

S T U D Y G U I D E

THE  
PARABLES  
OF  
JESUS

R. C. SPROUL



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# The Parables of Jesus

R.C. Sproul



LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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# Introduction to the Parables of Jesus

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

When Jesus Christ came to earth, He did not simply arrive on a Thursday, die on a Friday, and rise on a Sunday. Rather, He lived for over thirty years as a full-fledged member of the human race. His earthly ministry is significant for a number of reasons, especially for His prolific teaching about the kingdom of God. In fact, many people who reject the Christian faith still have great respect for Jesus as a wise, virtuous, and gifted teacher. In this series, Dr. R.C. Sproul will explore the teaching ministry of Jesus, focusing particularly on eleven of His parables. During our time together we will discuss why Jesus was such a gifted teacher, and we will seek a greater understanding and affection for the significant and timeless message that He proclaimed.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 13:34-35; Matthew 22:16; Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-32; John 12:49

## TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To present Jesus Christ as history's greatest teacher and communicator.
2. To describe the role of parables in the Bible.
3. To explain Jesus' purposes for teaching in parables.
4. To discuss the elements of salvation and judgment within the ministry and mission of Jesus.

## QUOTATIONS

*Our Saviour's parables are distinguished above all others for clearness, purity, chasteness, intelligibility, importance of instruction, and simplicity. They are taken mostly from the affairs of common life, and intelligible, therefore, to all men. They contain*

*much of himself: his doctrine, life, design in coming, and claims; and are therefore of importance to all men; and they are told in a style of native simplicity intelligible to the child, yet instructive to men of every rank and age. In his parables, as in all his instructions, he excelled all men in the purity, importance, and sublimity of his doctrine.*

–Albert Barnes

*He stood in the midst of Scribes and Pharisees, publicans and sinners, and preached the glad tidings...His preaching was full of parables, plain to those who had understanding, but often dark and mysterious even to His own followers, for it was a judgment from the Lord upon that evil generation that seeing they should not see and hearing they should not perceive.*

–Charles Spurgeon

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. Jesus the Teacher

- A. Jesus Christ was the greatest teacher who ever lived.
  - i. Jesus is the very incarnation of truth.
  - ii. The content of Jesus' teaching is impeccable and of divine origin.
  - iii. He was a master pedagogue with an extraordinary style of teaching.
- B. Jesus' contemporaries recognized His unique teaching abilities.
  - i. "No one ever spoke like this man!" (John 7:46)
  - ii. "And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." (Matthew 7:28-29)
- C. Jesus taught with a unique authority.
  - i. The Greek word for authority is *exousia*.
    1. The prefix *ex-* means "from" or "out of" (exit, exodus).
    2. The word *ousia* is a present participle of the word "to be," and it can be translated as "being," "essence," or "substance."
  - ii. Because Jesus taught with *exousia*, His teaching is not frivolous, but carries weight and substance.
  - iii. Jesus taught with the unique authority of God Himself. (John 12:49)

### II. The Significance of Parables

- A. Though Jesus used parables in a unique way, He was not the only one to use them.
  - i. Parables played a role in the traditions and teachings of the rabbis in Jesus' day.
  - ii. The Pharisees used parables to explain or illustrate the meaning of the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament.
  - iii. Jesus did not simply use parables to illustrate previous revelation; He used them to give new revelation.
- B. Though parables are rare in the Old Testament, they are still significant.



