

# Parable of the Pounds (Part 1)

by J.C. Ryle

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*J.C. Ryle's sermon on the Parable of the Pounds emphasizes the need for Christians to correctly interpret biblical prophecies regarding Christ's advents and the kingdom of God.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 22:16, Isaiah 53:5, Daniel 9:26, Micah 5:2, Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 24:30, Luke 19:11-13, Acts 1:11, Romans 11:26, Revelation 1:7

**Topics:** "Understanding Prophecy", "Christ's Advents"

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## Description

J.C. Ryle discusses the Parable of the Pounds, emphasizing the misunderstanding of Jesus' disciples regarding the immediate establishment of God's kingdom. He highlights their error in overlooking the necessity of Christ's suffering before His glory, paralleling it with contemporary Christians who may misinterpret prophecies about Christ's second coming. Ryle urges believers to approach Old Testament prophecies with a literal understanding, warning against the dangers of spiritualizing texts that refer to Israel and Jerusalem. He calls for a renewed examination of prophetic scriptures, advocating for a balanced view of both Christ's first and second advents. Ultimately, Ryle stresses the importance of recognizing the literal fulfillment of God's promises to Israel and the implications for the Church today.

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## Transcript

"Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten pounds, and said to them, Occupy till I come." (Luke 19:11-13)

These words form an introduction to the parable commonly called "The Parable of the Pounds." They contain matter which deserves the prayerful consideration of every true Christian. There are some parables of which Matthew Henry says, with equal quaintness and truth, "The key hangs beside the door." The Holy Ghost himself interprets them. There is no room left for doubt as to the purpose for which they were spoken. Of such parables, The Parable of the Pounds is an example.

St. Luke tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ "added and spoke a parable because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." These words reveal the secret thoughts of our Lord's disciples. They gathered from many of their Master's sayings that something remarkable was about to happen. They had a strong impression that one great purpose of His coming into the world was about to be accomplished. So far they were quite right. But as to the precise

nature of the event about to happen, they were quite wrong. What was their mistake, and how should present-day Christians regard it? This is the first question I shall consider.

Our Lord's disciples seem to have thought that the Old Testament promises of Messiah's visible kingdom and glory were about to be immediately fulfilled. They believed rightly that He was indeed the Messiah, the Christ of God. But they blindly supposed that He was going at once to take to Himself His great power and reign gloriously over the earth. This was the sum and substance of their error. They did not realize that before all these prophecies could be fulfilled, "it behooved Christ to suffer." Their sanguine expectations leaped over the crucifixion and the long parenthesis of time to follow, and bounded onward to the final glory. They did not see that there was to be a first advent of Messiah, when he was "to be cut off," before the second advent of Messiah, when he would reign. They did not comprehend that before the glory, Christ must be crucified and an elect people gathered out from among the Gentiles by the preaching of the Gospel. They grasped part of the prophetic word, but not all. They saw that Christ was to have a kingdom, but they did not see that He was to be wounded and bruised, and be an offering for sin. They understood the dispensation of the crown and the glory, but not the dispensation of the cross and the shame. It was a mistake which you will find partially clinging to the disciples even after the crucifixion.

I believe we have fallen into an error parallel with that of our Jewish brethren, an error less fatal in its consequences than theirs, but an error far more inexcusable, because we have had more light. If the Jew thought too exclusively of Christ reigning, has not the Gentile thought too exclusively of Christ suffering? If the Jew could see nothing in Old Testament prophecy but Christ's exaltation and final power, has not the Gentile often seen nothing but Christ's humiliation and the preaching of the Gospel? If the Jew dwelt too much on Christ's second advent, has not the Gentile dwelt too exclusively on the first? If the Jew ignored the cross, has not the Gentile ignored the crown?

We Gentiles have been very guilty concerning a large portion of God's truth. I believe that we have cherished an arbitrary, reckless habit of interpreting first advent texts literally, and second advent texts spiritually. I believe we have not rightly understood "all that the prophets have spoken" about the second, personal advent of Christ any more than the Jews did about the first. And because we have done so, I say that we should speak of such mistakes as that referred to in our text with much tenderness and compassion.

I ask you in all affection to examine your own views about prophecy. Take heed, lest insensibly you commit as great an error about Christ's second coming and glory as they did about Christ's first coming and cross. Do not dismiss the subject as a matter of curious speculation and one of no practical importance. Believe me, it affects the whole question between yourself and the unconverted Jew. I warn you, that unless you interpret the prophetic portion of the Old Testament in the simple, literal meaning of its words, you will find it no easy matter to carry on an argument with an unconverted Jew.

You would probably tell the Jew that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. You would show him Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Daniel 9:26, Micah 5:2, Zechariah 9:9, and 11:13. You would tell him that in Jesus of Nazareth those Scriptures were literally fulfilled. You would urge upon him that he ought to believe them and receive Christ as the Messiah. All this is very good. So far you would do well. But suppose the Jew asks you if you take all the prophecies of the old Testament in their simple literal meaning? Suppose he asks you if you believe in a literal personal advent of Messiah to reign over the earth in glory, in a literal restoration of Judah and Israel to Palestine, in a literal rebuilding and restoration of Zion and Jerusalem? What answer will you give?

