

Parables

OF THE KINGDOM



STUDY GUIDE

Parables

In the Gospel of Matthew there is an ancient explanation of Jesus' Parables.

All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet:

*"I will open my mouth in parables;
I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."*

The prophet referenced by Matthew is from the song book of Israel, the Psalms. The referenced section in Psalm 78 says,

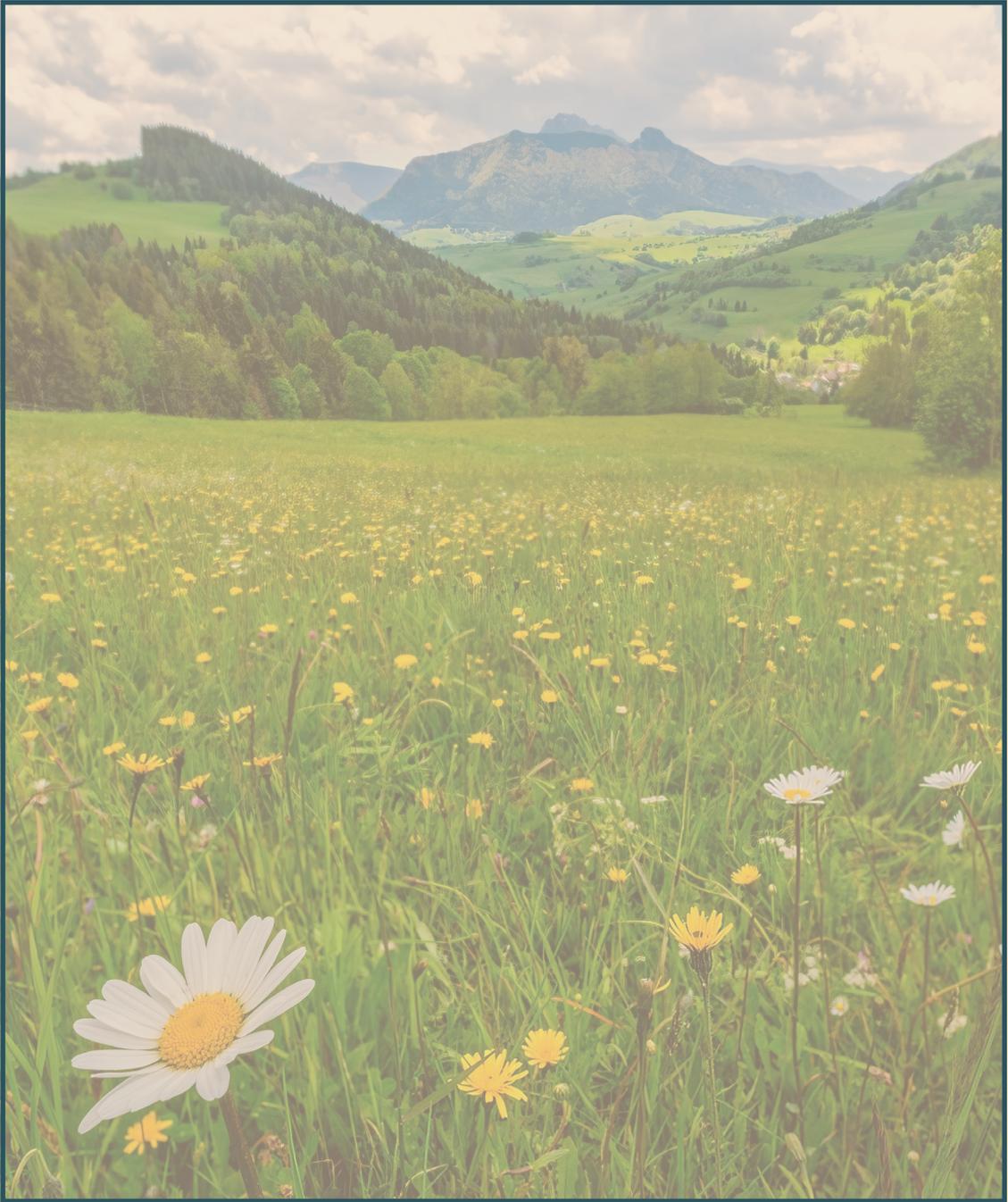
*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth!
I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,
things that we have heard and known,
that our fathers have told us.
We will not hide them from their children,
but tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.*

The message behind the parables in one sense is “hidden,” but has been “heard” and is “known.” The message is also intended to be passed down from “fathers” and to “the coming generation.”

