which gives an easy clue that a parable follows; sometimes he begins, ‘When...’, (Luke 11:21) or ‘There was...’ (Luke 16:19) which could introduce fact or parable.

The situations are often described so vividly, like the robbery on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, we might remember them as if they were historical narrative. Their point is valid, even if the story did not actually happen.

To discern their meaning, parables have to be understood *in context*, provided before the story begins: *e.g. Luke 15:1-2, leading in to three parables.*

- 1) Who? It was told to specific people.. *e.g. Pharisees*
- 2) When? ... in a particular circumstance... *they kept aloof from ‘sinners’*
- 3) Why? ... as something has prompted it... *Jesus eats with sinners!*
- 4) What? ... for an action may be required *Welcome sinners, as God does.*

So, the standard *Hearing the Word* pattern (p4, LEARN) varies slightly in this volume to cater for parables, as shown below:

Given that a parable describes the relationship between God and people

- a) Where is God represented?*
- b) With whom are we meant to identify?*
- c) What is the subject?*

NB In Matthew, Jesus’ parables describe ‘The Kingdom of Heaven...’
... whereas in Luke and Mark the phrase is ‘The Kingdom of God’.

This is because Matthew is writing for a mainly Jewish audience, who avoided using the name of God directly, whereas Luke and Mark address a universal audience – Jew and Gentile.

Study 1

Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43

The weeds

Background information

This parable is the first of a series of three about growth (13:24-33).

In this one, there are two sowers and two kinds of seed. To sow darnel as an act of revenge was punishable in Roman law, so the parable may refer to a real-life situation. (Darnel was useful as fuel where wood was scarce.)

The call for patience is prominent in the story.

The explanation expands on the role of the Son of Man. He is not only the sower, as in 13:3-9, but the chief harvester, and owner of the kingdom.

Word List

24	<i>Kingdom of Heaven</i>	(a term used only in Matthew – 30 times) – the unchallenged rule of God as King. (Luke favours the phrase, ‘Kingdom of God’)
	<i>is like</i>	or <i>may be compared to</i> see also v31,33, etc
25	<i>weeds</i>	probably <i>darnel</i> , a poisonous plant related to wheat and virtually indistinguishable until the ears appear
30	<i>weeds burned</i>	i.e. destroyed
36	<i>left crowd</i>	explained to disciples then ‘tested’ them with another three parables (51)
37	<i>Son of Man</i>	OT term in Ezekiel (used 93 times) stresses the humanity of Jesus
39	<i>end of the age</i>	the Day of Judgment
41	<i>cause of sin</i>	literally <i>stumbling blocks</i> , ie people as in 16:23
43	<i>the righteous</i>	those who put their faith in God (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:1ff)

Bible Connections

41	<i>Son of Man sends out his angels</i>	<i>c.f.</i> 16:27; 25:31
	<i>causes of sin (stumbling blocks)</i>	people, as in 16:23
43	<i>shine like the sun</i>	Daniel 12:3

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

24 *What was the point of the previous one?*

Who was he speaking to?

What is 'the Kingdom of Heaven'?

36 *Why explain just the parable of the weeds?*

37 *Why does Jesus call himself 'the son of man'?*

38 *Why does the good seed not stand for 'the message of the Kingdom?' (13:19)*

39 *Who is the evil one?*

When is 'the end of the age'?

41 *What kind of people 'cause sin'?*

42 *How would there be time in the fiery furnace for weeping etc.*

43 *What does it mean 'the righteous'?*

Why 'their father'?

Who 'has ears'?

What surprises or confuses you?

Why are the evil ones not yet judged?

2) The Context

a) Surrounding passage

12:14 *The Pharisees plotted to kill him. Aware of this Jesus withdrew.*

12:22 *Healed a demon-possessed blind mute.*

12:24 *Pharisees thought he worked by power of Beelzebub / Satan' (26)*

13:1 *'That same day' - parables of kingdom of Heaven, sower and weeds.*

13:11 *Parable - secret of Kingdom of Heaven given to disciples.*

13:1-52 *Sower, weeds, mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, pearl, net*

13:53 *When he had finished, he moved on.*

b) The book

- 37 Son of man – sins forgiven (9:6)
- 39 Devil (4:5-11; 25:41)
- 43 “... ears, let them hear” (11:15; 13:9)

c) The whole Bible

- 29 / 40 God is patient, not wanting any to perish (2 Peter 3:9)
The wicked prospering (Job 21:7; Psalm 94:3)
- 38 Sons of the King(dom) (c.f. Romans 8:15)

d) The Bible Story

God and humanity have been separated by sin.

God's requirements of the Law have been given but not met.

God's solution is about to happen as He sends His Son, Jesus.

LEARN

1) Using the context of the passage, how do you answer the questions the passage raises?

- 24 We sowers don't know where the word will be received / bear fruit?
He was speaking to the crowd (c.f. 13:2)
'Kingdom of Heaven' is where the King of Heaven, God Himself, rules
- 36 He explains it because that is the one he is asked about.
- 37 Jesus calls himself 'the Son of Man', because he wants to emphasis his humanity.
- 38 The good seed stands for something different as it is a different parable.
- 39 The evil one is the Devil.
'The end of the age' is the end of this world / judgment day.
- 41 Submitting to the devil's temptations / rejecting God 'causes sin'?
- 42 There will be time in the fiery furnace for weeping, as people are not annihilated at death.
- 43 The righteous' are those declared fit for God's presence.
'Their Father' because they are part of God's family.
The people who 'have ears', understand the Word and act on it.

