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Parables

James C. Christensen

Robert L. Millet

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PARABLES

JAMES C. CHRISTENSEN



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PARABLES

TEXT BY ROBERT L. MILLET

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DRAWINGS BY JAMES C. CHRISTENSEN

*Accompanies "Parables" the fine art giclée canvas
by James C. Christensen*



THE GREENWICH WORKSHOP

1. THE SOWER

And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;
And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:
Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:
And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.
And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:
But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.
Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.
Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.
When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.
This is he which received seed by the way side.
But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;
Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.
He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and

the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.
But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

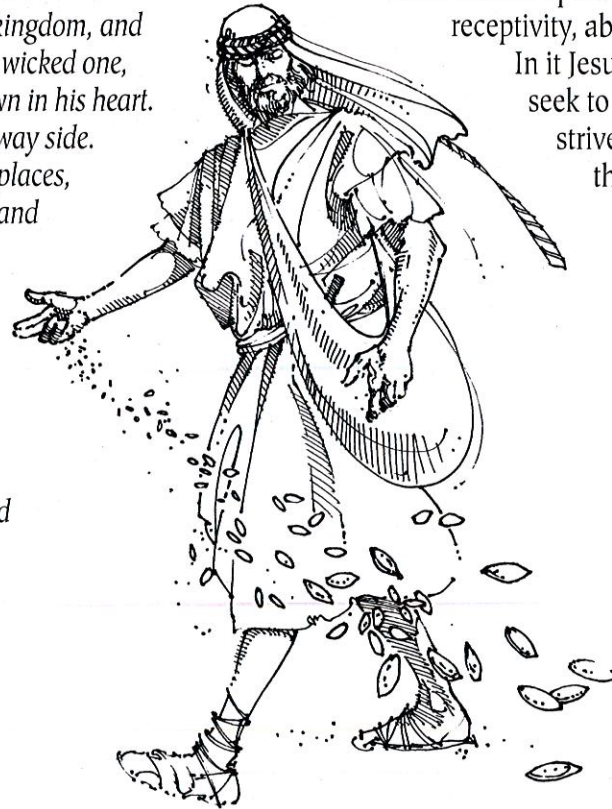
(MATTHEW 13:3-9, 18-23)



THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER is one of the “parables of the kingdom.” These parables focus on hearing the word of truth, coming into the kingdom and remaining faithful.

The Parable of the Sower might well be called the Parable of the Soils, inasmuch as it says far more about the soil into which the word of truth comes than it does about the one who plants the word. This is a parable about humility before God, about spiritual receptivity, about the openness of human hearts and minds.

In it Jesus encourages his listeners to receive the truth, seek to understand and cherish the truth and thereby strive to sink one’s spiritual roots deep, so that neither the pressure of persecution nor the cares of this temporal world can distract us from eternal things. Men and women must therefore plow, harrow and fertilize their own soils and show tender care for the seed or word of salvation, if they are to reap an abundant harvest here and hereafter. This parable is thus a call for sincerity, spiritual depth and certitude, all of which enable one to remain faithful in the face of opposition.



2. THE HOUSE UPON THE ROCK

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

(MATTHEW 7:24-27)

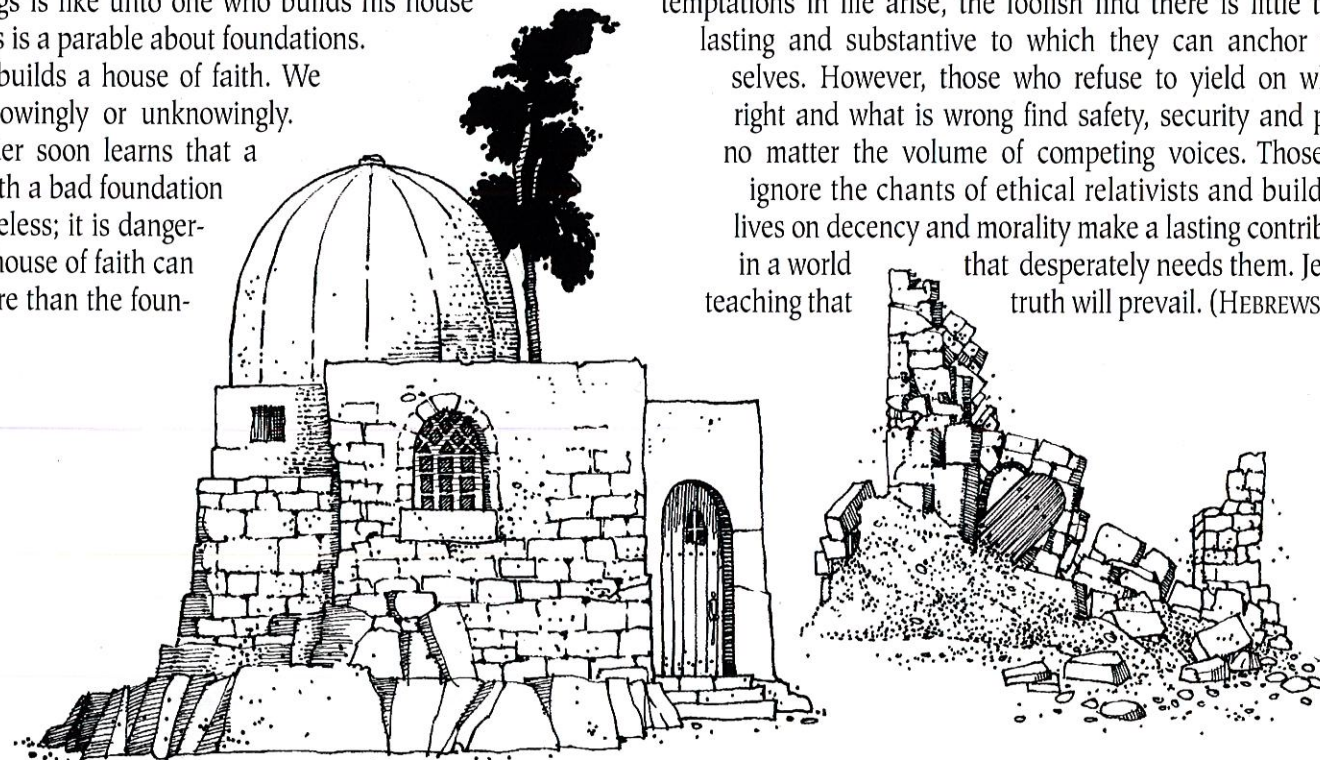
JESUS CONCLUDES his famous Sermon on the Mount by affirming the importance of what he has just taught: one who gives careful heed to his words may be likened unto a man who builds his house on the rock, while he who slights his sayings is like unto one who builds his house on the sand. This is a parable about foundations.

