

# The Kingdom of Heaven is Like



An invitation to engage  
stewardship by studying  
the Parables of the Kingdom.

*Prepared by  
The Stewardship Commission  
The Diocese of West Virginia  
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# The Kingdom of Heaven is Like

## INTRODUCTION

Stewardship is an adventure, an expedition into the Kingdom of God, an invitation to offer our gifts for the purpose for which we were created--the only purpose that truly fulfills us. Refocusing our lives by designing our budgets around tithing is a challenge. This refocus offers a way to break the bonds of consumption that involve us (often unwittingly) in perpetuating injustice and oppression. In an attempt to achieve this refocusing, we will, over the next five weeks, ponder several parables of Jesus.

Walter Wink, a professor of biblical interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City, wrote the following in *The Christian Century*, Nov. 5, 1980

Parables are tiny lumps of coal squeezed into diamonds, condensed metaphors that catch the rays of something ultimate and glint at it in our lives. Parables are not illustrations; they do not support, elaborate or simplify a more basic idea. They are not ideas at all, nor can they ever be reduced to theological statements. They are the jeweled portals of another world; we cannot see through them like windows, but through their surfaces are refracted lights that would otherwise blind us - or pass unseen.

Parables participate in the reality which they communicate. In the words of Sallie McFague, there is a "simultaneity of the moment of insight and the choice of metaphor - they appear to come together and be forever wedded." Nor can parables ever be exhausted; they always contain more than we can tell. They are the precipitate of something ineffable; they percolate up from the depths wherein the Kingdom itself is working its ineluctable work. They come from the same energizing reality that causes the seeds to germinate and the leaven to rise. They rise with the leaven.

So, on behalf of the Stewardship Commission of the Diocese of West Virginia, I invite you to enter into the parables of the Kingdom.

The Rev. Julie Harris

# The Kingdom of Heaven is Like

**The First Lesson: Matthew 13:24-33, 46-50**  
(Six Short Parables)

**Tithing Tidbit: Genesis 28:20-23**  
("Surely I will give one tenth")

*Prepared by The Rev. Julie Harris  
and The Rev. Adam Thomas*

## **Six Short Parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:24-33, 46-50)**

*By The Rev. Julie Harris, Rector at Trinity Episcopal Church - Martinsburg, WV.*

### **An Opening Prayer**

"Enter My Small Life" by Evelyn Underhill

Lord! Give Me Courage and love to open the door and constrain You to enter,  
whatever the disguise You come in, even before I fully recognize my guest!

Come in! Enter my small life!

Lay Your sacred hands on all the common things and small interests of that  
life and bless and change them. Transfigure my small resources, make them  
sacred. And in them give me Your very Self. Amen.

### **The Scripture**

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come *from*?" He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

## **Prompts for Discussion**

- As you hear these parables of Jesus, what word or phrase stands out for you?
- What is Jesus asking us to do or consider by telling these parables about the kingdom of heaven?
- What promises does God make to you?
- Where do you most feel Jesus' presence in your life?
- What are you most grateful for?
- When have you felt life draining out of you?
- What barriers prevent you from responding to God?
- Imagine what your life would be like without these barriers?

## **Another look at one of the parables**

*By The Rev. Adam Thomas, Curate at Trinity Episcopal Church - Martinsburg, WV.*

Jesus tells this parable: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46).

A bishop I knew a long time ago used to tell a story about this passage from the Gospel according to Matthew. I was very young, so I might get some of the details wrong and I might embellish others, but it goes something like this:

Once there was a man who found a pearl. This pearl was the most magnificent specimen. Indeed, only in the wildest dreams of clams did a pearl like this one exist. It was the size and weight of a golf ball, but no one would think to compare the two. The pearl was in a class by itself. It shone with a light all its own. The light might have hid some imperfections if the pearl had had any. But it didn't. The pearl, thought the man, was, quite simply, perfect. The trouble is, the pearl was in a glass case and very visible alarm wire crisscrossed the case and a wrinkled shopkeeper hovered over the case. The man opened his wallet, thumbed through the small bills in the billfold and pondered his several credit cards. He pulled out one especially shiny card and, pointing to the pearl, tried to hand the card to the shopkeeper. The

shopkeeper raised her eyebrows and shook her head.

