

## Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order

### Parable #9 — Luke 12:42-48 — Faithful and Wise Servant

<sup>42</sup> And the Lord replied, “A faithful, sensible servant is one to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his other household servants and feeding them. <sup>43</sup> If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward. <sup>44</sup> I tell you the truth, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns. <sup>45</sup> But what if the servant thinks, ‘My master won’t be back for a while,’ and he begins beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk? <sup>46</sup> The master will return unannounced and unexpected, and he will cut the servant in pieces and banish him with the unfaithful.

<sup>47</sup> “And a servant who knows what the master wants, but isn’t prepared and doesn’t carry out those instructions, will be severely punished. <sup>48</sup> But someone who does not know, and then does something wrong, will be punished only lightly. When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required.

### Parable #10 — Luke 13:6-9 — Unfruitful Fig Tree

<sup>6</sup> Then Jesus told this story: “A man planted a fig tree in his garden and came again and again to see if there was any fruit on it, but he was always disappointed. <sup>7</sup> Finally, he said to his gardener, ‘I’ve waited three years, and there hasn’t been a single fig! Cut it down. It’s just taking up space in the garden.’

<sup>8</sup> “The gardener answered, ‘Sir, give it one more chance. Leave it another year, and I’ll give it special attention and plenty of fertilizer. <sup>9</sup> If we get figs next year, fine. If not, then you can cut it down.’”

Parable #9 — Luke 12:42-48 — Faithful and Wise Servant

1. What would you do if you hired a house sitter/caretaker to watch your home and children, left for a week-long vacation, and then returned a day early to find your caretaker had neglected your kids, had a big party, and trashed your home?
2. What distinguishes the faithful and wise manager? (12:42-44)
3. How did Jesus say that an irresponsible servant might behave when left in charge of the household? (12:45) Why might a person behave in this way?
4. In view of Christ's second coming, what does this parable teach you about readiness? About stewardship? Judgement? Serving others? Witnessing?
5. The parable identifies four kinds of servant:
  - a) One who knows what he should do, and does the right thing.
  - b) One who knows what he should do, but does the wrong thing.
  - c) One who knows what he should do, but doesn't do anything.
  - d) One who does not know what he should do, and does the wrong thingWhat is the fate of each of them? Which one do you identify with?
6. Do you know your "master's will?" (12:47) Should you try to know it better or are you better off not knowing it so you will not be punished as severely? (12:48)
7. Over what has God give you stewardship (you, personally)? What do you think God wants you to do with it (be specific)? How would God evaluate the job you're doing? How can you improve the job you're doing?

Parable #10 — Luke 13:6-9 — Unfruitful Fig Tree

1. What is the context in which Jesus tells the parable of the barren fig tree?
2. In this parable, who are the characters represented by the fig tree, the owner, and the gardener? What do the figs (or fruit) represent?
3. Which is most surprising to you: that the owner wants to cut down the tree? Or that the gardener wants to give it another year?
4. What eventually happens? Is the tree cut down? Does the owner give it another year? If so, does it bear fruit?
5. What is the message of this parable?

## Parable #9 ~ Luke 12:42-48 ~ Faithful and Wise Servant ~ Discussion

In a departure from my other studies, I am not providing “answers” or jumping off points for the questions. So you’re on your own with this parable. Instead, I’m including a highly edited discussion of this parable by Ron Wallace, <http://www.biblefragrances.com>

### Context and Summary

Luke 12:41 – And Peter said, “Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone {else} as well?”

In the previous parable (#8) Peter recognized the general meaning of Jesus’ teaching, but now asks for clarification. He wants to know if this exhortation to be prepared applies to all people or just to the disciples? Jesus answers this by giving another parable (12:42-46), in which it is clearly stated that the consequence for not being prepared is total rejection and dismissal to the place of the unfaithful—and that it applies to everyone.

In verse 12:46, Jesus says, “The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect {him,} and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers.”