Will you dare to tell him that Old Testament prophecies of this kind are not to be taken in their plain literal sense? Will you dare to tell him that the words Zion, Jerusalem, Jacob, Judah, Ephraim, and Israel do not mean what they seem to mean, but mean the Church of Christ? Will you dare to tell him that the glorious kingdom and future blessedness of Zion, so often dwelt upon in prophecy, means nothing more than the gradual Christianizing of the world by missionaries and Gospel preaching? Will you dare to tell him that you think it "carnal" to take such Scriptures literally; "carnal" to expect a literal rebuilding of Jerusalem; "carnal" to expect a literal coming of Messiah to reign; "carnal" to look for a literal gathering and restoration of Israel?

Do you not see that you are putting a weapon into the hand of the unconverted Jew which he will probably use with irresistible power? Do you not see that you are cutting the ground from under your own feet and supplying the Jew with a strong argument for not believing your own interpretation of Scripture? Do you not see that the Jew will reply that it is "carnal" for you to tell him that the Messiah has come literally to suffer when you say it is "carnal" for him to expect Messiah to come literally to reign? Do you not see that the Jew will tell you that it is far more "carnal" in you to believe that Messiah could come into the world as a despised, crucified man of sorrows than it is for him to believe that He will come into the world as a glorious King? Beyond doubt He will do so, and you will find no answer to give.

I entreat you to throw aside all prejudice and view the subject I am dwelling upon with calm and dispassionate thought. I beseech you to take up anew the prophetic Scriptures and pray that you may not err in interpreting their meaning. Read them in the light of those two great pole-stars, the first and second advents of Jesus Christ. Bind up with the first advent the rejection of the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, the preaching of the Gospel as a witness to the world, and the gathering out of the election of grace. Bind up with the second advent the restoration of the Jews, the pouring out of judgments on unbelieving Christians, the conversion of the world, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth. Do this, and you will see a meaning and fulness in prophecy which perhaps you never yet discovered.

I believe it is high time for the Church of Christ to awake out of its sleep about Old Testament prophecy. From the time of the old Father, Jerome, down to the present day, men have gone on in a pernicious habit of "spiritualizing" the words of the Prophets until their true meaning has been well nigh buried. It is high time for Christians to interpret unfulfilled prophecy by the light of prophecies already fulfilled. The curses on the Jews were brought to pass literally, so also will be the blessings. The scattering was literal, so also will be the gathering. The pulling down of Zion was literal, so also will be the building up. The rejection of Israel was literal, so also will be the restoration.

It is high time to interpret the events that shall accompany Christ's second advent by the light of those accompanying His first advent. The first advent was literal, visible, personal, and so also will be His second. His first advent was with a literal body, so also will be His second. At His first advent the least predictions were fulfilled to the very letter, so also will they be at His second. The shame was literal and visible, so also will be the glory.

It is high time to cease from explaining Old Testament prophecies in a way not warranted by the New Testament. What right have we to say that Judah, Zion, Israel, and Jerusalem ever mean anything but literal Judah, literal Zion, literal Israel, and literal Jerusalem? What precedent shall we find in the New Testament? Hardly any, if indeed any at all. An admirable writer on this subject well says: "There are really only two or three places in the whole New Testament (Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation) where such names are used decidedly in what may be called a spiritual or figurative state. The word 'Jerusalem'

occurs eighty times, and all of them unquestionably literal, save when the opposite is expressly pointed out by the epithets 'heavenly,' or 'new', or 'holy.' 'Jew' occurs one hundred times, and only four are even ambiguous, as Romans 2:28. 'Israel' and 'Israelite' occur forty times, and all literal. 'Judah' and 'Judea' above twenty times, and all literal." (Bonar's Prophetical Landmarks, p.300)

It is no answer to say that it is impossible to carry out the principle of a literal interpretation because Christ was not a literal "door," nor a literal "branch," nor was the bread in the sacrament His literal "body." I reply that when I speak of literal interpretation, I require no man to deny the use of figurative language. I fully admit that emblems, figures, and symbols are used in foretelling Messiah's glory, as well as in foretelling Messiah's sufferings. I do not believe that Jesus was a literal "root out of dry ground," or a literal "lamb." All I maintain is that prophecies about Christ's coming and kingdom do foretell literal facts, as truly as the prophecy about Christ being numbered with the transgressors; that prophecies about the Jews being gathered will be as really and literally made good as those about the Jews being scattered.

The argument that the principle of literal interpretation deprives the Church of the use and benefit of many parts of the Old Testament is not valid. All things written in the Prophets concerning the salvation of individual souls may be used by Gentiles as freely as by Jews. The hearts of Jews and Gentiles are naturally just the same. The way to heaven is but one. Both Jews and Gentiles need justification, regeneration, sanctification. Whatever is written concerning such subjects is just as much the property of the Gentile as the Jew. Moreover, I hold Israel to be a people specially typical of the whole body of believers in Christ. I consider that believers now may take the comfort of every promise of pardon, comfort, and grace which is addressed to Israel. Such words I regard as the common portion of all believers. All I maintain is that whenever God says He shall do or give certain things to Israel and Jerusalem in this world, we ought to believe wholly that those things will be given and done to literal Israel and Jerusalem.

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