2) Given that a parable describes the relationship between God and people

a) Where is God represented?

43 *God the Father and God the Son – His Kingdom (41)*

b) With whom are we meant to identify?

43 *The righteous / the sons of the Father*

c) What is the subject?

The timing of the judgement of God.

3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

The evil ones are not yet judged, as that might hinder the growth of the wheat.

4) Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

The parable to the crowd tells that the good and bad plants won’t be separated till harvest time. Later Jesus explains to His disciples that the righteous sons of God and the sons of the evil one will be separated only at the final judgment – when evil is punished and righteousness rewarded.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

At the end of time, the good will be with God and the evil will be punished.

2) Which verse best sums up the passage’s message? **v 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.

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

24 *God’s privilege to reveal Himself to those He will.*

41 *God will not tolerate any sin in His Kingdom.*

b) His grace

38 *The good seed is sown by God before it sprouts!*

c) Jesus / His salvation

37 Jesus sows the good seed /the righteous.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

24 Listen to the Word of God.

36 Ask Him if I don't understand His Word

38 Note - There are weeds / sons of the evil one who are around us but whom we cannot discern yet (it takes an angel?)

41 Note - All who sin / do evil will be destroyed.

42 Note - The righteous are children of God.

43 Note - The righteous will shine in the Kingdom of God.

Note - The Word of God is sown everywhere but only those 'with ears' can hear.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Study 2

Matthew 13:44-52

Hidden treasure, the Pearl & the Fishermen

Background information

Jesus, having declared that ‘Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’ (12:50), goes on ‘that same day’ to teach in parables. (13:1)

To start with He is addressing a large crowd (13:2-34). However afterwards, He went into a house with his disciples and taught *them* (13:36-52). It was in this context that He told his disciple these last three parables.

Word List

- | | | |
|----|------------------|--|
| 48 | <i>bad fish</i> | those that are inedible |
| 49 | <i>righteous</i> | those who are declared righteous by faith (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4) |

Bible Connections

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|---|
| 49 | <i>wicked</i> | Matthew 12:39,45; 16:4; 18:32; 24:48; 25:2 |
| | <i>fiery furnace</i> | Matthew 13:42 |
| | <i>weeping and gashing of teeth</i> | Matthew 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30 |
| 52 | <i>Teacher of the Law</i> | Matthew 8:19; Mark 12:32 |

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

44 *How did he find it?*

Why did he hide it before he bought the field

Why did he sell everything he had?

45 *What is the difference with the merchant i.e. why the 2 parables*

47 *How is the kingdom like a net?*

48 *What is a 'good fish' and a 'bad fish'?*

49 *What does 'wicked' and 'righteous' mean.*

50 *What is 'the fiery furnace'?*

Why will there be 'wailing and gnashing of teeth'?

51 *Who are 'you'?*

Why had they been able to understand this? (Did they really?)

What are 'all these things'?

52 *Who are the teachers of the Law*

What are the new treasures and the old?

What surprises or confuses you

51 *Why does he mention –'teachers of the Law'? (None are described positively in Matthew Gospel.)*

2) The Context

a) Surrounding passage

48 *c.f. - good and bad / weeds and wheat (13:24ff)*

49 *End of the age (13:39,40)*

50 *Fiery furnace (13:42)*

51 *He taught them many things in parables (13:3)*

b) The book

49 *End of the age (24:3; 28:20)*

51 *Teachers of the Law all negative e.g. (5:20; 16:21, 23:15, 27:41)*

c) The whole Bible

44,45 *Sold everything (Luke 18:22)*

51 *c.f. The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them and they did not know what he was talking about (Luke 8:34).*

52 *New and old wine skins (Luke 5:37f)*

d) The Bible Story

God and humanity have been separated by sin.

God's requirements of the Law have been given but not met.

God's solution is about to happen as He sends His Son, Jesus.

LEARN

1) Using the context of the passage, how do you answer the questions the passage raises?

44 *He stumbled on it(?)*

He hid it as he wanted the discovery to belong to him.

He sold everything he had, as that is what it cost – everything.

45 *The pearl dealer was actively looking for pearls.*

47 *The kingdom is like a dragnet in that it 'catches' all, but only the 'good' are selected.*

48 *A 'good fish' is someone who has received the gift of the righteousness and a 'bad fish' is someone who has not.*

49 *The 'wicked' is someone who has not received the gift of righteousness, the 'righteous' has.*

50 *'The fiery furnace' is hell.*

There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth as there will be no enjoyment in hell.

51 *'You' are the disciples – {He spoke to the crowd (13:1-34) – then His disciples (13:36-52)}*

They understood these parables as Jesus had explained the previous ones.

'All these things' are 'the many things he had taught them in parables' that day. (13:3)

52 *These teachers of the Law are instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven, i.e are believers.*

The new treasures and the old and the New and the Old Covenant.

2) Given that a parable describes the relationship between God and people

a) Where is God represented?

The treasure, the pearl of great price, the fisherman

b) With whom are we meant to identify?

The discoverer of treasure, the pearl merchant, the fish.

c) What is the subject?

The subject is those who receive the Kingdom of Heaven.

3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

These are the true teachers of the Law, having not only The Old but also The New Covenant.

4) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

The Kingdom of heaven is like:

treasure – if 'unearthed' accidentally, it is worth everything

a pearl of great price – if searched for and discovered, it is worth everything

a drag net – it catches good fish, which are kept, and bad, which are destroyed

*A scribe who believes in Jesus, will bring the riches from Old **and** New Covenant.*

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

The Kingdom of Heaven is worth everything you have and embraces the Old and New Covenant

2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message **v 51**

Have you understood all these things?

