

The Parables of the Master

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Lessons

Lesson	Page
One: Introduction.....	1
Two: Four Hearts: The Sower - Matthew 13:3-23; Mark 4:2-20; Luke 8:4-15....	4
Three: Mixture of Good and Bad.....	9
The Tares - Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43	
The Dragnet - Matthew 13:47-50	
Four: Growth of the Kingdom.....	14
Seed Growing - Mark 4:26-29	
Mustard Seed - Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19	
Leaven - Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21	
Five: The Value of the Kingdom.....	17
Hidden Treasure - Matthew 13:44	
Pearl of Great Price - Matthew 13:45-46	
Six: Obedience: Wise and Foolish Builders - Matthew 7:21-27; Luke 6:46-49....	20
Seven: Divine Forgiveness and Human Love: Two Debtors - Luke 7:36-50...	23
Eight: Divine and Human Forgiveness - Matthew 18:21-35.....	26
Nine: Mercy: The Good Samaritan - Luke 10:25-37.....	30
Ten: Prayer.....	35
Friend at Midnight - Luke 11:5-13	
Persistent Widow - Luke 18:1-8	
Eleven: Wealth: The Rich Fool - Luke 12:13-21.....	40
Twelve: Bearing Fruit: The Barren Fig Tree - Luke 13:1-9.....	44
Thirteen: Humility: Chief Seats - Luke 14:7-11.....	47
Fourteen: The Divine Invitation.....	50
The Great Supper - Luke 14:15-24	
The Marriage of the King's Son - Matthew 22:1-14	
Fifteen: Counting the Cost.....	56
Building a Tower - Luke 14:28-30	
A King Going to War - Luke 14:31-33	
Sixteen: Christ Receives Sinners.....	60
Lost Sheep - Luke 15:3-7	
Lost Coin - Luke 15:8-10	
Lost Son - Luke 15:11-32	

Seventeen: Shrewdness: Dishonest Steward - Luke 16:1-13.....	66
Eighteen: Self-Righteousness vs. Humility: Pharisee and Tax Collector - Luke 18:9-14.....	69
Nineteen: Reward for Labor: Laborers in the Vineyard - Matthew 20:1-16.	73
Twenty: Lip Service vs. Repentance: The Two Sons - Matthew 21:28-32.....	76
Twenty-one: Ownership of the Kingdom: The Wicked Vinedressers - Matthew 21:33-43; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19.....	78
Twenty-two: After Death: The Rich Man and Lazarus - Luke 16:19-31.....	81
Twenty-three: Ready for His Return: The Ten Virgins - Matthew 25:1-13	85
Twenty-four: Faithful Service.....	87
The Talents - Matthew 25:14-30	
The Minas - Luke 19:11-27	
Twenty-five: Ministering to Needy Brethren: The Sheep and the Goats - Matthew 25:31-46.....	94

Lesson One Introduction

All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world' (Matthew 13:34-35).

“The parables comprise more than one-third of the recorded teachings of Jesus” (Lightfoot. 13). Obviously, if we are to understand the truth the Master taught, we must understand His parables.

The word “parable” literally “denotes a placing beside” (Vine. 3:158). “It signifies a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison” (Ibid).

The Greek term from which “parable” comes is found fifty times in the New Testament. It is twice used in Hebrews in the sense of a figure (Hebrews 9:9; 11:19). Jesus used the term in the sense of a proverbial statement (Luke 4:23). However, forty-seven of its fifty occurrences refer to stories told by Jesus. Forty-eight of the fifty times the word is used are in the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Whereas there are numerous parables in the Old Testament (e.g., 2 Samuel 12:1-4), no New Testament writers used parables. Thus, in the New Testament parables are uniquely associated with the personal teaching of Christ, and this form of teaching is confined to the three synoptic accounts.

The parables of Jesus were stories about common things from nature or human experience that both revealed and illustrated spiritual truths. The natural was thrown alongside the spiritual. For example, the Master employed a mustard seed to illustrate the growth of the kingdom (Matthew 13:31-32). He talked about building a tower to illustrate counting the cost (Luke 14:28-30). Ten times (all in Matthew) the Master began a parable with the formula, “The kingdom of heaven is like.” Of course, the kingdom of heaven is spiritual (Luke 17:20-21; John 18:36; Romans 14:17). “Often a parable is defined as ‘an earthly story with a heavenly meaning’” (Lightfoot, Ibid).

The parables of Jesus are distinguished from proverbs in that proverbs do not tell a story and are not necessarily figurative. Nor should we confuse a parable with a fable. Fables tell stories that could not have happened and give human characteristics to animals and plants (e.g., Judges 9:8-15; 2 Kings 14:9). The one New Testament figure identified by the inspired writer as an allegory (Galatians 4:21-31) draws comparisons between the details of a real, historical event and spiritual truths.

