



IT'S LIKE THIS . . .

STUDIES IN THE
PARABLES OF JESUS

WRITTEN BY MEMBERS OF
WARREN BAPTIST CHURCH
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Thank You!

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Introduction

When Jesus told stories or painted word pictures, he'd often start with, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..." This was His way of using everyday experiences to unveil eternal realities – fields and sheep and vineyards helped reveal 'things hidden since the creation of the world.' So if we want to see God's Kingdom the way Jesus did, we need to listen close when Jesus says, "It's like this..."



A master at teaching with parables, Jesus spoke about 35 percent of his recorded words in parables. According to the Tyndale Bible Dictionary, Christ's parables were more than illustrations for his preaching, they were his preaching to a great extent. Much more than simple stories, scholars have described Jesus' parables as both "works of art" and "weapons of warfare."

The purpose of parables in Jesus Christ's teaching was to focus the listener on God and his kingdom. These stories revealed the character of God: what he is like, how he works, and what he expects from his followers. They draw listeners and readers into a real and intimate encounter with the living God who is Shepherd, King, Father, and Savior.

April 5 - The Lost Sheep

Matthew 18:12-14 Luke 15:4-7

In the parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus is being ridiculed by the Pharisees for eating and welcoming sinners. He, in response, tells the story of a shepherd who goes after his one sheep that has gone astray while leaving the ninety-nine faithful sheep behind. When the shepherd finds his sheep, he is overjoyed and calls his neighbors together to celebrate. In this, he demonstrates that God, being the good shepherd, cares for all of his children, even when they turn away and scorn his love. He rejoices over those who have sinned and repented more than those who don't need to. He still loves all of us equally, but he especially wants those who reject him to know he loves them no matter what they have done.

I believe a moral from this story is that just as the shepherd searched for the one sheep, and just as Jesus overlooked the wrongdoings of the Pharisees, we should not look at the life of another and judge them based on their past. Instead, we should show them the love and forgiveness we know, so that they feel the love of God flow through us and help show them the way home.

“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” (Luke 15:7)

- Savannah Mogray

April 6 - The Lost Coin

Luke 15: 8-10

Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Luke 15:8-10

I have a special stuffed puppy named Soft Puppy. I have had him since I was a baby. I cuddle with him every night and carry him with me everywhere I go. Several years ago, I lost him. I looked everywhere for him. Every day I looked in more places, but I couldn't find him. This made me feel so sad, but I kept looking because I loved him so much. After a few weeks, I finally found him inside my toy lawnmower! I was so happy to have my puppy back that I was jumping around and showing Daddy and Mommy. I even called my Nana to tell her the good news!

In this parable we are like the lost coin. Jesus says that when we repent of our sins and ask Him into our heart we are not lost anymore, but we become like the coin that was found. He also says that there is a party in heaven with all the angels when just one person makes that decision.

I asked Jesus into my heart when I was 5 years old. I think Jesus and the angels had a party for me! This shows me

how special I am to God, even more special than my soft puppy is to me, because God made me.

Did you know that you are so special to God that all of heaven would have a party for you?

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for loving me so much that you never stop looking for me and for showing me how happy you are when I choose to follow You. Help me to show others how special they are to you by celebrating with them. I love You Jesus. Amen.

- Liam Givens (with help from his mom, Harmony)

April 7 - The Compassionate Father and His Two Sons

Luke 15:11-32

I chose Luke 15:11-32. It is the parable of the prodigal son and his older sibling and their father. This story reminds me of some things in my own family. We had a lot of relationship problems. My older sister and I have a younger brother. He got into drugs, stole from us, and did a lot of other hurtful things, especially to me. My mom got Randy into drug treatment programs and had him arrested when he stole. She kicked him out but then took him back quite a few times. He would promise to do better, but it never lasted. He caused a lot of stress in our home.

My mom was like the father in the parable.
My mom treated Randy like God treats us.
She loved Randy and gave him lots of chances.

The verse that stands out to me is verse 24. "For my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And they began to be merry." (KJV). There were times when my mom didn't hear from my brother for months. This parable reminds me of when it had been four months. She was at her work and she started praying that she would hear from him. About 10 minutes later her phone rang. It was my brother! He said, "Mom, something kept nudging me to call you." My mom said, "Randy, it was the Lord."

My sister and I got very tired of this and wished our mom wouldn't take Randy back anymore. We were jealous that he kept causing trouble and got so much attention. We felt left out. In this parable the older son was jealous because his brother was getting the attention. Why was he upset? He should have been proud of his brother.

One time later when we hoped Randy was better, he got married. I was excited. I was a bridesmaid in his wedding. I wore a long gold and black dress. I was happy for my brother. I think God helped me forgive him and to have a good attitude. God has helped me a lot.

We are praying for my brother to really repent and come to God like the prodigal son.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to understand these parables. Also give me courage to encourage other people. AMEN.

- Michelle Settles

April 8 - The Sower and the Soils

Matthew 13:3-9 Mark 4:3-9 Luke 8:5-8

Other seed fell on rocky ground where it did not have much soil . .

and since it had no root, it withered away. Mark 4:5-6

A few days from now we will be out on our garden plots, and by various methods, crumbling apart clods of soil and tossing aside soddy slices and under-composed debris from last season's harvests. Springtime as a child had me watching my dad working the soil for days with shovel and spade; I thought that this was the way it was done. My husband became helpful in this area years ago when we inherited a small rototiller. He suddenly became exceedingly more helpful after acquiring the irresistible good-deal of a used John Deere tractor, complete with attachments. Among them was a wide rotary tiller. This month working the soil will require just fifteen minutes.

Jesus, you planted a seed in my life, a seed so small, will it grow at all?

A farmer needs good soil in which to sow if his seeds are to grow.