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

49 God will judge and separate 'good' from 'bad'

b) His grace

44,49 God wills that some discover the priceless gift of His righteousness.

51 God gives His disciples understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven

c) Jesus / His salvation

52 Jesus, the King, rings treasure from the Old and New Covenant

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

44,45 Respond to the Gospel passing ALL that you have into God's hands.

48 Note – 'bad fish' are those who ignore the 'treasure / pearl' that is the Kingdom of Heaven.

49 Note - There will be a separation between the 'good' and the 'bad' on judgment day.

51 Grasp the Truth of the Kingdom of Heaven having discovered the worth of the righteousness of God by grace.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Study 3

Matthew 18:21-35

The unforgiving servant

Background information

Rabbinical teaching said you should forgive someone three times.

The ‘talent’ was the highest unit of currency, worth two years of a labourer’s wages; ‘ten thousand’ was the highest Greek numeral – a ‘billion pounds’ would convey the impression. (The total annual revenue for the province of Galilee at this period was 300 talents, so Jesus is using hyperbole).

In Jewish understanding, the heart is the governing centre of the body – physical, intellectual, psychological.

At v 22, some Greek manuscripts say, *seventy-seven times (77)*, others *seventy times seven (70 × 7 = 490)*.

Word List

24	<i>talents</i>	See above
27	<i>pity</i>	Compassion (c.f. 9:36)
28	<i>denarii</i>	One denarius was the daily wage for a labourer.
34	<i>jailers</i>	The Greek word means <i>torturers</i> .

Bible connections

21	<i>forgiveness</i>	6:12; Luke 23:34
22	<i>7 times</i>	Genesis 2:1
	<i>77 times</i>	Genesis 4:24 - Vengeance of Lamech.
27	<i>pity/ compassion</i>	Psalms 103:13; Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34
	<i>cancelling debt</i>	Deuteronomy 15:1-11
33	<i>mercy</i>	5:7; 9:13; 23:23; Exodus 33:19; Ephesians 2:4
34	<i>God’s anger</i>	Deuteronomy 4:25; Joshua 7:1; Psalm 7:11; Revelation 6:16; 19:15
	<i>God’s revenge</i>	Deuteronomy 32:35
	<i>God’s forgiveness</i>	Isaiah 1:18; Jeremiah 31:34; 1 John 1:9;
	<i>punishment in the Parables</i>	Matthew 13:42,50; 22:13; 25:30; 25:46
35	<i>forgiving and forgiveness</i>	Amos 1:3,6,9,11,13; 2:1,4,6;
	<i>the measure you use will be applied to you.</i>	Matthew 5:7; 6:14,15; James 2:13; Ephesians 4:32)

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 21 *What was happening before 'then'.?*
Why was Peter asking this question?
Who is his 'brother'?
Why did he chose the number 7?
- 22 *Why did Jesus make it '77', or even 490?*
- 23 *Why 'therefore'?*
Why 'The kingdom of heaven'?
- 25 *Sold to whom for what?*
Why were his wife and children included in it too?
- 27 *Why did he cancel the debt and not require any payment?*
- 28 *Why did he 'choke' him?*
- 30 *Why 'prison' and not sold?*
- 31 *What distressed them?*
- 32 *What does 'wicked' mean?*
- 34 *Why 'to be tortured'?*
How long would it take him to pay back what he owed?
- 35 *What is 'this'?*
Why 'my' and not 'your' Heavenly Father?
What does 'from the heart' mean?

What surprises or confuses you?

- 35 *How will Jesus' Heavenly Father treat the unforgiving?*

2) The Context

a) surrounding passages

- 18:1 *'At that time' marks the start of a fresh block of teaching.*
- 18:2 *Little children and kingdom – be like them (4), don't cause them to stumble (6), don't despise them. (10)*
- 18:15 *'Brother sinning against you' – resolution within church (17), involves Jesus himself. (20)*

b) whole Bible

21 Forgiveness (6:12; Luke 23:34)

33 Mercy (5:7; 9:13; 23:23; Exodus 33:19; Ephesians 2:4)

34 God's anger (Deut. 4:25; Josh 7:1; Ps 7:11; Rev 6:16; 19:15)

Punishment in Parables (Matthew 13:42,50; 22:13; 25:30; 25:46)

d) The Bible Story

God and humanity have been separated by sin.

God's requirements of the Law have been given but not met.

God's solution is about to happen as He sends His Son, Jesus.

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

21 *Jesus was teaching about church discipline.*

He asked to see how many times he had to 'win over' (15) his brother.

His 'brother' is a fellow Jew?

He chose the number 7 as the perfect number.

22 *Jesus made it '77' as an infinite number or as an OT reference.*

23 *'Therefore', to illustrate what is expected in 'forgiving 77 times'.*

This is what will happen in 'The Kingdom of Heaven'.

25 *Sold to another for money to recoup a fraction of the debt.*

Wife and children are included as he owned them.

27 *He cancelled the debt out of compassion / love.*

28 *He choked him out of personal resentment/judgment.*

30 *'Prison' was a punishment/a judgment.*

31 *The debtor and his lack of mercy distressed them.*

32 *Wicked means no connection with God/what is good.*

34 *'Tortured' was a punishment.*

It was impossible to pay back the huge amount owed.

35 *This is God's judgment in anger.*

'My' because if you behave like this you are not part of God's family.

'From the heart' means genuine, no longer 'remembering'/reckoning with the sin against you.