Jesus did not characteristically begin to use parables as the form of His teaching until after the

Jewish rulers had demonstrated their dishonesty (Matthew 12:22-45). From that time on His public teaching was characteristically in parables.

This helps us see the purposes of parables. The apostles asked Jesus why He taught in parables, indicating this was new to them (Matthew 13:10). He answered by explaining that it was given to some to understand the kingdom, but to some it was not given (verses 11-12). As Isaiah said, some were dull of heart (Matthew 13:12-15), as Israel was in the days of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:9-10). They were too materialistic to perceive the spiritual truths contained under the material illustration of the parables and too dishonest and stubborn to change. On the other hand, the disciples were blessed in that truths about the kingdom of heaven that even the prophets of old longed to understand were revealed to their honest, spiritual minds (Matthew 13:16-17). Since the parables were interesting stories, they aroused interest in Jesus' teaching.

He could arouse the curiosity of His audience by beginning a story, and they could follow Him all the way through without realizing where He was leading them. Then all at once the hidden meaning of the story would strike them like a flash, and they could not contradict what He said (Lightfoot.14; cf. Matthew 21:33-45).

Since stories are easy to remember, they preserved great truths in the minds of honest hearers. So parables as a form of the Master's teaching served five great purposes: to **conceal** truth from those with dull hearts, to **reveal** truth to those who were honest, to **arouse interest** in the truths to be taught, to cause hearers to **assent** to truth before they realized the application, and to **preserve** those truths in the minds of those who understood.

Jesus even gave the key to understanding parables when He explained the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:18-23) and the Parable of the Tares (Matthew 13:36-43). The only details of the story that have spiritual significance are those that advance the main point of the parable. That point is always spiritual.

In his book **Glimpses of Eternity**, Paul Earnhart has an excellent chapter on interpreting parables. Here is its gist.

The parables should be approached naturally, taking care not to derail them from their simple purpose. They are illustrative stories generally conceived to have three basic parts: (1) a historical occasion that produced the parable; (2) the story or narrative; and (3) the principal lesson to be derived from that story....

1. Study the parable in its historical context to determine why it was spoken.... Context must always rule the text.

2.... Most parables are intended to make only one point....

3.... A good rule is not to give some special figurative meaning to a detail unless the context warrants it.

4.... they must always be understood in the light of the clear teachings of Scripture, never in contradiction to them....

5. Finally, and most importantly, always make a personal application of each parable (14-15).

The parables of the Master are powerful teaching tools. They reveal in simple terms the deep, spiritual truths of the heavenly kingdom. If we come to understand them, the blessing of the Lord rests on us.

But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it (Matthew 13:16-17).

Works Cited

Earnhart, Paul, **Glimpses of Eternity (Studies in the Parables of Jesus).**

Lightfoot, Neil R., **Lessons From the Parables.**

Vine, W.E., **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.**

Questions

1. How much of the Master's recorded teaching is in the form of a parable?
2. What is a parable?
3. Where are the parables of Scripture found?
4. Was the use of parables unique to Jesus?
5. What are the characteristics of the parables Christ taught?
6. What is the difference between a proverb and a parable?
7. How do parables compare to fables?
8. What about allegories?
9. When did Jesus begin to characteristically teach in parables?
10. Why did the Master speak in parables?
11. What are the keys to understanding parables?
12. Is it important for us to understand the parables of Jesus Christ?

Lesson Two
Four Hearts
(The Parable of the Sower)
Matthew 13:3-23; Mark 4:2-20; and Luke 8:4-15

Once a friend asked me why equally honest, intelligent and diligent Bible scholars do not understand the Bible alike. Before I allow the Master to answer this question, three observations are in order: one's apparent honesty may be a deception (Matthew 7:15); superior intelligence is not important to an understanding of the Bible and can be a hindrance (1 Corinthians 1:18-21); and diligence in study without the desire to do what we learn is a useless academic exercise (John 7:17).



But Jesus answered this question in the Parable of the Sower. Before you read on, please carefully read the inspired accounts of this story in Matthew 13:3-23; Mark 4:2-20; and Luke 8:4-15. This parable answers the question, **Why do some understand the gospel and some do not?**

At the time Jesus taught this lesson in Galilee, He was followed by such large crowds that he got into a boat on the Sea of Galilee so he could address them all (Matthew 13:1-2; Mark 4:1; Luke 8:4). But trouble had already begun to develop, and it would deepen. Though Jesus' words and works proved Him to be from God, the Jewish leaders had already stubbornly rejected Him by foolishly attributing His miracles to Satan (Matthew 12:22-24). Soon after this even some of His disciples quit following Him (John 6:66). Jesus' disciples needed to be prepared for the facts that many would reject Him and His Word, that persecution would come upon His disciples, and that even some of them would turn back from Him. We need to be prepared for the same realities.

