

KINGDOM. SUPPLEMENT 5

[THE PARABLES OF JESUS]

1. THE CHILDREN SITTING IN THE MARKET PLACES, 2. THE WEATHER SIGNS and 3. THE DRAGNET

The parable of the children sitting in the market places in Matthew 11:16-19,
the parable of the weather signs in Matthew 16:1-4
and the parable of the dragnet in Matthew 13:47-50 are parables about
THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENTERING GOD'S KINGDOM.

A. THE CHILDREN SITTING IN THE MARKET PLACES

Read Matthew 11:16-19 and Luke 7:31-32.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduction. The parable is told in figurative words and the spiritual meaning is based upon this. Therefore we first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

The market places. On days when no business is transacted in the market, especially children gather in the wide spaces in order to play games. This is quite common everywhere in the world.

The games and the quarrelling. In this story, a group of children are pictured trying to play together, but without success. There are always some other children that oppose whatever suggestion is made about which game to play! When some children make a suggestion, for example that they play a joyful game, like playing the flute and dancing, another group of children oppose the idea. When they make another suggestion that they play a sad game, like singing a dirge and crying, again the other group boycott it. So the children complain and quarrel with one another, accusing one another of lack of co-operation.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of “the story” of the parable may consist of “the setting” and “the explanation or application” of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of the parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of this parable is contained in Matthew 11:7-15 or in Luke 7:24-30.

Jesus spoke about the importance of the ministry of John the Baptist, and pointed to the lack of response John got from the people of Israel. In the beginning, John was enthusiastically received by the common people (Matthew 3:5-7). John preached that people must turn from their evil ways and bear good fruit that proves their genuine repentance. Generally, many of the common people came from everywhere and agreed with these righteous requirements of God. They showed their agreement with God's righteous requirements by turning to God and submitting to the baptism of John with water. But large numbers of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, together with all their followers rejected God's saving purpose as far as they were concerned, because they did not want to be baptised by John (Luke 7:29-30). Jesus told this parable, because people were so fickle and changeable.

(2) The story of this parable is contained in Matthew 11:16-17 and Luke 7:31-32.

(3) The explanation or application of this parable is contained in Matthew 11:18-19 and Luke 7:33-35.

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes. Jesus does not give any of the details any particular meaning.

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Discuss. What is the central point or main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the children sitting in the market places in Matthew 11:16-19 and Luke 7:31-32 teaches about “the responsibility to enter God’s kingdom.”

The main message of this parable is the following. “A person must stop acting childish and start taking responsibility for his words and actions.”

While Jesus recommends being “to become like children” in Matthew 18:1-5, he condemns people for their “childish behaviour” in Matthew 11:16-19. An intolerant attitude and uttering constant criticism when they reject the wise teachings of God (Jesus), is childish and utterly foolish.

The ordinary people in society (even bad people) acknowledged that God’s way (of forgiveness for those who repent and believe in the Saviour) was right and were therefore baptised with water by John. But the Jewish religious leaders rejected God’s purpose and plan (of salvation by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ) for themselves and were therefore not baptised with water by John (Luke 7:29-30).

Personal responsibility is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The genuine people of God’s kingdom have stopped acting childish and have taken personal responsibility to repent, believe and enter into God’s kingdom (cf. Mark 1:15).

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-4; Hebrews 5:11 to 6:3.

Discover and discuss. How does what these passages teach, compare to what this parable teaches?

Notes. Both passages teach the consequences of immature behaviour. Childish behaviour is characterised by the following:

- quarrelling about religious beliefs that are based on human opinions and church traditions and not on the pure Word of God
- breaking up into different denominations instead of remaining united in the One Body of Christ
- behaving like people of this world
- remaining dependent on spiritual leaders (pastors) for their spiritual food instead of learning to feed themselves.
- not able to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil, truth from error.

In these two Bible passages, the Corinthian Christians and the Hebrew Christians had still not taken responsibility for their own lives, decisions, choices, spiritual growth and behaviour!

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What are the main teachings or messages (lessons) of this parable? What does Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what does he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) Irresponsible and inconsistent behaviour is condemned.

Jesus said that his critics, the Pharisees and teachers of the law were childish. They were frivolous and were acting irresponsibly and inconsistently. They were never positive and never satisfied. First they were enthusiastic about John and did not find fault with his austerity, lowering his standard of life and call to repentance.