Farmers encounter a variety of challenges with the earth. One is when repeated plowing with heavy equipment results in a fine, soft planting bed, but just underneath, the pressure is forming densely compressed dirt. Over time, this hard layer can become so cement-like and impervious, it will interfere with healthy growth and harvest yields. The common term is "plow pan." A plow pan can prevent rain water from soaking into the ground and drown young plants in mini floods. Enough of a slope can also cause that water to run downhill, taking with it fertile topsoil. Later in summer

when weather becomes dry, it can be a barrier to normal capillary action that draws stored ground water up to the thirsty crop. Most notably, plant roots that are fast requiring more space and nutrients are instead restricted, unable to penetrate the tough pan. Growth above is then limited.

Have you been a Christian for a few years? Or maybe lots of years? Perhaps like many, you haven't been experiencing much personal growth, and lately have seen less than exciting harvests. After many seasons, we can get into hard habitual ruts that deprive our soul of spiritual oxygen, nutrients, and the water of life. Maybe we attend church, give something, and read the Bible on occasion, unaware that our anemic roots are being stunted by a self-made plow pan. Are the routinely repeated habits of our schedules robbing us of the space we need to really thrive like Jesus, our farmer, intended? Do our hardened hearts find little time to marvel at our merciful rescue from wrath? Have our overly entertained minds become dulled to the ways we fail to respond in softness to the promptings of God's Spirit? Is callous complacency causing us to forget who we are in Christ?

“For thus says the Lord . . . Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord; remove the foreskin of your hearts” (Jeremiah 4:3-4).

When faced with this problem, farmers need to employ a specialized “deep tillage chisel plow” with 2-foot spikes to pierce, slice and break up that hardened old plow pan. Sometimes the Good Farmer, in His wisdom and love, brings to bear sharp trials or cutting sorrows as convicting tools that break our hearts, but also break up the hardness in our lives. We are usually shocked and dismayed by the severity of such discipline, but in mourning we are also promised comfort, and with fresh humility comes His grace.

It is often then that God's Word goes deep to become truly part of us, and we experience the bursting forth of exuberant growth that every gardening enthusiast loves to see. He knows the coming harvest will be sweet.

Good soil for Your Word, dear Lord make of me,
so it can sprout and grow and be all that You meant it to be.

- Vivian Ward

April 9 - The Wheat and the Weeds
Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.²⁷ “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’” Matthew 13:24-30

I am reticent to provide my own thoughts as this is one of the few parables where Jesus provides an explanation. (You can find that starting in verse 36.) Initially, I began thinking, “This doesn’t sound like a good farming technique to let the weeds grow. Why does there have to be ‘people of the evil one?’ What do I learn from being a seed?” It’s easy to miss the big picture.

As the Easter season is nearing, what comes to mind is actually a different Bible story, not far removed from when the parables were shared. The battle between good and evil make their presence felt in Holy Week – the final days before Jesus’s crucifixion. While Jesus death was always a part of

God's plan, let's not miss the evilness at play. Crowds chanting "Crucify!", Judas Iscariot being lured by the love of money over the life of his Creator, and religious leaders attempting to maintain control by lying and organizing the death of the only perfect man. The evil one and his weeds appeared to have the upper hand and be in complete control. More than ever were they clearly at work.

The kingdom of God is something that is here but also not yet fully arrived. In the meantime, wickedness will rear its ugly head. The weeds are present, and we can find ourselves in the same field, perhaps feeling overwhelmed and defeated.

What is curious and such a mystery is God's sovereignty through it all. Notice the harvesters ask if they should pull up the weeds. "No," the owner of the field instructs. Not yet. The implication is that intervention is intentionally being delayed until God's Kingdom is fully here. Why? I speculate it's out of God's common grace, or maybe there is a bigger story God is writing in the same way He used the wickedness of men to bestow His righteousness to us through His Son's death on the cross.

Do not be deceived. God is in complete control and promises to take care of the weeds; in fact, it's a crucial part of His plan. Do you want to get a glimpse of what the kingdom is like without weeds? Jesus tells us.

"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (v. 43).
- Christopher Ward

April 10 - Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-21 Mark 4:30-32 Luke 13:18-19

What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like... It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade. Mark 4: 30-32 NIV

While running some errands one day with my wife, Cathy, I suddenly had a sharp pain in my lower back. "Must have over done it in the yard," I thought to myself. The pain increased in intensity, so I pulled into a parking lot to walk it off. As I stood to walk, it felt as if a knife was jabbed into my back and side. It brought me to my knees! What was going on?! Cathy called 911. On the ambulance ride to the ER, spasms of pain shot through me causing me to involuntarily kick the EMT several times! I kept apologizing in between spasms. An x-ray revealed that a kidney stone was the culprit! How could something so small cause so much pain?!

The parable of the mustard seed reveals the opposite of what I and others have gone through. God can use the least to do great things (Luke 9:48). Jesus said even if our faith is as small as a mustard seed, we can do things we could never imagine! (Matthew 17:20 & Luke 17:6) As you go through this life, do you feel small and insignificant?

Prayer: Father, help me to remember the mustard seed. You make the weak strong and the last first! Thank you for seeing the potential and value in me! - Lamar Friesen

April 11 - The Treasure and the Pearl

Matthew 13:44-46

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.” Matthew 13:44-46

When I read these two parables, I am reminded of my early days as a believer. As the verse from “Amazing Grace” says, “How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!” I find that as the years go on, I tend to take God's amazing grace for granted, and I need to remind myself that God's grace is indeed the pearl of great value and treasure hidden in the field.

