

NT 11: The Kingdom of God Parables

Monte F. Shelley, 27 Mar 2011

Quotes

- **The Lord will carry our burdens, but not our baggage.**
Burdens are part of the mortal experience—the burdens that come with unfulfilled expectations, with disappointment and heartache, with affliction and wavering faith. Loneliness ... [and] emotional wounds can be burdens. Heavy assignments from the Lord can feel like burdens. ... Sin creates burdens. But the Savior atoned precisely so we wouldn't have to carry our burdens alone. He knew they'd be too heavy for us. ... Burdens have the potential to exalt us, but *baggage* just weighs us down and wears us out. When we don't repent, sin becomes baggage. Natural-man behaviors that we aren't ready to give up become baggage. Worry, jealousy, and guilt are baggage. An unforgiving heart, anger, regret, and pride are baggage. Resentment, the desire to retaliate, fear, and insecurity create unbearable baggage. We choose whether or not to pick up baggage, and Satan loves nothing more than loading us down like pack mules. (Sheri Dew)
- Jesus invites us to take upon us His yoke. Satan tries to force us into his "yoke of iron" and bring us "down into captivity." We can "follow the Lord and be endowed with His power and have peace, light, strength, knowledge, confidence, love, and joy, or we can go some other way ... without His support, without His power, without guidance, in darkness, turmoil, doubt, grief, and despair.' ... We cannot choose whether to bear a yoke, but we can choose which yoke we will bear. We can bear the yoke of sin, or we can bear the yoke of Christ." (MM #10)

1. Woman anoints Jesus in house of Simon (Lk 7)



³⁶ [A] Pharisee desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and <reclined at the table.>

Before this time, Jesus had been preaching good tidings to the poor, healing the broken hearted and the sick, raising the dead, inviting all to come unto him to find rest for their souls, and teaching that all would be forgiven as they forgave others. Many believed in him. Pharisees began to observe his actions and ask questions to "find an accusation against him." They had found many faults: he ate with publicans and sinners, he healed on the Sabbath, and he forgave sins as if he were God.

"As Jesus entered the house, all traditional courtesies were omitted. Custom required a kiss of greeting, usually on the face. ... Water and olive oil would be brought for the washing of hands and feet. Only then could grace be offered. Finally the guests would recline on the [broad U-shaped dining] couch ... and the meal would begin." The omission of these rituals was "a calculated and pointed insult. ... Jesus had the full right to say, 'I see that I am not welcome her!' and leave." (MEE 242-3)

"At traditional ... village meals, the outcasts of the community ... sit quietly on the floor against the wall, and at the end of the meal are fed. Their presence is a compliment to the host who is thereby seen as so noble that he even feeds the outcasts. ... The rabbis insisted that the door be open when a meal was in progress lest you 'lack food.'" (MEE 246, n. 15)

³⁷ And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she <learned> that *Jesus* <was eating> in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster <jar of perfume>, (<>=NIV; {}=JST)

The Pharisees believed God cared for law-keepers not sinners. One must confess sins, make full compensation, and keep the Law. They probably would have told a prostitute that compensation was impossible. But Jesus taught of God's love sinners and may forgive without full compensation. Some Pharisees invited Jesus to a meal so they could correct him or find accusation against him. The woman believed his message and was eager to show her gratitude for being forgiven. When she learned where he would be eating, she arrived early and was in the house when Jesus arrived (v. 45). She brought a flask of oil probably to anoint his hands and feet. (MEE 242-246)

³⁸ And stood at his feet behind *him* weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe *them* with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed *them* with the ointment.

The woman saw the host insult Jesus by not greeting him with a kiss or washing his hands and feet. She was saddened by how rudely Jesus was treated, but she had no water or towel, and knew the host would not give them to her. She began to weep, approached his unclean feet, washed them with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the oil she had brought. "Her tears are not for her sins but for his public humiliation." She had already been forgiven much and therefore loved much. (MEE 246-7)

³⁹ Now when the Pharisee which had <invited> him saw *it*, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman *this is* that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