These fascinating and sometimes challenging texts are set along the grain of reality, but somehow speak of greater truth. They are thought-provoking and sometimes mind-numbing. They are called “hidden.”

What are we to take from them? How do they speak about the same truths? How do we know what the kingdom of heaven is like?

Welcome to the Parables of the Kingdom . . .



Instructions

For The Series

As you go through the parables, each are a series of texts from the Gospels.

- 1. Pray before reading** through the passages for the session.
Ask that God's wisdom would prevail and that you may discern accurately.
- 2. Take time reading through each passage as a group.** Share the reading responsibility as much as appropriate.
- 3. We will give you a passage for each parable, but you may need to read some of the surrounding context** to answer the questions accurately.
- 4. Observe** what is going on in the passage before you attempt to interpret it. In longer parables, there may be characters and setting, but in some you will only have a comparative statement.
 - Don't read things into the text that aren't there.
 - Don't assume that a character in the parable is a direct match to someone in real life.
 - Try to discern the audience of the parable.
 - What does the parable reveal about the characters involved?
 - Is there a comparison or contrast being made in the parable?

Parables OF THE RETURN

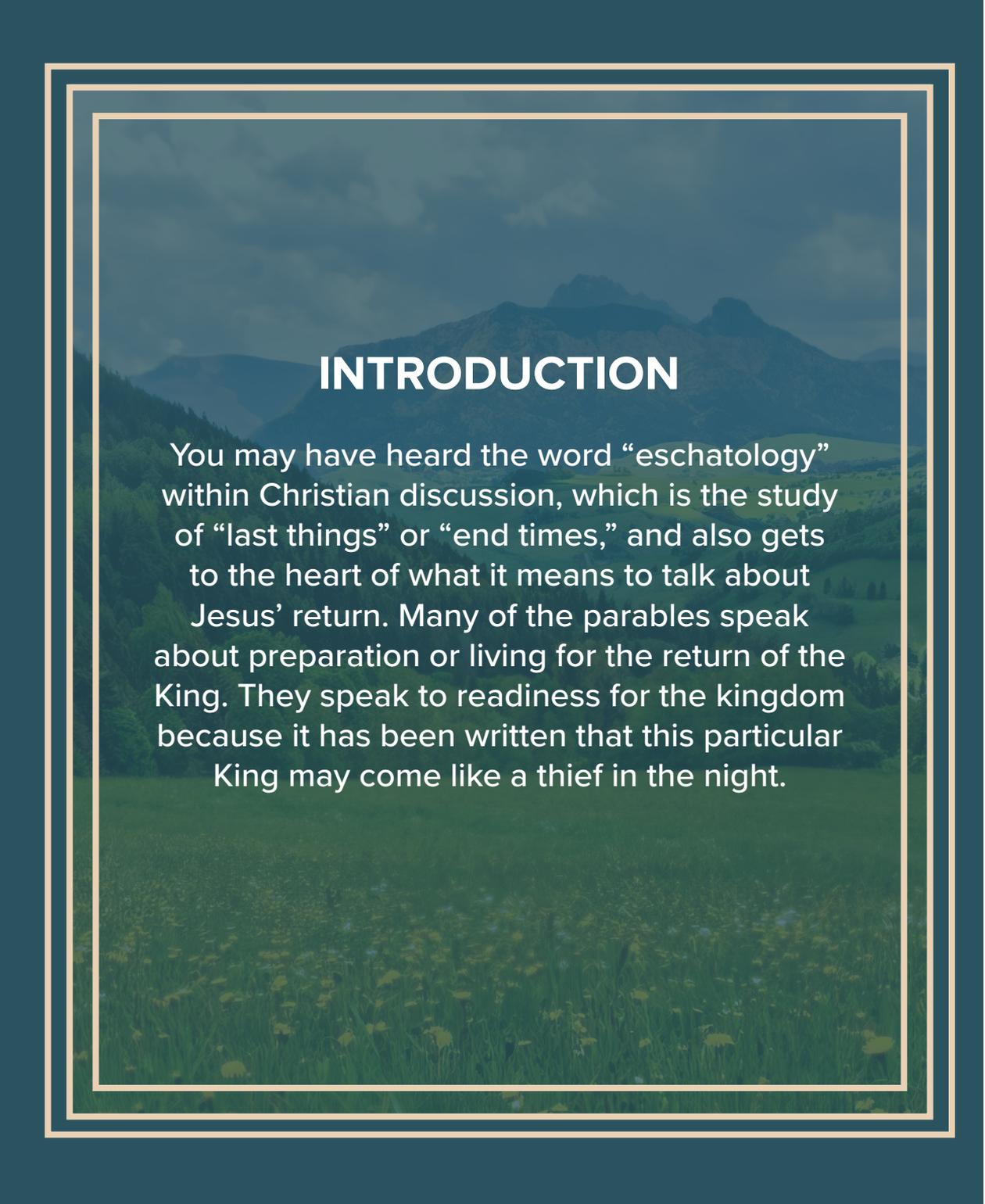


¹ “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

- Matthew 25:1-13 (ESV)

⁴⁶ “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? ⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”

- Luke 6:46-49 (ESV)

The background of the slide is a scenic landscape. In the foreground, there is a lush green field filled with numerous small, yellow wildflowers. The middle ground shows rolling green hills and dense evergreen forests. In the background, a range of rugged mountains with rocky peaks is visible under a sky filled with soft, grey clouds. The entire scene is presented with a dark blue overlay, and the text is centered in white.

INTRODUCTION

You may have heard the word “eschatology” within Christian discussion, which is the study of “last things” or “end times,” and also gets to the heart of what it means to talk about Jesus’ return. Many of the parables speak about preparation or living for the return of the King. They speak to readiness for the kingdom because it has been written that this particular King may come like a thief in the night.

Thinking Through The Parables

1. In one sentence what is the parable of the ten virgins about? What is the context of this parable?