When I first came to know the Lord, it was crystal clear to me that nothing else in this world mattered nearly as much as the faith I was granted. All else paled in comparison, especially since this faith saved my life in every way possible. I was desperate and clinging to shifting sand for rescue when the Lord lifted me out of that muddy pit and set my feet on the solid rock. Since I would have lost everything without His grace, His grace meant everything to me, and still does. Sometimes the daily stresses of life shift my eyes away from this heavenly focus. I must keep reminding myself of where I was before God drew me to Him and how far He has taken me, live my life in such a way

that the pearl of great value is still precious beyond anything else, and keep my priorities straight!

What things tend to seem more important than God's salvation as you live your daily life? Do you need a reminder that the indescribable joy of finding the hidden treasure is of greater value than all other worldly possessions?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for leading me to the hidden treasure of your love and grace. Nothing on this earth is comparable to the pure joy of knowing You and Your love. Keep my eyes focused on You as the priority in my life and keep my heart in constant gratitude for the unimaginable riches you have bestowed on me.

- Linda Frey

April 12 - The Barren Fig Tree

Luke 13:6-9

I do not feel like I am bearing fruit. Since I have multiple high-risk COVID factors, I have been pretty isolated. I'm not attending church in-person. I am attending a Zoom Bible study (which is better than nothing but very frustrating for me). I only meet friends outside, usually to walk together. Almost all my interactions are by email or phone call. It does not feel like I am bearing fruit or contributing to my church family.

Ephesians 2:10 notes that God has prepared "good works" for us to do. The story of Esther demonstrates how God can put us in a particular place at a particular time to do a particular task (Esther 4:14). John 15:6 says that branches that don't bear fruit will be pruned off and thrown into the fire.

This parable in Luke indicates that God allows us the time to bear fruit; in this instance giving the gardener a specific time before again evaluating whether to tear the tree out or not.

So how do we bear fruit in such a time as this? Biblical admonitions come to mind: "Stand firm" (I Corinthians 16:13). "Don't give up" (Galatians 6:9). "Abide" (John 15:14). "Seek" (Jeremiah 29:13). "Open the door" (Revelation 3:20). Maybe this is a time to let the Spirit work in me, and, rather than looking at my "works," let the Spirit develop more fruit

in my life. “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Prayer: Lord, help me not to look at the lack of activity in my life, but to seek the fruits of your Spirit. Thank you that you love me and are working in my life to make me more like Jesus. Help me to see you better, Father.

- Steve Washburn

April 13 - The Wicked Tenants

Matthew 21:33-41 Mark 12:1-9 Luke 14:15-24

A Strategy to Win?

*. . . but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.
Romans 5:20 ESV*

From some of our earliest speech proceed rebellious ultimatums such as: “You aren’t the boss of me!”

Americans especially are an independent lot, valuing and defending the freedom to govern our own lives, choices, and possessions. Our strategy to reign, like kings and regimes down through the millennia, is to compete for power and territory, then dominate as long as possible, regardless of our legitimacy. It was the same method used by these guys renting the land of the lord. Jesus told this parable not long after the religious leaders questioned his right to do things such as clearing out the Temple.

Like the prophets sent to Israel with God’s Kingdom truths, they abused and silenced each messenger, sometimes permanently. Their goal - to establish their own rule over the land and keep all the benefits of its produce for themselves.

“Why . . . are the people devising a vain thing . . . against the Lord and against His Anointed?” (Psalm 2:1 NASB)

The murder of the son of the lord is the tale’s climactic act of treachery, just as the brutal crucifixion of the Son of God is the apex of all human evil. In our minds, the landlord obviously did not know what he was doing, or who he was

dealing with, when he foolishly sent his own flesh and blood to face those formidable enemies alone. To us, this was the exact opposite of a smart plan to reestablish authority in the vineyard.

In both cases it looks convincingly like the bad guys won. To those who envisioned taking their country back from the Romans, this Jesus thing was a miserably failed coup. However, to set His sovereign reign in the lives of His stolen people, this was the perfect strategy. The only strategy. God's strategy. From eternity past, His enemies were to show themselves strong so that He may show Himself infinitely stronger in His Son. In this greatest increase of sin "grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20). Out of that most heinous murder, the Trinity performed the victorious deliverance of the ages.

We are so much like those rotten renters, devising ways to retain control over our own... no, over the lives that God created, only to forfeit the marvelous abundance to be had as beloved servants in His fruitful dominion. For the subjects of His realm are not merely forgiven and saved to life, but are ruled and reigned in by Christ, the Son, continually being built into the ultimate Temple of His design.

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes" (Matthew 21:42 ESV).

Prayer: Sovereign Lord, give us eyes to see, and hearts to joyfully participate in this, Your strategy. - Vivian Ward

April 14 - The Two Builders

Matthew 7:24-27 Luke 6:47-49

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock...But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.” Matthew 7: 24, 26

Do you ever have a tune stuck in your head? While often manipulated by clever advertisers, songs are a natural way to learn and retain information. When my children were school age, I used songs to help them learn math and geography facts as well as scripture and biblical truths.

A favorite of those childhood songs was “The Wise Man Built His House Upon the Rock.” It was lively. It was active. (Who doesn’t like “and the house on the sand went SMASH!”) Yet, as I revisited the parable of the Two Builders for this devotional, I realized the song’s lyrics were incomplete.

While the basis of the song is true – we want a firm foundation of rock rather than the foundationless ground of sand – the lyrics, by focusing on the outcome, miss the focus, the foundation so to speak, of this parable. The song omits *why* the two builders have different outcomes. One a house that withstands the storms of life that are sure to come and the other a house that quickly crumbles under the weight of trouble. *Both* the wise man and the foolish man heard Christ’s words. The difference is obedience. “Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I say? I

will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice” (Luke 6: 46, 47). The wise man incorporated the Lord’s teachings into his life; the foolish man did not.