So the man went home. He wandered through his house, into the garage, and onto the deck. He gathered up everything not nailed down and sold it all-his car, his computer, his beloved grill. He went back to the shop. Not enough, the shopkeeper's look told him.

So the man sold his house. Not enough. He cashed out his stock options. Not enough. He even gave up his mint-condition Nolan Ryan rookie card. Not enough. The man stared plaintively at the shopkeeper. Then his eyes wandered down to the pearl. He knew somehow that obtaining this pearl was why he was alive, what he was made for. He didn't know how he knew, but, looking at that pearl, he just knew. He looked back up at the shopkeeper. "What about me?" he said, "What if I give myself?"

The shopkeeper smiled, brought a jangling set of keys to eyelevel, and began searching for a key. She found it, unlocked the case, and slowly lifted the pearl off of its bed of velvet. "Here you go," the shopkeeper said. "And by the way," she continued, "you were willing to give up everything for this pearl. Your house and grill and baseball card are still mine, but I want you to look after them for me. And remember, you are mine, too."

This story has been with me for quite a while, and I share it because I think it centers the discussion of stewardship better than anything I can come up with myself. To understand the importance of stewardship, we must first acknowledge that everything we have comes from God, and is, in fact, still God's. We are just holding onto God's stuff for a while.

Indeed, a steward is someone who manages the assets of another. So when we talk about stewardship in a Christian context, we are saying that we are blessed with abundance from God, and we are striving to use that abundance justly and wisely. When we think of Christian giving-of time, of talent, of monetary resources-we should really tack on another word. We should think of it as "Christian giving *back*."

Stewardship always entails some form of giving. Stewardship has at its base a *certain kind* of giving that we do every Sunday. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we are literally "giving thanks," for that is what *Eucharist* means. By starting with thanksgiving, we acknowledge that our gifts, our lives, our livelihoods come from God. Stewardship must start with an "attitude of thanksgiving."

The reevaluation of our allocation of resources begins with humbly acknowledging that we are not the owners of the stuff we accumulate and gratefully giving thanks to God for what God has given us to look after. In the end, this all comes down to trust. The financial crisis in which we are currently embroiled is predicated on untrustworthy practices; indeed, we don't even know how much certain things are worth anymore because of deceit and mistrust. But God is trustworthy, and God has entrusted us with God's stuff. How will we respond?

## A Tithing Tidbit

*Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you."*  
Genesis 28:20-23

Our Book of Common Prayer teaches us that it is *"the duty of all Christians to follow Christ, to come together week by week for corporate worship and to work, pray and give for the spread of the kingdom of God."* (BCP, p. 856)

In the gospel, we have been given something that belongs to Jesus Christ. He tells us what to do with it. We are called to be stewards, or managers of his property - in our time, in our relationships, in our money, and in the gospel, all to his honor and glory.

How does this duty echo Jacob's vow in Genesis?

Compare the act of the tithe (giving a tenth of all you have) with the act of making an offering of Thanksgiving to God from the first fruits of the gifts we have been given. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach? Which attracts you and why?

## A Final Thought

Hymn #705 (Words by Frank von Christiernson)

As those of old their first fruits brought of vineyard, flock, and field to God, giver of all good, the source of bounteous yield; so we today our first fruits bring, the wealth of this good land, of farm and market, shop and home, of mind and heart, and hand.

A world in need now summons us to labor, love and give; to make our life an offering to God that all may live; the Church of Christ is calling us to make the dream come true: a world redeemed by Christ-like love; all life in Christ made new.

With gratitude and humble trust we bring our best to thee to serve thy cause and share thy love with all humanity. O thou who gavest us thyself in Jesus Christ thy Son, help us to give ourselves each day until life's work is done.

