



The Parables of Jesus

SERMON SERIES DEVOTIONAL

Name





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Introduction to the Parables

The Valley loves a good story and a good story is always better with intention. Intention behind a good story causes everyone to reflect, even if it's for a moment. A good story will remind people of a shared experience or something to consider. This is why we have chosen to walk through a series on the Parables of Jesus. Throughout the gospels, when Jesus taught a parable, he was always in community and always provided the parable in the form of a good story.

In short, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly intention. Each time you come across a parable, the story is meant to be relatable, reflective, and thought provoking. The intention of each parable is to get us to consider the condition of our heart as it relates to a relationship with Jesus. Every parable we examine over the next ten weeks is meant to draw us closer to the One who gave Himself for us through a sinless life and substitutionary death on a cross so that we might know God. The parables will teach us that it is not our efforts, prior knowledge and experience, or resumé that God desires, but our heart.

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

This devotional is designed to help you consider and apply God's word in practical ways. We have created content such as this devotional because we deeply long for the people of God to know Jesus better and to flourish as they pursue righteousness. Discipleship through devotionals are a great tool to help draw and immerse you in the pages of Scripture. Each devotional is meant to help

you slow down and contemplate on the words of Jesus as you apply them in the context of your everyday life.

I pray that you are blessed by this devotional and the creative work placed by several authors to better serve you. May the Holy Spirit be your great guide and counselor as you receive the words of Jesus through His parables.

Warmly,

Pastor Marco



The Sower

MATTHEW 13:1-23

For a moment, let's go back to our elementary science roots. One of the basic topics we learned about is that of plants and their seeds. I'm sure we have all done the "plants in cups" project or have helped our children, nieces, or nephews with a similar assignment for school. That particular project was not only created so that we could see what types of soils work better, but so that we could also have in mind the popular quote, "no soil, no life." This means that if a seed does not grow and sprout as it is intended to, the problem is not the seed, but rather the soil it is being planted in.

So why the crash course on soil and seeds? In this parable, Jesus teaches the "plants in cups" experiment as a reality to our spiritual life. Not only does Jesus compare the soil to our hearts, but He confirms that by nature our hearts are corrupted. Because of this corruption, the seed, which is represented by the Gospel, is not able to take root and grow. Jesus teaches us this by giving us three possible causes as to why the Gospel doesn't take root in the human heart. Firstly, Jesus talks about those whose hearts are not receptive to the gospel because of a hardened heart (*Matt 13:5*). In this scenario, sin has such a grip over their lives that their hearts are "sealed off" to anything that God has to say.

Because of this, they are prevented from seeing the Gospel as good news. Secondly, Jesus introduces those who are shallow hearted toward the Gospel (*Matt 13:6*). Although at first they may have heard the Gospel and confessed their faith, in a momentary lapse of time once the excitement is over, they become disinterested and eventually “fall out” of the faith. In the end, these individuals were more interested in their experience, and as a result, we never actually saved. Lastly, we learn about those whose hearts are so invested in this world that they lose sight of the Gospel (*Matt 13:7*). Whether it be jobs, money, hobbies, or cars, individuals in this category care far more about this temporary world than they do about the riches of eternal glory and their communion with the Father.

Given everything that Jesus has said, this calls for us to examine our soil. Christian, what is your heart set on? Is it experience? Is it in the toil and “riches” of life? Jesus said “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (*Matt 6:21*). Our hearts will follow the things that we find high regard to. If it is not in Christ, where is our hope placed? Church, let us look to God the Father, the Divine Gardener who tills the barren lands of our hearts so that we would be receptive to the seed that is the glorious truth of the Gospel.

Questions

1. Before your conversion, where might you have landed from the three “types” of soil? Why?
2. In our culture, why are experience and the things of this world so important? How is the Gospel counter-cultural?
3. How has your conversion affected the way you view the Gospel?

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The Unforgiving Servant

MATTHEW 18:21-35

How many times should we forgive our brothers and sisters when they sin against us? Surely it's a question that has come to our minds often as it did to Peter's in this portion of scripture (*Matt 18:21-35*).