Immediately prior to this parable, Jesus had taught the crowd on the mountainside what this “put into practice” looks like - “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (v. 27), “forgive and you will be forgiven” (v. 37), “do not worry” (Matthew 6:25), etc. “Put into practice” takes effort. It involves not just hearing, but the next steps of heeding and acting. When we live a life of obedience, we are simultaneously building a firm foundation.

Prayer: Lord, may we “hasten and not delay to obey your commands.” (Psalm 119:60)

- Shelley Harley

April 15 - The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

Jesus often used parables to teach the message he wanted to convey to his listeners. It is a language everyone from the least learned to the highest educated person could easily understand.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan told by Jesus, it is the most unlikely person who does the most to help the victim. This parable has profound lessons applicable for our lives today. Let's look more closely to see what we should derive from it.

What shall I do to inherit eternal life? (v. 25) This question is asked by a lawyer. His question is a valid question to be asked to the Divine Being who will reward us with Eternal Life. But, was this question asked for instruction or for the purpose of testing Christ?

What is written in the Law? (v. 26) Jesus answered the lawyer's question with another question. He wants us to look into our hearts and minds for the answer. So the lawyer answered Jesus, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind' and "your neighbor as yourself' " (v. 27 NKJV).

Who is my neighbor? (v.29) The lawyer answered right, as we can see from Jesus' response. But the lawyer is not satisfied with this discourse and wants to further try Jesus.

Or perhaps he wanted to justify himself and show everyone how righteous he is. So, he continues, “Who is my neighbor?”

The answer of Christ This is where the Parable of the Good Samaritan begins. We read that a man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho; he is robbed and left half dead along the roadside. The first person to pass by is a Priest. Of all people, surely, he will help this man. What happened? He saw the man but passed on by. Seems that he forgot that one of the weightier matters of the law is MERCY. Perhaps he thought it would make him dirty or unclean if he touched the man ... even if he would be defiled should he not have compassion and mercy for this injured man? Then another man came by. Just as the Priest, the Levite passed by. Both the Priest and the Levite hold respected offices, one would think this would obligate them to help this man. So far, this scenario may not make much of an impact; however, what if we translate the words Priest and Levite to Pastor or Elder, or Choir Director, or yes, church member? All of us in some way share a likeness with these two men. This is where the flow of this story changes. The Good Samaritan saw this man, and he had compassion. He never questioned his nationality; was he a robber; could he pay for his care? He simply acted. He treated the wounds, put him on his donkey and took him to the inn for further care, even leaving money to pay for his care. Here was a complete stranger taking responsibility for someone he didn't know, exemplifying what it means to be a good neighbor. A truly remarkable account of unconditional love.

Go and do likewise. (v. 36-37) At the end of the parable, when asked of the lawyer, “Who was a neighbor...?” his answer was, “The one who showed mercy.” Jesus wants us to do the same.

How can I be a good neighbor? We probably won't see an injured person along the roadside. So, how can I be a good neighbor?

- Pray for others - God hears our prayers.
- Grab every opportunity to do a good deed.
- Visit the sick - many feel lonely and helpless.
- Visit someone in prison - isolation is a very depressing place to be.
- Give without expecting to be recompensed.
- Donate - the list is endless: clothing, books, water, your time.

Through this parable, Jesus not only answered the lawyer, but conveyed to all of us, that when it comes to loving your neighbor, we must be ready to serve the needy irrespective of the parameters that divide us. He implies that Love and Compassion are the links that unite all mankind.

-Bonnie Tipton

April 16 - The Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

1. Read Jesus's parable about the *Workers in the Vineyard*.
2. This parable grows out of the attitude that the disciples had shown toward service and rewards. Jesus had rebuked them for going about their service for the reward rather than love.
3. In this parable, the angry workers are stuck with the never-ending mentality of grace through works. In other words, the person who works hard deserves better than those who don't. People like this have a sense of entitlement, no matter how many times scripture tells us otherwise. Unfortunately, this is an easy trap for all of us to fall into.
4. God created us and everything else in this world, so who are we to make demands of the one who created us. Doing this diminishes what God has done. We should do our service out of love without regard to the rewards others are receiving.
5. Not everyone is called to Jesus in the same stage of life. For some it's in childhood, for others it's late in life and for still others, like the thief on the cross, it's a "death bed" conversion. It is up to God. He has his reasons, and we often don't understand them.
6. This is a case where our built-in sense of fairness, that God has instilled in all of us, gets in our way of understanding God's grace to all.
7. I think the importance here is that we understand that our repentance and God's forgiveness of our sin are

more powerful than the sin itself. Without this, no sins could ever be forgiven.

8. What about Ted Bundy's conversion just hours before his execution? Or Ravi Zacharias, the famous Christian apologist, when, after his death in 2020, it became known that he had abused many women and threatened them if they told anyone? Where does he stand eternally? Do his accomplishments outweigh his indiscretions? Is there such a thing as "partial grace through works" mentality?
9. These are questions that only God can answer. As His followers, we are to believe even if we don't understand.

- Gary Garner

April 17 - The Zinger

Luke 14:25-33

The symphony experience was beautiful. The music hall was elegant in its design with rich mahogany paneling on its walls and a chandelier hanging from its high ceiling. The musicians, dressed in black, echoed the elegance. And as the conductor brought the music to life, the audience was swept into a corporate sigh of comfort. It was beautiful. The round chords echoed off the walls and even the chandelier seemed to dance.

That was all true - until the discord was struck. The harmonious melody suddenly changed – notes clashed together to produce an irritating chord. It sounded like cats fighting. Immediately, the audience gritted its teeth and began wondering first about the conductor and then the musicians. Did the composer really write it that way?

That's the feeling one gets when reading the above verses.

- Following Jesus requires total commitment.
Yes, we agree.
- Following Him means carrying your own cross.
Yes, we agree.
- It's foolish to start a building project with insufficient finances.
Yes, we agree.
- It's crazy to go to war with a nation twice your size without first seeking terms of peace.
Yes, we agree.