This parable is also mentioned at Matthew 24:45-51, but Luke adds some factors that amplify the spiritual truths illustrated. The ONE spiritual lesson of this parable is that at the return of Jesus, there will be some who are accepted and some who are rejected. Beyond this, it is probably not wise to find too many other spiritual correlations to the many embellishments in the story, although as we’ll see, there are four different kinds of people that Jesus speaks of. You can certainly identify yourself as one of them

Let me remind the reader here, *that it is impossible for a person who has been saved by God and is being held in God’s grasp to ever lose his salvation*. The unprepared servant here is clearly one who has *not* trusted in Jesus as the Messiah/Savior, has no relationship with God, and will be totally rejected at the return of Jesus for His elect.

Some people think that this parable should be applied to believers only, and that the faithful slave is a believer in fellowship with God, and the unfaithful slave is a believer out of fellowship. The obvious focus in this parable is rejection of the unfaithful slave when Jesus returns. But a believer, no matter whether he is in or out of fellowship with God will be gathered to the Lord at Jesus’ return, and the language of total rejection that occurs in this parable, *cannot refer to any believer* at that time.

Part of the total rejection language in this parable is an assignment of an unbeliever to the place of the hypocrite (Matthew 24:51) and the unfaithful (Luke 12:46). But for a believer to be placed anywhere but “My Father’s house” (John 14:1-3) when Christ returns is contrary to Scripture.

Matthew 24:51 – He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Luke 12:46 – He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

### Verse by Verse

Luke 12:42 – And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise steward his master will put in charge of his servants to give them their allotted food at the proper time?”

The illustration pictures mankind in general, all of whom have responsibility to the Creator and are accountable to Him for having a right relationship with Him through faith in the Messiah. The servant or steward who is faithful is one who has trusted in Jesus Christ as his Messiah and Savior.

Luke 12:43-44 – That servant whose master finds him working when he comes will be rewarded. I tell you the truth: He will put him in charge of all his possessions.

You may think, hey, this isn't really such a great reward. I do a good job and then I get even more responsibilities! What! I thought that I'd enter God's rest! What's this about more responsibilities? Sorry, but that seems to be God's plan and it's repeated in several later parables: the more responsibilities you handle well, the more you're going to get. On the other hand, the "responsibilities" Jesus speaks of can also be seen as blessings. And that's a good thing to get more of.

The language in the parable is symbolic of what happens when Jesus returns. It refers to the blessing of being with Christ, and should not be taken as some kind of literal assignment of responsibility. When Jesus returns, all who have trusted in Him will be gathered out of the earth, taken to heaven, and enter into eternal fellowship with other believers and into everlasting peace.

Luke 12:45 – But if that servant says in his heart, "My master will be a long time in coming," and begins to beat the other servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk;

This refers to a person, who in human arrogance, ignores the Lord's call upon his life and chooses not to trust in Christ as the Savior. Instead, he lives in the self-centeredness of his sin nature, indulging his pleasure lusts and oppressing others. The "long time in coming" phrase reminds us of what Peter writes at 2 Peter 3:3-4 – Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with {their} mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For {ever} since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

Let's look at the last three verses of the parable together. <sup>46</sup> The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. <sup>47</sup> "The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. <sup>48</sup> But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

So we see that in verse 44 and these last three (46-48), there are actually four kinds of servant discussed:

- a) One who knows what he should do, and does the right thing. (44 and 48b)
- b) One who knows what he should do, but does the wrong thing. (46)
- c) One who knows what he should do, but doesn't do anything. (47)
- d) One who does not know what he should do, and does the wrong thing (48a)

Let's consider each of these. We've already looked at the one who knows what he should do and does the right thing. He gets rewarded with more responsibilities and blessings. Jesus reiterates this again in the second part of the last verse when he says, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." When Jesus says something twice in a few minutes, what does that mean? *Pay attention! This is important.* He's saying, "learn the right thing to do—and DO it!"

Okay, so now what if you know what you should do but deliberately decide to do the wrong thing? In this parable that meant beating the other servants, feasting on the master's food and getting drunk. What happened then?