Every person builds a house of faith. We do so either knowingly or unknowingly. And every builder soon learns that a good building with a bad foundation is worse than useless; it is dangerous. Thus one's house of faith can be no more secure than the foun-

ation upon which it is built. Foolish persons build upon the shifting sands of popularity and social consensus, while wise persons build upon absolute truths and time-honored values, principles and practices that civilizations acknowledge as divinely given.

Foolish persons build upon the shifting sands of popularity and social consensus, while wise persons build upon absolute truths and time-honored values, principles and practices that civilizations acknowledge as divinely given. Some things have endured the tests of time, and after this many centuries of life on this planet, there are certain verities—causes of famine and plenty, war and peace, unhappiness and contentment for individuals and nations—that wise men and women simply ought to accept and acknowledge. Foolish persons build their houses upon counterfeits, vain and artificial substitutes for happiness. As an example, the lessons of the centuries prescribe that one cannot sow the winds of pride and selfishness without reaping the whirlwinds of sorrow and destruction.

When the winds of adversity blow, when problems, crises and temptations in life arise, the foolish find there is little that is lasting and substantive to which they can anchor themselves. However, those who refuse to yield on what is right and what is wrong find safety, security and peace, no matter the volume of competing voices. Those who ignore the chants of ethical relativists and build their lives on decency and morality make a lasting contribution in a world that desperately needs them. Jesus is teaching that truth will prevail. (HEBREWS 11:3)



3. THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (LUKE 18:9-14)



HE PHARISEES were one of the major religious sects in the days of Jesus. They considered themselves to be the separated ones, a step above the people of the land in their observance of religious and ritual. Publicans were among the most hated and despised of all people. They were tax collectors, employees of the Roman government and as such were considered traitors to their own nation through their complicity with their evil overlords.



The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican is a condemnation of hypocrisy and self-righteousness. All of us fall short of the divine standard. All of us are in need of pardoning mercy. The Pharisees “trusted in themselves that they were righteous.” This Pharisee’s words betray the fact that he doesn’t really feel that he needs God; his impressive deeds are sufficient to save him. The Publican, on the other hand, knowing his many sins, acknowledging his lowly station before man and God, simply pleads for mercy. A stark contrast, to be sure. But it is the sinful Publican, not the pious Pharisee, who goes home forgiven, cleansed and declared righteous.

Jesus calls his disciples to lose their self-will, their self-promotion, their selfish desires, in favor of a greater and more far-reaching will. He does not ask that they do less than their best or that they perform less than what is required to do the job. What he does ask is that they be less concerned with what others think, less troubled by mortal pecking orders, less bothered by appearances than they are with reality.

There is a striking irony in the message of this parable. Truly, the recognition of our plight, of our spiritual bankruptcy without divine assistance, is the beginning of wisdom, the door that opens us to strength and power beyond our own. “For when we are weak, then are we strong.” (2 CORINTHIANS 12:10)

4. THE IMPORTUNATE FRIEND

*And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend,
and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him,
Friend, lend me three loaves;
For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have
nothing to set before him?
And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not:
the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed;
I cannot rise and give thee.
I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because
he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise
and give him as many as he needeth.
And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you;
seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth;
and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.
If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he
give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for
a fish give him a serpent?
Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer
him a scorpion?
If ye then, being evil, know
how to give good gifts unto
your children: how much more
shall your heavenly Father
give the Holy Spirit to them
that ask him?*

(LUKE 11:5-13)



EW MESSAGES are more forcefully taught in the New Testament than the invitation to simply “ask of God.” Jesus does not refer to God as an impersonal force in the universe or as some cosmic collection of laws; more than any single title, Jesus chooses to address God as “Father.” In order to dramatize the fact that God is eager to hear from his children, that he will not scold them for asking for his help, Jesus gives the Parable of the Importunate Friend. To importune is to persist in a request, to persevere, to stick with it. This message is given to encourage his listeners to turn to the Almighty and continue to importune the heavens until the answer to our problems or deliverance from our plight come.