# The Kingdom of Heaven is Like

**The Second Lesson: Matthew 18:23-35**  
(The Unforgiving Servant)

**Tithing Tidbit: Leviticus 27:30-32**  
("All tithes...are holy to the Lord")

*Prepared by The Rev. Mike Snider*  
*Rector, Christ Church, Bluefield West Virginia*

## An Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father you are our Lord and our King; make us mindful of how we prioritize our accounts; make us aware of all the areas of our lives we have debts we cannot repay; forgive us the times we hold people to standards we are unable to meet; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

## The Scripture

<sup>23</sup> "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. <sup>24</sup> When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; <sup>25</sup> and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup> So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' <sup>29</sup> Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' <sup>30</sup> But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup> Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' <sup>34</sup> And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. <sup>35</sup> So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

## Comment

For Jesus, the king is a Gentile tyrant; for Matthew, the king already represents God, and "debt" represents sin. One understanding is that the servant is not a household slave, but a subordinate official. The debt was incurred through mismanagement of the king's resources and/or contracting to raise taxes from subject nations, not by personal expenditures. Any way you interpret who the "slave" is the debt is unpayable. Casting the servant into prison will be punitive—it will pay him back for his gross mismanagement—but it is utterly beyond the realm of possibility that the servant can repay his debt, no matter how much time is given.

## Questions

- What happens to your life when you forget that you live under a heavenly king who has the right to settle accounts?
- Do you live all areas of your life according to the profession “Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead?”

## Comment

The slave asks for mercy, and contrary to all expectation, the king responds with compassion.

## Questions

- Do you ever ask for mercy? Why or why not?
- Do you recognize when your debts are forgiven?
- How do you respond to being forgiven?

## Comment

The outrageous contrast between the way the first servant is treated by the king and the way the servant treats his fellow servant is not just a contrast of amounts owed. It is the whole thrust of the parable. It is used to bring the second scene into line with the first. The servant does not respond to his fellow servant as he has been treated by the king. Then the unthinkable happens. The king takes back his forgiveness, and the servant is condemned to eternal torment.

## Questions

- When happens when you apply standard of “for with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get” to your life? (Matthew 7:2)
- What areas of your life do you struggle to forgive your brothers and sisters?
- What do you need to do to forgive them?
- What forgiveness do you need from your brothers and sisters?

## Comment

Matthew has clearly allegorized the parable, so that the king equals God; debt equals sin; first servant equals the one who is forgiven an enormous debt of sin by God; second servant equals one who has committed an “ordinary” sin against a fellow human being or fellow Christian. This is a vivid lesson on forgiveness.

## A Tithing Tidbit

*All tithes from the land, whether the seed from the ground or the fruit from the tree, are the LORD's; they are holy to the LORD. If persons wish to redeem any of their tithes, they must add one-fifth to them. All tithes of herd and flock, every tenth one that passes under the shepherd's staff, shall be holy to the LORD. Leviticus 27:30-32*

## Closing Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen

# The Kingdom of Heaven is Like

**The Third Lesson: Matthew 20:1-16**  
**(The Laborers in the Vineyard)**  
**Tithing Tidbit: Deuteronomy 14:22-29**  
**("Set apart a tithe")**  
*Prepared by Dr. Timothy Saxe*  
*Member, Stewardship Commission*

## **An Opening Prayer**

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; Psalm 78:1-7

## **The Scripture**

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 4 and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. 5 When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. 6 And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' 7 They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' 8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' 9 When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11 And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12 saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' 13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' 16 So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

## **Questions**

- If this is a parable that describes how a loving God treats his creation, how should we as good stewards of His creation respond to Him?

- Have you ever been jealous of the bounty that another has received? Why?
- How does this parable relate to our being good stewards of God's creation?

## Comment

Giving of a whole day's wages to those who had only done one hour of work is designed to show that God distributes his rewards by grace and sovereignty, and not by debt. The best of the workers, those that begin first and worked the longest, as well as the workers who truly scarcely worked in the vineyard are treated the same. Because we are under grace, and not under the law, all services, done in sincerity, shall not only be accepted, but also by free grace richly rewarded. Compare Luke 17:7-8, with Luke 12:37

## Questions

- Do we respond to God out of "a debt to be repaid" or from that place of grace that lives within us?
- Do you think the worker who worked only one hour was appreciative of the day's wage he received, or did he assume it was owed to him?
- Does it bother you when a gift you have given is not appreciated? Why?