- i. After David's sin with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan confronted the king with a parable.
- ii. David responded to the parable with outrage, not realizing that he himself was the perpetrator of the crime in the parable.
- iii. Nathan's parable was an effective teaching tool in a moment of crisis.
- C. Parables can clarify the meaning of what is being said.
  - i. The English word "parable" comes from the Greek word *parabolē*.
    - 1. The prefix *para-* describes something that functions alongside something else (para-church, paralegal).
    - 2. The word *bolē* refers to something that is thrown or hurled.
  - ii. A parable, then, is thrown alongside other teaching in order to illustrate a concept or clarify meaning.
  - iii. Similarly, preachers will use stories and illustrations to heighten the listener's ability to understand what is being said.
- D. Parables can conceal the meaning of what is being said.
  - i. Jesus concluded the parable of the sower with "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Mark 4:9)
  - ii. Jesus beckons his listeners not just to hear the sounds that are being made, but to understand and embrace his teaching.
  - iii. The Greek word for obedience is *hupakouē*, which includes *akouē*, the word for hearing.
  - iv. Obedience, then, is a deliberate act of hearing and heeding an instruction or command.
  - v. Jesus' parables penetrate the hearts and minds of some people but not others.
    - 1. To those who have ears to hear, parables bring a deeper understanding of the things of God.
    - 2. To those who do not have ears to hear, parables are instruments of concealing and obscuring the mystery of the kingdom of God.

### III. The Crisis of Jesus' Ministry

- A. By nature, fallen human beings have no desire to hear or understand God's words.
- B. God's words, then, bring salvation for those who believe and judgment for those who do not.
  - i. In Isaiah 6, God commissioned Isaiah to shut the people's eyes, stop up their ears, and harden their hearts.
  - ii. Though most will be given over to their sinful desires and will be judged, God will preserve a remnant.
- C. In the New Testament, Jesus' entrance into the world is sometimes described by the word *krisis*.
- D. *Krisis* refers to judgment and is the root of the English word "crisis."
- E. Christ's coming is good news for some and bad news for others.
  - i. Jesus causes some to rise and others to fall.

- ii. He has not brought peace, but a sword. (Matthew 10:34-35)
  - iii. Christ is both the cornerstone of the church and a stumbling stone for unbelievers.
  - iv. Jesus is the aroma of salvation for those who love Him, and He is the grounds of condemnation for those who oppose Him.
- F. Jesus' use of parables reflects his two-fold mission of salvation and judgment.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