2. What is your initial emotional response to the parable of the ten virgins? What is behind your response? To whom do you respond most negatively? Why?
3. Describe a time you were unprepared for something whether a test or a project. Was it an accident, did you not value the work, or are you a procrastinator? Explain.
4. This will require serious introspection and honesty, but are you the type that tends to come up with excuses when you fail or are you the type that quickly owns up to the failure? Why?
5. Read Matthew 13:24–30 and 13:47-50. What do these parables have in common? Why would we discuss these in regards to Jesus' return?

6. Now read Matthew 25:31–46. How does this passage fill out some information about readiness for the kingdom?

7. Read Matthew 25:14-30. What is the readiness that the master was expecting upon his return? Why might this come right after the parable of the ten virgins?

8. How is Jesus defining a “strong foundation” in Luke 6:46-49? Logically, which foundation requires more work and commitment to establish? What does this have to do with preparedness?

9. Read Matthew 21:28–32. Who is Jesus speaking to and who might be similar in today’s world?

10. Collectively, what do these parables say about not being prepared?

LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE Parables

There is a very fine line between parables of return and parables of judgment. It's kind of obvious why. There are two general responses to the return of the King. Obedience and rebellion. This makes it sound as if salvation by our King is somehow contingent upon how much we do in the process. So, what does being prepared look like? If you want to go on a camping trip, you get out your sleeping bag and your tent. You make sure they aren't infested with bugs and spiders. If you don't know how to prepare, you might ask your dad or a friend. Why? Because you want to go. You want it to be good. If you don't want to go, you simply don't prepare because you don't care.

It's a bit like when you fall in love with someone. You think about the person a lot. You share good food and great conversations. You give gifts that show them delight. Now imagine you discover the person you have fallen in love with chasing after several other lovers instead of you. It makes you hate the one whom you previously loved. Not our King. Not in His Kingdom. He looks at all of our rebellion and chases us down anyway. He wants His good to be experienced, and that should make us want to be prepared. The fullness of His utter goodness is promised.

So, what does your own preparedness for the Kingdom look like? How is your life different now that you want to be part of His Kingdom? Where are areas you have failed to "trim your wicks" and "bring extra flasks of oil"?