The Master spoke of a sower going out to sow, a simple scene with which His hearers were very familiar (Matthew 13:3; Mark 4:3; Luke 8:5). As the sower scattered the seeds of grain by hand upon the ground some seeds were blown by the wind upon the footpath between the fields. Here the soil was so hardened by pounding feet that no seed could penetrate it. The sandals of passers by crushed the grain, and hungry birds quickly gobbled it up, so that it bore no fruit (Matthew 13:4; Mark 4:4; Luke 8:5).

Other grain fell upon thin soil over bedrock. This soil was warmed quickly by the spring sun, so the grain quickly germinated and sprouted. But the summer sun scorched the plants, which could not send down roots for moisture because of the rock beneath, and the plants withered and died without producing any grain (Matthew 13:5-6; Mark 4:5-6; Luke 8:6).

Some seeds fell where the soil was encumbered with thorns. As the good seed and the weeds

grew together, the hardier weeds used up the richness and moisture of the earth and blocked out the sunlight, and the stalks of grain were choked out and died (Matthew 13:7; Mark 4:7; Luke 8:7).

But some seed fell upon good earth and yielded abundantly (Matthew 13:8; Mark 4:8; Luke 8:8).

The lesson of this parable is so important that all who are capable of understanding must do so (Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8).

Later, when Jesus was alone with His disciples, they asked Him two things: why He spoke in parables and the explanation of this parable (Matthew 13:10; Mark 4:10; Luke 8:9). Jesus first explained His purpose for speaking in parables.

He was teaching “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 13:11; “kingdom of God”; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10). A “mystery” is simply a “hidden purpose or counsel.” (Thayer. 420). It is not necessarily difficult to understand. It’s simply secret from general knowledge until revealed, or made known. The “kingdom of heaven” is God’s rule, particularly in the hearts of His people (cf. Daniel 4:3,25-26,34-35; Luke 17:20-21). The heart is one’s intellect, with which he understands, and will, with which he submits (Matthew 13:15). This parable makes known how God exercises His rule among men so that some are lost and some are saved. For those who heed, this profound concept will cease being a mystery and become a revelation.

God in His eternal wisdom and rule has decreed that some will understand and receive the gospel and some will not. To those to whom it is given to understand, the parables of Jesus simplify the truth and make it easier to remember. To those to whom it is not, the parables obscure the truth. Those with receptive hearts keep on learning. As with any body of knowledge, those who fail to learn the first principles soon forget what little they did learn. They have the intellectual ability to see, but they don’t see; they can hear, but they don’t hear; they can understand, but they don’t understand. The problem is with their dullness of heart. For whatever reason, they refuse to accept the truth. Their refusal to comprehend prevents their turning to God and receiving forgiveness of sins. Those who do see are blessed of God. The prophets of old desired to know the precious truths these believers accept (Matthew 13:11-17; Mark 4:11-12; Luke 8:10; cf. Isaiah 6:9-10; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

According to the Lord, in God’s sovereign will, the heart of the hearer determines his salvation. God has not chosen in eternity before time to save certain individuals. He has chosen to save a certain kind of people, those who will receive the Word of His Son.

Jesus then explained the Parable of the Sower, both to give His disciples a key to understand all parables and to help them understand this parable of paramount importance (Mark 4:13).

The seed represents the word of God (Luke 8:11). The seed has the power to bring forth life (John 6:63), nor has that power diminished with the centuries (1 Peter 1:24-25).

The sower is the preacher (Mark 4:14; cf. Romans 10:14-17). His work is to faithfully proclaim the Word (2 Timothy 4:1-5). If he accurately presents the gospel, and hearers reject it, it is their fault, not his.

The soils are four kinds of human heart. The wayside soil is the heart so hardened that it refuses to understand the truth. Satan quickly sends false teachers to convince the hearer of the error he wants to believe, so he never believes the truth and is not saved (Matthew 13:19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12).

The stony ground soil represents the hearer who, ruled by his emotions, quickly and joyfully believes, but just as quickly falls away when pressure, persecution, and temptation come. He lacks depth of conviction (Matthew 13:20-21; Mark 4:16-17; Luke 8:13).

The thorny ground is the hearer who receives the Word, but he becomes “choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life” and thus “becomes unfruitful.” The things of this world crowd the kingdom out of his heart and life (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:18-19; Luke 8:14).

The good ground is the hearer with a good and honest heart. He understands the Word, accepts it, keeps it, and bears “fruit with patience” (Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15).

So, why do some understand the gospel and some do not? God in His sovereignty has determined that those with good and honest hearts will understand, accept, and keep His Word and bear fruit with patience. It is all a matter of the attitude of your heart. In fact, **your attitude toward the Word of God will determine the destiny of your soul.** “Therefore take heed how you hear” (Luke 8:18).

Work Cited

J.H. Thayer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.**

Discussion Questions

1. Might a person seem to be honest but really be insincere?
2. Do we need to have great intellect to understand the will of God?
3. If we study the Scriptures diligently but do not desire to do God’s will, will we come to an understanding of the Word?

