

A person wearing a dark hoodie and black pants stands on a city sidewalk, holding a large cardboard sign. The sign has the words 'STORY TELLER' in a bold, distressed font, with the website 'WWW.CITYONAHILL.COM.AU' printed below. The background is a blurred city street with other pedestrians, suggesting a busy urban environment.

STORY TELLER

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STORYTELLER[™]

‘Storyteller – The Parables of Jesus’

We all have stories.

Stories help us make sense of who we are and the world we are in. They shape our culture. They shape our relationships. They shape our decisions. They shape us.

Jesus is the most famous storyteller who ever lived.

Throughout His ministry he taught through ‘parables’ – stories coloured with humour, intriguing characters, twists and turns. The parables of Jesus are works of art, taking us into a world of mystery, imagination and surprise. A world where his story is our story, and our story is found within His story.

Over the coming months you are invited to listen in on the stories of Jesus. Hear his parables of sadness, joy, death, life, darkness, light, hell, heaven, abandonment, acceptance, repentance, and grace. In His story we will discover our story.

This short booklet is a guide along the way. You will find in here further information about interpreting parables, the teaching schedule, an area to take notes, and further reading for the adventurous.

On behalf of the team at City on a Hill, thank you for joining us as we listen to the ‘Storyteller.’

For Jesus fame,

Guy Mason

(Pastor – City on a Hill)

WHO IS JESUS?

Today more than 2 billion people around the world are Christians. Together they share one vital thing in common – a love for Jesus.

Jesus was born 2000 years ago and can rightly be considered the most famous and influential person to have ever lived. Author and historian H.G. Wells says, 'I am not a believer, but I must confess that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history.'

Jesus is known and worshiped for his claim to be God, his miraculous healings, life changing teaching and his work of salvation, which he accomplished on the cross.

Peter, an eyewitness of Jesus says, 'Christ died, the righteous for the unrighteous that we might be brought home to God' (1 Peter 3v18). This means that on the cross, Jesus the perfect God-man died in our place, as a substitute for our sin and rebellion against each other, this world and ultimately God. Jesus did this so that through belief we might be forgiven, and reconciled to our Father in Heaven forever.

The testimony of history and scripture reveals that three days after Jesus' death, he rose again. This triumphant victory demonstrates his ultimate power over sin, Satan and death. His resurrection from death also points to the future glory for those who trust in Him.

To find out more about this good news, we'd encourage you to continue attending our Sunday services and join a weekly connect group. These are great ways to hear about the claims of Jesus and ask questions. We'd also love to give you a free copy of the gospel of Jesus.

In addition, we will also be running in April a four-part course called "Introducing Jesus." These midweek events will include food, biblical teaching and plenty of time to ask questions – they will be especially helpful for those exploring Jesus for the first time. To find out more email an expression of interest to info@cityonahill.com.au.

WHAT ARE PARABLES?

The wonderfully named Klyne Snodgrass defines a parable as 'stories with intent'; simple, evocative little tales that burst with meaning and purpose. They are stories that work on two levels; as explicit narratives, and as deeper moral tales, designed to challenge and convict. Though they may appear innocuous and elementary, they demand a response from their audience, and were used by Jesus to expose the motives of those who surrounded him during his ministry, and enlighten his followers.

Some characteristics of parables:

- generally brief and to the point; they 'frequently omit unnecessary descriptions and frequently leave motives unexplained and implied questions unanswered'
- utilize metaphor and allegory, comparing elements and attaching spiritual meanings to superficial elements. As Snodgrass puts it 'parables are best defined as stories with two levels of meaning; the story level provides a mirror by which reality is perceived and understood. In effect, parables are imaginary gardens with real toads in them!'
- employ elements from everyday life, but often in exaggerated, unrealistic ways, to emphasize a point
- inspire reflection (22 parables start with a question) and subvert expectations; the heroes are unlikely, the villains are those who would avoid suspicion
- build to a dramatic climax which reveals the parable's key lesson or challenge - just like a modern-day movie
- focus on Jesus, the kingdom of God, and humanity's response to this; 'Jesus told parables to confront people with the character of God's kingdom and to invite them to participate in it and to live in accordance with it'

UNDERSTANDING THE PARABLES

Focus on the key message

At their heart, parables are simple stories with explosive intent. There is usually one key message – a searing question that demands a response, a profound conclusion that reshapes life. Don't get distracted by tangents; focus on the application Jesus is intending.