To emphasize His point, Jesus tells the disciples this parable: a wealthy king is approached by his servant who owed him a lot of money (ten thousand talents). In passing, we might not think much about that sum; however, it was the amount King Herod's whole kingdom was bringing in annually. In today's currency, it would be equivalent to 3.6 million dollars. Despite the enormous debt, the king finds pity on the servant and forgives him of his debt. The servant then walks through the palace gates and runs into a man who owes him money. Although the man's debt was pricey, comparatively, it was "pebbles" to what the servant owed the king. The amount was one hundred denarii, equivalent to a few thousand dollars. Resorting to physical violence, the servant grabs the man by the throat and throws him into a debtor's prison. The king becomes furious when he hears of this man's inconsistency and throws the unforgiving servant into the debtor's prison as well.

When Jesus shares this parable, He is not saying we should forgive if we want to be saved, rather since we are

saved we ought to forgive. Jesus reminds us how great our debt to God truly is. By nature, we break God's law constantly and consistently. To use the language of our parable, our debt to our king runs into the millions and is unpayable. However, when Christ spoke this parable, He was on His way to the cross, sent by the Father, our king, so that our debt would not only be paid for, but completely forgiven. It is only because of His Son's sacrifice on the cross that there can be forgiveness for any sinner. Once we come to the reality of the debt we owed to God, it should lead us to quickly loosen the grip on our fellow believer's throat. Although we might find it difficult to forgive the same person three times, much less seven, Jesus casts all the sins of His people "into the depths of the sea" and remembers them no more (*Mic 7:19*). Our only hope is to be truly forgiven out of the free mercy of God in Christ. His forgiveness is lavish, glorious, fear-inducing, and produces thankfulness. Let us lean on God's enabling grace to forgive in an unbound way.

Questions

1. If we fail to forgive, how would verses 34-35 be applied in that scenario?
2. In your own words define forgiveness. How does the view of a great debt help us to forgive those who sin against us?
3. How do we reconcile God’s omniscience with *Micah 7:19*?

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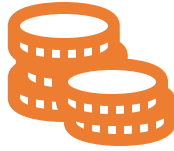
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The Hidden Treasure

MATTHEW 13:44-46

In *Matthew 13:44-46*, Jesus tells his audience the parable of the hidden treasure. In this parable, when a man discovers treasure, he makes sure it stays tucked away, and sells everything that he has to obtain it. For those on the outside looking at this, he would have looked like a fool. All of that for a simple piece of land? But the man was no fool, for he knew something that they did not know. He recognized that the treasure in the field far exceeded in worth all that he had and all that he could ever hope for. Therefore, his calculated risk was actually no risk at all. Instead, it was a joyful and uneven trade.

Similarly, in our salvation there is an uneven trade that occurs at the moment of our faith in Jesus. All of our sinful deeds that deem us guilty and unrighteous before a just and holy God are traded for Jesus's perfect and righteous deeds so that we are granted a place in heaven with our Father for eternity. For this reason, Jesus is greater than all the treasures of the world and better than all of our own personal treasures. This includes the things we value most, our plans, possessions, time, health, or even life itself. If Christ is supremely valuable, then selling everything and giving everything to have Him is not a loss—it is a gain. Jesus said to those who would follow Him, "For whoever would

save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (*Matt 16:25*).

As Christians, our response should be one of action, such as the man who sold all his possessions. Although salvation is God's work from start to finish, living out that gracious work should not be half-hearted. And there was nothing half-hearted about this man who found treasure in a field. We see a spirit of full-heartedness, of confidence, and of tenacity. We are to be living out this life for the glory of God every single day. It is not a half-hearted venture, and it is not a passive life. It's a life of action and urgency, and faith and joy.

Questions

1. What is double imputation? How important is it in our salvation? Why do you say that?
2. What are some practical ways we can "sell" all that we have in exchange for God's kingdom?
3. If you remember, describe your moment of conversion. Were you feeling liberated, joyful, sorrowful, guilty? Have you been joyfully and wholeheartedly pursuing Christ? What seems to stop you?