Parables
OF THE SURPASSING
WORTH OF THE KINGDOM

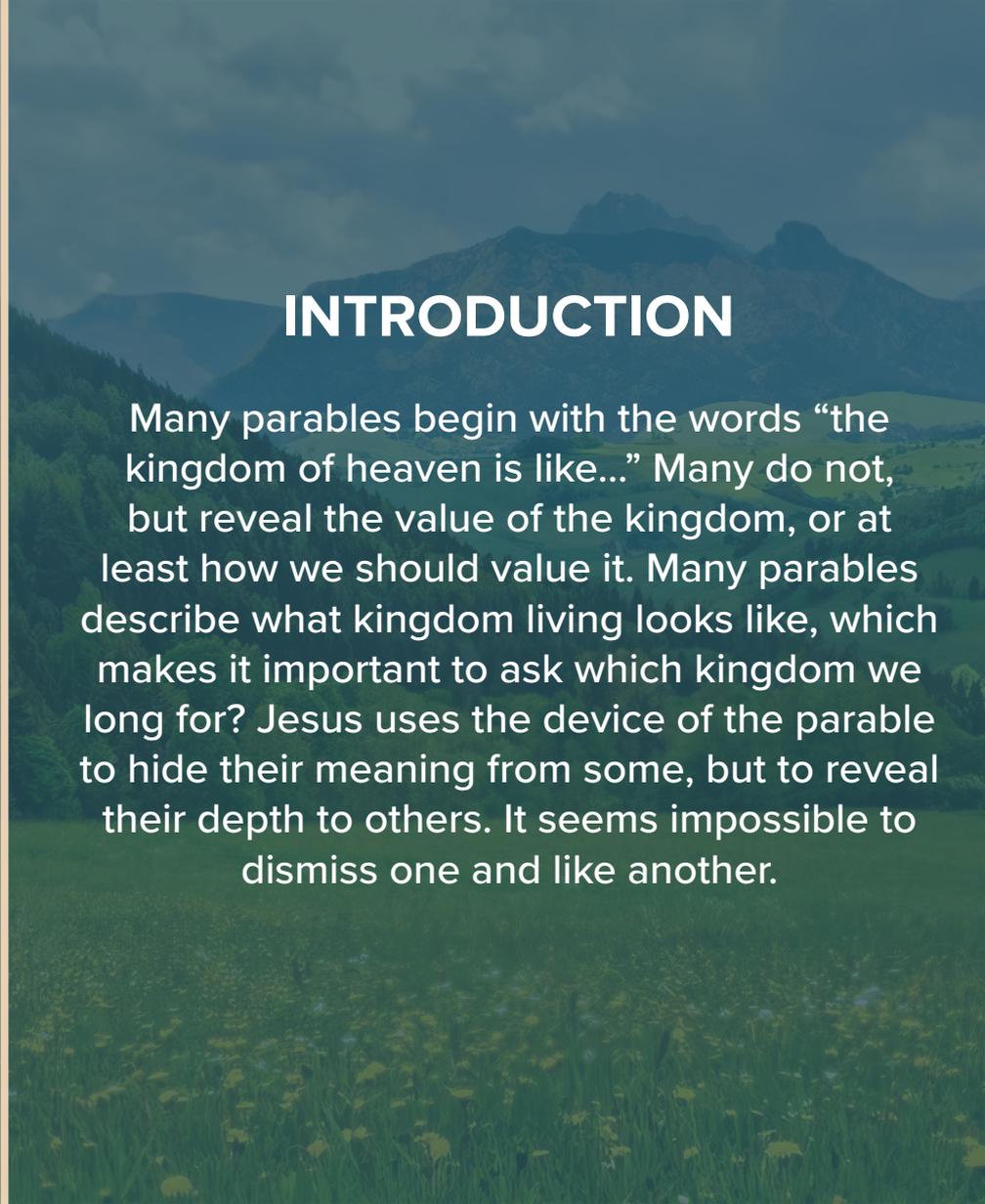


⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

- Matthew 13:44-46 (ESV)

¹ “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴ and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ ⁵ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ ⁸ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ ⁹ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, 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 a denarius? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last.”

- Matthew 20:1-16 (ESV)

A scenic landscape featuring a range of mountains in the background under a cloudy sky. In the foreground, there is a lush green field filled with numerous small, yellow wildflowers. The entire scene is framed by a double-line border in a light, warm color.

