

Bible Group

Monday March 16th: Parable of the Talents: Matthew 25: 14-30: Host Toyin, Lead David See also Luke 19: 11-17 - There are significant differences between Matthew and Luke: different audiences, different contexts, different currency and different allocations; and Luke is almost certainly referring to an actual well-known incident when Archelaus went off to Rome seeking promotion, leaving his servants in charge. However, the two parables are so alike, that we can't easily read the one without the other.

In Matthew, Talents follows Virgins – the Virgins about patient waiting, the Talents about working fruitfully during the time of waiting. There was a very real temptation for the Christian converts just to sit around doing damn all until Jesus came back. Jesus' message to his disciples, and their message to those they preached to was YOU HAVE A HUGELY IMPORTANT JOB TO DO. If we use talents in the modern meaning of the term, we enhance the parable. Yes God gives us different talents: I can just about sing, but I can't sing solo, But in addition, if I had bothered to learn music I could sing a great deal better. Talented people build on a basic talent with study and practice – whether we are talking about particular skills, or sporting talent, or areas of knowledge, or professional competence. Luke Little no doubt has certain natural assets, but these alone would not have got him to where he is in the darts world. The talents in the parable are very firmly the master's talents. Our talents are in large measure our own hard work, building on the original gift. And then use it or lose it.

My Parable Commentary tends to focus on spiritual gifts, and on the special gifts of preachers, priests, Biblical scholars. However, the service of the Lord requires a much wider range of talents – to comfort others, repair doors, cook meals, etc, etc. Peter's talent for fishing came in useful, as well as the teamwork he knew about from fishing. And actually the Bible's outstanding talented people were not by any means always easy in their ministry: witness Moses and Paul.

The local church needs to be good at recognising potential talents and nurturing them... and of course sometimes saying "Maybe try this instead".

What do you take away from the Matthew/Luke differences?

Monday March 23rd: The Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37: Host Toyin, Lead Peta

I suppose this is the parable of parables: the best-known. An example parable rather than a symbol parable. Profound, powerful and simple: a child can get the point. But it is hugely challenging. (It doesn't even say family first, then neighbour!) We can suspect that the lawyer questioner knew his stuff: the essential messages, not just the words; but was struggling with the conviction of many of his fellow lawyers that Gentiles were NOT neighbours. P.S. You don't need to like your neighbour; indeed your neighbour does not behave to be likeable!)

Jerusalem (View of Peace) was about 15 miles from Jericho (City of Curse). Jerusalem was workplace for both priests and levites. Jericho was home to about 12,000 priests. Linking the two cities was a rocky gorge, the Pass of Blood – all the more dangerous since Herod had sacked 40, 000 Temple builders once their job was done; and many had become brigands. Priests and Levites were

relatively safe on that journey, as compared with the Samaritan (Jewish/Gentile cross) merchant. Note that priest and levite were on their way home, not on their way to work, so the traditional excuse for their behaviour of wanting to avoid contamination is a bit thin. (Remember that in the healing of the multiple lepers, the one who returned to give thanks was a Samaritan.)

Listeners would have recognised the presence of the priest and Levite as a God-give n thing: opportunity rather than accident. Jesus is not labelling all priests and levites as bad neighbours, or all Samaritans as good neighbours. Note that the Samaritan was well-equipped for this dangerous journey – whether with his own possible needs or the needs of others in mind. Note too that the question was about who is the neighbour I need to help. The answer was about who is the good neighbour who does the helping. Another learning point is that neighbour goes beyond nearness, though most often the person who needs us is the person we meet: Christian Aid etc are about neighbourliness with people we shall never meet. (Of course in our world we can see or hear those distant neighbours, and therefore have less excuse for not knowing about and responding to their needs.)

One theological thought: The Incarnation is about God meeting us as His neighbours. Jesus is the Good Samaritan – going beyond lifting us up etc, to dying for us. The Good Samaritan in the story was of course risking more than his goods, money and donkey. He didn't know that the robbers were far away by then.

Do you think the lawyer "did likewise"?

Monday March 30th: I realise I have scheduled the 3 losts for March 9th, so will need to replace the Prodigal/Lost Son suggested for this session. Alternative suggestions welcome. Maybe the Un-merciful Servant (Matthew 18: 21-35)? If that were to be the choice, we would have:-

Host David, Lead Toyin: The theme is forgiveness, with an echo of the Lord's Prate "forgive that you may be forgiven". In a recent Radio 4 broadcast, two theologians were asked about forgiveness, and said forgiveness required first penitence. The interviewer reported two minutes later that another theologian had rung in to say "No it didn't!" Your views? I think the caller was right. Of course it is good to get penitence before forgiveness, but it isn't difficult to imagine being deeply wounded, forgiving, and then the offender acknowledging their fault. I guess parents can forgive their child long before the sulky child gets round even to recognising that there is something to apologise for. As to God forgiving us before we say/feel sorry, maybe at least we can recognise that God knows the whole story much better than even the best-informed human judge. Think on!

What do you make of forgiving the same person for the same offence 490 times? Would you be ticking of the 490th forgiveness with a shout of joy that at last you could beat the offender to death? Note the offender is a brother, Easier or harder to forgive someone you know well? Would the offending brother be keeping his own list of offences on your part – how does that affect the scoring system? Can forgiveness ever be too easy? If the offence is verbal, social media mean it is often much more "permanent" and much more widely shared.

Is there something of an obsession with public apologies – should Scotland be making reparation to England for raids across the then border between what are now Scotland and England? Should England be making reparation to what is now Wales for having enslaved Welsh women in Saxon times?

Monday April 6th: Easter Monday – No meeting.