Luke 12:46 – the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect {him,} and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and will banish him with the unbelievers.

When Jesus comes back to this earth at the Day of the Lord, He will come as a thief in the night (1 Thes. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15), unexpectedly, suddenly and without warning to the unbelieving world (1 Thes. 5:3; Luke 21:34). For that matter, it is even possible for believers to be unprepared through carnal pleasures and be caught off guard (1 Thes. 5:4-11; Luke 21:34-36). However, *all believers* will be taken out, and only the unbelievers will remain to undergo the Day of the Lord judgments, and ultimately end up in the lake of fire unless they change their mind and believe in Christ during the period between Jesus' second coming (the rapture) and the Last Judgement (Armageddon).

Okay, but what about this disobedient servant that Jesus says will be "cut into pieces?" This statement is bit difficult to understand. Although the Greek word *means* to cut something into two parts, based on context here, a better translation may be scourging (whipping, lashing, or cause great suffering). Cut into two pieces would imply physical death, and if that were the case, then there is no way he could be assigned to the place of the unbeliever. What does being assigned to the unbeliever mean?

When Jesus returns a second time, unbelievers are *assigned* to the same place as the unfaithful hypocrite, (Matthew). He does not go immediately to that place, but is simply assigned to it. The final placement in hell, the lake of fire, will not occur until the last judgment. So although he will be rejected at the second return of Jesus, he will still have another opportunity to trust in Christ up until the final judgement (battle of Armageddon). After that, all unbelievers will be removed from the earth and sent to Hades.

Thus we see that if you know what you should do but deliberately decide to do the wrong thing, you are punished and then *assigned* to the same place as the unfaithful hypocrite. You're punished, but you get a second chance..

Now let's look at the third kind of servant Luke 12:47 – "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes,

Luke 12:47 – "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes,

This clearly indicates the administration of a more severe punishment upon the one who is blatantly rebellious against God.

The puzzle is, that the one who did the wrong thing cannot advance much upon being left behind at the Jesus' second coming (the rapture). What then would be the significance of more lashes for the one who did nothing vs. fewer lashes for the one who did the wrong thing? I think Jesus is saying that when you hear the message God wants you to do something, even if it's the wrong thing, rather than sitting back and doing nothing. God wants you to be a doer, not a watcher. Do the wrong thing—you get punished. Do nothing—you get punished even more.

Luke 12:48a – But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows..

Again, we can clearly see that a less severe punishment is administered upon the one who is rebellious against God, but who does so ignorantly, that is, without a full understanding of his obligation to the Creator. This is perhaps a person who has become aware of God via God Consciousness type revelation, but has not read the Bible or expressed interest in becoming a Christ follower and has not been born again.

Some people might ask, “what about people who haven't been exposed to Christ or the Bible—will God send them to hell?” Here's the answer. Later generations who have seen Jesus' miracles and read the Bible will be held to a higher standard. A greater revelation was given to Christ's generation than to the former generations and neither will bypass the first judgement when Christ returns. The unbelievers of both generations will be held accountable for their unbelief and both will be *assigned but not sent* to the lake of fire, but the ones who don't know about Christ will receive a less severe indictment at the last judgment. So it seems that the soul of the unbeliever is going to be more sad and miserable in view of *having known* what was expected of him.

The final word: Luke 12:48b – And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

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### **Parable #10 ~ Luke 13:6-9 ~ Unfruitful Fig Tree ~ Discussion**

By Rev. Takao Kiyohiro, Tokyo, Japan

1. What we are given for today is the parable from Jesus about a fig tree planted in a vineyard. It sounds unnatural for a fig tree to be planted in a vineyard, but it seems that it wasn't all that strange after all. Figs, along with grapes, have been altogether quite familiar in Israel from of old; they have been used as tree stands letting the grape vines be entwined upon them. Well, because [this one in our story] was planted in the good earth of the vineyard, as a matter of course, it was expected to be fruitful. But yet, there stood the fig tree fruitless for years. Jesus began to speak as follows: “A certain man planted a fig tree in a vineyard, but when he came to look for its fruit, he didn't find any,” (verse six). So, finally, the owner of the vineyard ordered the garden keeper to chop that tree down.