But then they criticised him saying that he was harsh, his message was too severe and he was possessed with an evil spirit. They said that John was *unsociable*, but condemned Jesus for being *too sociable*, because they regarded him to be “a glutton and a drinker, a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Luke 7:33-34). Jesus said that such thoroughly unfair and bitter criticism and intolerance would get nowhere, because in the end God’s truth will be victorious!

(2) Wisdom is proved right by her actions.

Matthew literally says, “Wisdom is justified by her actions” (Matthew 11:19) and Luke literally says, “Wisdom is justified by all her children” (Luke 7:35). These expressions mean the same. Both expressions mean the same: “The wisdom of any action (“her actions”) is proved right in what it accomplishes in the heart and life of people (“her children”) who allow themselves to be guided by such wisdom.” Matthew emphasises “actions that are wise” and Luke emphasises “people that allow themselves to be guided by this wisdom”.

Matthew says that the wisdom of John the Baptist was that he insisted on conversion and producing fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:2,8). And the wisdom of Jesus was that he held out the hope (expectation) of salvation and healing to whoever heard the gospel (Matthew 11:4-6). The wisdom of these actions could be seen in the results these actions had in the lives of people. The actions (ministries) of John and Jesus were fully justified by what they accomplished in the hearts and lives of “all her children”, that is, of all those who allowed themselves to be guided by that wisdom!

Because the Jewish religious leaders (the Pharisees and experts of the law) were engaged in hair-splitting arguments with one another about the meaning of the Jewish law (and the 613 additions made by the rabbi's) (the Sabbath, fasting, circumcision, public paying, food rules, tithing, etc.), they remained unresponsive to the preaching of John the Baptist and of Jesus about repentance from sin and transformation of life. Consequently they failed to enter into God's kingdom (they failed to be saved).

But because the common people and even tax collectors responded to the preaching of John the Baptist and of Jesus, they were entering into God's kingdom in great numbers (Luke 7:29-30).

B. THE WEATHER SIGNS

Read Matthew 16:1-4 and Luke 12:54-56.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

The story is quite common. Everywhere people have an opinion about the weather by looking at the sky: whether it is going to rain today or whether the sun is going to shine. In Israel, the Pharisees and Sadducees interpreted the weather signs very well. They knew that when the sky was bright red in the evening, it meant that the clouds had moved to the sea in the West and that it would be good weather during the next day. They also knew that when the sky was red mixed with threatening bands of dark clouds in the early morning, it meant that the clouds were coming from the sea in the West and that it would probably rain that day.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of the parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the story is contained in Matthew 16:1.

The religious and political leaders of Israel were increasingly opposed to Jesus Christ and his ministry. Jesus had been preaching the gospel and healing people, not only in Israel proper, but also in the neighbouring Gentile areas as Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 15:21-22). The religious leaders of Israel came to test Jesus. Their purpose was to tempt Jesus, in the hope and with the expectation that he would fail, and would thus be publicly discredited. They had probably heard of his miracles (signs) of providing food for a crowd of hungry people and of the physical restoration of the handicapped on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 15:29-39).

The demand for a sign from heaven. As in Matthew 12:38, they did not believe that the miracles of Jesus "were a sign that he had been sent by God". They could not very well deny his extraordinary miracles, but they tried very hard to convince themselves that this was a kind of black magic, that Jesus did these miracles through the power of Satan. They regarded these miracles of Jesus as merely "signs on earth". What they wanted to see was "a sign from heaven". As examples of such signs from heaven, they could have thought of the following:

- the manna which, in their view, Moses caused to rain from the sky (John 6:30-32)
- the sun and moon which stood still at the prayer of Joshua (Joshua 10:12-14)
- the stars which fought for Israel in the days of Deborah and Barak (Judges 5:20)
- the great thunderstorm which threw the Philistines into a panic in the days of Samuel (1 Samuel 7:10)
- the fire from God which devoured the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the water and the soil in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 18:30-40).

In the view of these enemies, Jesus had not yet shown such "a sign from heaven".

(2) The story is contained in Matthew 16:2-3.

(3) The explanation or application is given in Matthew 16:3-4.