2) Given that a parable describes the relationship between God and people:

a) Where is God represented?

The King

b) Who are we meant to identify with?

The wicked servant

c) What is the subject?

Forgiveness of a brother

3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

God will commit the unmerciful / unforgiving to everlasting jail (He will never be able to pay back that which he owes.)

4) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

To teach Peter about forgiving, even repeated wrongdoing, Jesus described someone forgiven an unimaginably large debt then ruthlessly demanding payment from a person who owed him a paltry amount. When the initial creditor heard of it, he punished the man he had previously forgiven. When God forgives us the wrongs we do, it obliges us to forgive those who wrong us.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

God expects us to forgive others as he has forgiven us.

2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message? **v 35**

This is how your heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

27 God has compassion on his servants

God is amazingly generous.

God is not hard-hearted or tight-fisted (Deuteronomy 15:7).

34 God can be moved to act in righteous anger.

35 God's forgiveness when received inevitably leads the recipient to forgive his fellow man.

b) His grace?

27 He totally cancels, not reschedules, our debt.

c) Jesus / His salvation?

27 Jesus' death is totally sufficient for the cleansing of ALL sins.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

21 Present your questions to Jesus.

35 Forgive others, as God has forgiven you.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

(An earlier version of Study 4 first appeared in 2016)

Study 4

Matthew 20:1-16

The workers in the vineyard

Background information

In Israel the harvest of grapes comes at the end of September, shortly before the rains come. There is urgency, so workers may be enlisted at any time as the farmers make haste.

The marketplace was the local 'labour exchange'. Casual workers waited there, hopeful that they might be employed for at least some of the day.

The Jewish timing was sunrise (approximately 6am) to sunset (approximately 6pm), but they numbered the hours from 0 to 12. *i.e.* our 9am was the third hour, noon the sixth hour, 3pm the ninth hour etc.

Word List

2 *A denarius*

a Roman coin: a basic, low wage for a day's work

Bible Connections

16 *the last will be first*

Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 4 *What does he mean by what is 'right'?*
- 6 *Why were they still standing at the 11th hour?*
- 8 *Why did he begin by paying the last labourers hired, first?*
- 10 *Why did they expect more?*
- 12 *What was the cause of their grumble?*
- 13 *Why did he call them 'friend'?*
- 14 *What did he mean by, 'Take your pay and go'.*

What surprises or confuses you?

It does seem odd to 'pay' the last hired, first and as with much as he pays those who have worked all day – not business like?!

2) The Context

a) Surrounding passage

19.1 *Jesus left Galilee for the last time.*

19:21 *Sell your possessions and give to the poor.*

19:30 *Last first*

c.f. 20:16

b) The book

13 *Friend*

22:12

c) The whole Bible

- | | | |
|----|--|----------------|
| 1 | <i>The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.</i> | Psalm 24:1 |
| 9 | <i>The least deserving / (the sick) first</i> | Luke 5:32 |
| 13 | <i>Friend</i> | John 15:13-15 |
| 14 | <i>Paul, the worst of sinners</i> | 1 Timothy 1:15 |

d) The Bible Story

God and humanity have been separated by sin.

God's requirements of the Law have been given but not met.

God's solution is about to happen as He sends His Son, Jesus.

LEARN

1) Using the context of the passage, how do you answer the questions the passage raises?

- 4 *'Right' i.e. what I decide not what you deserve.*
- 6 *The were still there because they were eager for any work at all.*
- 8 *They came first as he bid them come.*
- 10 *They expected more as they had done more work.*
- 12 *The cause of their grumble was that they thought they deserved more.*
- 13 *He called them 'friend' as he chose that relationship (not 'employee').*
- 14 *By 'Take your pay and go', he meant be satisfied with your lot.*

2) Given that a parable describes the relationship between God and people

a) Where is God represented?

God is the landowner.

b) With whom are we meant to identify?

We are one of the workers in the market place.

c) What is the subject?

The grace of God

3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

This underlines God's grace.

4) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

A landowner agrees a daily wage and pays employees the same at the end of the day whenever they were taken on, justifying it as his right. He the pays the last hired, first.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

Those who are least deserving (and know it) receive the gift of the Kingdom of Heaven.

2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message

v 16

So the first will be last and the last will be first.

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

1 God owns the world.

2ff God invites people to work in His vineyard.

b) His grace

10b All receive the same gift (eternal life).

15 God is generous.

God chooses to be gracious to the undeserving.

16 God graciously gives the least deserving the first.

c) Jesus / His salvation

1 Jesus looks for 'workers[in His Fathers Kingdom.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

15 Rejoice - God is gracious to an underserving sinner like you.

16 Receive God's grace / His 'first'.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Study 5

Matthew 21:28-32

The parable of the two sons

Background information

Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem for the last time. He clashes with various religious leaders (21:15,23,45; 22:34,41). At the same time, the crowd, astonished at His teaching (22:33), accepted Him as a prophet (21:46).

In 21:23-27 Jesus deals with a 'high level deputation' from the Sanhedrin, who have come to question of His authority. He then tells three parables, all dealing with Who is acceptable to God and Who are His true people.

Word List

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|---|
| 23 | <i>chief priests and elders</i> | <i>ie</i> the Sanhedrin, the body responsible for maintaining order in civil and religious affairs. |
| 31 | <i>tax collectors and prostitutes</i> | Those most despised, and regarded as furthest from pleasing God. |
| 32 | <i>John</i> | <i>ie</i> John the Baptist <i>see</i> Matthew 3:1-12. |
| 32 | <i>way of righteousness</i> | Semitic for the <i>right way</i> <i>cf</i> Proverbs 8:20. |

Bible Connections

For a different parable also concerning two sons, *see* Luke 15:11.