INTRODUCTION

Many parables begin with the words “the kingdom of heaven is like...” Many do not, but reveal the value of the kingdom, or at least how we should value it. Many parables describe what kingdom living looks like, which makes it important to ask which kingdom we long for? Jesus uses the device of the parable to hide their meaning from some, but to reveal their depth to others. It seems impossible to dismiss one and like another.

Thinking Through The Parables

1. What makes something valuable to you? Pick an example and work backwards into the reasons it is valuable.
2. Contrast Luke 12:13-21 with the “pearl of great value” and the “treasure hidden in a field” parables. Describe the ironies between these stories.
3. How do the parables of the “leaven” and “mustard seed” that are just before the “pearl of great value” and the “treasure hidden in a field” parable build upon the nature of the kingdom?
4. Reading Mark 4:26–29, what does this parable say about the value of creation to humanity? Without a Christian worldview, where is the value in this agricultural process?

5. Reading Matthew 20:1–16, What do the workers think of the master? How does this parable speak to the surpassing worth of the kingdom?
6. What do you think of the master of the house? How would you respond if your boss did something similar? Explain.
7. In the center of Luke 7:36–50 is a parabolic statement. Here we can see the direct use of a parable to teach. Who is Jesus challenging? What does a person who values Him look like?
8. If someone asked you what the “kingdom of heaven” was like, what would you say? Maybe try writing something. If the same person watched you live your life at work, at home, or even while playing, what would they think the kingdom of heaven is like?
9. Is there something in your life that you really don’t like, but most of your money, time and energy go to it? What makes you continue? Explain.

LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE Parables

If we are being honest, we assign value to things almost as unpredictably as stock market valuations of stocks. The up, the down, and overall craziness is based upon wants, emotions, and desires, rarely based upon actual value. We want things that we think will bring happiness and stability, but we are never sure what will deliver.

Here's a simple question. What would you bury in the field or sell everything to acquire? What is the one thing you trust will bring you hope, joy even? Whatever you identify, that is your god. You will do anything to get it, and everything to protect it. If you can't answer these questions, it just means you have found nothing reliable, so you will bet on a bunch of things, spread your risk. Nothing is trustworthy. These parables that describe the "kingdom of heaven" are invitations to a single undeniable trust—a trust in the One who holds the kingdom together, the King Himself.

This trust changes how we see the value of the kingdom. It changes our idea of valuable living in the kingdom. This trust can waver, but the Object of the trust never does. How do we know? The One telling the parables sacrifices everything to ensure the kingdom will come.