The signs of the times. Jesus pointed out to them that they paid far more attention to "the signs of the weather" (the constantly changing conditions of the weather) than to "the signs of the times" (Greek: *semaia ton kairon*). "Times" are here not used in the sense of the mere duration of time, past, present and future, but in the sense of the beginning of a new era in history marked by special events! The leaders of Israel were majoring in minors. They understood everything about unimportant weather-signs, but understood nothing about the crucial signs of the times. The signs of the times are the special signs that marked the beginning of the new era in God's history of salvation with mankind! The signs of the times are:

- "The Old Testament period of shadows" in the Law and the Prophets were fulfilled by "the New Testament period of realities" (Colossians 2:16-17)
- "The Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament were fulfilled by "the coming of the long expected Messiah (Jesus Christ)"
- "The Messianic Era begins with "the times of refreshing" with the first coming of Christ and will continue to "the time for God to restore everything" at the second coming of Christ (Acts 3:19-21)

- The senseless rules of the Law” as interpreted by the Jewish religious leaders were replaced by “the truth of the revelation and the power of grace” (John 1:17)

The signs of the times consisted thus of Jesus Christ himself who had come with love, grace and truth to seek lost people and find them. With power he performed all kinds of miracles. The religious leaders in Israel did not recognise “the handwriting on the wall” (Daniel 5:5,24-28). They did not realise that the days of quarrelling about the meaning of man-made and often silly regulations (the ceremonial laws as interpreted by the Jewish religious leaders) were numbered and that the gospel was going to spread until it covered the whole earth (Isaiah 11:9; Jeremiah 31:34)!

The sign of Jonah. The only sign that Jesus gave to the people of Israel was “the sign of Jonah”. Matthew 12:38-42 explains the sign. “As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” The Jewish and Roman authorities would crucify Jesus Christ, but *on the third day* he would be resurrected from the dead to the everlasting dismay of all governments and all their followers! The only sign that Jesus would give to the nation of Israel was his death and his resurrection!

The Bible does not reveal exactly how these *three days and three nights* were computed. Some Christians try to use this as a proof that Jesus was dead for three whole days of 24 hours each and that he therefore was crucified on Thursday afternoon instead of Friday afternoon. But this theory is not correct.

- First. The Bible teaches clearly that Jesus was not crucified on Thursday, but on Friday afternoon and was resurrected very early on Sunday morning. The original word in the Greek language, “paraskeue”, means “the preparation” for the Sabbath (on Friday), the day before the Jewish Sabbath (on Saturday). This word is still the modern Greek word for “Friday” (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:55-56; John 19:42).
- Second. “Three whole days” in their view would have meant that Jesus could only have been raised on Sunday afternoon. However, Jesus was resurrected on Sunday morning very early.
- Third. “Three days, night and day” in Esther 4:16 and 5:1 cannot mean three whole days of 24 hours each. The expression “one day and one night” is a time-unit that indicates a part of a day or a part of a night. The Jews counted a part of the day as equal to a day and a part of the night as amounting to a night. Conclusion: According to Jewish usage of such terms, it meant that Jesus was in the grave for a part of the first day (Friday), the whole second day (Saturday) and a part of the third day (Sunday). *After this event*, Jesus prophesied repeatedly that he would be resurrected “on the third day” (Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19)!

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Teach. The story is merely an introduction to the application, which is really the only essential detail in this parable (Matthew 16:4).

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the weather signs in Matthew 16:1-4 teaches about “the responsibility to enter God’s kingdom.”

The main message of this parable is the following. “A person must stop looking at the merely unimportant weather-signs and instead start looking at the special signs that mark the beginning of the new era in God’s history of salvation with mankind! These signs are:

- **the (first) coming of Jesus Christ in which he fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies**
- **and brought the realities to which the Old Testament shadows pointed.**
- **the first coming of Christ in which he proclaimed salvation and judgement**
- **taught the truth, showed mercy and grace and performed miracles**

With these signs of the times he introduced the New Testament period! The great events around Jesus, especially his death and resurrection, are such great and important signs that people ought to notice them and respond to them.

Personal responsibility is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The genuine people of God’s kingdom have stopped looking at the less important signs (wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, hatred of nations, apostasy from the faith, many false prophets/religions, increase in criminality, and love that has grown cold (Matthew 24:6-12). and the proclamation of the kingship of Jesus Christ to all nations). Instead they are looking at the most important signs in the history of the world (the first coming of Christ in which he fulfilled the prophecies, brought the realities to which the shadows pointed, Jesus Christ and his message of the kingdom is proclaimed to all nations (Matthew 24:14) and his death and resurrection on the third day as proof that God has accepted his sacrifice of atonement - in short: the completion of his work of salvation in our place.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Discover and discuss. How does what these passages teach, compare to what this parable teaches?

(1) Look at the God of the living patriarchs.