4. What question does the Parable of the Sower answer?
5. In what situation did the Master teach this parable?
6. What need did it meet on the part of His disciples?
7. What happened to the seed that fell on the footpath?
8. What happened to the seed that fell on the thin soil that had bedrock beneath it?
9. What about the seed that fell among thorns?
10. What became of the seed that fell on good soil?
11. How important is the lesson of this parable?
12. What two questions did the disciples ask Jesus?
13. What did the Master say He was teaching about?
14. Define these terms:
 - a. mysteries
 - b. kingdom of heaven
 - c. heart
15. What does the parable reveal about the rule of God?
16. Why do some people understand the principles of the kingdom, while others do not?
17. How important is it that we understand?
18. What will determine whether you and I are saved or lost?
19. Why did Christ explain the parable?
20. What does the seed represent?
21. What does the sower represent?
22. What about the different kinds of soil?

23. Describe the kinds of heart and the results represented by the four kinds of soil.

a. wayside

b. stony ground

c. thorny ground

d. good ground

24. Which is your heart?

25. What will determine the destiny of your soul?

Lesson Three

Mixture of Good and Bad

Weeds in the Wheat:¹
The Parable of the Tares
Please read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Story

As He sat in a fishing boat just back from the shore and spoke to the pressing throngs, the Master related a second story about a farmer, a field, and grain. This lesson, as the Parable of the Sower, reveals an important characteristic of the kingdom of heaven.

In the parable a farmer sowed good wheat seed in his field. Under cover of darkness an enemy came and maliciously scattered seed of tares. When the plants matured, it was obvious to the workers that tares and wheat were growing together, so they asked their master why. He concluded that an enemy was responsible for the tares. They further inquired if they were to uproot the tares. No, the master replied, because that might cause the wheat to be uprooted as well. Rather, the wheat and tares would grow together until harvest, at which time the tares would be bundled for burning, and the wheat would be gathered into the barn.

According to scholars, the word translated “tares” refers to a plant known as “bearded darnel.” It is indistinguishable from wheat until the head containing grain appears, at which time the two grains are obviously different. The darnel, mildly poisonous to both people and animals, is a useless, noxious weed. By the time the plants have produced heads, the roots of the wheat and darnel are so intertwined that the weeds can’t be pulled up without also uprooting the wheat.

The Keys

As with the Parable of the Sower, the Lord himself gave His disciples, and therefore us, the keys to interpret the parable.

He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels (Matthew 13:37-39).

Misapplications

We must guard against common misapplications. William Barclay asserted the parable teaches us that all judging is wrong. Nonsense! “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with

¹Title borrowed from Paul Earnhart, **Glimpses of Eternity**. 51.

righteous judgment” (John 7:24). The Lord condemned hypocritical and hypercritical judging (Matthew 7:1-5), but He taught us we must judge if people are spiritual hogs and dogs (Matthew 7:6).

And the parable has nothing whatsoever to do with discipline in the local church. “The field is the world,” not the local congregation. Congregations must purify themselves of impenitent, publicly known sinners (1 Corinthians chapter 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14).

Proper Applications

The Master teaches great lessons in the Parable of the Tares. Perhaps the disciples as most people today thought that when the kingdom of heaven came, all evil on earth would cease. But in this story about the kingdom, sons of the kingdom and sons of the wicked one are intermixed in the world.

How can this be? David prophesied that Christ would rule in the midst of His enemies (Psalm 110:2). Despite the opposition of both Jew and Gentiles, kings and rulers, God set Messiah the King on His throne (Psalm 2). He rules the nations with a rod of iron (Revelation 19:15).

A paradox of the parable helps us see what the kingdom of heaven is. “The field is the world.” But the gathering of the tares means “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness” (Matthew 13:41). The Lord’s rule, his kingdom in one sense, covers the unbelieving world as well as His church (Luke 19:14,27; Ephesians 1:15-23; Revelation 19:11-16). In the story of the tares, we are taught that we will not know certainly who are “sons of the kingdom” and who are in the world until the great day of judgment. The sons of the kingdom, within whose hearts the kingdom dwells (Luke 17:20-21), and the sons of the wicked one are intermingled in the world. The sons of the wicked one will be gathered out from among the sons of the kingdom.

The judgment to determine who is a son of the kingdom and who is a son of the wicked one doesn’t take place until the end of the age, and the one who sorts them out, in other words, passes judgment on their final destiny, is the Son of Man, aided by His angels (verses 40-41; cf. Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:22-30). I must judge to whom I will extend the right hand of fellowship (Ephesians 5:11; Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10-11; 2 verses John 9-11), but I have neither the knowledge nor the authority to pass judgment on anyone’s final destiny (James 4:12).