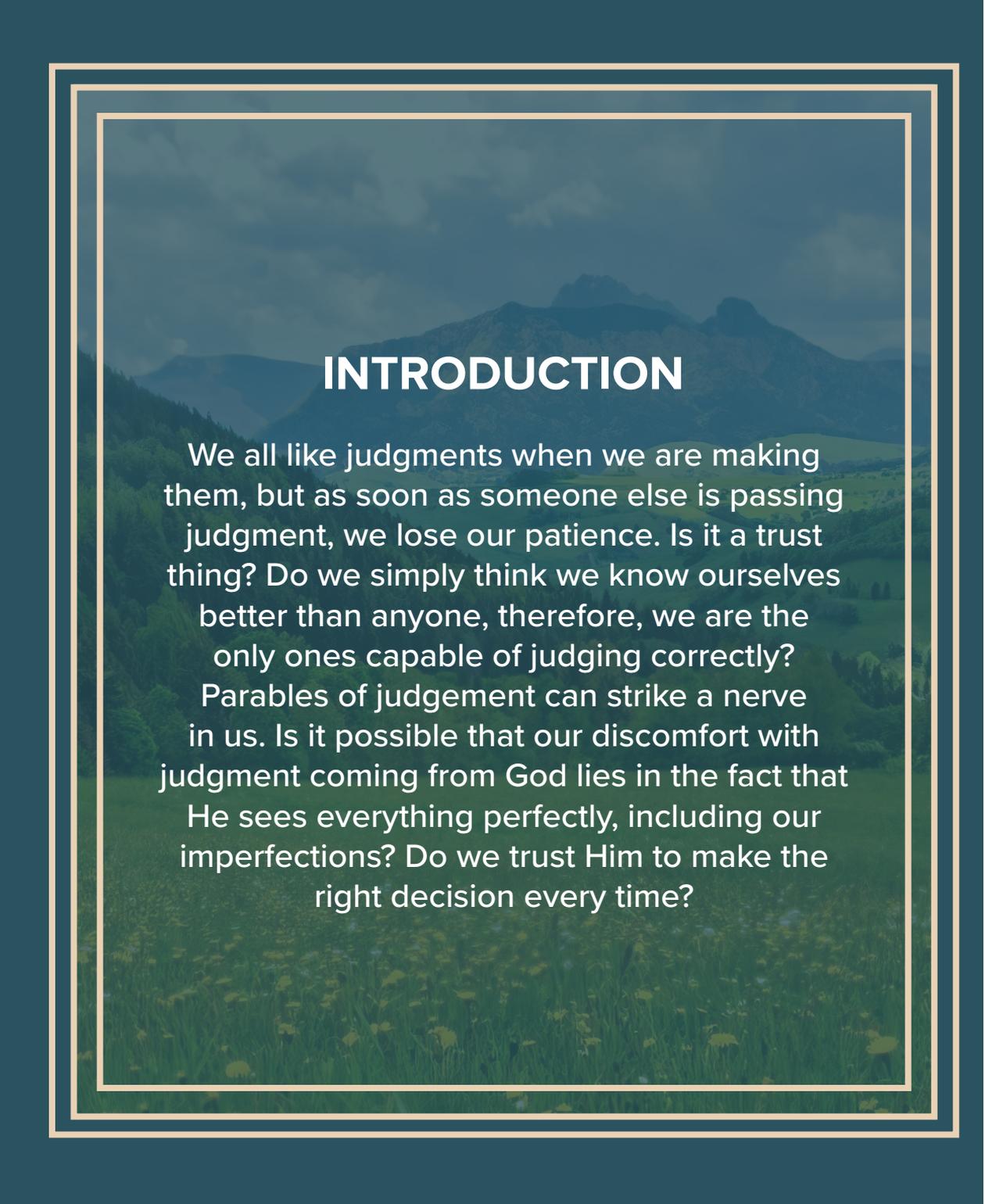
Parables OF JUDGMENT



¹ And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³ and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷ The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹ “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

- Matthew 22:1-14 (ESV)

A scenic landscape featuring a range of mountains in the background under a cloudy sky. In the foreground, there is a lush green field filled with numerous small yellow and blue flowers. The entire scene is framed by a double-line border in a light cream color.

INTRODUCTION

We all like judgments when we are making them, but as soon as someone else is passing judgment, we lose our patience. Is it a trust thing? Do we simply think we know ourselves better than anyone, therefore, we are the only ones capable of judging correctly?

Parables of judgement can strike a nerve in us. Is it possible that our discomfort with judgment coming from God lies in the fact that He sees everything perfectly, including our imperfections? Do we trust Him to make the right decision every time?

Thinking Through The Parables

1. What qualifies someone to stand in judgment? What would make a person good at it?
2. Read 2 Samuel 12:1-6. What is the intent of this Old Testament parable? How did it work on King David?
3. Now compare Nathan's parable with Matthew 21:33-46. What is similar? What is different? How can the two responses be explained?
4. Read Isaiah 5:1-7. Identify how this text likely influenced the parable in Matthew 21:33-46.
5. Comparing the parables in Matthew 21:33-46 and 22:1-14, what is each saying about "insiders" and "outsiders" of the kingdom?

6. Read Luke 16:19-31. To whom is the parable told? What is the general message of the parable and how does it fit with judgment?

