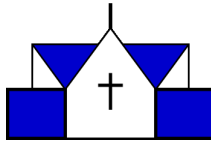


# UPPER BEEDING BAPTIST CHURCH



## HOME GROUP STUDIES SUMMER 2010

### THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Jesus' parables form a very basic part of His teaching; in fact a large proportion of what He said comes in the form of 'Story Telling'. A good number of the parables appear in several of the Gospels and clearly they were a very memorable element of His ministry.

If you have a copy of the 'Life Application Bible' – which is a valuable source of information for study – you will find all the Parables listed after the end of John's Gospel.

For simplicity of study we shall use only Luke's Gospel and take parables from a variety of the different headings listed in the Life Application Bible. Each study is independent of the others, but throughout the series we gradually build a picture of the values and attitudes of Jesus in His teaching.

#### **The Gospel of Luke**

Luke was a careful historian. (Luke 1 vv 1-4) Moreover, he wrote with a definite readership in mind – a thoughtful non-Jew named Theophilus, a follower of Christ. His purpose was to set down in writing an existing oral tradition, and allow his reader to gain a greater measure of certainty in his grasp of the person and teaching of Jesus. In order to do that he has selected material carefully. Some of the stories can also be found in Matthew and Mark, whereas other elements are unique to Luke. He emphasises Jesus' real humanity and how Jesus was in touch with ordinary people, including many on the margins of society who were considered by the religious establishment to be 'Sinners'.

As you read the gospel, it becomes clear that Jesus' teaching touches the hearts of such everyday people- the Parables especially.

You will discover however that the placing of the parables in the overall story is not random. They are linked with the events that Luke is recording – their order and placing does seem to be significant. As a result, no Parable can be really grasped without first looking at what else is going on in the story – the context. So in these studies learn to look carefully at the context in which the parable is spoken.

### **Parables – An Introduction.**

When Jesus taught, people listened! You cannot help but notice that he told plenty of stories, and people like stories. This would have been utterly different from the way others teachers went about speaking to people. The scribes and Pharisees, who were determined to try to get everybody to obey the law, simply told people what to do. They instructed them how to behave, demanding obedience to the minutest elements of the law. In that way they laid burdens on the ordinary people and made them feel guilty about their slightest misdemeanours. So who wouldn't have enjoyed listening to a teacher who told stories!

But these stories were parables – stories with a meaning. In fact, Jesus' methods puzzled even the disciples somewhat. We find them asking, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" ( Matt 13:10). Sometimes the parables were so pointed that everyone got the message immediately, even the Pharisees. They certainly got the point of the parable of the vineyard in Matthew 21, leading Matthew to record "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' Parables, they knew he was talking about them." (Matt 21:45) On other occasions even the disciples were mystified by the stories, and had to corner Jesus and ask for an explanation. They failed, for example, to grasp the significance of the parable of the sower in Luke 8, prompting Luke to write, "His disciples asked him what this parable meant." (Luke 8:9) – and so Jesus explained it in detail.

The word 'Parable' means literally the placing of two things side by side for the purposes of comparison: hence the illustration of truth in the spiritual realm by a story in the earthly or natural realm. They are designed to make people think for themselves rather than just allow 'the teaching' to go in one ear and out of the other. The story prompts us to visualise something tangible and earthly and so make the leap into understanding some spiritual reality. The other side of this is that those who are too lazy to think, or believe they have nothing to learn from Jesus, gain nothing from the story – the meaning is lost on them!

It is important for us therefore to look at the parables and try to grasp something of the circumstances that prompted Jesus to tell them. He told them in order to illustrate a point that was relevant in their immediate context. It may have been because of the people who were present, or in response to a particular question or incident, or even arising from events going on around them. But the point he was making was relevant to that particular situation – and we shall try to figure that out as we read. That may not be possible for every parable, but it is worth the effort of trying to find out.

It is also worth bearing in mind that there is generally one major point that Jesus is trying to convey. Many of us might have heard sermons elaborating on the tiniest details of each story, trying to draw out meaning from the most insignificant elements. So beware – these are parables and NOT allegories. An allegory is generally a longer piece of writing, such as ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ or ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe’. In an allegory there are deliberately many points of correspondence between the story and the truth-reality that it illustrates. A parable is a pithy and memorable story that moves the hearers to think for themselves about the principle meaning. It is the process of thinking about the parable that makes the story and its significance so memorable. Even if we cannot agree on what the major point is, trying to work it out together in a Home Group becomes really worthwhile.

**It will be very helpful if every member of the group reads the whole passage before coming to the meeting.**

**It will be useful in preparation to look up and consider other parts of the Bible that deal with the same issues as the parable.**

Be prepared to share your personal responses in the discussion.

**ABOVE ALL – The questions are only a guide for you to wrestle with the text and come to your own conclusions as to the meaning and application of the story. Try to put yourselves in the position of the first hearers and ask – What is this all about?**

1. **12<sup>th</sup> April.** Meeting at:  
The Kingdom of God. Luke 8 vv 4 - 15  
The various soils and the resulting crops.
2. **26<sup>th</sup> April.** Meeting at:  
Prayer. Luke 11 vv 1-13.  
Persistence in prayer.
3. **10<sup>th</sup> May.** Meeting at:  
Wealth. Luke 12 vv 13-21.  
What constitutes real wealth.
4. **24<sup>th</sup> May.** Meeting at:  
Christ's return. Luke 12 vv 35-48.  
Preparing for the Master's return.
5. **7<sup>th</sup> June.** Meeting at:  
God's love. Luke 15 vv 11-32.  
The watchful father and his prodigal son.
6. **21<sup>st</sup> June.** Meeting at:  
Humility. Luke 18 vv 9-17.  
Having a proper view of oneself.
7. **12<sup>th</sup> July.** Meeting at:  
Service and Obedience. Luke 19 vv 11-27.  
Using the talents God has given.

**Questions to be considered in each study:**

- A. What is the context of this parable, or what circumstances prompted Jesus to tell the story?
- B. What does the story teach us about Jesus, His priorities and values?
- C. How did people respond to the story?
- D. What is the single main lesson of the story? (You may not all agree about this, but don't get hung-up on the incidental detail!)
- E. Are there other parts of the Bible that throw light on the story, or apply it clearly?
- F. Learn to be personal about the story as if you were a listener: -
  - Does it prompt you to action?
  - Does it cause you to re-evaluate your priorities?
  - Does it say anything about your relationships with other people?
  - Does it help you to understand more about Jesus or God's character?
  - Does it challenge your own existing ideas or patterns of behaviour?