"The room was occupied by two types of sinners: law-keepers and lawbreakers. ... Law-keepers often condemn lawbreakers as 'sinners.' Lawbreakers generally look at law-keepers ... [as] 'hypocrites.'" The Pharisees find fault with this woman. She "uncovered her hair and 'touched' Jesus! In traditional Middle Eastern society ... a woman was and is obliged to cover her hair in public." The Mishnah says a man can divorce his wife without a financial settlement "if she goes out with her hair unbound, or spins in the street, or speaks with any man." Jesus "was expected to be embarrassed over the 'touching' ... and shocked that she exposed her hair." Simon's response reveals part of his agenda. Jesus was invited so the Pharisees could examine him. Was he a prophet worthy of respect? (MEE 247-8)

"If the woman had purchased the expensive perfume with money of her earnings from prostitution, the gift was tainted (Dt 23:18). ... Gifts from immoral people were considered dirty and unacceptable by any respectable person." (BTW 121)

⁴⁰ Jesus ... [said] Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, <Teacher>, say on. ⁴¹ There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed [500] ^a pence, and the other [50]. ⁴² When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

^a GR *denarii*; one *denarius* was a workman's daily wage.

The Aramaic word for debts also means sins. According to the rabbinic view, “Man owes God obedience, and every sin, whether of commission or of omission, is a defaulted obligation, a debt.” In this parable, Jesus affirms that the woman is a big sinner but suggests that Simon is a little sinner for his earlier rudeness. Both are forgiven without the full compensation demanded by the rabbis. (MEE 253–254)

⁴³ Simon ... said, I suppose that *he*, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

“Jesus can (a) reject the woman, (b) apologize for her actions, or (c) defend her. ... Jesus chooses to defend her.” (MEE 255)

⁴⁴ And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head. ⁴⁵ Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

Jesus publicly attacks Simon by saying, in effect, As Middle Easterners, we know your duty to me as your guest. You refuse to notice this woman you see as a sinner and expect me to do the same. But “she is making up for your inexcusable failures as a host, and if I am to avoid sinners then I will be obliged to avoid you.” (MEE 256)

⁴⁷ Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, <have been> forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little <has been> forgiven, *the same* loveth little. ⁴⁸ And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. ⁴⁹ And <the other guests> ... began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

Instead of repenting of their rudeness, the Pharisees find more fault with Jesus for blasphemy in forgiving sins, and for talking to the woman in public. “A rabbi was strictly warned ... not to talk to women in any public place, not even to his own wife.” “Jesus made clear that both law-keepers and law breakers are sinners and equally in need of forgiveness ... that he freely offered to all. The woman accepted. Simon’s response is unknown. Simon invited Jesus to a meal so that they could cross-examine him, discover if he was a prophet, and chastise him for accepting sinners. A true prophet for Simon was someone who avoided sinners—particularly female sinners! For Jesus, true prophethood involved getting hurt for sinners by confronting their attackers.” Jesus and the woman realize his defense of her will anger the Pharisees and increase their attacks. The Pharisees believed their judgments were righteous because they knew the Law and the traditions of their rabbis. They were a chosen people and law-keepers. (MEE 257–259)

⁸¹ Afterward ... he went ... preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom ... and the twelve *were* with him, ² And ... women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities,

2. Jesus taught with parables (Mt 13)

Jesus ... ² went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. ³ And he spake many things unto them in parables,

What are parables? “The word *parable* ... means a setting side by side, a comparison” (BD Parables). Parables make up about 35 percent of Jesus’ recorded sayings (Parry-Parables ch 1)

Why did Jesus speak in parables?

Joseph “In my mind [the parables of Matthew 13] affords us as clear an understanding, upon the important subject of the gathering, as any thing recorded in the bible” (TPJS 94)

3. Parable of the Sower and Four Soils (Mt 13)

³ Behold, a sower went forth to sow; ... ⁴ Some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls ... devoured them up: ⁵ Some fell <on rocky> places, where they had not much <soil>: and <quickly> they sprung up ...: ⁶ When the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns; and the thorns ... choked them: ⁸ But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some [100-fold, 60, 30].

Joseph: This parable ... demonstrate[s] the effects ... produced by the preaching of the word; and we believe that it has an allusion directly to ... the setting up of the Kingdom in that age; therefore we shall ... trace His sayings concerning this Kingdom from that time forth, even unto the end of the world. (TPJS 97)

Wayside or hard heart: ¹⁹ 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.

Joseph: Men who have no principle of righteousness ..., whose hearts are full of iniquity, and have no desire for the principles of truth, do not understand the word of truth when they hear it. The devil taketh away the word of truth out of their hearts, because there is no desire for righteousness in them. (TPJS 96)

Thin-soil heart: ²⁰ But he that received the seed into <rocky> places, the same is he that heareth the word, and <at once> with joy receiveth it; ²¹ Yet hath he not root in himself, but <lasts> for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, <quickly> ^c he is offended <or falls away>.