## Comment

*The parable of the gift*

*The Master of a monastery he required larger quarters, since those in which he was teaching were overcrowded. A wealthy merchant decided to donate five hundred pieces of gold toward the construction of a more commodious school. This money he brought to the teacher.*

*The Master said: "All right. I will take it."*

*The merchant gave the sack of gold, but he was dissatisfied with the attitude of the teacher. One might live a whole year on three gold pieces, and the merchant had not even been thanked for five hundred.*

*"In that sack is five hundred gold pieces," hinted the merchant.*

*"You told me that before," replied the Master.*

*"Even if I am a wealthy merchant, five hundred gold pieces are a lot of money," said the merchant*

*"Do you want me to thank you for it?" asked the Master.*

*"You ought to," replied the Merchant.*

*Why should I?" inquired the Master. "The givers are the ones who should be thankful."*

## Questions

- Why should the Giver be thankful?
- What happens when we give? Remember the words of St Francis...”it is in giving that we receive”
- How is this true, that in giving there is no loss?
- Is there a difference between a sacrifice and a gift?
- Which is more valuable, which means more to the receiver?
- Is the moth drawn to the flame because it loves the light, or fears the darkness?
- Are you drawn to the Devine because of fear or love?
- Do you give because of duty and fear of reprisals or because of love and appreciation? Which do you think means more to God?

## A Tithing Tidbit

22 Set apart a tithe of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field. 23 In the presence of the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose as a dwelling for his name, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the firstlings of your herd and flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. 24 But if, when the LORD your God has blessed you, the distance is so great that you are unable to transport it, because the place where the LORD your God will choose to set his name is too far away from you, 25 then you may turn it into money. With the money secure in hand, go to the place that the LORD your God will choose; 26 spend the money for whatever you wish — oxen, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever you desire. And you shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your household rejoicing together. 27 As for the Levites resident in your towns, do not neglect them, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you. 28 Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; 29 the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake. *Deuteronomy 14:22-29*

## Questions

- Why are we asked to tithe?
- What does tithing guarantee?
- What does tithing say about our relationship with God?
- When the church discusses tithing how does it make you feel?
- Should we give as a sacrifice, out of duty (give till it hurts) or because of our love and gratitude for the blessings of God’s creation?

## Comment

Many ancient agriculture based cultures developed religions that saw the earth as our mother. By giving back a tenth of the harvest the size of next years harvest was guaranteed. This tithe was good agriculture. One saved the best seed to be given back, planted the next year. Thus over generations of farming this natural selection of the best, better plants gave better harvests.

## Questions

- How can this same principal translate into our daily lives and practices?
- What implications does tithing have for our culture today, our relationship with Christ, the church and the communities in which we live?

## A Final Thought

If we believe that God is the source of all gifts spiritual and material, what implications does this have for everyday life?

- What is our response to what we believe: gratitude, giving, being good stewards, a commitment to follow Christ?
- How do you now see God's relationship to us?
- How do you now see our relationship to God?
- Has there been a change in your commitment to Christ or the Christness in others?
- What do I need to do now?

## Closing Prayer

*Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi*

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

# The Kingdom of Heaven is Like

**The Fourth Lesson: Matthew 22:1-14**  
**(The Parable of the Wedding Banquet)**

**Tithing Tidbit: Malachi 3:6-12**  
**(Accusation concerning tithes)**

*Prepared by The Rev. William Carl Thomas*  
*Rector, Saint Matthews, Charleston West Virginia*

## **An Opening Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

## **Reflection on the opening prayer**

You are probably wondering, “Why the Lord’s Prayer and not an intentional stewardship prayer given that this series is geared around stewardship?” This series is entitled *The Kingdom of Heaven is Like* and within the Lord’s Prayer Jesus teaches us “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” As you enter into The Parable of the Wedding Banquet ponder what it takes to recognize the moments you clearly see the kingdom of heaven on earth.

## **Questions**

- What is God inviting you to both see and do?
- Is being a good steward a form of living into the prayer “thy will be done?”
  - Is discerning and following God’s will a form of obedience?
  - The Latin root for obedience is *obaudire* (to hear or listen completely). St. Benedict taught “listen with the ear of the heart.”
  - Is there a relation between “thy will be done” and listening with the ear of the heart?
- Is it possible for the Kingdom of Heaven to be a reality now? If so, what would it look like?