7. In Luke 18:9-14, what is the warning that Jesus is offering in the parable?

8. Read Luke 19:11-27. How does this parable challenge its hearers? What is its main message?

9. How can we resolve the tension between Luke 18:9-14 and Luke 19:11-27?

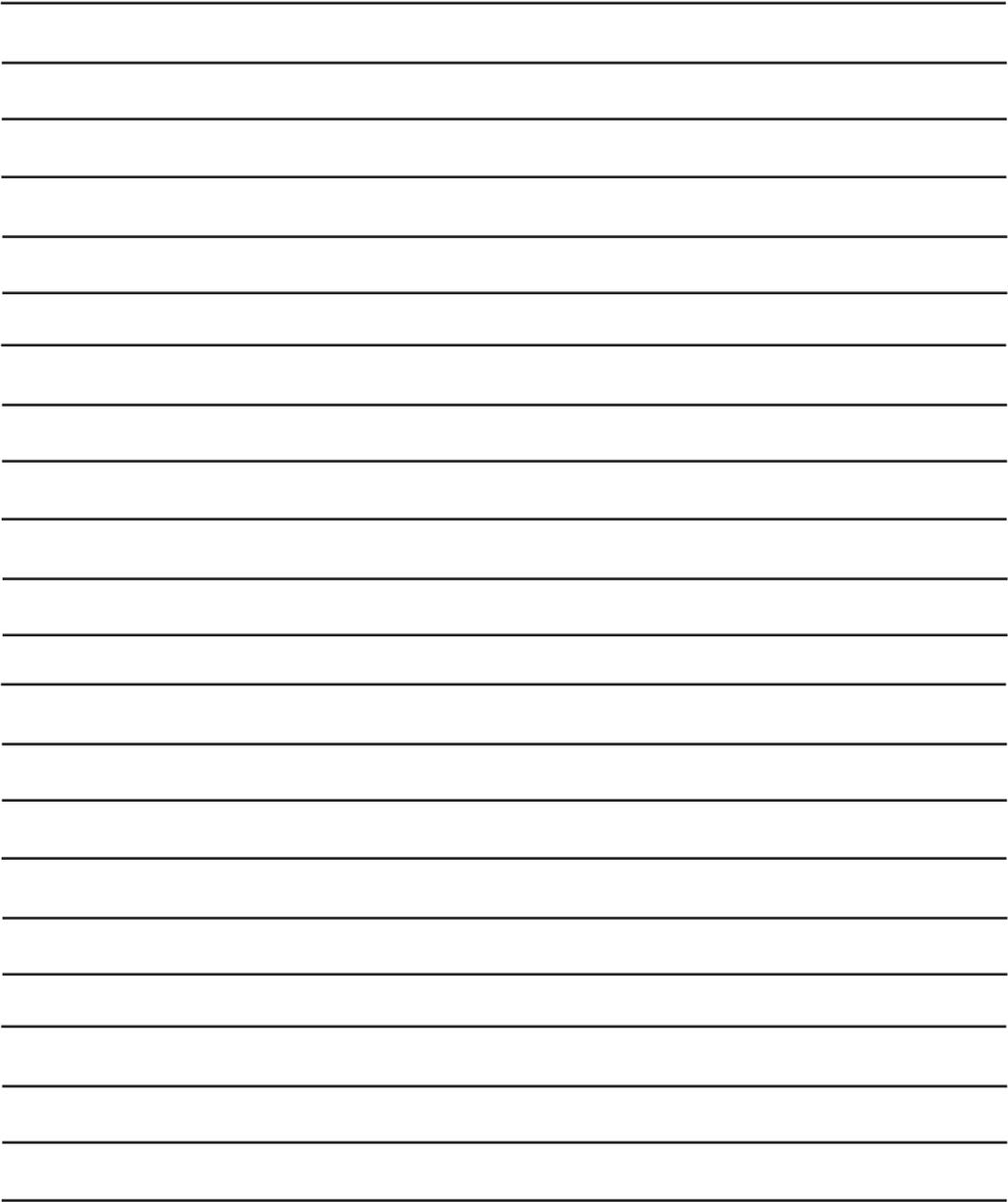
10. After reading Matthew 25:31–46, what seems to be the reason for the Son of Man's judgment of “sheep and goats”?