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The Mustard Seed

MATTHEW 13:31-33

A particular weed is found in the Rio Grande Valley with thorny seeds. This espina grows in and amongst the grass of your lawn and can be rather difficult to notice, until you step on one that is. However, the real problem with this espina is that, if left unchecked, soon your entire lawn will be coated in the stuff, which means that painful thorns will dog your every step and coat your shoes. The parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven found in Matthew 13 are reminiscent of the espina found in our yards. They both point to the ease in which evil can permeate the Church and us.

These two short parables are sandwiched between another parable, the Parable of the Weeds (v. 24-30) and its explanation (v. 36-43). Since the Mustard Seed and the Leaven are found here, we can understand them to be reinforcing the message of this parable. Jesus explains that amongst the righteous saints of the Church will be the unrighteous, masquerading, infiltrating, and deceiving. In the end, God will separate the holy and unholy, however, in this present age they are mingled together, difficult to differentiate, yet able to exert great influence. The Mustard Seed and the Leaven show the devastation of sinful influence. In both cases, a small seed and a small portion of

leaven grow and become a place where evil roosts until the entire community is corrupted.

It can be easy to accept certain evil in our own lives. Sin becomes normal or justified in our minds. You may look at your angry outbursts at your family as just your personality, the small lies throughout the day as a means to save face, or the secret addiction to pornography just a normal part of modern life. However, each sin is a mustard seed, a portion of leaven, that will continue to grow and spread, multiplying sin. Despite how many sins we may entertain, God does not leave us alone in this fight. Jesus Christ died for each and every sin, even the ones we try to justify. He has forgiven and redeemed us, declaring victory over them all. The Holy Spirit dwells within you, granting power to say "enough is enough." It is never too late to submit any sin, great or small, to God and receive the grace He freely offers. Examine your life and heart. Confess and repent of any sins you have allowed to take residence and enter into a new day of victory and redemption, free and righteous.

Questions

1. How have you seen the influence of sin spread in your life?
2. Do you take sin seriously? Even the “little” ones?
3. Do you really believe that Jesus gives you freedom from all sin?

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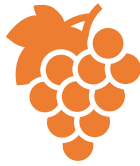
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The Workers in the Vineyard

MATTHEW 20:1-16

A teacher once bought presents for her students. Each present was individually wrapped and each present was a different size. When it came time to give the presents away, each student had the opportunity to choose which one they wanted. After unwrapping their present, the kids learned that they had all received the same gift. There were some who were a little disappointed, while others were puzzled. However, the teacher was never as concerned about the presents as much as she was about the joy of her students.

This is how we are introduced to the parable of the workers in the vineyard (*Matt 20:1-16*). In this passage, an owner of a vineyard hires multiple workers throughout the day to tend his vineyard, and doesn't only agree to pay them a denarius (a day's wage), but hires them on the account of their willingness to work. There aren't many more details concerning the "plot" of this parable. In the end, each worker is paid what was agreed (v.2) regardless of the hours they worked or whether or not they did a good job. In the end, the workers who worked the longest are upset and puzzled, assuming they would receive more for their labor, but instead feel shorted.

While we may think similarly about fairness or equal pay, that's not the point. The owner of the vineyard wasn't

thinking of profit or investment. Rather, the owner, who is God, was far more concerned with the people and His care for them. We are not given the details of his satisfaction with their labor or their diligence. Instead, we learn the heart of God: God cares more about the heart of people than their productive efforts.

This parable teaches us two things about ourselves and our relationship with God. First, we think God owes us (v. 10-15). Second, we have a tendency to view others as projects and production rather than people. The truth is that God owes us nothing, but nonetheless is rich in mercy and in Jesus, we are loved, valued, and served in spite of our production. The gospel reveals that He cares far more about you and your heart than anything else.

Questions

1. God does not owe us anything, we do not place Him in our pocket. How does this affect your view of God and His message of the gospel for you?
2. How can you serve others, as God does, this week? Think of three people.
3. What is God teaching you through this passage?