Like a beautiful symphony, the words of Jesus sound true. But then, the zinger comes, "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions" (Luke 14:33).

This verse is alarming. It can only be read with gritted teeth. Surely, we think, He didn't mean it to sound that way. Yet, we know it's so easy for the appeal of possessions to possess us. Commentators relate that the word used for "letting go of possessions" means to say "goodbye" to your stuff. It's the liberating action of trusting God to supply our needs versus being enslaved by consumerism.

I admit, their words seem a lot easier to swallow, a lot more melodious. But what if the Lord sounded the notes of discord for a reason?

Prayer: Lord, help me to sit with this for a while. Don't allow me to dismiss your truth. What do you want me to hear? To be? To do?

- Randy Thomas

April 18 - The Rich Fool

Luke 12: 16-21

Formerly, I was comfortable looking past the parable about the Rich Fool. Everyone knows you can't take this stuff with you when you die, money can't buy you happiness, etc. I knew all the clichés. But while slowing down, God revealed new things to me.

We have, because God gave. In this parable, the ground yielded an *abundant* harvest. God provided this! Do I stop and thank God for my warm shower every morning, for wheels to take me wherever I want to go, for enormous grocery stores with endless choices of food? This once was at the forefront of my mind after returning from a mission trip to Mexico many years ago, but over time, numbness set in.

Then I recognized the first mistake - the Rich Fool had an important conversation with himself. I believe my poor thinking has a greater chance of being corrected when I'm willing to surround myself with other eternally-minded believers instead of self-talk, listening only to the voice in my head. The words that stood out were, "Take life easy" (Luke 12:19b). Now, I believe one should be prepared for retirement, and I spend the majority of time helping people do this in my career, but Jesus' life was not characterized by taking life easy.

God calls the man out by labeling him a fool - someone who doesn't understand and needs corrected thinking. The final blow is when we read that the Rich Fool will lose his life that very night, and all the earthly-planning in the world will be in vain. Graciously, Jesus offers an alternative solution which is to be "rich towards God" (v 21). He doesn't say, "do your

part”, “tithe”, “give a little”, but instead *be rich* as he was earlier by giving an *abundant* harvest - *profuse, lavish, copious!*

But how? Whether you are an introvert or an extrovert, have a five figure or six figure income, have much education or little, I’m convinced that the greatest joy comes from serving others and putting their needs above your own. By doing this, we are storing up treasures in heaven.

When is the last time you used your hands, your voice, your ears, or your wallet in a **BIG** way to help someone? As Matt 6:21 says, perhaps it is time to look at where your treasure is, because there your heart is also.

Prayer: Lord, help each of us to be reminded of what you have given us. Instead of indulging in selfish wants, by your strength, give us courage and motivation to think creatively how we can use our resources for your kingdom.

-Joyce Pereira

April 19 - The Friend at Midnight

Luke 11:5-8

Throughout the gospels, we see examples of Jesus' prayer life. In Luke Chapter 11, Jesus' disciples ask Him to teach them to pray. In reading this chapter, I noticed that the disciples didn't ask Jesus to show them *how* to pray but, simply, *to* pray. Jesus responded with what is known as the Disciples' Prayer. He follows in verses 5-8 with a parable describing a midnight visit a man made to a friend in need, asking for three loaves of bread to give to a newly arrived guest. His friend was irritated by the request at such a late hour and just wanted to go back to bed. But the man persisted, and his friend finally got up and gave him the bread. This man's knock on his friend's door was a request born out of necessity not selfishness. Unable to provide for his guest himself, he knew someone who could and would supply what was needed.

A recent midnight call gave me a better understanding of the meaning of this parable. Our great grandson was likely going to be delivered at less than 26 weeks gestation. My mind raced over the possible risks of a premature birth and the journey this little guy and his parents had in store for them. COVID restrictions meant that this young couple wouldn't have the support of loved ones with them at the hospital. Our hearts were breaking, but we knew who to turn to that could and would be with them and supply what was needed.

In verse 8, Jesus says, “I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.” (NKJV) God is not like that sleepy, reluctant friend who doesn’t want to get up out of bed. On the contrary! When we truly know His character, His promises, and His unwavering love for us, we can be confident that He won’t turn us away.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, good Father. Every good and perfect gift comes from You. You don’t turn away but invite us to boldly come before Your throne with our praises and with our burdens. Although I don’t always understand, I believe Your Word and trust that Your love will carry me through the midnight hours when my burden is heavy and my heart longs for answers and for peace. Great is Your faithfulness!

- Judy Crafton

April 20 - The Unjust Judge

Luke 18:1-8

Then he spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying, "There was in a certain city, a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Luke 18: 1-8 NKJV

At first glance, this parable seems to be encouraging the “squeaky wheel” motivation for prayer, but Jesus clearly states at the beginning what his purpose is behind this parable: to encourage us to pray always and not lose heart or give up.

A recent Bible study written by Kristi McLelland taught me much about this parable. Such as how interesting it is that Jesus chooses to use a widow as his main character since widows were very powerless in the culture of Jesus's time. They were actually forbidden to bear testimony in Jewish courts and were vulnerable without a male to protect and provide for them. So, this lowly widow has great courage, or chutzpah (persistence), in appearing before the unjust judge to plead her case. Oftentimes, people would plead their case before a judge by appealing to their love of God or

fellow man, but in this case, the judge cared little about those things. However, because of the persistence of this woman, he granted her request.

Jesus contrasts this unjust judge with our loving God, who sees and hears his people. If this evil judge will listen to this lowly widow, will not our loving, just God listen to us? The answer is clearly yes, much more so. This is so encouraging to me to not give up on my prayers. Sometimes it may seem to me that God is not listening or is slow to respond, but I must not lose heart! God is indeed listening, cares very much, and may be acting already on my behalf in ways that I cannot yet see. I must have faith that, in his perfect timing and perfect will, he will hear and do what is best in response to my prayers. While, in my human mind, I may get tired of repeating the same requests to God, I must not stop, for he is always listening.