## A Personal Reflection on “invitation.”

Two years ago I was in a familiar chapel during a clergy training conference. I had had distinct God moments during Centering Prayer in this chapel in previous years and was looking forward to more of the same. I sat in early morning quiet of the chapel and could not get my mind to join in the silence. Busy thoughts were overwhelming my desire and expectation of the clarity and peace that comes from a God moment. I was frustrated as all seemed lost when we moved from silence into the comfortable rhythm of Morning Prayer. It was with these words coming from my lips joined with other I heard God call me to a new breath prayer, “I have nothing to prove, only your invitation to offer.” Wow, my body tingled and I realized that it would be 20 minutes before I could leave to write down these incredible God given words. The impulse to leave Morning Prayer was strong but somehow I stayed. The new breath prayer found harmony with the spoken Morning Prayer. Obviously, I managed to remember. Now I hope I have the grace to be a vehicle of God’s love even for those people who reject that love.

## Comment

The Parable of The Wedding Banquet is not unique to Matthew. Luke has a simpler version as does the Gnostic gospel of Thomas. Matthew, however, closes the parable as you will see in verse 14 with the words “For many are called, but few are chosen.” M. Eugene Boring in his commentary on Matthew found within The New Interpreter’s Bible Volume VII writes on page 418, “Matthew does not use ‘call’ in the sense of ‘effective call,’ as does Paul, but in sense of initial invitation to become a disciple. Whether one is actually ‘chosen’ (‘elected.’ i.e ., accepted in the last judgment) depends on manifesting authentic Christian faith in deeds of love and justice.”

## Questions

- Look closely for the theme of invitation.
- Ignore the parts that make no sense to the narrative (i.e. verse 6 – a possible reference to the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 CE) unless you want to look at the broader themes found in the Gospel according to Matthew
- Can you move from the seemingly unfair condemnation in verse 12 and find a connection with what Matthew might be portraying as authentic Christian faith?
  - Is it possible to reject the grace of God?
  - By what actions (or inaction) would such a rejection be known?

## The Scripture

1 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2“<sup>2</sup>The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3<sup>3</sup>He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4<sup>4</sup>Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ 5<sup>5</sup>But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6<sup>6</sup>while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed

them. 7The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ 10Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. 11“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, 12and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. 13Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 14For many are called, but few are chosen.”

- In this parable, who do you think Matthew was referring to when he wrote of those “not worthy?”
- How do verses 8-10 correspond to the Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:18-20?

*18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

- How broad is God’s invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven?
- Are there consequences that follow accepting the invitation?
- As one who has accepted the invitation to follow Christ and act God’s steward, what challenges to you find in the following statement:

Salvation history is a web made up of the interaction between God’s gracious invitation and man’s free response. If man’s response does not take God’s invitation seriously, it will be the wrong response. (*Commentary on Matthew* by John P. Meier, page 249).

- What connection do you see to this statement and the guest not dressed in the wedding robe in verse 12?
- How does Matthew’s call to action to live the Christian life resonate with your actions as a Christian, especially in your actions as God’s steward?
- Do your actions invite the Kingdom of Heaven to be accessible here on earth?
- What changes are needed for you to make heaven more a reality here on earth?

## Tithing Tidbit

*The tithing tidbit is in **bold**:*

6For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished.7Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, “How shall we return?” 8Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, “How are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings! 9You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! **10Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you**

***an overflowing blessing.*** 11I will rebuke the locust for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the Lord of hosts. 12Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts. *Malachi 3:6-12*

- Does the prophetic theme of Malachi (which means “messenger”) resonate with the previous statement, “interaction between God’s invitation and man’s free response?”
- Using the words of Malachi, what does God yearn for from the “called?” (Matthew 22:14)
- Again, using the words of Malachi, how will God reward the “chosen?”
- Is the phrase, “land of delight” (Malachi 3:12) a description of “heaven on earth?”
- Is commitment to being God’s steward in the form of the tithe a way to express the obedience necessary to make “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven?”