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The Prodigal Son

LUKE 15:11-32

Jesus was motivated to tell the parable of the prodigal son after He heard some Pharisees and scribes grumbling about His eating with sinners (Luke 15:1-2). While they might have acknowledged that they sinned from time to time, they did not view themselves as sinners. That was a term that applied to tax collectors, prostitutes, murderers, thieves; those who were "worse" than they were. The Pharisees and scribes believed that these individuals were so vile and corrupt that they were beyond the reach of God's love and grace. To squash their misunderstanding, Jesus taught them the parable of the prodigal son (*Luke 15:11-32*).

In the parable, after the son received his portion of inheritance, he squandered it all away, to the point that he desired to eat the food that the pigs had, since no one would even bother to give him food. Despite his circumstance, he remembered his father, and instead of sulking longer in his sin, he decided to return back to him. His plans were to confront his father and say "I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:19). From his words, we capture the status of his changed heart. First, we see a repentant heart. Not only

does he know that he sinned against his father, but he acknowledges that he first sinned against God. This is true even in our own lives. When we sin against others, it is not just our relationship with others that gets damaged, but also our relationship with God. The grim reality is that sin is never compartmentalized, it expands to every crevasse of our lives. However, like the prodigal son, we are to turn from our sin and approach our Father. Second, we see a lowly heart. The son insisted on not assuming the position of a son, but rather a servant. He was willing to take a subordinate position with no familial benefits just so that he could be with his father, even if it meant being a servant. As readers, we can clearly see the desperation of the son. How is our desperation to be with our Father in communion? Is it a lukewarm relationship? Or are we pursuing an intentional relationship day by day? However, before the son could even utter a word to his father, his father met him, restored him as a son, and joyfully called for a celebration.

The Pharisees and scribes, in this parable, are represented by the older brother, who is resentful at his father's embrace of his sinful sibling (*Luke 15:28-29*). How could his father welcome back this son who wasted his father's gifts in careless living and great sin, they would think. This is because they believed that God's love for them was based on how righteous they were. For this same reason the resentful brother expressed, "Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command" (*Luke 15:29*). His brother believed he deserved to be loved more because of all of his deeds. We can understand how upset they would be with this parable since it teaches us about God's love toward fallen people.

Despite the sin, this parable gives us comfort in knowing that when we come to our heavenly Father with repentant and lowly hearts, we can be assured that we will not be turned away. He will embrace us and exclaim, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (*Luke 15:24*). There is no sinner too far for God to reach. Church, let us rejoice in this great truth lest we may adopt a holier-than-thou attitude just like that of the resentful brother. We should not close the doors of our church to the most notorious sinners. If they have repented and turned to Christ, we must likewise embrace them. If we do not, then just like the Pharisees and scribes, we likely have not understood our own unworthiness and the lavish gift of grace God has given to us.

Questions

1. When a brother or sister repents, are you joyful for them or do you have the tendency to be a pharisee?
2. What does repentance look like in your life? Do you have difficulty repenting? Why?
3. How is your relationship with your terrestrial father? Do you have the tendency to view God the Father the same way? Why?

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The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

LUKE 18:9-14

In *Luke 18:9-14*, two men go up to the temple to pray. One is a Pharisee and the other is a tax collector. The Pharisees were known for looking and acting religious in public (*Luke 20:47*). In this parable, the Pharisee demonstrates exactly this in his prayer.

After offering a brief word of gratitude to God, he says he is not like other men; in fact, he is better than they are. He prays, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector" (*Luke 18:11*). First, when he measures himself against others, especially against the tax collector, he declares his superiority and arrogance. This practice is as dangerous as it is common; we too often compare ourselves to others to minimize the gravity of our sin. Although easy to do, we must keep in mind that the standard is not the conduct of other individuals, rather our conduct should always be measured up against Jesus' perfect righteousness. When we do that, we will find that we are just as guilty as those who we believe are "worse" than we are. Second, the Pharisee is boasting about what he has done. He continues, "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get" (*Luke 18:12*). The foundation and drive of his prayer is based, not on a need, but a "resume" of his own

righteousness. It was for this reason that Jesus taught them the parable (*Luke 18:9*). Boasting in ourselves before God is a sign of the pride that we carry. However, the Bible makes it clear that outside of Christ, our best deeds are like filthy rags (*Isa 64:6*). This means that there is no righteousness of us to speak about. In the end, it seems more likely that he's talking to himself than to God.