What prayer requests have you repeated multiple times to God that make you feel like giving up?

Take heart, sons and daughters, and persist in your prayers, for your God cares and hears you!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you that you listen to your people, though humble and small as we are. I thank you that you are just and righteous and love us beyond what we can imagine. Give us the courage and chutzpah to continue and persist in our prayers to you, knowing that you are faithful and never tire of hearing our prayers. Keep our faith strong as we wait on you for your answers.

- Linda Frey

April 21 - The Net

Matthew 13:47-50

The Parable of the Net is short and to the point. It describes the final judgment. The good fish are Jesus' followers, and the worthless fish are those who reject Him.

As Christians, many of us have someone we love for whom we are praying that they would say yes to Jesus; someone who as yet doesn't know, or who even rejects, God and Jesus the Savior. We also pray for those we know nothing about who may not ever have heard the Good News. What a responsibility and what a privilege!

The parable tells of the fisherman's net scooping up the fish all in one scoop, one net full. That shows that the good and the lost are mixed together, side by side in the net until the fisherman separates them. Some of us are called to preach, some to teach, but all are called to live Christlike lives, touching the lives of others who are lost and separated from God by unbelief and sin.

Unlike fish, people are acquainted with, and feel love for, the other people we are thrown together with - as in a net. We work with others, side by side. We live in houses, sometimes mere feet apart, separated by fences or hedges. We play sports with friends. We volunteer alongside others. We attend school together. Apart from pandemics, we are pretty social creatures.

When judgment day comes, we will not want to witness others being separated from God for eternity because we failed to be doing what we have been called to do by Christ Himself in John 13: 34,35 - "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

- Debbie McHugh

April 22 - THE TALENTS & THE MINAS

Matthew 25:14-30 Luke 19:11-27

First, please read the two parables about Loaned Money.

These two parables are remarkably similar and for that reason they have been combined into one devotional. The wealthy noblemen in the stories represent God while the servants and other subjects represent people like you and me whose decisions here on earth will determine how they spend eternity. Without this understanding, the actions of the noblemen will seem cruel and even tyrannical.

Here are a few of my thoughts as I read these parables:

1. The first two servants in each story show faith and trust in their Master. The two who buried their gold showed no faith or trust in their Master or His ability to make a harvest from their efforts. The servants who were rewarded for wisely investing the money loaned to them could have failed, but they didn't because the Master wanted to honor their faithfulness. It is like when we share the Good News to the unsaved - it's not up to us to make a conversion. That is the job of the Holy Spirit. Our job is to share.
2. Jesus explains in Matthew 25:15 that assets are distributed proportionately to the abilities of those receiving them. Thus, promising that we will never be given more than we can handle.

3. Our gifts are not to be hidden under a bowl. In Luke 12 Jesus says, "To whom much is given much is required" (v. 48).
4. In Luke's parable, Jesus adds additional players who, at the King's command, are brought before him and executed. This seemingly cruel act is hard to understand, but before the Nobleman became King, this group was vocal about hating Him and did not want Him to become King. These are people, like many today, who overtly deny God, have no regard for His commandments, and tell lies to embarrass his followers. The fate they suffered was by their own doing.
5. God gives us resources and abilities, and all are to be used to carry out the Great Commission. Never squander what God has given you. The issue is not how much we have but how well we use what we have.
6. We are to accept scripture even if we do not understand it. We are also told to love God...accept His goodness...and to conduct our lives accordingly.
7. Pray for opportunities to use your gifts to serve God and those in need.

- Gary Garner

April 23 - The Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:23-35

“Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” Matthew 18:33

I can remember as a child the difficult task of forgiving my younger brother for something he did to me or the times when I would need to ask forgiveness of someone. As I have gotten older, it has become somewhat easier, although perhaps not as easy as it should be. The Oxford dictionary defines forgiveness as a “stopping of feeling angry or resentful toward (someone) for an offense, flaw, or mistake.” Since those feelings aren’t stopped immediately, the process gives me time to look deeper into my heart in an attempt to understand forgiveness at a deeper level - maybe into an awareness of *mercy*.

In reading the parable of The Unforgiving Servant, we can easily ignore the context of Jesus’ teaching immediately preceding its telling. Here we find Peter asking how many times he must forgive his brother? 7 times? (Matthew 18:21) Jesus answers, “70 times 7...” (v. 22 NLT). Doing the math in comparing the two, we deduce that the point Jesus is making is that we are to forgive far more than we might care to acknowledge. We are to forgive and show grace toward our brothers and sisters without regard to the number of times.

A greater point - an introduction to the concept of mercy - comes through Jesus telling the story of The Unforgiving Servant. Mercy isn't a word we hear much anymore - especially in a world and culture consumed by the cry of injustice. Mercy carries the idea of compassion and kindness shown to an individual by a person in a position where they can punish or harm the other.

In the parable, Jesus ups the ante using hyperbole to a point almost beyond our comprehension. Jesus instructs that not only are we to forgive (like Peter in the preceding verses), but we are to be merciful like a wealthy king as well! How merciful? In verse 24 Jesus sets the price at "ten thousand bags of gold" - a *talent* for each bag - a big number. For reference, a *single* talent is 20 years of a day laborer's wage! The king was willing to forgive the servant 200,000 years of wages! 70 times 7? How about offering forgiveness - in the form of mercy - for a debt that could only be paid in full after 200,000 years of labor?