The popular acclaim enjoyed by false teachers and hypocrites can bring anguish to those who are suffering for righteousness’ sake (Psalm 73). But at the end of the age,

The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matthew 13:41-43)
What a scene! On that day everyone will be exposed to all the world for what he truly is, wheat or tares. Those who act without divine authority (cf. Matthew 7:21-23; Colossians 3:17) and those who cause others to stumble and fall (cf. Matthew 18:6-7) will be identified as the noxious weeds they are. I do not want to be cast into that furnace of fire! But I do indeed longingly anticipate shining forth as the sun before the King of the universe and before the saved of all the ages as a son of the kingdom!

Questions

I. Terms to Define

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. kingdom of heaven | 4. sons of the wicked one |
| 2. tares | 5. Son of Man |
| 3. sons of the kingdom | 6. offend |

II. Fact Questions

1. Tell the story of the Parable of the Tares
2. Why can wheat and tares not be separated before harvest?
3. What do each of these elements of the story represent?
 - a. the one who sows the good seed
 - b. the field
 - c. good seeds
 - d. tares
 - e. the enemy
 - f. the harvest
 - g. the reapers

III. Thought Questions

1. Does the parable prohibit all judging?
2. Does it teach that local congregations should not withdraw from impenitent sinners within their membership?
3. Does the presence of the kingdom of heaven on earth mean all evil will cease and all evil people disappear?
4. What does the parable teach about the nature of the kingdom of heaven?
5. Is it our prerogative to pass judgment on the eternal destiny of anyone?

6. When will it be revealed who is saved and who is lost?
7. Who will make that judgment?
8. What will be the results?

The Dragnet **Matthew 13:47-50**

This is the last of the seven “Parables by the Sea” recorded in Matthew thirteen that introduce the Master’s teaching by parables. As usual, Jesus describes a common scene in first century Palestine, especially here beside the Sea of Galilee, to illustrate the nature of the heavenly kingdom.

The “dragnet” is a very large net with floats on the top and weights at the bottom covering a large area of water and drawn by several men that simply hauls in everything in its path whether useful or trash. The necessity to cull the edible from the useless would be even more important among Jews, bound by law as they were to eat only “clean” sea creatures, those with both fins and scales (Leviticus 11:9-12; Deuteronomy 14:9-10).

The lesson of the Parable of the Dragnet is not precisely the same as that of the Tares. In that parable, “the field is the world” (Matthew 13:38). In the story of the tares, we are taught that we will not know certainly who are “sons of the kingdom” and who are in the world until the great day of judgment. In this narrative we learn that even those drawn into the kingdom by the gospel may be unacceptable to the Lord and finally lost.

We lack the omniscience of the Lord to know for certainty who is saved and who is lost (1 Corinthians 4:3-5; 1 Timothy 5:24). We must determine to whom we extend fellowship (1 Corinthians 5:11-13), but the Lord Jesus Christ, when He returns with His angels, will in all justice determine who is saved and who is lost (John 5:22-30).

We may fool a local church into accepting us even though we are living sinful lives, but we most certainly will not deceive the Lord.

Questions

I. Term to Define:
dragnet

II. Fact Question
Relate the Parable of the Dragnet

III. Thought Questions

1. How is the lesson of this parable different from that of the tares?
2. What is the primary lesson it teaches?

Lesson Four How the Kingdom Grows

Three parables of the Master reveal how the kingdom of God grows. The kingdom of God does not grow the way the rule of men does. The Roman Empire of Jesus' day and the United States of America today each grew into the mightiest nation on earth through a long series of mostly successful wars and conflicts. Not so the reign of heaven.

Like Seed Growing Mark 4:26-29

My younger grandson planted sunflower seeds this spring and waited impatiently for them to germinate and grow into plants. Now that the stalks are twice his height, he has lost interest. But he learned that **the power to produce life is in the seed**. Neither my six year old grandson nor a Ph.D. botanist understands how life got into that seed. It is the work of God.

The power to change the self-willed sinner to a submissive child of God, that is to produce the kingdom of God within the human heart, does not lie with the eloquence of the preacher (1 Corinthians 2:1-5), clever methods that beguile the sinner into obedience (2 Corinthians 4:2), or carnal attractions that lure impenitent sinners into the fold (John 6:26-27). The power is in the word of God (Romans 1:16; 10:17), which, when faithfully preached and taught, will always accomplish the will of the Lord (Isaiah 55:10-11). **It doesn't matter who plants the seed but Who put the life in the seed** (1 Corinthians 3:6).

If my grandson becomes a gardener, he will learn to garden in faith. He will plant the seed and then go about his business, trusting that the seed will germinate, grow into a plant, and produce a crop. **We sow the seed of the kingdom in human hearts in faith that the word will do its work**. We preach and teach, then we leave the sinner and go about other tasks, trusting the seed to germinate within the heart, grow into faith, and produce the rule of Christ in the heart. The one who says any method whereby the word is imparted to hearers does no good lacks faith in the Lord and in His word. The word of God is still "living and powerful" (Hebrews 4:12).