In contrast, there is the tax collector. Everything about him reveals contrition and brokenness. Humility comes through his posture and prayer. He stands far off because he is separated from God because of his sin. He is ashamed of his sin, so he won't even lift his eyes to heaven. He continues to beat his chest to show his sorrow. He cries out to God for mercy because he knows he is a sinner that desperately needs it instead of looking to himself for righteousness. The plea for mercy is a cry for God's anger to be removed graciously. Jesus concludes the story by telling us that "this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other" (*Luke 18:14*). The word "justified", or "justification" is a courtroom legal term that is used to say that an individual is in "right standing" with another party. The reality is that we are all in a courtroom whether we realize it or not. We all stand before God, the Great Judge, guilty of sinning against Him. Because of that, we deserve to be sentenced to death. As we've seen in the prayer of the Pharisee, one does not gain God's favor in the courtroom based on merits, rather, it comes by trusting in the righteousness of another. The man telling the parable, Jesus Himself, earned that righteousness that is counted to believers by living a holy and perfect life that we could never live. It is humbling to realize that we have nothing to

offer God. Rather, it is an occasion of rejoicing to realize that the justification we need is found in Christ.

Questions

1. How do justification and sanctification go hand-in-hand? Can you have one without the other?
2. How would you define intimacy in prayer? How can pride hurt your prayer relationship with God?
3. What are some of the ways that false humility can be displayed? How can we prevent ourselves from falling into it?

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The Sheep and the Goats

MATTHEW 25:31-46

Our sin not only corrupts our relationship with the Father, but also corrupts our relationship with one another. Within the fall of mankind until now, we have been estranged and alienated from one another as much as we've been estranged from God. In this parable, Jesus is primarily referring to our treatment of other believers in the context of the family of faith.

Jesus mentions two categories of people: sheep and goats. The sheep are often linked with those who are true believers and part of the family of faith. In the parable, it is the sheep that care for each other. Even if only in simple deeds, the sheep serve one another, especially the needy. In contrast, the goats are those individuals who are not part of the family of faith because they are false converts or because they are lukewarm. Though they dwell among God's flock, they disregard the sheep and overlook their needs. When we look at the actions of these groups, they point to the internal condition of their hearts. On one hand, the sheep are loving, caring, and selfless. On the other hand, the goats are arrogant, prideful, and selfish.

The solution is not just a "quick fix" and "do better, do more," but rather a genuine conversion that changes our affections, minds, and wills. Only through the repenting of

our sins are we granted this change of heart that will lead to producing fruitful actions. However, we should not look at this as a "solo mission." Jesus' ministry was one of reconciliation. The word "reconcile", or "reconciliation" means to bring together parties who are estranged or alienated. When we look at the cross, not only did Jesus sacrifice His life so that we would be reconciled to the Father, but also so that we would be reconciled with one another (2 Cor 5:18-20). This was Jesus' prayer in the book of John, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21). This does not mean that doing good works towards other believers merits salvation. Jesus is merely teaching that "if anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 John 4:20). Jesus is identified with His people, and whatever we do towards other Christians, we do to Him. This means that we serve the Lord when we do simple acts of service for one another, such as making a meal for new parents or a family who has recently lost a loved one, or a phone call or visit to the lonely. The donation of time, money, or supplies to your church's mercy ministry is an act of love for Jesus. Our profession of faith is invalid if we are not engaged in these or other similar activities.

Questions

1. How often are you in community with other believers? If you have not spent time with other believers, do you find that concerning? What makes it difficult to be in a community?
2. How can you better love your brothers and sisters in Christ? Practically, how can you tell them "I am here if you need me" with your actions?
3. Why is the community of faith so important? Do you view community as a necessary part of being a Christian? Why or why not?

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The Persistent Prayer

LUKE 18:1-8

Prayer is one of the foundational disciplines of the Christian life. Prayer is how we communicate with God, express our emotions, process our thoughts, and listen for the will of our Father. Prayer is vital. The parable of the Persistent Widow in *Luke 18* is about prayer, and gives us a special glimpse into Jesus' heart for us, especially as we go through trial and injustice.