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 31 | <i>'Truly I tell you'</i> | Occurs 31 times in Matthew's Gospel. |
| 32 | <i>John's message</i> | <i>see</i> Matt 3:1-12. |

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 4 *What does he mean by what is 'right'?*
- 6 *Why were they still standing at the 11th hour?*
- 8 *Why did he begin by paying the last labourers hired, first?*
- 10 *Why did they expect more?*
- 12 *What was the cause of their grumble?*
- 13 *Why did he call them 'friend'?*
- 14 *What did he mean by, 'Take your pay and go'.*

What surprises or confuses you?

It does seem odd to 'pay' the last hired, first and as with much as he pays those who have worked all day – not business like?!

2) The Context

a) Surrounding passage

19.1 *Jesus left Galilee for the last time.*

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d) The Bible Story

God and humanity have been separated by sin.

God's requirements of the Law have been given but not met.

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LEARN

1) Using the context of the passage, how do you answer the questions the passage raises?

- 4 *'Right' i.e. what I decide not what you deserve.*
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2) Given that a parable describes the relationship between God and people

a) Where is God represented?

God is the landowner.

b) With whom are we meant to identify?

We are one of the workers in the market place.

c) What is the subject?

The grace of God

3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

This underlines God's grace.

4) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

A landowner agrees a daily wage and pays employees the same at the end of the day whenever they were taken on, justifying it as his right. He he pays the last hired, first.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

Those who are least deserving (and know it) receive the gift of the Kingdom of Heaven.

2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message

v 16

So the first will be last and the last will be first.

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

1 God owns the world.

2ff God invites people to work in His vineyard.

b) His grace

10b All receive the same gift (eternal life).

15 God is generous.

God chooses to be gracious to the undeserving.

16 God graciously gives the least deserving the first.

c) Jesus / His salvation

1 Jesus looks for 'workers[in His Fathers Kingdom.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

15 Rejoice - God is gracious to an underserving sinner like you.

16 Receive God's grace / His 'first'.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

The parable of the two sons

Background information

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In 21:23-27 Jesus deals with a 'high level deputation' from the Sanhedrin, who have come to question of His authority. He then tells three parables, all dealing with Who is acceptable to God and Who are His true people.

Word List

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| 31 | <i>tax collectors and prostitutes</i> | Those most despised, and regarded as furthest from pleasing God. |
| 32 | <i>John</i> | <i>ie</i> John the Baptist <i>see</i> Matthew 3:1-12. |
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Bible Connections

For a different parable also concerning two sons, *see* Luke 15:11.

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| 31 | <i>'Truly I tell you'</i> | Occurs 31 times in Matthew's Gospel. |
| 32 | <i>John's message</i> | <i>see</i> Matt 3:1-12. |

LOOK

1) The Text

28 *Who was speaking?*

Where was he speaking?

Who was he speaking to?

Why did he ask them what they thought?

Why two sons?

What does the work of the vineyard represent?

Why did he order rather than request?

29 *Why did he change his mind?*

30 *Why did the second son call his father “Sir”?*

31 *Why did Jesus say, ‘I tell you the truth’?*

Why tax collectors and prostitutes?

How are they entering the Kingdom?

32 *How did John show ‘the way of righteousness?’*

What was the evidence that the tax collectors / prostitutes believed John?

What surprises or confuses you?

They are blamed for not repenting – but isn’t repentance a gift? (Acts 11:18)

2) The Context

a) Surrounding passage

28 *Jesus entered the Temple courts (21:23a)*

The chief priests and elders came to Him (21:23b)

32 *Tax collectors (9:10; 11:19)*

b) The Book

28 *Vineyard – parable of the workers (20:1-16)*

– parable of the tenants (20:33)

31 *Drive out demons...the kingdom of God has come upon you. (12:28)* *hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. (19:24)*

32 *People confessed their sins and were baptised in anticipation of a greater one to come. (3:6, 11)*

Unless your righteousness exceeds that of Pharisees and teachers of the law you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven. (5:20)

Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. (6:33)

Repent (and believe) the Kingdom of Heaven is near. (4:17)

c) The Bible

28 Vineyard = Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7)

The work of God is to believe in the one whom he sent (John 6:29)

31 Jesus said ‘... I am the truth’ (John 14:6)

Father’s work is for us to believe in His son (John 6:29)

32 The way of righteousness (Genesis 15:6)

God grants repentance (Acts 11:18)

d) The Bible Story

God and humanity have been separated by sin.

God’s requirements of the Law have been given but not met.

God’s solution is about to happen as He sends His Son, Jesus.

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions the passage raises

28 Jesus was speaking.

He was speaking in the Temple Courts.

He was speaking to the chief priests and elders.

He asked them what they thought, so as to re-engage them – he had just silenced them.

Two sons, because Jesus wanted to contrast two responses to God.

He ordered because he was in charge.

- 29 *There is no apparent reason why he changed his mind.*
- 30 *He called his father “Sir” as an outward showing of respect.*
- 31 *He said, ‘I tell you the truth’, to add emphasis to the statement.*
Tax collectors and prostitutes were morally unclean / not allowed in the Temple.
They entered the Kingdom by repenting and believing. (Matthew 4:17)
- 32 *The ‘way of righteousness’ is by believing in God.*
The tax collectors / prostitutes showed their belief in John by repenting.

