

Parables about Prayer

*Matthew 13.10-11: And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the **mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**, but to them it is not given. The parables were designed to reveal (and indeed conceal) various facets of truth concerning the 'mysteries of the kingdom of heaven'. This is their primary **interpretation**. There are, however, a great number of **applications** which can also be made to our profit.*

The *Kingdom of God* is the sphere of God's rule or reign (emphasising the **Person**). The *Kingdom of Heaven* is the reign or rule of heaven over the earth (emphasising the **place**). Although God's Kingdom is **universal** (Psalm 103.19), it has ever been His mind to rule on earth through a divinely chosen representative who speaks and acts for Him. *Genesis 1.26: And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have **dominion** over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.* Adam forfeited this position of dominion and ever since God has been working in human history towards His initial objective of ruling this world through a man, something that will be ultimately realised in Christ. He came in order to reign. John the Baptist preached a message of repentance in the light of the imminent Kingdom (Matthew 3.1-2). The Lord and the apostles preached the Kingdom of God (Matthew 4.17, Mark 1.14-15). The Kingdom of God, as predicted by the OT prophets, was truly among them (Luke 11.20) in the Person of the King. Yet, opposition began. The religious leaders blasphemously attributed Christ's works to Satan's power (Matthew 12.24, Mark 3.22), He was accused of madness (Mark 3.23) and many of His disciples left Him (John 6.66). This rejection of the nation necessitated a **postponement** of the setting up of the visible Kingdom of God, something not clearly revealed in the OT. *Matthew 21.43: Therefore say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation (a repentant generation) bringing forth the fruits thereof.* The parables, therefore, throw further light on the Old Testament's teaching on the Kingdom of God, particularly in view of its postponement due to Israel's rejection of their Messiah. This new revelation is called the 'mysteries of the kingdom of heaven'.

The parables could therefore be categorised as follows:

- Parables concerning the (then present) **offer** of the Kingdom and its rejection, e.g. the Wicked Husbandmen.
- Parables concerning the **setting up** and **entrance into** the (future) Kingdom including Satan's opposition, e.g. the Sower.
- Parables concerning the **subjects** of the Kingdom and their **way of life** (or responsibility), e.g. the Ten Pounds.

Parables about Prayer (Luke 18.1-14)

Number	Name	Matthew	Mark	Luke	Unique?
22	The Persistent Widow			18.1-8	✓
23	The Pharisee & Publican			18.9-14	✓

These two parables concern the subject of prayer and, although probably spoken at different times, they are brought together by the Holy Spirit (note the word 'also', v.9 JND). The first parable describes the *attitude of God* towards **man** in prayer, the second describes the *attitude of man* towards **God** in prayer. Again, the first describes the **method** of approach to God (faith), the second describes the **ground** of approach (blood). They are also the only two parables in Scripture where the reason is given for speaking them (vv. 1, 9).

Setting: The Lord Jesus had been asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come (Luke 17.20-21). Then, privately to His disciples He revealed the signs that would accompany the visible manifestation of the Son of Man and His Kingdom (Luke 17.22-37). This is therefore describing the period of Great Tribulation.

The Persistent Widow (Luke 18.1-8)

1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that ~~men~~ (they, i.e. disciples) ought always to pray, and not to faint. It is in the above setting that the Lord Jesus speaks concerning praying and fainting (v.1). In the days of great tribulation, God's people will **either** pray **or** faint (lose heart). In difficult circumstances there are two options open to the people of God. If we pray, we do not faint. If we faint, it is because we do not pray. Our lives should be lived in a constant attitude of prayer ('always'). Note. We can also lose heart (or 'faint') by not considering Him (Hebrews 12.3) or by being lethargic in well doing (Galatians 6.9).