Clearly, no one is going to owe me a sum of money equal to those many years of wages. But in sharing the story, Jesus brings us down to a simple, manageable idea: "...show mercy on your fellow servant..." (v.33) and it will be easier to "forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (v.35). That is a forgiveness that goes beyond what we can begin to fathom and also makes a simple point about our heavenly King: infinite is the mercy we have been shown, and mercy we are expected to show in return. May we be known as

people of forgiveness, but even more so as persons of mercy.

Reflection: Think of a time in which you may have had the opportunity to offer more than forgiveness. Maybe you were in a position to offer mercy. What did you do? In retrospect, if you now think that maybe you would have done things differently, how might that help you for the next time?

Prayer: Lord, it should be so easy to recognize the great forgiveness and mercy we have been shown, but why is it so hard to move beyond forgiveness and be a person of mercy? Help us to be quick to forgive when we are wronged or hurt - and to show mercy to those that we can.

- David Harley

April 24 - The Lamp on a Stand

Matthew 5:14-16 Luke 8:16-18 Mark 4:21-25

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:14-16

You are invited to listen in on a conversation:

Question: What if we gave you a flashlight without batteries, what would you do?

Audrey: I would ask to have batteries so we could fix it.

Question: What if we didn't have batteries. Is that flashlight helpful?

Audrey: No, it would be broken.

Question: Would you be in the dark without batteries?

Audrey: Yes, I need it to see.

Question: What do you do with your flashlight?

Audrey: I look at books in my bed; I don't hide it. I shine it on the pages so I can see.

Question: Is it good for people to be in the dark or in the light? Why?

Audrey: I like the light so I can see.

Question: What did Jesus do for you and me?

Audrey: He died for everyone's sins. All the people of the world.

Question: Do you know some people don't know what Jesus did?

Audrey: Oh, no.

Question: Do you think it's important for people to know Jesus died for them? How can we let them know?

Audrey: Yes, it's important. Other people who know God need to tell them. We tell them that this is the really good truth.

Even as a 5-year-old, Audrey recognizes some key ideas from this well-known parable.

A flashlight without batteries does not fulfill its purpose. It's designed to counter the darkness, shine light in the expanse, and allow others to see. The "really good truth" of Jesus, as Audrey calls it, is intended to be shared by those who know it. Maybe for the first time, Audrey heard that not all have been exposed to the Gospel of Jesus, that he died to save all people. While you did not witness her emotion, Audrey was disconcerted when she realized not all have heard the news. It is sad when our light is hidden, and we are not living fully in a way God intended.

What a good reminder that the logical step of those who know the good truth is to tell those who do not. The flashlight is effective at lighting up a room when it's turned on and not smothered. It's truly a miracle that our deeds, that are naturally bent towards selfishness, can be transformed by the power of God's Spirit to instead be light to our world and ultimately give glory to God.

- Audrey, Hannah, and Christopher Ward

April 25 - New Cloth Patch and New Wineskins

Matthew 9:16-17 Mark 4:21-25 Luke 8:16-18

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If they do, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And people do not pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins. Mark 2:21-22

Have you ever sat down with a group of friends to play a card game at their house and maybe you thought you knew how to play, but you discovered their house rules were different from how you had always played the game? Perhaps you even argued a bit over whether their “rules” were the right rules because they were “not how the game is played.” Did you feel a bit grumbly about having to play by different rules?

Perhaps John’s disciples and the Pharisees felt like that on the many occasions when they asked Jesus why His disciples were not adhering to some of the old laws or following the pre-established “rules of the game.” Why, they asked, weren’t His disciples fasting on the days that, according to Jewish law, had been set aside as fasting days? (Mark 2:18) This is not the first time He had been questioned about not adhering correctly to the old law. Jesus gave His answer in the form of this parable. His answer must have been perplexing to them. Perhaps they walked away grumbling and wondering why Jesus was making things so difficult, not understanding his answer.

When Jesus talked about patching up an old garment with an unshrunk piece of cloth or using an old wineskin for new wine, he was telling them that the best parts of the old and familiar were going to be kept, but there needed to be some stretching room for something that was going to feel both foreign and new. Stretching room for flexibility, compassion, and grace. Christianity was not something that would be easily understood by the Pharisees. It was radical, extraordinary, and all inclusive. Christians were going to have a new rulebook - everyone will be able to play, competition will be discouraged, merit badges will be eliminated, and bad form will be forgiven. Players will be guaranteed to win the prize no matter how late they join the game or how badly they play. The new rules will be easier to learn but challenging to master. Fully engaged players will be promised an abundance of peace, riches, hope and joy. What an amazing promise!

- Kathy Thomas

April 26 - The Strong Man

Matthew 12:25-29 Mark 3:22-27 Luke 11:15-23

The Strong Man....who is THAT? Your boss? Your husband or wife? Your dad? Your pastor? Usually we think of a strong man as a GOOD person to have around and help do the hard jobs.

Why should anybody be concerned? BECAUSE there has always been a STRONG MAN on earth to destroy anything good. His first goal is: DIVISION.

Once that is in motion, the devil uses his tactics: accusations, blame, comparing, anger, etc., etc., etc. The devil will be sure to show you all the faults in another person. Soon, you start to believe that demonic lie! Your thoughts begin to weaken...and division begins to wield its demonic weapons! It could be in marriages, relatives, friends. The devil loves to DIVIDE!! But GOD is standing...watching...waiting for the time to heal. Is the devil the strong man the Bible is talking about? Matthew 12: 29 indicates he is.

How can division happen with strong believers in Christ? In strong friendships? Between those going to church faithfully and singing the songs?...YES, IT CAN HAPPEN...It can happen to pastors, too! DIVISION means DIVIDE. Christ does not divide his children!! THAT IS SATAN'S PLAN! CHRIST DOES NOT DIVIDE HIS CHILDREN! We do.