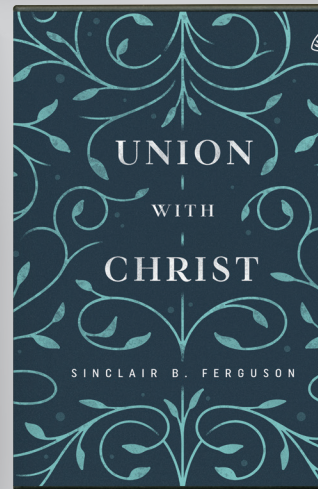
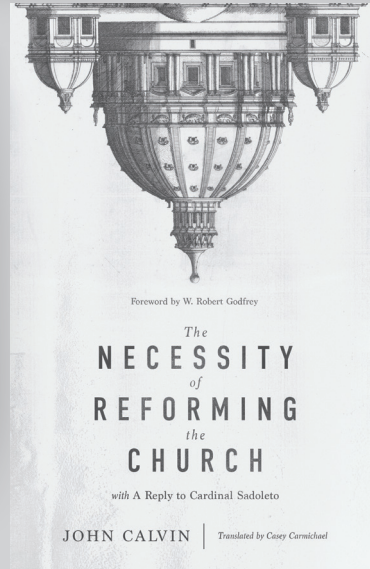
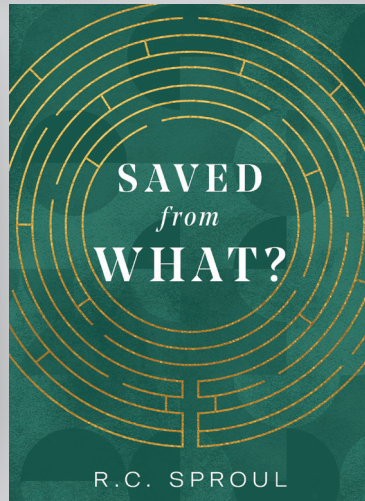
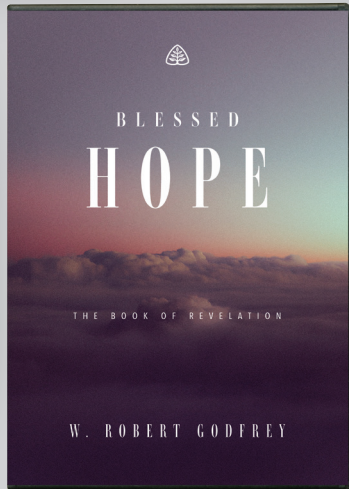
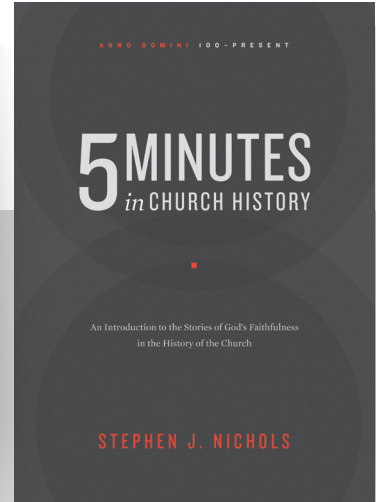
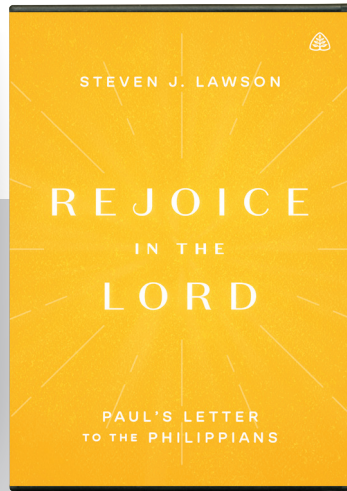
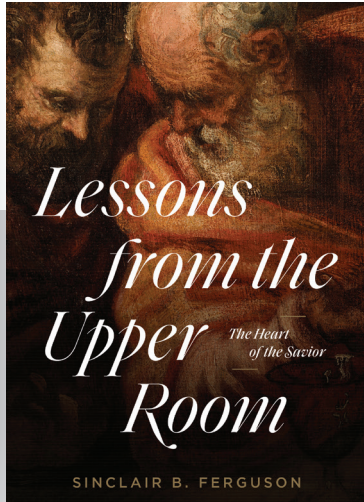
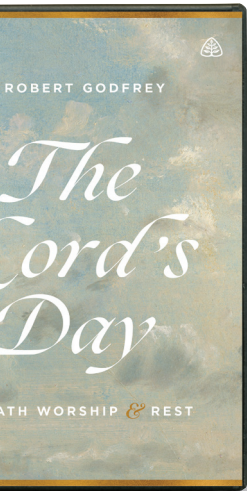
1. Which of the following is *not* a reason for considering Jesus the greatest teacher who lived?
  - a. He is a master pedagogue with an extraordinary teaching style.
  - b. He invented the parable as a new way to reveal divine truth.
  - c. He is the incarnation of truth.
  - d. His teaching had a divine origin.
  
2. Jesus used parables not just to explain previous revelation, but to give new revelation.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
3. Jesus is the only person in the Bible to use parables.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. In the New Testament, the function of parables is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. To explain truths about the kingdom of God.
  - b. To obscure and conceal truths about the kingdom of God.
  - c. To illustrate and clarify the teachings of Jesus.
  - d. All of the above.
  
5. In Isaiah 6:8-10, what was God's purpose for Isaiah's ministry?
  - a. That the people of Israel would repent and follow God's ways
  - b. That Isaiah would destroy the idols in the land
  - c. That Isaiah would lead Israel to victory against its enemies
  - d. That the Israelites would harden their hearts and be judged

## BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why was Jesus a great teacher? What characteristics set his teaching apart from that of the other religious leaders in his day?
2. Which parable of Jesus has been particularly meaningful to you? How has God used this parable in your life? With which parable do you wrestle the most?
3. When Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” in Mark 4:9, what did He mean? How does this verse shed light on the purpose of parables within the teaching ministry of Jesus?
4. In what ways does Jesus bring good news? In what ways does He bring bad news? How does this two-fold reality affect the church’s proclamation of the gospel?



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