The farmer must be patient (James 5:7) as he waits for the sunshine and rain to bring the crop to maturity. We must simply sow the seed and wait patiently for the Lord to yield the increase. There are times of faith testing frustration when all our labor seems to be accomplishing nothing. We must not lose heart.

"Those who sow in tears
Shall reap in joy" (Psalm 126:5).

Questions

1. Where is the power to produce the reign of Christ in the human heart?
 - A. the eloquence of the preacher
 - B. clever methods of teaching
 - C. carnal attractions
 - D. the word of God
2. Prove your answer from the Scriptures.
3. Why does it take faith to teach and preach the gospel to sinners?
4. Why is patience required?
5. Are there other lessons in the Parable of the Seed Growing of Itself?

Like Mustard Seed Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19

Though the mustard seed was not strictly the smallest seed known in Palestine, it was so tiny that its minuscule size was proverbial (Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6). Yet it became such a large shrub, one the size of a small tree and in which birds nested, growing to a height of ten or twelve feet, that it was planted in the open field rather than the garden.

The prophets foretold the universal (Daniel 2:35), eternal (Daniel 2:44) extent of the kingdom of God, and this is indeed the nature of the heavenly reign (Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 12:5). But its beginning was so unimpressive that the disciples were to have their faith severely tested. The King began His life in a stable and ended His career on a cross. His twelve emissaries were “uneducated and untrained men” (Acts 4:13). The disciples were a despised, severely persecuted minority (Acts 8:1-3). But in one generation the gospel and with it the kingdom of God was carried throughout the world (Colossians 1:3-8) and proclaimed to “every creature under heaven” (Colossians 1:21-23).

When the foundation of the rebuilt temple was laid by Zerubbabel, the prophet Zechariah inquired, “For who has despised the day of small things?” (Zechariah 4:10) Many of the old men who had seen the temple that Solomon had built wept loudly (Ezra 3:12). In comparison to that temple the one being built seemed to them as nothing (Haggai 2:3). But the Lord through the prophet declared, “The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former” (Haggai 2:9).

In 1948 one Nigerian man, C.A.O. Essien, took a Bible correspondence course sent by the Lawrence Avenue Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee. Today there are multiplied thousands of Christians in Nigeria. The mustard seed has grown into a tree.

Questions

1. What principle concerning the growth of the kingdom does the mustard seed illustrate?

2. What was the beginning of the kingdom like?
3. How far did it spread in one generation?
4. Should we be discouraged if we make a small beginning in the growth of the kingdom?
5. Should we view such a beginning as contemptible or hopeless?

Like Leaven
Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21

The woman and the amount of flour in this briefest of parables are the details that make it a story and have no spiritual significance. It is the leaven that represents the kingdom of heaven. “The work of leaven is ... inward and invisible. This parable is a powerful declaration of the spiritual nature of the kingdom.... The leaven must therefore symbolize the gospel as it works unseen in the individual spirit (1 Pet 1.22-23) and then moves quietly from one heart to another” (Earnhart. 61).

The Word of Christ, quietly and unseen, permeates the human heart until “all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17), and the son of the kingdom is transformed into the very image of the Son of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). Only when our minds are transformed will we present our bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2). Like yeast inside dough, the change must take place within. Reworking society from impoverished to wealthy, from autocracy to democracy, will not change people or save their souls. Wicked, lost sinners are the primary populace of Hollywood, whereas thousands of righteous Christians call Zimbabwe home. Only the gospel quietly working inside the heart will change the son of the wicked one to a child of God.

Without the marching of armies or the booming of artillery the kingdom of heaven spreads throughout society until every honest heart is “brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Questions

1. Do the woman or the amount of meal have significance?
2. What does the leaven represent?
3. What does the parable teach about the nature of the kingdom?
4. What does it teach about the growth of the kingdom?

Work Quoted

Earnhart, Paul, **Glimpses of Eternity**.

Lesson Five The Value of the Kingdom (Possessing the Priceless²)

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.
“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:44-46).*

Two men each found an object of surpassing, even preeminent value, each recognized the worth of what he had found, and each joyfully made the necessary sacrifice to obtain the valuable object.

Hidden Treasure

Ancient Palestine lacked real banks as safe places to deposit money, and the country had the problem of being repeatedly overrun by enemies and infested by brigands and thieves. Money could be deposited with money changers in the Temple for a low rate of interest (Matthew 25:27, **King James Version**), but there was certainly no FDIC to insure deposits. It appears that people often hid valuables in various places in hope of keeping them safe, died, and left no record of the treasure. People thus engaged in “treasure hunts” (cf. Job 3:21; Proverbs 2:4; Jeremiah 41:8). It was common in America after the bank failures of 1929 for people to hide their valuables and money rather than employing a bank.