This is one of those times in the New Testament in which Jesus teaches by contrast. It is as though he had asked, ‘If a frail, mortal being who calls himself your friend will in fact respond to your inconveniencing request (even when he would rather not be bothered), how much more readily will God—who loves his children and delights to assist us in any way he can—respond to our pleadings for divine guidance and strength?’ Truly, if human beings who are plagued by ignorance, limitations and selfishness rush to the aid of their colleagues in need, how much more will a divine Being who is all-wise, all-powerful and completely selfless hasten to bless his children?



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5. THE LOST COIN

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.

Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. (LUKE 15:8-10)



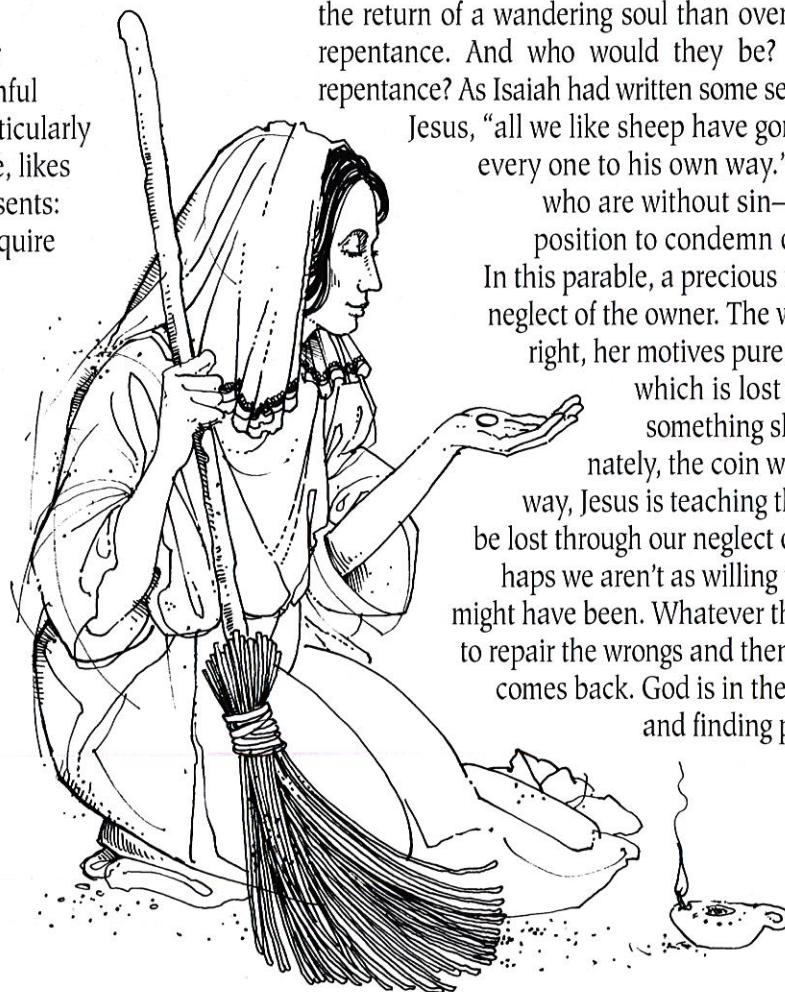
VERY ONE OF US has at one time or another lost something. It's a painful thing, especially if the item is particularly valuable or meaningful. No one, for example, likes to lose money because of what money represents: privileges or opportunities to do things or acquire things. Surely many, many hours in a life-time are spent seeking to find or discover lost or stolen or misplaced coins or bills. And, once they are found, there is indeed much rejoicing. If this is true in regard to inanimate objects, how much more so for lost pets? Or how much more so for a child who became separated from Mom in the mall, or a teenage son who took the wrong exit on the freeway and was several hours finding his way back home? Or how much more joy and rejoicing take place when a spiritually

lost person comes back, one who has been rejected or personally damaged by insensitivity or arrogance and chooses to distance himself for many years from the family, the congregation or the community? It's just good to get back that which was lost, especially people.

Though it seems to be a lovely story that focuses on the value of working hard to retrieve a lost item, this parable, when read in context, is in fact an accusation against those who see themselves as perpetually faithful and therefore view others as less worthy. Jesus' words are biting, for he states that there is more joy in heaven over the return of a wandering soul than over 99 persons who need no repentance. And who would they be? Who, exactly, needs no repentance? As Isaiah had written some seven hundred years before

Jesus, "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." (ISAIAH 53:6) Only those who are without sin—which is no one—is in a position to condemn others.

In this parable, a precious item is lost because of the neglect of the owner. The woman's heart seems to be right, her motives pure, her desire to retrieve that which is lost genuine. It certainly isn't something she planned to do; unfortunately, the coin was misplaced. In the same way, Jesus is teaching that a brother or sister may be lost through our neglect or our insensitivity; or perhaps we aren't as willing to forgive and forget as we might have been. Whatever the cause, we do all we can to repair the wrongs and then rejoice when the lost one comes back. God is in the business of searching out and finding people and so must we be.