2 *Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: 3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.* The character of this judge was such that he submitted to no rules or superiors (possibly being likened to one of the inferior judges under the unjust and oppressive jurisdiction of Herod, cf. 2 Thessalonians 2.3-4). He broke both sides of the commandments, his duty towards God and his duty towards his fellow men. The widow (seen as weak and helpless) comes to the judge asking for justice ('avenge'). This speaks of God's people during the tribulation period. They will be oppressed and, finding no justice on earth, will cry out to God (Revelation 6.10, Matthew 24-25). Note. The widow had been wronged and was legitimately asking for justice according to the law. When we petition God in prayer, we must be sure to ask according to His mind and will (1 John 3.21-22, 5.14, James 4.3).

4 *And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; 5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary (give a black eye to) me.* The unjust judge finally answered the petition of the widow, not because he cared about justice, God or the widow, but because he was afraid of being caused more personal inconvenience.

6 *And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. 7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night (out of necessity) unto him, though he bear long with them? 8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find (that) faith on the earth?* Note the **significance** of the parable which teaches through **contrast** in **character** and **actions** between the unjust judge and God. In terms of **character**, God has great care, compassion and love for mankind. In terms of **actions**, God works at a cost to Himself to quickly secure justice for His people. So, if a worldly and wicked judge finally answers the cry for justice from a lowly, persevering widow, how much more shall a just, holy and loving God answer the cry for justice from His elect? Although, during the tribulation, it might seem as if God is slow in taking action on their behalf, He will 'speedily avenge' (cf. Matthew 24.22, 25.41). Now, let **us** not lose heart, but, let **us** come before God in full confidence that He hears, He answers and where necessary, He delivers!! **Does Christ find such faith in us?**

The Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18.9-14)

The **setting** for this parable is the same as above, although here the message is addressed to a wider audience (v.9). This parable emphasises the **ground** of approach to God, rather than the **method**. There are two **men** (v.10), two **prayers** (vv.11-13) and two **results** (v.14).

The **Pharisee** prided himself on being righteous whilst despising all others as nothing (v.9). He stood in a posture of arrogance and self-satisfaction (v.11). He thought he measured up well against (the worst of) society, though in actual fact the Pharisees themselves were extortioners (Matthew 23.14, 25), unjust (Matthew 23.28) and spiritual adulterers (Matthew 12.38-39, 15.19). He thought he prayed to God, but instead he prayed only to himself (v.11). He paraded his exploits before his imagination (v.12), deeds that went far beyond the requirements of the law, even to the tithing of garden herbs (cf. Deuteronomy 14.22-23, Luke 11.42). The Pharisee was blinded by his religion. He thought God was his debtor because of what he had done. He was trying to earn merit with God. **The result?** The humiliation of a lost eternity (v.14). *Luke 17.10: So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*

The **Publican** is a delightful contrast. He felt the holiness of the presence of God and his own unfitness to be there. For example, he stood 'afar off' (cf. Ephesians 2.13) and 'would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven' (v.13). He 'smote upon his breast' as a sign of remorse and self-accusation. He knew he was a poor guilty sinner, so much so that he cried out 'God be *propitious* to me, **the sinner**'. Note also the use of the word propitiation! He was not calling on God to overlook his sin or change His attitude towards it, rather he was pleading the **blood** as the basis on which he might approach God. Between the publican and the sanctuary stood the altar upon which the morning and evening lambs were sacrificed. The publican was asking God to look upon the shed blood of the *innocent* sacrifice and consequently reach out in mercy to him, the *guilty* sinner. Propitiation is the basis on which mercy can be extended and yet justice be satisfied. **The result?** He was justified and in due time shall be exalted (v.14).

What is the practical teaching? **1.** These men were both seen to be doing the right **thing** (praying) at the right **time** (hour of prayer) in the right **place** (temple). But, what a difference there was in their attitudes and appreciation of God. **2.** Note a key principle of the Kingdom of God (v.14). Adam exalted himself and fell. The Lord Jesus humbled Himself and has been exalted. Let us as believers take the lowest place. **3.** How do we approach the presence of God? In Christ we have the privilege of entering into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. We are to have 'boldness' to do so (Hebrews 10.19), but this does not suggest pride and arrogance. Rather we are to draw near with genuine and sincere hearts (not profession or lip-service) and with complete confidence in the finished work of Christ (Hebrews 10.22). We are accepted in Him before the throne.