So the Master tells the story of a man who found a treasure hidden in a field. There is no indication the man had been treasure hunting. Joyfully he hid the treasure again, sold everything he had, bought the field as his own, and thus gained possession of the fortune. The 19th century scholar Aldred Edersheim maintained that the man’s actions were legal under Jewish law³, but this is really irrelevant to the story. Christ is defending neither the legality nor morality of the finder’s course. He is using him as an example of placing correct valuation and acting accordingly.

Pearl of Great Price

Pearls were as prized in ancient society as diamonds are today. Myths circulated about how pearls were formed. Of course, without cultured pearls or modern diving equipment, they were much harder to acquire than today, and thus their value was greater.

Jesus related how a pearl merchant, one who would have a trained eye for pearls, found one

²From **Glimpses of Eternity** by Paul Earnhart. 66.

³**The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah**. 1:595-6.

jewel of surpassing value. He was actively seeking pearls, recognized the preeminent worth of the pearl he had found, and made the appropriate sacrifice.

Value

Both short parables illustrate the value of the heavenly kingdom. Of course, the kingdom of heaven is the rule of God through His Son Christ Jesus in the hearts of His people (Luke 17:20-21). But here the parables emphasize the blessings of kingdom citizenship, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm (Ephesians 1:3; Romans 14:17).

The value of the kingdom of heaven surpasses that of anything the world has to offer or even of the entirety of this world (Matthew 16:26-28). The benefits of the kingdom exceed in worth all earthly wealth (Matthew 6:19-21,33), pleasures (Ecclesiastes 2:1-2; Galatians 6:7-8), and popularity (Romans 3:3-4; 8:31).

Sacrifice

Some people, as the woman at the well of Sychar in Samaria (John 4:5-29) more or less accidentally encounter the gospel. Others, as the eunuch of Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-39) and Cornelius (Acts chapter 10) are actively seeking salvation. But each, in order to obtain the righteousness of the kingdom, must be willing to sacrifice everything, even his own life (Matthew 16:24-25).

Joy

The man who found the treasure did not mourn at the sale of all his possessions, nor did the merchant weep at giving up everything he had previously owned. Because he realized the preeminent value of the hidden treasure, the man who found it joyfully sold all that he had in order to gain it.

Paul, recognizing the preeminent worth of the blessings in Christ, willingly sacrificed all that had formerly been his reason for living (Philippians 3:3-11). Rather than looking back longingly on the things he had given up, rather than mourning, weeping, and complaining over his sacrifices, as he contemplated the possibility of a violent death for his service to Christ, he declared, "I am glad and rejoice with you all" (Philippians 2:17).

Conclusion

We will have made the shrewdest of all transactions if we sacrifice all the world has to offer for the kingdom of Christ (Matthew 16:24-27). "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." So much the more so when that which he cannot lose is of preeminent worth.

Questions

I. Definition

kingdom of heaven

II. Fact Questions

1. Tell the story of the “Hidden Treasure.”
2. Relate the parable of the “Pearl of Great Price.”
3. How were the actions of the two men different?

III. Thought Questions

1. What is the value of the kingdom of heaven?
2. Is anything of greater worth?
3. What sacrifices should we be willing to make for the kingdom?
4. What emotion should we experience from sacrificing all for the kingdom?

Lesson Six

Obedience: Wise and Foolish Builders

Matthew 7:21-27; Luke 6:46-49

In the Sermon on the mount (Matthew chapters 5 - 7), the Lord reveals the nature of the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). Entrance into the kingdom of heaven, in other words, being saved (cf. John 3:5) requires that our righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20) and that we follow the narrow, difficult way rather than the broad, easy way (Matthew 7:13-14).

As the Master brings the great discourse on the righteousness of the kingdom to a close, He does not relax or tone down His message. He urges upon His disciples the absolute necessity of obedience as opposed to any supposed easier way to God by warning of the judgment to come.

The Protestant denominations urge sinners to “pray the sinner’s prayer,” promising immediate and sure salvation. You can find such a prayer inside the cover of Bibles the Gideons leave in motel rooms, but you cannot find it in the inspired words of Scripture. In fact, the Lord Himself emphatically declared, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21; cf. Luke 6:46). It is not enough to plead in prayer, “Lord, Lord, save me.” Salvation not only requires obedience to God (Hebrews 5:8-9), it necessitates obedience to all the will of Christ (Matthew 28:19).

“That day,” is Judgment Day, when one will either be welcomed into the eternal, heavenly kingdom or be told to depart into eternal condemnation (cf. Matthew 25:31-33,46; Jude verse 6).

It is not enough to do what we consider good works. Many will be lost on judgment day who not only will have done what they thought were good works, but they will think they were acting in the name of Christ (Matthew 7:22). But because their deeds were “lawless,” unauthorized by the Lord, they will be commanded to depart, for the Lord never recognized them as His own (verse 23).

It is not enough to pray; nor is it sufficient to be religious, even sincerely religious, in fact hard working and sincerely religious. To be saved, we must do all the Lord directs us to do and only those things He has authorized.