6. THE PRODIGAL SON

And he said, A certain man had two sons:
And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the
portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto
them his living.
And not many days after the younger son gathered all together,
and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted
his substance with riotous living.
And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in
that land; and he began to be in want.
And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country;
and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.
And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the
swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.
And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants
of my father's have bread enough
and to spare, and I perish with hunger!
I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him,
Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make
me as one of thy hired servants.
And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was
yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had

compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.
And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven,
and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.
But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and
put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:
And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat,
and be merry:
For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost,
and is found.
And they began to be merry.
Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew
nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.
And he called one of the servants, and asked what these
things meant.
And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath
killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.
And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father
out, and intreated him.
And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I
serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment:
and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry
with my friends:



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*But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy
living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.
And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that
I have is thine.*

*It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this
thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost,
and is found.* (LUKE 15:11-32)



ESUS HERE MINGLES with the lower crust of society, which aggravates the religious leaders of the day. In response, Jesus utters three parables of lost things—a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son. All three are parables that point out that to some degree all of us are lost and are in desperate need of pardoning mercy.

In the last, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, (“prodigal” meaning wasteful, extravagant, reckless) a rebellious young man demands his inheritance from his father and chooses to forsake home and family values. He goes into the world, sins against virtue and soon encounters the harsh reality

of joblessness and homelessness. When he finally recognizes the famine for goodness in his own life and the present emptiness in his soul, he begins the long and arduous road home.

The arms of family and friends are opened wide, an outpouring of compassion and love takes place and all rejoice. All, that is, except for the older brother who has stayed home and remained faithful to the father. He feels in some way cheated or slighted because the returning one is given a robe, a ring and a fatted calf.

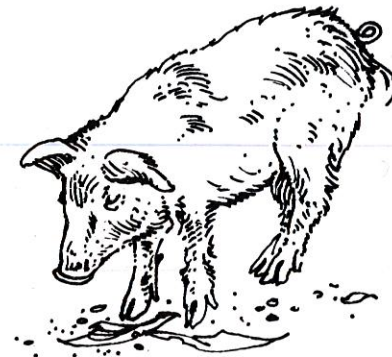
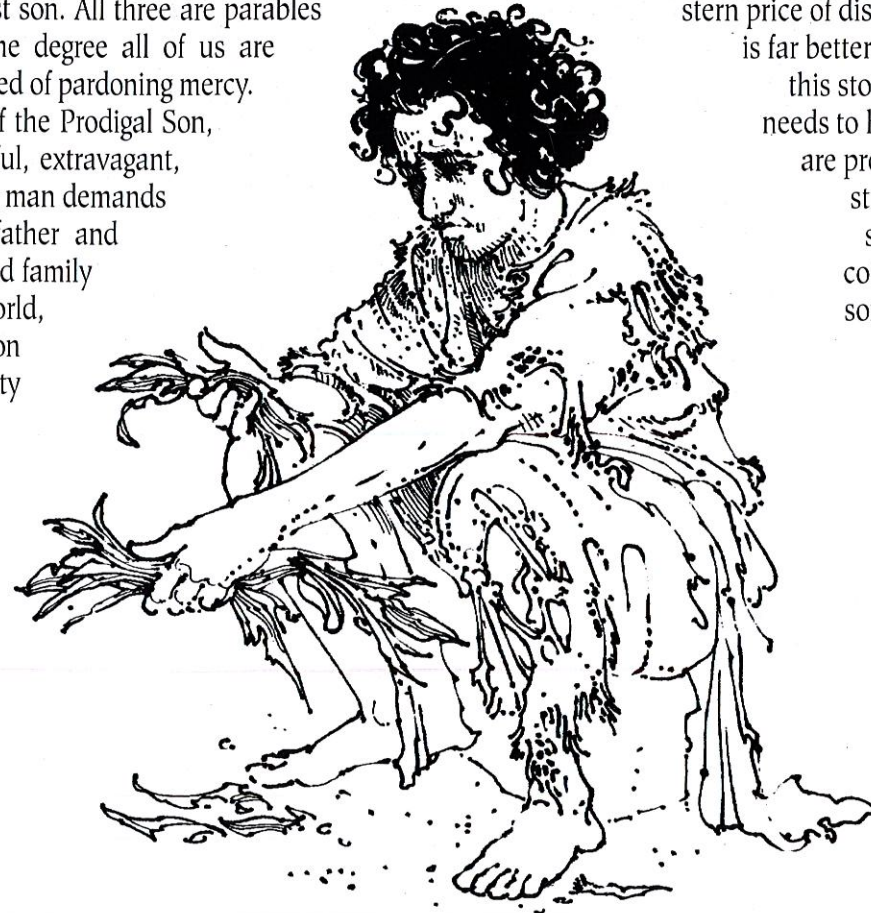
There seems to lurk in his mind the questions: “What about me? I’m the good guy, remember?” In one sense, an application of the parable might be a warning against wandering and the

stern price of disobedience. To be sure, prevention is far better than redemption. The message of

this story, however, is one that each of us needs to hear regularly, especially when we are prone to judge another: whether one

strays out of ignorance (like the lost sheep), out of neglect (like the lost coin) or knowingly (like the prodigal son), the Almighty stands ready and

willing to receive us back and reinstate us in the royal family.



