

KINGDOM. SUPPLEMENT 9

[THE PARABLES OF JESUS] THE ASKING SON

“The parable of the asking son” in Matthew 7:7-12 and Luke 11:9-13 is a parable about BOLD AND PERSISTENT PRAYER IN GOD’S KINGDOM.

Read Matthew 7:7-12 and Luke 11:9-13.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will 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 story of this parable is in the form of a question. When children ask their fathers for good things, ordinary fathers in the world will never give them bad things! Although the fathers in the world are certainly not perfect, even sinful and sometimes evil, they still know how to give good gifts to their children! While in Matthew, Jesus speaks of bread and stones, fish and a snake, in Luke he speaks of fish and a snake, an egg and a scorpion. All these elements of the story are readily understood.

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 this parable?

Notes.

In Luke 11, the setting, the story and the explanation or application of the parable of the asking son differs with the same parable in Matthew 7. This shows that Jesus taught the same truth more than once in different settings, just as any teacher would do today.

(1) The setting of this parable is found in Matthew chapter 5-7.

It consists of the Sermon on the Mount about the demands of the righteous way of living. These demands are not easy. Without God, the citizens of God’s kingdom would not be able to live out the requirements of God’s kingdom. Therefore, Jesus urged his listeners about the necessity of persevering prayer accompanied by earnest effort. He taught them to ask, to seek and to knock. But each exhortation implies more than the previous one.

Asking implies humility and a consciousness of need. The word “ask” means to ask as a child asks his father or a servant asks his master. James 4:2 teaches that people, who do not ask, do not receive. In Luke 18, the Pharisee asks nothing. He also receives nothing! Instead of asking, he tells God how good he is. But the tax collector asks God to be merciful to him. Asking presupposes belief in a personal God with whom a person can have fellowship. When he asks, he expects an answer. And this implies faith in a God who can, does and will answer.

Seeking implies asking as well as acting. The word “seek” means seeking to find, investigating to discover, desiring to possess. For example, when a person prays for understanding of the Bible, he should study the Bible himself, meet with other Christians to discuss the Bible and strive to live in harmony with the Bible’s teachings. Or when a person prays for a needy person, he should desire to find help for this person’s need and investigate what help would be best suited for this person, what help could realistically be found and do something about it.

Knocking implies asking and acting as well as persevering. The word “knock” implies that the person keeps on knocking until the door is opened. It implies persevering until an answer has been given. All three verbs are in the present continuous tense and this means that perseverance is implied in all three actions: “Keep on asking!” “Keep on seeking!” “Keep on knocking!”

The three exhortations are followed by three promises. When a person fulfils the conditions, God promises to fulfil the promises. Everyone who asks will receive. Everyone who seeks will find. Everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. God promises that not a single Christian will be disappointed! At this point, Jesus told the parable of the asking son.

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Matthew 7:9-10.

(3) The explanation or application of the parable is contained in Matthew 7:11-12.

If even earthly fathers, who are sinful and weak by nature, provide their children only with good things and with nothing that will harm them, *how much more* will our heavenly Father provide us with good gifts? In Luke 11:13, Jesus says, how much more will our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to us? There is no conflict between these two applications of the same parable, because the Holy Spirit is the Source of every good gift on earth (James 1:17)!

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

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. Parables are not allegories. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

The father and his son. From the application, it is clear that the father and the son represent God the Father and a Christian. But the comparison is not exactly the same. While earthly fathers are sinful and weak, God the Father is holy and all-powerful!

The bread and the fish. These represent “the good things” that God the Father gives to a Christian in his prayer.

Stones and a snake. These represent “the bad things” which God the Father will never give to a Christian!

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message (or central theme) of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. *A parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make.* Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the asking son in Matthew 7:7-12 teaches about “frank and persistent prayer in God’s kingdom”.

The main message of this parable is the following. “God, the heavenly Father, will not disappoint any of his children, when they pray. He will answer the kind of prayer that is accompanied by seeking and knocking, that is, by faith that acts and that perseveres.”

God the Father will never disappoint any of his children when they pray. This does not mean that God the Father will always give his children whatever they ask. It means that he will not give them anything that is bad for them. He will give them the Holy Spirit and all the benefits of the Holy Spirit. He will give them the transformation they need, the fruit of the Spirit that transforms their character (Galatians 5:22-23), the wisdom of the Spirit, which their enemies cannot withstand (Matthew 10:19-20; Acts 6:10), and the open doors, which no man can shut (Revelation 3:7-8). God the Father loves his children and cares for them, but he does want them to ask for the things they need!

Prayer is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom! The genuine people in God’s kingdom pray while they act, and they do this with perseverance.

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.

See “The parable of the interceding friend” in Luke 11:5-10 and “the parable of the persistent widow” in Luke 18:1-8 in lesson 29 of manual 11.