- 2) Given that a parable describes the relationship between God and people
a) Where is God represented?

God is the Father.

- b) With whom are we meant to identify?

One of the sons

- c) What is the subject?

The subject is ‘believing in Jesus that leads to actual obedience, not mere lip-service’.

- 3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

The gift of repentance must be received.

- 3) Give an overall ‘picture’ of the passage in a few sentences.

Jesus tells a parable of two sons being given a command to work. The first initially refuses, but later obeys; the other initially agrees, but does not actually go. The hearers agree the former did as the father wanted. (28-31)

Jesus applies that to John the Baptist’s teaching on the way of righteousness – the sinners believed and repented, the religious leaders did not. (31b, 32).

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

God looks for obedience (to believe in Him)

2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message? **v 31**

Which of the two did what the father wanted.. the first .. the tax collectors and the prostitutes

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

28/31 God engages our minds.

28 He instructs us to do His Work; he doesn't invite us!

31 The Father wants obedience / belief in Him.

b) His grace

29 By God's grace, we are allowed to change our mind.

31 The thing that gives us entry into the Kingdom of God is God's grace.

c) Jesus / His salvation

31b Jesus tells / is the truth.

32 Jesus is 'the way of righteousness'.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

29 Note – I have the freedom to say 'no'.

30 Note - Outward good manners toward God, politely calling him "sir", is no substitute for obedience.

31 Obey / believe in Jesus.

32 My response to the Word of God is repent and believe.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Study 6

Matthew 22:1-14

The wedding banquet

Background information

We are in the final week of Jesus' earthly life. He has made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday and is now teaching in the temple courts. The chief priests and the elders are continuing to oppose him.

In an era before clocks, invitations could specify the day of the feast, but not easily the precise time. The system was to send out servants on the day in question to all those who had already been invited (and had presumably accepted) to say, 'It's time; come now.'

The context of this parable (third in a related set) makes it clear that Jesus is still saying something about the religious leaders' failure to meet God's requirements and so being liable to judgment, with a consequent change in the composition of the people of God.

Word List

2	<i>banquet</i>	Symbolises the blessings of God's salvation
7	<i>city</i>	Refers to Jerusalem / Temp destroyed in AD70?
10	<i>good and bad</i>	Gospel attracts both good and bad
13	<i>wedding clothes</i>	Not special garment but clean clothes, likely white
14	<i>the invited</i>	Literally 'the called'

Bible Connections

Similar parable: Luke 16:14

5	<i>field... business given higher priority</i>	<i>see</i> Matthew 6:24
11	<i>wedding clothes of 'fine linen, clean and white' (KJV)</i>	Revelation 19:8

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

1 *Why did he speak in parables?*

What did he say in the preceding parables?

2 *What is 'the Kingdom of Heaven'?*

Who is the king?

Who is the son

What is the wedding banquet?

3 *Who are his 'servants'?*

4 *Why did he repeat his invitation?*

6 *Why did they ill-treat / kill his servants?*

7 *Why was he enraged?*

Why destroy their city?

9 *Who would they find on the street corners?*

What did it mean 'both good and bad'?

10 *Why would he not be wearing wedding clothes?*

12 *Why did he call him 'friend'?*

Why was he speechless?

13 *Why tie him hand and foot?*

Why darkness?

Why weeping and gnashing of teeth?

14 *Why 'many' not 'all'?*

Why are few 'chosen'?

What surprises or confuses you?

14 *Why is it 'chosen' - should it not be 'accept the invitation'?*

2) The Context

a) Surrounding passage

1 *Again - already told 2 parables, (21:28-44); - the chief priests and Pharisees knew he was talking about them (21:45)*

6 *Killed servants / killed son (21:39)*

8 *Those entitled rejected (21:41)*

b) *The book*

2 *The wedding banquet (25:10)*

c) *The whole Bible*

2 *The wedding feast is that of The Lamb / Jesus (Rev 19:5; Eph 5:31,32)*

7 *"It is mine to revenge, I will repay." (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19)*

12 *Friend c.f. Judas (Matthew 26:50)*

13 *People walking darkness have seen a great light (Isaiah 9:2; Matt 4:16)*

d) *The Bible Story*

God and humanity have been separated by sin.

God's requirements of the Law have been given but not met.

God's solution is about to happen as He sends His Son, Jesus.

LEARN

1) Using the context, how do you answer the questions the passage raises?

1 *He spoke in vivid parables so they would remember, even if they did not (yet) understand.*

In the preceding parables, Jesus taught that those who seem to have rejected God, may in the end accept and obey Him, and vice versa. God's Kingdom would be taken away from Jews in the latter group, and given to any who would bear fruit and give Jesus His place.'

2 *'The Kingdom of Heaven' is the unchallenged rule of God.*

God the Father is the king.

God the Son, Jesus, is the son.

The wedding banquet is the celebration at the end of time.

3 *His 'servants' are believers / his angels.*

4 *He repeated his invitation because of his grace / he loved them.*

6 *They ill-treat / kill his servants because they resented him.*

7 *He was enraged because his love was spurned*

He destroyed their city so that no trace of their rebellion would remain.

9 *On the street corners were beggars / the 'dregs' of society.*

'Both good and bad' meant those worthy and unworthy.

No wedding clothes, as he had not been gathered in by the servants – he had come on his own.

12 *He called him 'friend' as a recognition that he was one of his own.*

He was speechless as he had 'no leg to stand on' / no advocate.

13 *'Tie him hand and foot' so there was no escape.*

Darkness because the light / God was absent.

Weeping and gnashing of teeth as people there are conscious.