7. THE GOOD SAMARITAN

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

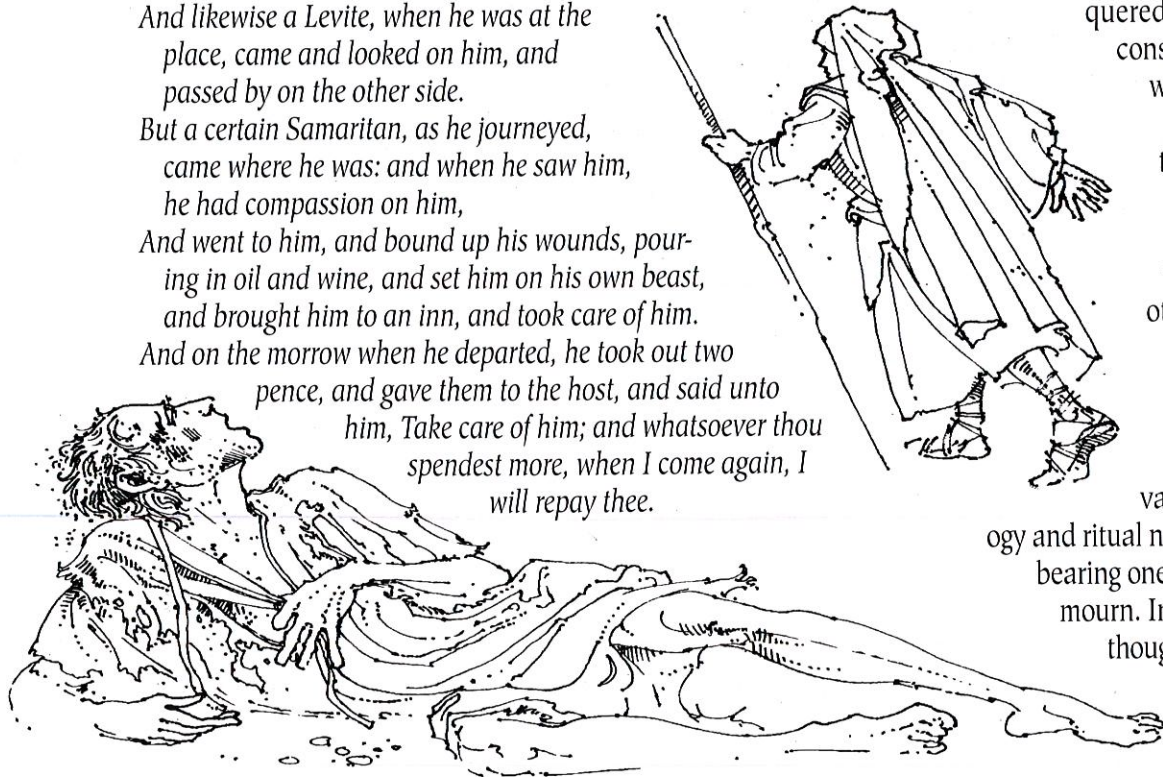
And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.



Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. (LUKE 10:25-37)



SOME OF THE MOST POWERFUL lessons in the New Testament come as a result of Jesus' answer to questions like, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" In response to this lawyer's inquiry, Jesus capsulized the law with the two "great commandments"—we must love God and love our neighbor. And then, in answer to the follow up as to who is our neighbor, the Parable of the Good Samaritan follows.

The Samaritans were hated by the Jews and considered to be "half-breeds." Many of the Samaritans had come through the intermarriage of Jews and Assyrians, the Assyrians having conquered the land of Israel several centuries earlier. Jews considered the Samaritans to be ritually unclean and were instructed to have no dealings or interactions with them. (JOHN 4:9) And so in this parable, two prominent men in the religious establishment, both of whom had responsibility for the upkeep and operation of the sanctuary, passed by the wounded man as though they did not see. On the other hand, a dreaded Samaritan—of all people!—was willing to be inconvenienced and therefore extend himself in service.

This parable highlights the sobering truth that neither religious belief nor strict religious observance qualify one for divine approval; rather, theology and ritual need to be translated into pure religion, in terms of bearing one another's burdens and mourning with those who mourn. In addition, the tendency of a man or woman to be thoughtful or compassionate is often unrelated to their place in society's pecking order.

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8. THE GOOD SHEPHERD

*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life
for the sheep.*

*But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the
sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep,
and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.*

*The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not
for the sheep.*

*I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am
known of mine.*

*As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father:
and I lay down my life for the sheep. (JOHN 10:11-15)*

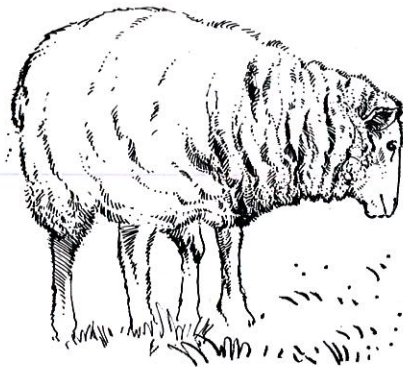
WHEREAS THE PARABLES of Jesus are
to be found in the Gospels of
Matthew, Mark and Luke,
there are in the Gospel of John two
extended metaphors—the Good
Shepherd and the Vine and the
Branches. (JOHN 15) Jesus' descrip-
tion of the Good Shepherd is a charac-
terization of successful leadership.