Don't stress the details

Parables have strong key messages, so don't get sidetracked trying to work out all the details. For many centuries, Christians have 'allegorized' the parables, matching each element in the story with a spiritual meaning - so the prodigal's robe is the righteousness of Christ, or the Samaritan's two coins are the promise of this life and the life to come. Such an approach frequently strains the text, and obscures the central message of the parable. David deSilva comments: 'Parables are stories, and stories need detail to work. The details tend to be part of the medium rather than the message.'

Read around the parable to discover the writer's interpretation

The parables come to us through the Gospel writers, who splice them into the greater narrative of Jesus' life with strategic purpose. The parable of the prodigal son, for instance, comes in the middle of Jesus' sustained attack on the pride of the religious leaders - placing the emphasis not so much on the lost son, but on the haughty older brother.

Highlight the hyperbole and humour

Jesus was a skilful orator, who deliberately used exaggeration, hyperbole and humor to make his point. These are wonderful stories – so enjoy the wit of them.

Explore the background information to show the richness of the stories

What images come to mind when you think of the word 'Samaritan'? Someone noble and charitable? That's not the image that would have to mind for Jesus' original Jewish hearers, who saw the Samaritans as traitors who had broken faith with the tribes of Israel. Samaritans were cursed publicly in synagogues, their testimony was not accepted in court, and Jews prayed that they would not experience eternal life – in fact, Jesus was labeled a Samaritan as an insult (John 8:48). Understanding this lends new power to the parable, because it shows how shocking and subversive Jesus was being; it is the despised Samaritan who Jesus holds up as a good neighbour, to shame his proud, 'respectable' hearers. Understanding this gives the parable extra meaning.

Major on application

Jesus' parables emerged from a culture very foreign to ours, but they have a wonderfully timeless quality that makes them instantly applicable today. Try to find yourself in the stories; who do you relate to? How would you respond to Jesus' questions, or calls to action? And consider what each parable teaches you about Jesus, God's character, and his Kingdom.

Parables are simple, but only the humble will understand them - so pray hard and lead by example

Jesus spoke in parables to test the hearts of his hearers. They are simple stories, but their meaning is often enigmatic or obscure, demanding that the hearer explore further. Parables 'hide in order to reveal'; by telling these stories, Jesus was sifting his followers; who was there for a quick fix - eager for a miracle but not discipleship? Who was there in pride, ready to scoff at his bedtime stories? And who was there to listen to Jesus? Who sensed his power and grace and true identity, and wanted to learn from God? Pray that we will be humble enough to learn from God.

TEACHING SCHEDULE

March 6	-	The Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37)	Guy Mason
March 13	-	At Midnight (Luke 11:5-13)	Nick Coombs
March 20	-	The Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21)	Guy Mason
March 27	-	Two Brothers (Luke 15:11-32)	Guy Mason
April 3	-	Hell (Luke 16:19-31)	Guy Mason
April 10	-	Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)	Guy Mason
April 17	-	Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)	Luke Nelson
April 24	-	The Debtors (Luke 7:36-50)	Guy Mason
April 26	-	Heaven's Feast (Luke 14:12-24)	Guy Mason

FURTHER READING

The Prodigal God by Tim Keller

Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels by Joel B. Green

Interpreting the Parables by Craig L. Blomberg

Vintage Jesus by Mark Driscoll

The Historical Reliability of the Gospels by Craig L. Blomberg

The Parables of Jesus by James Montgomery Boice

Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus by Klyne Snodgrass

Luke 10:30-37

³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (ESV Bible)

Luke 11:5-13

⁵ And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷ and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. ⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (ESV Bible)

Luke 12:16-21

¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." (ESV Bible)

Luke 15:11-32

¹¹ And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" (ESV Bible)

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' ²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'" (ESV Bible)

Matthew 25:1-13

¹ "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹² But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (ESV Bible)

Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (ESV Bible)

Luke 7:36-50

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

⁴¹ "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." ⁴⁸ And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (ESV Bible)

Luke 14:12-24

¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

¹⁵ When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" ¹⁶ But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷ And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' ¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' ¹⁹ And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' ²⁰ And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' ²² And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' ²³ And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'" (ESV Bible)

ABOUT CITYONAHILL

City on a Hill began at the end of 2007 with a small team and a big vision to see Melbourne renewed with the great news of Jesus. Since then, God has gathered men and women of all ages with a passion to know Jesus and make Him known.

As a community we meet every Sunday for our main services at 8.45am, 10.30am and 6pm where we hear relevant and practical messages from the Bible about God, life and the world we live in. We pray, we sing, we hang out, and then through the week we commit ourselves to being people of light and love in our city.

To find out more about what God is doing in and through this community and how you can partner with us visit www.cityonahill.com.au

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