14 *'Chosen', as all are dependent on his invitation.*

2) Given that a parable describes the relationship of God and people

a) Where is God represented?

God is the King / God is 'the son'.

b) With whom are we meant to identify?

The first invited, who on the day refused?... the second group, who accepted?... or the third, those who tried to sneak in another way?

c) What is the subject?

Those refusing the invitation will be excluded from God's Kingdom.

3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

Chosen / accept the invitation, bridges the gap between predestination and free will.

4) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

Jesus continued in parables showing God's righteous rule. (1, 2a)

The king gave an invitation for his son's wedding banquet through his servants. It was rejected and the servants were ill-treated and killed. This enraged the king, who totally destroyed the refusers. (2b-7)

The king told his servants to invite all the waifs and strays instead, and they filled his hall. (8-10) However, one slipped in without wedding clothes and was expelled. (13). The point – many are called, but few are chosen. (14)

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

The invitation is general, but only a few, the 'needy', are selected by God.

2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message? **v 14**

For many are invited but few are chosen.

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

3 *The Lord invited His people (the Jews) to the wedding banquet of His son / Heaven.*

3 *The Lord respects our free will – he invites.*

6 *God is emotional (enraged).*

God is vengeful (he destroys the city).

12 *God is prepared to view all as 'friends'.*

13 *God is a faithful and true judge.*

14 *God, ultimately, chooses.*

b) His grace

10 *God invites 'the good and the bad'.*

c) Jesus / His salvation

2 *Jesus is the one getting married!*

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

1 *Receive the invitation.*

9 *Make God's offer to all.*

10 *Go to the wedding with the King's servant.*

11 *Note – There is no other way than to receive the invitation / the King.*

13 *Note – The alternative to being a guest is terrible !*

Note – There is no appeal.

14 *Be the 'chosen'!* **Now underline the application of the Main Point.**

Study 7

Matthew 25:1-13

The ten virgins

Background information

At a wedding in Jesus' day, it was the practice for the bridegroom to call on his bride and her attendants. The tradition was to surprise them any day and any time – they were to be ready.

The wedding party then went through the village to their new home, gathering their friends for a celebration in their house. After they arrived, the door was closed. Late comers were excluded.

(Another important point is that people were not allowed in the streets after dark without a lamp.)

Word List

1	<i>virgins</i>	Attendants of the bride, participants in the bridal party
	<i>ten</i>	In Hebrew it signifies the divine judgment of God according to His Law.
6	<i>midnight</i>	Literally – middle of night (6pm – 6 am)
12	<i>I tell you the truth</i>	emphatic (repeated 30 times in Matthew's gospel)

Bible Connections

1	<i>bridegroom</i> –	OT reference to God: Isaiah 54:4-5; 62:5; Jeremiah 2:2; Hosea 1-3 etc.
11	<i>too late</i>	<i>c.f.</i> Hebrews 3:7 to 4:13
12	<i>I do not know you</i>	Matthew 7:22,23

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 *What 'time'?*
- 2 *Why 'ten'?*
- 9 *Why did they not share the oil?*
- 11 *Who are they addressing 'Lord, Lord'?*
- 12 *How could he say, 'I never knew you'?*
- 13 *What are we to watch for?*
 Why do we not know the hour?

What surprises or confuses you?

9,12 *There is no sharing of oil / and no second chance?*

2) The Context

a) Surrounding passage

- 5 *Longtime (24:48)*
- 6 *Midnight (when you least expect it) (24:45)*
- 13 *Keep watch (24:46)*
 Only the Father knows the hour. (24:36)

b) The book

- 1 *At that time (24:10,23,30)*
 Righteous, judgement, sin / self-control (John 16:8; Acts 24:25)
- 12 *Many are invited but few are chosen. (22:14)*

c) The whole Bible

- 12 *C.f. my sheep know my voice*
- 13 *The coming of the day of the Lord - sudden (1 Thessalonians 5:1)*

d) The Bible Story

God and humanity have been separated by sin.

God's requirements of the Law have been given but not met.

God's solution is about to happen as He sends His Son, Jesus.

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions the passage raises?

1 *That time is the end of the age / the 2nd coming of Jesus.*

2 *'Ten' because this is speaking of the time of the divine judgement.*

9 *Judgement will be a strictly personal thing.*

11 *They addressing the bridegroom as 'Lord, Lord'.*

12 *By 'I never knew you' he was speaking of relationship not 'acquaintance'.*

13 *We are to watch / be ready for the 2nd coming of Jesus.*

We do not know the hour because only the Father does.

2) Given that a parable describes the relationship between God and people

a) Where is God represented?

God is the bridegroom / Jesus.

b) With whom are we meant to identify?

We are meant to identify with one of the ten virgins.

c) What is the subject?

The subject is preparation for the divine judgement.

3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

This is the time of divine judgement – it is personal, there is no second chance, the only aide we may have is Jesus and we must call on His name BEFORE that time.

4) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like 10 virgins waiting for the bridegroom. Five were ready, and five were not. Those not ready were left behind and excluded from the marriage feast.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

Be ready for the bridegroom / Jesus to come.

2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message **v 13**

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

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

12 God knows His own.

b) His grace

1 *The virgins were all invited to the wedding.*

c) Jesus / His salvation

6 *The bridegroom, Jesus, will return unexpected.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

9 *Note – when Jesus returns, we will all meet Him by ourselves.*

10 *Be prepared for Jesus return / His wedding banquet.*

11 *Note – there is a time (when Jesus returns) that it will be too late to call on His name.*

12/13 As one of his own, keep watch / be expectant for the bridegroom's return.