There is a difference between a sheep-
herder or a hireling (one who guards the
sheep because it's his job to do so) and a

shepherd. The sheepherder is not really concerned about the
sheep, only as it pertains to getting the job done. The shepherd
knows the sheep by name and shows personal concern for each.
The sheep know him and they know his voice. The sheepherder
drives the sheep; he stands behind them, makes demands and
shouts out directions and often uses gimmicks to motivate them.
The shepherd walks before his sheep; he leads them and they fol-
low him. When there is danger, the sheepherder is often the first
to panic and the first to bolt. The shepherd stands firmly at his
station and the sheep feel secure and confident.

Just as it is true that "a double-minded man is unstable in all
his ways" (JAMES 1:8), so a man or woman who attempts to
lead others to do X while believing or being Y, will be
frustrated in the effort. The leader will have the
power of presence, the proper power of persuasion
only to the degree that he or she is true to his or
her own values. On the other hand, people are
attracted to and have little difficulty following
someone who is possessed of integrity, someone
who stands up for what he or she believes.

Jesus was known as the Good Shepherd, and his
invitation was for men and women to assume a loving
care for others and thus become undershepherds, to
lead and love and lift others as he did.



9. THE RICH FOOL

*And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:
And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?
And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.
And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.
But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?
So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (LUKE 12:16-21)*

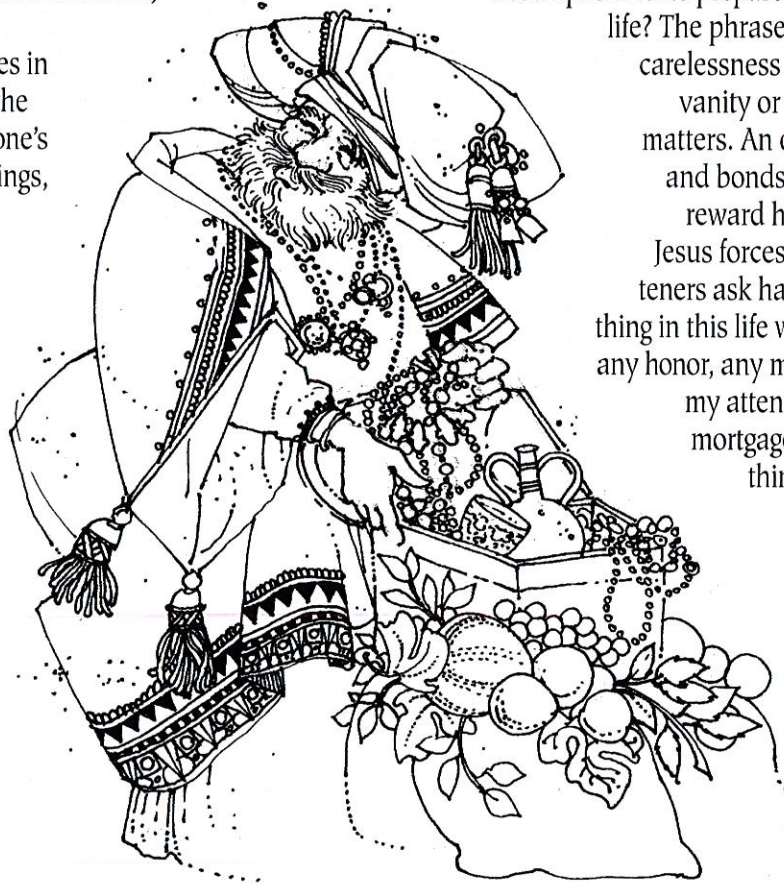


ONE OF THE recurring themes in the teachings of Jesus is the warning against placing one's trust in and reliance upon earthly things, particularly earthly treasures. The Parable of the Rich Fool is given in response to a request that Jesus serve, as it were, as an arbitrator between two brothers who are wrestling over an inheritance. In this parable, the main character seems to have devoted himself almost exclusively to the expansion of his portfolio and the

hoarding of his wealth. There would thus have been little time and energy to devote to persons or causes that might be blessed by his benevolence. It is his trust in his riches, his drive to expand upon his excesses, that turned him inward and cost him his soul. He became possessed by his possessions.

Significant confusion seems to have arisen in the mind and value system of the Rich Fool, for he said: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." This man had indeed established a worldly surplus and supposed thereby that he was secure. No doubt he could certainly survive on his savings. But what, in fact, had he done to place his soul in good standing before the heavens? To what degree had his financial accomplishments prepared his soul for what comes after this life? The phrase "eat, drink, and be merry" implies carelessness with regard to things of substance, vanity or lightness in regard to the weightier matters. An overabundance of money or stocks and bonds here will do little to secure eternal reward hereafter.