## **Better Chop It Down!**

2. First, let's listen to the words of the owner of the vineyard. He says, "Even though already for three years I have been coming to search for fruit on this fig tree, I have never found any at all. So, chop it down. Why let the ground be plugged up for this?" (verse seven).

3. Just before this parable the following words are found. "Unless you all repent, you will perish the same way," (verse five). In other words, this parable is given in the context of "the judgment of God." When we compare the judgment of God with the words of this owner, these words have a very strict ring to them. "Better chop it down!" We will see in our mind's eye behind such words the image of a cold blooded and ruthless man. We compare that with the image of an angry God handing down his judgments in a pitiless manner. I'd say there are more than a few feeling resistance to the words of the owner.

4. But, as you think about it, it wasn't anything special that the owner was commanding. Normally, what we'd think would hardly be different.

5. I'm not good at throwing things away. My disposition to hold onto something until it is totally useless probably is a trait I get from my grandmother somehow. A lot of things with no function and no use stay around and start taking up space. When we moved last April, it turned out that we had quite a lot of unnecessary objects stored around. So when done, we ended up throwing away most of it. But it wasn't me who did the pitching out, it was my wife who did it. And even though she threw it all away, it never bothered me a second. In the end I knew her judgment was right. Anyone who is always packing useless things is not called wise. It is common sense to pitch anything that serves no purpose or is useless.

6. The tree appearing in this story does not yield fruit even though it has been at the fruit bearing age for fig trees. Two years go by, then three years, but it doesn't have fruit. In the first place, according to the law of Moses even if a tree has fruit, it can't be eaten right away. It can't be eaten for three years. The fruit from the fourth year will be an offering to the Lord. Then after the fifth year it can be eaten. So, even had it yielded on the third year, it would be edible on the fourth year still ahead. But, in reality, no fruit had come at its third year either. When you think about that, it's not odd for the fig tree to be judged as useless and unfit for the earth. "Chop it down" is every bit a commonsensical judgment call. Even if there were some who felt resistance to the figure of this owner in some way or another, we'd probably be the first to say "chop it down" if we had been standing there in his shoes. That much, in a sense, would have been within our rights.

7. Besides that, if we take it further, there is a background to this parable in the Old Testament. The Israelites are time and again compared by way of illustration to figs, grapes, and other fruit. For example, resembling the situation of the owner in today's parable, we find the following words in Isaiah. "For the one I love, a song of the love of the vineyard will I sing. My loved one used to have a vineyard on a fertile slope. He removed the rocks making it quite arable and planted for good grapes. He set a watch tower in its midst, dug out a winepress, and waited for the good vines to bear fruit. But,

the fruit it bore was sour grapes. ... What should I do for the vineyard, what is there still that I have not done? Though I have waited for good grapes to yield, why have sour grapes yielded?," (Isaiah 5:1-4).

8. Figs and grapes are different. But the point they have in common is in that someone's expectations have been betrayed. The fig tree is not just useless. It also corresponds with the figure of humanity which has continuously betrayed its trust and expectations. In Isaiah God lifts his voice of lament with "What should I do for the vineyard, what is there still that I have not done?" It is the same even in this parable from Jesus. The figs have not been growing wild along the side of the road. They have been set in a vineyard. They have been planted in good soil. There is even a gardener there to care for the plants. When we consider the Old Testament background to this parable, the figs are not trees that have been turned wild. It assumes they've been tended to by hand already. In other words, "despite all that" it is then "for three years already, even though I've come looking for fruit on this fig tree, I have never found any on it." Therefore, to say "chop it down" is an altogether quite sensible judgment call.