In the parable, a widow persists in her appeal to an unrighteous judge for justice. She had been wronged and deserved justice, yet the judge would not rule in her favor. She continued to beat down his door until eventually he succumbs and grants her request. The widow finally receives justice. Jesus says that even this unrighteous man finally gave the widow justice, so how can we doubt that God will as well? Now, many will try to argue that this means if we just pray persistently enough then God will grant our every prayer. They will then blame any unanswered prayer to a lack of faith. This is an evil and heretical interpretation. This parable tells us to pray persistently, but not for anything and everything. A broad and general application does nothing but lead us into more despair, because not every prayer or desire will be granted.

Jesus tells us what this parable is about (v. 7-8). He says that God will speedily give justice to his elect and asks if “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” This parable is about the second coming of Jesus and the eternal Judgment that awaits us all. We can know that God will uphold his promises for this ultimate conclusion. What is that promise? That those who believe in faith will have eternal life with God! The life and work of Jesus Christ has made the way for any who believe in him to have everlasting life and to be judged holy at his second coming.

This parable is Jesus’ heart for us as we navigate a difficult life in this present age. Life will be difficult. We will be wronged and face injustice. Despite that, we can know with complete confidence that Jesus is coming again and those who believe and are his elect will experience grace and salvation. As we struggle in this life, persistently pray for that day to come and rejoice that it will. Jesus says that hope, that promise, that assurance is what will carry us through.

Questions

- 1. What about the second coming of Jesus comforts you? Scares you?
- 2. Does God's ultimate promise of justice give you comfort in the midst of present day injustice?
- 3. What does your prayer life look like? Is it mostly worship, supplication (asking for things), intercession (praying for others), or thanksgiving?

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The Wedding Feast

MATTHEW 22:1-14

If you take a walk through the neighborhood streets in the Valley on the weekends, the aroma of perfectly seasoned and mesquite grilled fajitas will bind the senses. The sounds of uncontrollable laughter, a loss of air, and red faces echoing through the alleyways will entice the ears to what they are missing. And finally, the clanking of cold drinks will pour refreshment over the soul. This is the Valley and everyone is invited, except when someone is invited and they don't show up.

Those who are absent will receive a flood of messages and phone calls that are both sarcastic and curious such as, "you think you're better than us, that's why you didn't come?" or " I thought you were coming over, what happened?" It's a mix of concern and slight insult.

The parable of the wedding feast (*Matt 22:1-14*) has similar parallels to our beloved Valley. The king, who represents God the Father, throws a feast for His son, who represents Jesus, and the guests who have been invited would not come (*v. 1-6*). In fact, according to Luke's gospel, these guests made excuses for not coming (*Luke 14:18-20*). The king then decides to extend the invitation to everyone else: those who are in the margins and the outskirts of the

city. This is similar to bringing someone to the family dinner who wasn't originally invited and one person shouts, "get them a plate!"

This parable provides three insights. First, those who were originally invited represent those who have known the message of the kingdom of God and ignored it. That's alarming because the intent of this parable is to show that simply because one has heard the message of the gospel doesn't mean they actually and affectionately know Jesus. Second, those who did attend were totally and utterly grateful to be included in the feast. They gratefully enjoyed the feast with the king and his son more than those who were "supposed" to be there.

Finally, the servants in this parable represent God's prophets who were ignored, rejected, and even beaten in the Old Testament. And while prophets are no longer around, the message of the gospel is still ignored and rejected by many who consider themselves a part of the people of God. This parable serves as a reminder: the gospel is an invitation to the downcast, transformation for the broken, and a warning to the hardened heart to repent.

Questions

1. There is a danger for Christians in allowing the gospel to become old and assuming news. The danger is that the gospel will be forgotten. How do you view the gospel today? What does this reveal about your heart toward God?
2. God in Christ calls us to Himself in spite of our status. How does His pursuit and affection of you help better understand the gospel?
3. What is God teaching you through this passage?

Notes

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Additional Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.





STOREHOUSE
Community Church