Jesus forces an issue and demands that his listeners ask hard questions of themselves: Is anything in this life worth my soul? Is there any reward, any honor, any mortal station that is so deserving of my attention and my affections that I would mortgage my eternal future for them? Some things we cannot take with us through death; some things simply will not make it through celestial customs.



10. THE TEN VIRGINS

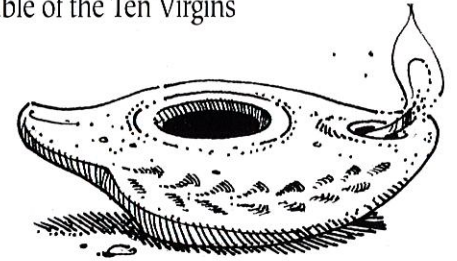
*Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins,
which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.
And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.
They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:
But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.
While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.
And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom
cometh; go ye out to meet him
Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.
And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for
our lamps are gone out.
But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be
not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to
them that sell, and buy for yourselves.
And while they went to buy, the bridegroom
came; and they that were ready
went in with him to the marriage:
and the door was shut.
Afterward came also the other
virgins, saying, Lord, Lord,
open to us.
But he answered and said,
Verily I say unto you, I
know you not.
Watch therefore, for ye know
neither the day nor the hour
wherein the Son of man cometh.*
(MATTHEW 25:1-13)



HERE JESUS DELIVERS three parables in a row. They are parables of preparation, given to steel his listeners against trying times ahead—the Parables of the Ten Virgins, the Talents, and the Sheep and the Goats. Whereas the other two parables within this chapter deal with the need for productive discipleship and tender regard for humankind, the Parable of the Ten Virgins is about spiritual readiness.

Interestingly, the main characters in the story are designated as ten virgins, meaning presumably ten people who have kept themselves from the taints of the world. But they are found wanting in regard to what it takes to keep the light of God burning

in their lives. The level of oil (often symbolic of the Holy Spirit) within their lamps could thus represent the degree to which they had cultivated the influence of the Holy Spirit to navigate life's shoals and empower them in meeting life's challenges. And, sadly, Jesus points out that there are some things—like years of personal devotion and meaningful service—that one cannot borrow from a neighbor on the spur of the moment. Further, just as many of the small lamps in the Middle East require a careful and methodical effort to fill them, so in our own lives we need to build our reservoirs of faith and spiritual depth gradually. The way to peace and preparation is thus not through spiritual marathons at the last hour, but rather through consistent and steady spiritual progress throughout our lives.



11. THE TALENTS

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents:

behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:

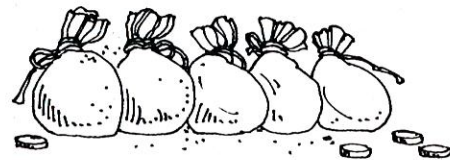
And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:

Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (MATTHEW 25:14-30)



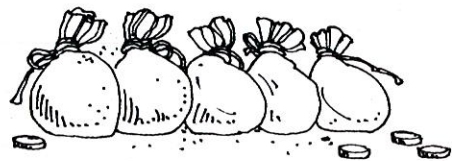
IN THIS PARABLE, an employer dispenses money (the talent is a measure of weight, as well as money) to three employees. The unstated presumption of this story is that men and women are expected to be wise and fruitful with their gifts. The first two servants do just that—double their investment. The third, motivated perhaps more by his fear of failure and rejection than an eagerness to succeed, hides his one and only talent. The day of reckoning comes, the Master returns, and rewards and punishments are issued.

A "slothful" person is not only unproductive but also, like his namesake (the sloth), lazy, idle and uncaring, unwilling to work and contribute. The Parable of the Talents is one of the "parables of preparation" found in Matthew 25. It focuses on the need for persons to demonstrate ingenuity and resourcefulness with what they have been given if their lives are to be considered productive or worthwhile. Jesus' message is fairly clear: God expects his children to use what they have been given, to multiply personal talents or holdings or obligations of trust, to capitalize on our blessings. We are not judged according to the successes or failures of others, but rather according to how we cultivate the plot of ground apportioned to us, large or small. Just as there are no ordinary people, so there are no ordinary moments and no ordinary assignments; God expects us to give life our best shot.



12. THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

... money to the exchangers, and
... eived mine own with usury.
... and give it unto him which



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When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand,

Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me:

I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat:

I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked

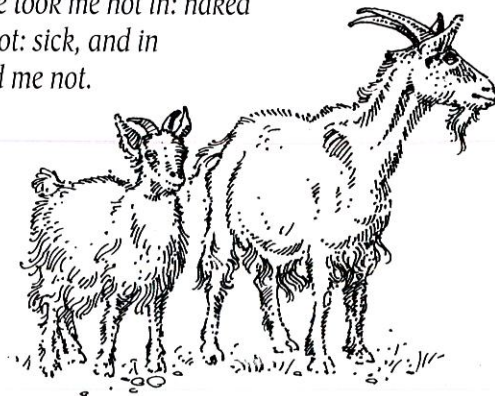
and ye clothed me not: sick, and in

prison, and ye visited me not.

Then shall they also answer him, saying,

Lord, when saw we

thee an hungred,



or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

(MATTHEW 25:31-46)



THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP and the Goats is the final parable of preparation in Matthew 25. In it Jesus describes the day of judgment in which the faithful ones (on the right hand of God) are separated from the unfaithful (on the left), when the sheep are separated from the goats.