9. So, we need to take another look here in this passage about what it says on God's judgment. Most often we resist depictions of God's wrath. We feel a resistance against the harsh words of this owner in this parable. But what the owner is saying is not improper or hardly strange, so it is neither wrong nor weird if God shows his anger towards us or if he hands down judgment. Much rather, the truly important thing is that we admit that by our very natures we exist as helpless to being judged and being taken down. Even if God judges and destroys the world, it would not be an immoral or an abnormal act. [As master of the universe it is within God's sovereign right.]

### **Leave It Be For This Year**

10. When you understand this, it seems that the especially surprising thing being said in this parable is not in the first half of it but rather the second part. The words of the owner to "chop it down" are a normal judgment call, but on the other hand the very very unusual words are those of the gardener that come after his.

11. So, let's take a moment to listen to his statement. The gardener answered the owner, "Master, leave it be for this year. I'll dig around the tree and fertilize it. Then, next year it may bear fruit. If it is still no good after that, chop it down," (verses eight and nine).

12. The gardener asked that the fruitless fig tree might stay on till next year. Were the tree to remain, there would be no particular benefit to the gardener. Instead, it would only add the extra work load for him of digging around it and giving it fertilizer. Nevertheless, the gardener petitioned the owner on behalf of the tree. The parable ends with the words from the gardener. In the final analysis, the message to be implied by that is that the owner did not reject the gardener's words. As a development in the story this is not what you'd expect but it is rather surprising.

13. In addition, a surprising thing happened but not just in this parable, but outside the parable, in the real world of life. This parable only appears in Luke's Gospel [and not the

other three]. Also, similarly, there are the words of Christ in it that Luke's Gospel alone transmits. When Christ was hung on the cross, the Lord prayed, "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing," (chapter twenty-three and verse thirty-four). Please, please leave it alone for this year. Please do not chop it down. Next year it may have fruit. In his having spoken like that, we see on the cross the figure of the gardener who showed mercy and who was so strangely attached to a fruitless fig tree that was just wasting space.

14. Even more though, it wasn't only on the cross. Jesus' petitioning didn't end then. His intercession still continues now. Paul wrote the following verses. "Who can judge us in sin? He who died, no rather, he who was raised from the dead, Christ Jesus sits on the right hand of God and intercedes on our behalf," (Romans 8:34).

15. Actually today's not the first time I preached from this passage of scripture. Exactly two years ago in March, I preached from this. Since then one year then another year's time has flown by. But the world still exists. Our church also exists. We have been allowed to appear before His presence unchanged. We worship the Lord today too the same as that day. Do we deserve this? I don't think we do. The gardener requested "one more year" for him to leave the tree that had never yielded forth fruit and the owner thought his offer was good and that they should wait. The surprising thing being said in this parable really takes place in us.

16. Well, the words of the gardener end with "If it is still no good after that, chop it down." But nothing is said conclusively about a year later regarding whether the fig tree gave forth fruit or if it didn't have fruit and was chopped down. This means that the heart of what Jesus meant to say in this parable was not on whether the tree was ultimately to be cut down or to be left alone. None of that mattered. The place we ought to be looking is on the point that the tree still stood though it deserved to be cut down because of the way it was.

17. As I mentioned at the beginning, this parable is given in the context of "God's judgment." When we think of how that it is on God's judgment, our thoughts inevitably turn to whether we will be chopped down or saved on "the last day." However, the parable of Jesus draws our eyes so apt to turn to "the last day" back to "now, this hour." For, the main thing is not "the last day, but "now, this hour" in which we stand under the intercession of Christ and are shown God's mercy and patience. As of Wednesday the church calendar will enter Lent, Passion Season [of the Lord's suffering]. As another year passes we have been able to welcome in this hour for this year as well. Even for this year we are allowed, especially as an hour of repentance, to spend this period of time. It is always the "now, this hour" that has do to with repentance. We must respond with gravity to this hour given to us as a gift of grace for now, for the very present moment. Paul had something to say on this, "Right now is the hour of grace; right now is the day of salvation," (2 Corinthians 6:2).