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Study 8

Matthew 25:31-46

The sheep and the goats

Background information

Jesus has entered Jerusalem for the last week of his earthly life (21:1ff). The main theme of his teaching during this time was the last judgement. It reaches its finale in this parable.

The parable describes a herd of sheep and goats which, in the middle east of that time, looked very similar when they were grazed together. When the time came, they were split up.

Today's method of doing this is to make the flock walk along a thin passage, single file, to a 'Y' junction, which has a door that can swing to block one or other of the two passages. The farmer operates the gate as each animal passes him and so he separates each one to right or left.

Jesus uses such an analogy to describe God's separation of the nations before Him on the day of Judgement.

Word List

- 31 *Son of man* used by God of Ezekiel often meaning human being
used by Jesus to describe Himself – equal to God
(Philippians 2:6), he was 'veiled' in flesh. (1 John 4:2) but
truly human.
- 37 *righteous* Those set right with God through their faith in Him.
(Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:1; c.f. Ephesians 2:8,9)
- 41 *angel* (*Greek angelos*) Messenger / bearer of good news

Bible Connections

- 32 *all nations* Daniel 7:14; Matthew 28:14
- 41 *brothers - those who do the will of My Father in Heaven* Matthew 12:50

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

31 *When will He come in His Glory?*

How does the son of man have 'His' glory?

Why is he sitting on a throne?

32 *Who are 'all nations'?*

34 *Who are the 'blessed by the Father'?*

What does an inheritance mean?

What is the significance of prepared 'before the foundation of the earth'?

37 *Why are they 'righteous'?*

40 *Who are His brothers?*

41 *Why did he say 'depart from me'?*

What does 'cursed' mean?

Who are the 'Devil's angels'?

Why is 'since the creation of the world' (v34) missing from v 41?

45 *What does 'one of the least of these' mean?*

46 *What is 'eternal punishment'?*

What surprises or confuses you?

Why does it say nothing about having faith in Jesus?

2) The Context

a) Surrounding passage

1 *As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciple came to Him privately. "Tell us" they said, "When do.... .."* (24:3,4)

b) The book

40 *My brothers* (12:49; 28:10)

c) The whole Bible

31 *I will not yield my glory to another.* (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11)

32 *All nations* (Psalm 67:2)

Judged before Him (Hebrews 9:2)

40 *Do to Jesus* (Acts 9:4)

41 *The work of God* (John 6:29)

41 *What fellowship can righteousness/ light have with wickedness / darkness?*
(2 Corinthians 6:14)

d) The Bible Story

God and humanity have been separated by sin.

God's requirements of the Law have been given but not met.

God's solution is about to happen as He sends His Son, Jesus.

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions the passage raises?

31 *He will come in His Glory at the end of time, the day of judgment.*

The Son of man has 'His' glory as He is divine.

He will be sitting on His throne because He is King.

32 *'All nations' means every human being, past and present.*

34 *They are blessed by the Father in that He has given them an inheritance.*

An inheritance is something we have been given by a predecessor.

Being prepared before the foundation of the earth means the one receiving it has not contributed to it at all by their own efforts.

37 *They 'righteous' because they have received the righteousness of Jesus.*

40 *His brothers are those who do the will on His Father in Heaven.*

41 *He said 'depart from me' s light cannot have fellowship with darkness.*

'Cursed' mean cut off from the goodness of God.

The 'Devil's angels' are the demons.

Unlike the kingdom for those on his right, prepared for recipients 'since the creation of the world', God's destination for those on his left only arose after they had rebelled. Hell was not part of His original, intended plan.

Judgment is what Isaiah calls God's 'strange work' / 'alien task', for those who reject the cornerstone: Isaiah 2:16,21, cf Acts 4:11, 1 Peter 2:4-6.

40/45 *'One of the least of these' means the seemingly least significant of those who do God's will / believe in Jesus.*

46 *'Eternal' means unending; 'punishment' means retribution for wrong doing.*

- 2) Given that a parable describes the relationship between God and people
a) Where is God represented?

God / Jesus is the King

- b) With whom are we meant to identify?

We are meant of identify with either the sheep or the goats.

- c) What is the subject?

The subject is being ready for the return of Jesus.

- 3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

It is not dealing with HOW you become a follower of Jesus (faith) but the evidence of that faith.

- 3) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

Jesus, the son of man, will return and judge the nations, separating people, as a shepherd does his sheep and goats, into those who have evidenced their devotion to him by kindness to his needy brothers. The gracious were welcomed in to eternal life. The ungracious were committed to the eternal punishment.

LISTEN

- 1) What is the lesson or the main point?

Those who believe in Jesus and evidence it by grace toward the least of the believers, will receive eternal life. Those who don't, will be confined to eternal punishment.

- 2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message **v 46**

Then they will go away to eternal punishment but the righteous to eternal life.

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

46 God has only two fates for mankind - eternal punishment or eternal life.

b) His grace

34 *God has prepared an inheritance for His people BEFORE the foundations of the earth.*

c) Jesus / His salvation

31 *Jesus is glorious.*

Jesus reigns.

32 *Jesus is the judge – HE is the ‘separator’.*

40,45 *Jesus is evident in His brothers.*

41 *Jesus will be clinical in His judgment of sin / sinners.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

32 *Acknowledge that Jesus reigns over ALL.*

37 *Note – Jesus’ brothers **are** righteous.*

46 *Note – the choice before us is eternal punishment or eternal life.*

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

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