Read Matthew 22:23-33. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection from the dead. Therefore they would also reject Jesus' prediction that he would be resurrected from the dead after three days. However, in Matthew 22, Jesus proves to them in another way that the resurrection from the dead will definitely take place. Although Abraham and the following generations had already died (physically) many years before, God still called himself "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob". And because God is "a God of *the living* and not of the dead", this proves not only that the *spirits (or souls)* of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were very much alive and in the presence of God, but also that God would resurrect their *bodies* in the future!

(2) Look at the Messiah in the Scriptures.

Read John 5:39-47. The Jews diligently studied the Old Testament Scriptures, because they thought that by them they would possess eternal life. However, not the study of the Scriptures, but the obedience to what the Scriptures say leads to eternal life. The Scriptures speak of Jesus Christ and of coming to him to receive eternal life. On the final judgement day, Moses and the other prophets will accuse the Jews of not believing and not obeying the Scriptures!

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main teaching of this parable? What does Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what does he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event in human history! This one great event in the history of mankind divides human history into two parts: it ends the Old Testament period of prophecies and shadows and begins the New Testament period of fulfilment and realities. This one great event is the only sign Jesus Christ gave to the Pharisees who had plotted his death and did not believe that he would be resurrected. And this one great event is the only sign Jesus Christ gave to the Sadducees who did not even believe in the resurrection of the body.

C. THE DRAGNET

Read Matthew 13:47-50.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes. The story is quite common wherever people have fisheries. A net catches the good and the bad fish at the same time. But later when they have pulled the nets on the shore, the good and bad fish are separated.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of the parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the parable is Matthew 13:36-51.

It is the same setting as that of the parables of the weeds among the wheat, of the hidden treasure and of the pearl of great value, which were all spoken to the disciples only and not to the crowds.

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Matthew 13:47-48.

(3) The explanation or application of the parable is given in Matthew 13:49-50.

The parable speaks of the mixed character of the kingdom of God in its present manifestation. The genuine Christians and the insincere Christians have to live and work together until the final judgement day. At his second coming Christ will send his angels to separate the unbelievers from the believers, the wicked from the righteous and the insincere Christians from the sincere Christians. The unbelievers and the wicked will be thrown into hell, where they will suffer punishment.

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

Jesus does not give any of the details of the story any particular meaning. "The net" catching the fish is not interpreted, but it is a picture of the disciples catching people (Luke 5:10). "The sorting out" of the bad fish from the good fish is a picture of the final judgement, as Jesus himself explained in Matthew 13:50.

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the dragnet in Matthew 13:47-50 not only teaches about “two kinds of people in God’s kingdom”, but also about “the responsibility to enter God’s kingdom.”

The main message of this parable is the following. “Every person must be aware that the final judgement will be irrevocably decisive. There the good and the bad people will be separated.”

The main message is related to the main message in the parable of the weeds among the wheat in Matthew 13:41-43. There the emphasis is on the need to exercise patience with regard to the intermixture of genuine Christians and nominal Christians in the kingdom of God in its present earthly manifestation until the final judgement. Here the emphasis is on the absolute certainty and irrevocable decisiveness of the final judgement in which the nominal Christians will definitely be separated from the genuine Christians!

Jesus teaches his disciples to warn people about the coming final judgement. He says that in view of the irreversible decisiveness of the coming judgement, they must impress upon people how precious a treasure is God’s kingdom and how necessary it is to take possession of it here and now!

Personal responsibility is one of the basic characteristics of the kingdom of God. In view of the certainty and decisiveness of the final judgement, serious people stop all further delay and make a personal and responsible decision to enter God’s kingdom.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Teach. Especially the explanation or application of the parable of the dragnet resembles that of the parable of the weeds among the wheat. Both the good and the bad people are intermingled in the kingdom of God in its present manifestation. They will only be separated at the second coming of Jesus.

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What are the main teachings or messages (lessons) of this parable? What does Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what does he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

The final judgement will be irreversible and unavoidable! Jesus Christ constantly emphasised the finality of the end-time sentence of God in the last judgement when once he has pronounced it (Matthew 8:12; 13:4; 13:50; 25:10; 25:30; 25:46; Luke 17:26-37). Therefore, he urges people everywhere to repent (Matthew 4:17; 9:13) and he exhorts them to be constantly alert (Matthew 25:13). At the same time this harmonises with the deeply sympathetic heart of Jesus Christ towards all kinds of people (Matthew 9:35-38; 11:28-30; 14:13-18; 15:32; 23:37)