Marriage is ALSO GREATLY ATTACKED by this STRONG MAN. He would love to DIVIDE marriages through: disagreements, fault finding, not reading the Bible, not helping each other, not talking to each other, anger, unforgiveness!! YES, YES, this can happen to a good

Christian. DID GOD CAUSE THIS? NO! The devil LOVES to break you down and divide. Jesus came to destroy Satan's plans for you.

“But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF falls down. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?’”
(Luke 11:17-18 NHEB)

CLOSING: Let us WORSHIP JESUS with our voices, as the Spirit leads. Let us...HUMBLE OURSELVES to each other... and to the Lord. There will be a river of LOVE flowing and we WILL BE STRONG MEN AND WOMEN who walk in HIS beauty and power. And NOTHING can divide them...STRONG MEN AND WOMEN of GOD...Overcoming the enemy in unity!!! LOOK TO JESUS!

- Carol Hall

April 27 - The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree

Matthew 24:32-35 Mark 13:28-31 Luke 21:29-33

Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you, also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and Earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." Luke 21:29-33 NKJV

When I was in high school in the 1970's my friends and I were reading and passing around a book called *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey. We talked about how exciting it was, even scary, that we were living in the last days! Surely Jesus was coming soon! As the years went by, we graduated and lost touch with each other. We felt the disappointment of time passing without seeing the events we were so hoping for. Now 50 years later we are still waiting, but we have lost most of the excitement we had in those early years.

Again, I read the words of Jesus telling me of the signs of His coming. Then, as if to give me comfort and assurance that I can still believe these words, He says "Look at the fig tree" (v. 29). When I look at my own fig tree, I know without a doubt that when the buds are swelling soon the leaves will follow and summer is nearly here. I plan my life around that fact and know what I need to do to be ready for the summer months.

Jesus tells us that as we know with assurance the sign we see in the fig tree, he also wants us to know with assurance “the kingdom of God is near” (v. 31), and that “Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away” (v. 33).

Can those of us who have long looked for His coming read His message in the fig tree and begin to get excited once more that indeed Jesus is coming soon?

Prayer: Almighty Father, I pray that you will bless our hearts with assurance and give us renewed minds so that we will receive these words of Jesus and prepare our hearts to be ready for the coming of our Savior.

- Evelyn Schmidt

April 28 - The Wedding Feast

Luke 14:7-11

Introduction: This is probably my favorite parable. It's one of several parables that are only found in the Gospel of Luke. There's no guessing as to what it means, and it teaches a lesson that we can put into action every day!

Main Idea: Be humble even when you have an opportunity to boast or self-promote. Jesus says the proud will be humbled and the humble will be honored.

Summary: A man goes to a wedding feast and intentionally seats himself in a place of honor and when he's asked to move, he's humiliated. Jesus tells us to do this instead - find a seat for common people and you will be honored when the host says, "Friend, we have a better place for you!" (Luke 14:10) Then Jesus goes on to tell the host to not invite his rich friends and family members to a fancy dinner just so they will repay him by returning the favor. Instead, invite the poor and handicapped, then at the resurrection of the godly, God will reward you for being kind to people who could not repay you (v. 12-14).

Real-life Connection: I grew up in a boarding house on Capitol Hill in Seattle. My mother was a nurse's aide at Virginia Mason Hospital. She genuinely loved to help people without regard to being paid back. She was the most humble, generous, and faithful person I've ever known. At dinner time I never knew who was going to show up. One day it was a fireman from the fire station behind our

house. Usually, they were people from the hospital or someone she met in the grocery store. The most expensive room in the house was \$20 per month. The room in the basement was only \$10. Keep in mind that this is 1950's. We always had four boarders. I never saw her get upset when residents were late with their rent. I know of only one time when a resident skipped out without paying. Well-meaning people frequently told her that she was being taken advantage of. It never seemed to bother her. Sometimes I was embarrassed by her generosity. She was a wonderful Christian woman who showed her faith by her actions, not her words. Here on earth, she was much loved. In the next life, it's simply, "Well done my good and faithful servant."

Prayer: Pray for opportunities to anonymously give and to serve with no chance of reciprocation.

- Pete McHugh

April 29 - The Children's Chants
How Can I Describe This Generation?
Matthew 11:16-19 Luke 7:31-34

How would it be to hear Jesus start talking about you?

If hearing his stories regarding wheat, bread and water caught people's attention, I wonder what impact an audience would feel when *they themselves* became the subject of his story. In Luke 7 Jesus turns his focus on "the people of this generation" – that is, the very people he was teaching!

After powerfully commending the ministry of John the Baptist and upholding the faithfulness John demonstrated as a messenger, Jesus laments the lack of a good response from his listeners. He likens them to children whining about not getting what they want to see:

"To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry "' (*Luke 7:31–32 NIV 1984*).

(For those who remember coin-operated juke boxes, I would liken this frustration to the times when I would "put in my quarter" but the machine wouldn't play the song I wanted. *Waaahh*). Jesus denounces their childishness. They are acting like grumpy spectators sitting and waiting for just the entertainment they want to see.

But it's not just that they are spoiled. Listen to the reason Jesus gives for the proclamation he has made against them: "For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners"' (v. 33-34).

It's as if Jesus is saying, "You know. . . I just can't win with you!"

It is so easy to fall into the trap of being just a critic on the sidelines. We can always find some fault to dismiss the validity of what is presented to us – especially if we can simply change the criteria at our whim, whenever we want! And that is exactly what Jesus so clearly exposes in them. "You are acting like brats who can't be pleased."

I wonder how they responded to Jesus' scathing words. Did some of them repent of their simply toying with the messengers God sent to them? . . . Maybe some *DID!*

Meditate on the powerful verses Luke places for us just before the parable we heard: "(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John)" (v. 29-30).

Will we reject God's purpose? Or will we acknowledge His way is right?
- David Pereira