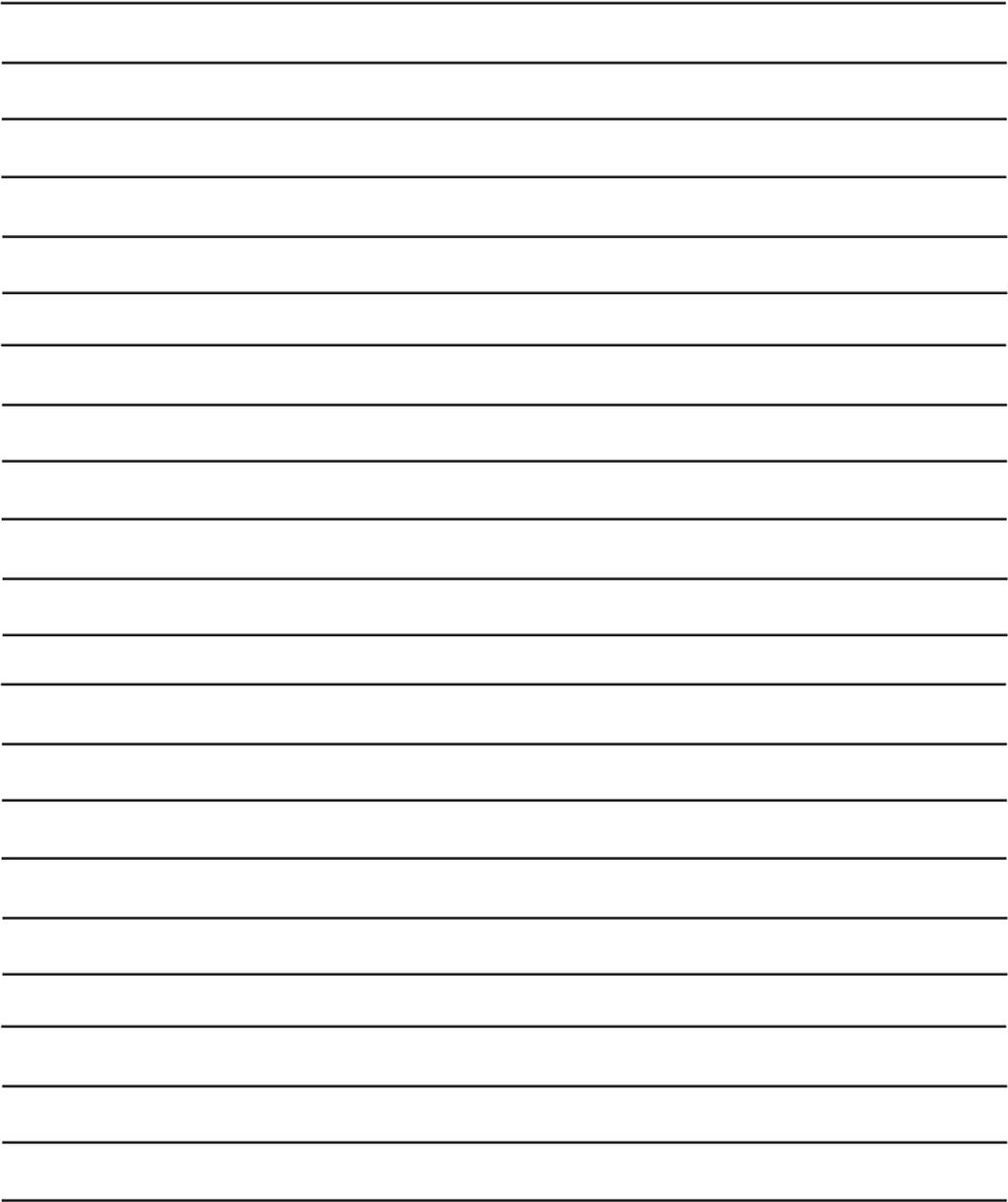
LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE Parables

Reading these parables stretch our understanding of Jesus. They are full of divisions, warnings, and consequences. Not the usual images we want at the front of our minds when we think of Jesus. Truthfully, parables make us look at ourselves. They can't be ignored for fear we become the ones "who seeing we do not see, and hearing we do not hear, nor do we understand." But if Jesus is the King, does He not have every right to run His kingdom the way He defines? Is He not qualified to do so? Would we not remove a fig tree from a garden that bears no fruit? Again, parables make us look at ourselves. It's scary. What are the things that might disqualify us? But, if you look at what He has done, we begin to see the grace that scripture has talked about since the beginning. In Exodus 34:6-7, the LORD describes Himself to Moses saying:

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

The King is holy, and long-suffering with our rebellion because He wants His creation to return to Him. The clearest we see this, is at the crucifixion.







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