James E. Faust: When Simonds Ryder read his mission call from Joseph and saw his name was spelled ‘Rider,’ “he became offended. ... Like the seed that fell upon stony places, [he] joyfully received the word ... but quickly became offended over a trivial matter and lost his place in the kingdom.” (“Of Seeds”)

Neal A. Maxwell: Perhaps the parable about the gospel seed falling on different kinds of soil and not flourishing in one type of soil because there was ‘no deepness of earth’ also describes the shallowness of those who do not ponder and pursue the basic doctrines. (*All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience*, 98)

Thorn-infested heart: ²² 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.

Mark and Luke also list the “lusts of other things” (Mark 4:19) or “pleasures of this life” (Lk 8:14). *Cares* →: <life’s worries>

Bruce R. McConkie: So it is of the saints who think more of the honors of men, the educational standards of the world, political preferment, or money and property, than they do of the gospel. (DNTC 1:289)

The heart of my servant James Covill was right before me, for he covenanted with me that he would obey my word. ² And he received the word with gladness, but straightway Satan tempted him; and the fear of persecution and the cares of the world caused him to reject the word. (D&C 40:1–3)

Good soil or broken heart: ²³ But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth {*and endureth*}; which also beareth fruit, ... some [100-fold, 60, 30].

The amount of fruit depends on how much we prepare the soil, weed, protect, water, and nourish the plant (Al 32). Alma talked to those humbled by poverty and afflictions. He told them to plant the seed (word of Christ) in their hearts, and nourish it so it would become a tree of life (Al 32:28, 40; 33:22–23).

“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine. ... He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (Jn 15:4-8).

What soil represents my heart? Broken, hard, shallow, thorns

Parable of the Sower (planting the seed)	Lehi’s Dream (reactions to the tree of life)
Some seeds fell by the wayside (Matt 13:4, 19)	Some went directly to great and spacious building (1 Ne 8:31–33)
Some seeds grew, then withered in sun (13:5–6, 20–21)	Some started on path, lost way in dark mist, and wandered off (8:23)
Some grew among thorns and choked (13:7, 22)	Some partook of the fruit, were ashamed, then fell away (8:25)
Some grew in good soil and brought forth fruit (13:8, 23)	Some partook of the fruit and stayed by the tree (8:30)

* Adapted from BTW, 17

How does the Lord prepare the soil of our hearts?

Neal A. Maxwell: “The Teacher depicted the varied grades of spiritual receptivity existing among men, and characterized with incisive brevity each of the specified grades. He neither said nor intimated that the hard-baked soil of the wayside might not be plowed, harrowed, fertilized, and so be rendered productive; nor that the stony impediment to growth might not be broken up and removed, or an increase of good soil be made by actual addition, nor that the thorns could never be uprooted, and their former habitat be rendered fit to support good plants.’ ... The ‘hard-baked’ disciple often experiences the harrowing necessary to disrupt the unyielding terrain of his life so he can receive and retain the Gospel seed.” (*A Time to Choose*, 34.)

How does this parable apply to our missionary efforts?

4. Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Mt 13)

²⁴ The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: ²⁵ But while men slept, his enemy ... sowed tares among the wheat. ... ²⁶ But when the blade ... brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. ²⁷ So the servants ... said ..., from whence ... hath it tares? ²⁸ He said ..., An enemy hath done this. The servants said ..., Wilt thou then that we ... gather them up? ²⁹ But he said, Nay; lest ... ye root up also the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest: and ... I will say to the reapers, Gather ... first the {wheat} into my barn; {and the tares are bound in bundles to be burned.}

When the two species of plants are young, they look very much like wheat. And as the darnel weed grows, its roots typically intertwine with the roots of the wheat. Thus, it is difficult to separate the two while they are growing without damaging the wheat. If darnel is harvested with the wheat and mixed into bread, it will bring a bitter taste; it causes dizziness and can act as a violent emetic. The darnel must therefore be separated from the wheat at harvest time. ... Tares ... take of the sustenance intended for the wheat, thereby weakening the good plants. ... In their more mature form, one can easily tell the difference, for they bear different kinds of fruit. (Parry-Parables)