## **Closing Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

# The Kingdom of Heaven is Like

**The Fifth Lesson: Matthew 25:1-13**  
(The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids)

**Tithing Tidbit: Hebrews 7:4**  
(Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek)

*Prepared by Linda Crocker*  
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## **An Opening Prayer**

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **The Scripture**

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five of them were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us: you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

## **Background**

In the preceding weeks we have examined many images of the Kingdom through Jesus' parables. This parable is one of the last in Matthew's gospel. It is in a series that is talking about the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming and the final judgment.

## **Comment**

This passage reminds me of the ways I would try to teach 'life lessons' to my children, for example personal safety lessons. I started with rules – you have to hold my hand to cross the street, you have to wear your seatbelt, don't get in a car with a stranger, wear shoes when you go outside. As the kids got older and needed to make their own decisions my teaching was more along the lines of advice and examples from real life as they learned to make their own decisions – if you don't wear a jacket you will be cold, make sure that branch is strong enough to hold you, remember when your brother broke his nose jumping off the top bunk, I remember when I slammed my sister into the garage door because I

wasn't paying attention. Finally they became teenagers or young adults and I had given them rules, advice, examples, I'd done my best and they ignored it all - they finally heard "What were you thinking? You're an adult. You don't always get a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance. Grow up!"

## Questions

- Have you had this experience as a parent?
- In the workplace?
- In another setting?
- Do you sense a similar scenario behind the passage from Matthew?

## “Our lamps are going out”

### Questions

Think of a time when you were caught unprepared for an important event.

- What circumstances led to you being 'foolish'?
- What were your thoughts and feelings at being 'caught'?
- Did/could anyone help you out of your predicament?

Think of a time when you were prepared for an important event but a friend, colleague or family member was unprepared.

- What circumstances led to you being prepared?
- What were your thoughts and feelings at seeing others unprepared? About your own preparedness?
- Did you help the unprepared? Why/Why not?

## Comment

This parable is full of symbols – many see the bridegroom as Jesus, the wedding banquet as the Kingdom of Heaven, the foolish and wise bridesmaids as unfaithful and faithful Christians.

### Questions

- What other symbols and representations can you find?
- What does it mean when the bridegroom says 'I do not know you'?
- Imagine that you are a foolish bridesmaid, an unfaithful Christian – what are your thoughts and feelings at being told 'I do not know you'?
- Imagine that you are a wise bridesmaid – what are your thoughts and feelings at being welcomed into the wedding banquet?
- At leaving the others behind?
- What qualities distinguish foolishness from wisdom in the parable?
- What parallel qualities do you think distinguish the unfaithful from the faithful?
- Is this related to a difference in outward signs of faithfulness vs. inner faithfulness?

## Tithing Tidbit

“See how great he is! Even Abraham the patriarch gave him a tenth of the spoils.”  
*Hebrews 7:4*

### Comment

The ‘he’ is Melchizedek, identified in Genesis 14:17-20 as King of Salem (a name for Jerusalem) and a priest of God Most High. He has blessed Abram (Abraham) after a battle victory (Abram’s nephew Lot was rescued and Abram receives the spoils of war). The blessing is immediately followed by Abram giving ‘one tenth of everything’ to Melchizedek. This is the first instance of a tithe recorded in the Bible.

### Questions

- What are the links you see between tithing and thanksgiving?
- What are the links you see between tithing and faithfulness?
- What are the links you see between tithing and being prepared?
- How might tithing help you to become truly faithful?

### A Final Thought

The parable indicates real consequences for the unfaithful and a need to be alert and ready. However the ‘Kingdom of God’ is not just some future event after death but a reality we are trying to live into yesterday, today and tomorrow.

- Remember a time when you felt really alert and aware of God’s presence.
- What practical steps can you share with others that help you to stay alert to God?

### Closing Hymn

*Give Me Oil in My Lamp* Unknown Author Words public domain

Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning  
Give me oil in my lamp, I pray  
Give me oil in my lamp, keep my burning  
Keep me burning till the break of day

Chorus:

Sing hosanna, sing hosanna  
Sing hosanna to the King of kings  
Sing hosanna, sing hosanna  
Sing hosanna to the King

Vs 2: Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising

Vs 3: Give me peace in my heart, keep me resting

Vs 4: Give me love in my heart, keep me serving

The Kingdom  
of Heaven  
is Like

# The Kingdom of Heaven is Like



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