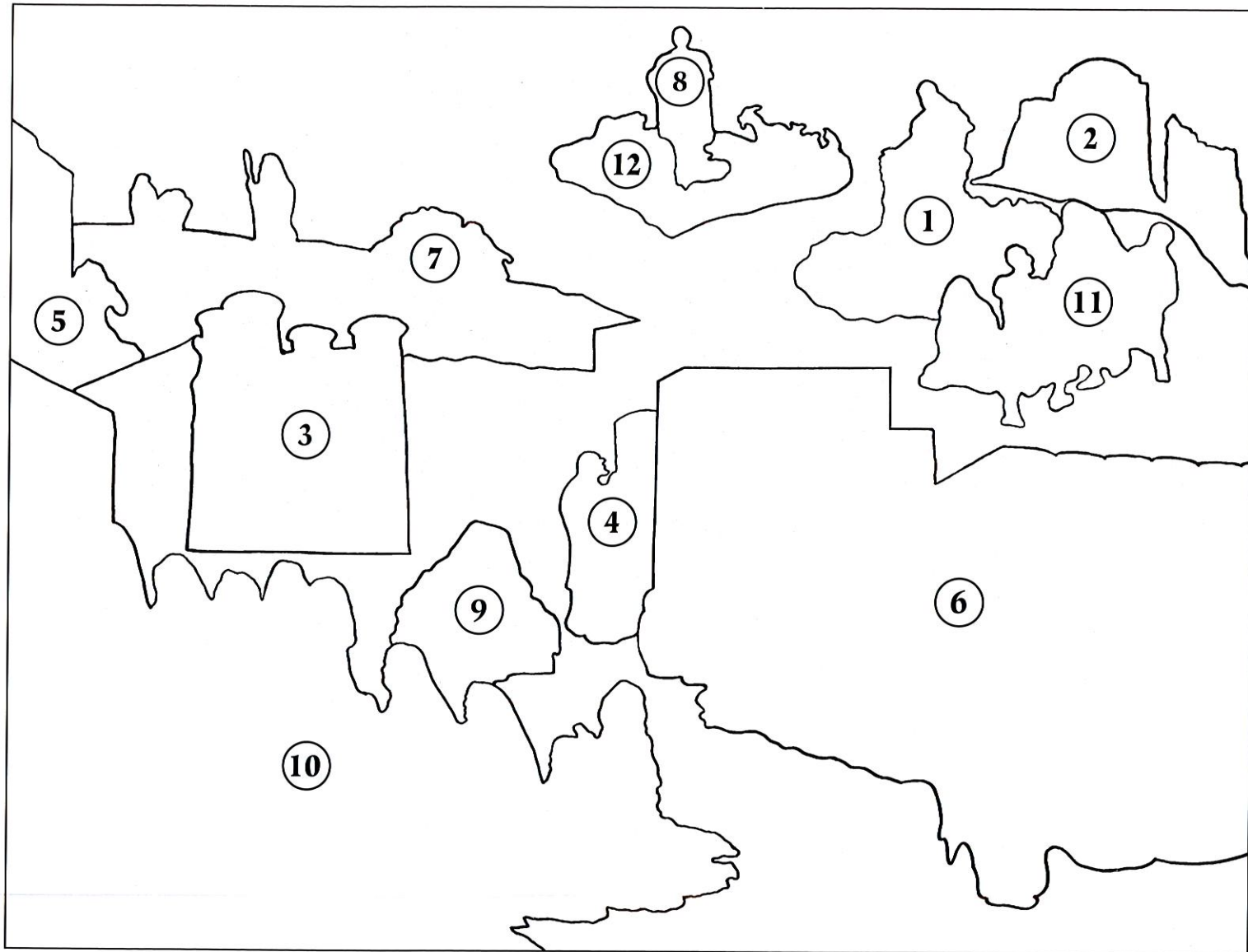
Shepherds in ancient Israel often tended their sheep with their goats. There were, however, advantages to keeping them separated. Sheep have a relatively pleasant disposition and tend to graze slowly and quietly, while goats are prone to wander off to what they suppose are greener pastures. Goats are simply high maintenance creatures. Jesus is obviously comparing people to sheep and goats; submissive and obedient sheep are placed on the right hand, while the rebellious ones are assigned to the left.

And what is it that makes the difference? Why are some people labeled as sheep and others as goats? Jesus indicates that the sheep are those who loved and served their fellow man, who fed the hungry, clothed the naked and accommodated the homeless, in many cases doing so spontaneously and without concern for recognition or reward. Further, service to our

fellow mortals entails service to our God. The rebellious thereby missed opportunities to serve God by turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to those in need. The faithful are never too busy for people.



GUIDE TO THE PARABLES



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|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. The Sower | 5. The Lost Coin | 9. The Rich Fool |
| 2. The House Upon the Rock | 6. The Prodigal Son | 10. The Ten Virgins |
| 3. The Pharisee and the Publican | 7. The Good Samaritan | 11. The Talents |
| 4. The Importunate Friend | 8. The Good Shepherd | 12. The Sheep and the Goats |