Interpretation: 13:36–43 (see JST and D&C 86:1–7)	
Son of man = sower	The enemy = the devil
Field = the world	Harvest = end of the world(ly)
Good seed = children of kingdom	or <i>destruction of the wicked</i>
Tares = children of wicked one	Reapers = the angels

Joseph: Now we learn by this parable, not only the setting up of the Kingdom in the days of the Savior, which is represented

by the good seed, which produced fruit, but also the corruptions of the Church, which are represented by the tares, which were sown by the enemy, which His disciples would fain have plucked up, or cleansed the Church of. ... But He, knowing all things, says, Not so.... The Church is in its infancy, and if you take this rash step, you will destroy the wheat, or the Church, with the tares; therefore it is better to let them grow together until the harvest, or the end of the world, which means the destruction of the wicked, which is not yet fulfilled. (TPJS 97–8)

5. Seed growing by itself (Mark 4:26–29)

²⁶ So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; ²⁷ And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. ²⁸ For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn. ... ²⁹ But when the fruit is brought forth, ... he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

6. Parable of the mustard seed (Mt 13)

³¹ The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man ... sowed in his field: ³² Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds ... lodge in the branches thereof.

Black mustard was generally planted in Galilee and was the smallest seed cultivated at the time, but could grow to a height of between 8 and 10 feet. (Sense, 101)

Comparing God’s kingdom to the smallest of seeds may have shocked Jews who were anticipating a large kingdom powerful enough to prevail over all other kingdoms. (Parry-Parables)

Joseph: This figure is given to represent the Church as it shall come forth in the last days. ... The Book of Mormon, which a man took and hid in his field. ... has ... come forth out of the earth, and righteousness begins to look down from heaven ..., and God is sending down His powers, gifts, and angels to lodge in the branches thereof. Is not this the Kingdom of Heaven that is raising its head in the last days. ... The Kingdom of Heaven is like a *grain of mustard* seed ... [that] brings forth a large tree, and the fowls lodge in the branches. The fowls are the angels. Thus angels come down, combine together to gather their children. (TPJS 98–99, 159)

Wilford Woodruff: The Prophet [Joseph] called on all who held the Priesthood to gather into ... a small house, perhaps 14 feet square. ... The Prophet called upon [us] ... to bear testimony of this work. ... When they got through [he] said, ‘Brethren, I have been very much edified ... tonight, but ... you know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother’s lap. ... It is only a little handful of Priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world.’ ” (TPC: JS, chap. 11)

7. Parable of leaven or yeast (Mt 13)

³³ The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Three measures of meal was ... about fifty pounds. The resulting bread would be enough to feed a hundred or more people. ... As the kingdom goes forth, the Saints will mix and intermingle with the people of the world. As they do, they will have a powerful effect on those around them. (Parry-Parables)

Joseph: The Church ... has taken its rise from a little leaven that was put into three witnesses. Behold, how much this is like the parable! It is fast leavening the lump, and will soon leaven the whole. (TPJS 100, 102)

8. Treasure found hidden in field (Mt 13)

⁴⁴ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he {secureth it}, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

According to the Rabbinic law of the time, if one finds a treasure on another's property, he ... must purchase the land ... to obtain the treasure. (Parry-Parables)

"I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy" (Alma 22:15).

Joseph: The Saints work after this pattern ... selling all ... they have, and gathering themselves together unto a place that they may purchase for an inheritance, that they may be together and bear each other's afflictions in the day of calamity. (TPJS 101)

9. Pearl of great price (Mt 13)

⁴⁵ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: ⁴⁶ Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Joseph: The Saints again work after this example. See men ... who, when they find the place for Zion, or the pearl of great price, straightway sell that they have, and buy it. (TPJS 102)

Mark E. Petersen: That merchant was an extremely wise man, because he was willing to give up all that he possessed ... to acquire the pearl. ... [But what if] he had given up the pearl ... for something of little or no value? Some ... give up the pearl ... for a fleeting fancy. They actually sell their birthright ... for less than a mess of pottage. What a pity!" (CR, Oct 1945, 88.)

10. Like a net cast into the sea (Mt 13)

⁴⁷ The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: ⁴⁸ ... When it was full, they ... gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. ⁴⁹ So shall it be at the end of the world: *{And the world is the children of the wicked.}* The angels shall ... sever the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ And shall cast them *{out into the world to be burned.}*

Joseph: Behold the seed of Joseph, spreading ... the Gospel net upon ... the earth, gathering of every kind, that the good may be saved ..., and the angels will take care of the bad. So shall it be at the end of the world—the angels shall ... sever the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace. (TPJS 102)

Neal A. Maxwell: Since life in the Church presents to us, painfully at times, our own defects as well as the defects of others, we are bound to be disappointed in ourselves and in others. We cannot expect it to be otherwise in a kingdom where not only does the 'net gather of every kind,' but those of 'every kind' are at every stage of spiritual development. When people 'leave their nets straightway,' they come as they are. Though they are already in the initial process of changing, the luggage reflects their past. Hence, this is a developmental journey that requires patience, understanding, and meekness toward others who join the caravan, as, together, we disengage from one world and prepare ourselves for another. (*Meek and Lowly*, 88)

11. Parable of the Householder (Mt 13)

⁵¹ Jesus ... [said] unto them, ... every scribe [which has become a disciple in] the kingdom of heaven is like unto ... an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure *things* new and old.

The aim of scribes "was to reproduce and teach others to reproduce accurately the words of the wise" (BD Scribe). A householder is responsible to feed, clothe, and govern.

Joseph: See the Book of Mormon, ... [the Doctrine and Covenants], also the translation of the Bible—thus bringing forth out of the heart things new and old. (TPJS 102)

"The scriptures are our treasure. Some stories we return to again and again—like old friends. They strengthen us with their familiar power. But if we continue to search, we will always find new gems of wisdom to inspire and lead us." (Michael Wilcox, quoted in BTW 46)

12. Joseph's View of Parables in Matthew 13

These parables "describe ... the history and destiny of the Church and kingdom of God from the days of Jesus Christ ... [to] the Millennium. But no one in ... Christian history had ever seen it—until ... Joseph Smith ... was inspired ... to understand the ultimate meaning of the Savior's teachings." (Ogden 284)

Parable	Joseph's broader meaning
Sower and the soils	Jesus and apostles sowing gospel seeds then
Wheat and tares	Great Apostasy
Mustard seed	Restoration; kingdom to fill the earth
Leaven	3 witnesses + Spirit raises sinners to saints
Treasure in a field	People gather to kingdom to build Zion
Pearl of great price	Saints sacrifice to establish Zion
Net	Gather good & bad; separated 2 nd coming
Householder	New & old scriptures help us establish Zion

Quotes

Ezra Taft Benson: The Lord has said, '... the angels are crying unto the Lord day and night, who are ready and waiting to be sent forth to reap down the fields.' ... [and] that he would 'let the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest is fully ripe.' (D&C 86:5, 7.) ... Joseph Fielding Smith said in 1967, 'Peace *has* been taken from the earth. The devil *has* power over his own dominion. The Spirit of the Lord *has* been withdrawn. Not because the Lord desires to withdraw that Spirit, but because of the wickedness of mankind.' ... Wilford Woodruff, in ... 1894, said: 'God has held the angels of destruction for many years lest they reap down the wheat with the tares. But ... those angels have left ... heaven, stand over this people and this nation now, and are hovering over the earth waiting to pour out the judgments. And from this very day they shall be poured out. Calamities and troubles are increasing in the earth. ... If [we] do [our] duty, we shall have protection and shall pass through the afflictions in peace and safety. Read the scriptures and revelations.' Yes, peace has been taken from the earth, and 'if prophecy is to be fulfilled, there awaits the world a conflict more dreadful than any the world has yet seen.' (Joseph Fielding Smith)" (*God, Family, Country*, 92–93)

Ezra Taft Benson: Within the Church today there are tares among the wheat and wolves within the flock. As President [J. Rueben] Clark stated, "The ravaging wolves are amongst us, from our own membership, and they, more than any others, are clothed in sheep's clothing because they wear the habiliments of the priesthood. ... We should be careful of them." (CR, Apr 1949) The wolves amongst our flock are more numerous and devious today than when President Clark made this statement. President [David O.] McKay has said that "the Church is little, if at all, injured by persecution and calumnies from ignorant, misinformed or malicious enemies. A greater hindrance to its progress comes from faultfinders, shirkers, commandment-breakers, and apostate cliques within its own ecclesiastical and quorum groups." (CR, Oct 1967) Not only are there apostates within our midst, but there are also apostate doctrines that are sometimes taught in our classes and from our pulpits and that appear in our publications. And these apostate precepts of men cause our people to stumble. (CR, Apr 1969)