To illustrate the lesson, the Master told the story of two men who each built a house. One was wise, and the other was foolish. What made the difference between wisdom and foolishness?

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10). This wisdom is proven by obedience (Ibid) and demonstrated by careful preparation for the future (Matthew 16:26-27).

Much of Palestine is similar to the American Southwest. In the dry season there are places known as “dry washes” (called “wadis” in Palestine) that might have flat, sandy beds. They

become raging torrents when rain comes.

The wise man of the story built his house on a rock (Matthew 7:24-25). He exercised the foresight and expended the effort to build a secure foundation for his house (Luke 6:48). The work is more difficult, but the reward is a reliable house that can withstand the wind, rain, and flood of the storm.

The foolish man constructed his house on the flat, sandy bed of the dry stream (Matthew 7:26-27; Luke 6:49). Construction was easy, but when the storm came, the bed became a flood that swept all before it. The sand beneath the building quickly eroded, and the house collapsed violently. The result was disaster.

In the parable, the houses are the lives of the builders. There is no apparent difference in their lives, but the difference is in the foundations. No building is more secure than its foundation. The foundation of stone is obedience to the Lord. The foundation of sand is hearing without obedience. The storm is the judgment, as the context demands (Matthew 7:22-23).

It is not enough to hear and to know what the Lord says; we must do His will (James 1:22-25). Obedience to His will is the secure foundation that will withstand the storm of judgment.

The only one who can successfully stand before Christ in judgment is the one who both hears and obeys the doctrine of Christ. Prayer apart from obedience is futile, working zealously at religious deeds unauthorized by Christ is vain, and hearing without doing is a foundation of sand. The only way we can be ready for the great storm of judgment is by obeying all the will of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The storm is coming. Will your house stand, or will you suffer the greatest of all tragedies?

Questions

1. In the Parable of the Two Builders, what do each of these represent?
 - a. the foundation
 - b. the house
 - c. the storm
2. What does the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven require?
3. Can we be saved by prayer apart from obedience to Christ?
4. If we are sincere, hard working, and religious, are we assured of our salvation?
5. How much of the will of the Lord must we obey to be saved?
6. What is the day of which Christ speaks in the text?

7. What is the beginning of wisdom?
8. How do we know if we fear God?
9. When the storm came, why did one house stand and the other fall?
10. How can we be prepared for the Judgment?

Lesson 7
Divine Forgiveness and Human Love
Parable of the Two Debtors
Luke 7:36-50

As the Master preached and performed miracles in Galilee a Pharisee named Simon invited him to his house to eat. Jesus ate with known sinners as well as with Pharisees, but Pharisees were the religious separatists of the Jews and refused to associate with sinners (Matthew 9:9-11; Mark 2:15-16; Luke 5:29-30). Although the Pharisees put their own traditions above the law of God (Matthew 15:1-9; Mark 7:5-13), both the people and they themselves thought of them as the paragons of righteousness (Matthew 5:20; Luke 18:9-12).

Some knowledge of first century Jewish customs sheds light on this incident. Wealthier Jews lived in a square house composed of several rooms surrounding a tree shaded courtyard. During a meal people from off the street might come and go and even converse with the diners. The Jews borrowed from the Greeks the custom of reclining on their left elbow at meals while eating from a low table. Their feet would be behind them, away from the table.

There were three characteristic acts of hospitality a Jewish host performed for his guests. Since they walked to their destination on dusty paths wearing sandals which consisted of a leather sole held to the foot by a leather strap, a servant would refresh them by washing their feet. The host would place his hand on the shoulder of the guest and give him the kiss of peace. He would also anoint the head of his guest with a drop of oil such as attar of rose. These were common courtesies and to fail to do them was rude.

As the Lord ate with Simon a notoriously sinful woman entered, stood weeping at Jesus' feet, and began washing his feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, kissing his feet, and anointing them with fragrant oil.

But this sinful woman was performing all the loving acts of hospitality Simon had coolly omitted. The water that bathed his feet was her own tears. The towel her own hair. She kissed not his cheek but his feet, not once but over and over again.

Two other Jewish customs make this scene even more vivid. It was considered lewd for an Israelite woman to loose her hair in public. Further, the women characteristically suspended an alabaster flask of fragrant oil from their necks.

What a scene! All in the room except the woman and the Master would have been shocked and embarrassed. But Jesus spoke not a word to or about the woman until Simon drew a conclusion about Him. Thinking a prophet would discern what kind of woman this was (cf. 2 Kings 5:20-27) and, just like a Pharisee, would therefore refuse to allow her to even touch his person, Simon concluded silently within himself that Jesus could not possibly be a prophet.

But, knowing what Simon was thinking, the Lord proved to Simon both that He was a prophet,

indeed, far more than a prophet, and at the same time taught Simon a great lesson about sin. Still ignoring the woman, He informed Simon, "I have something to say to you." Simon replied respectfully, "Teacher, say it."

The Master related a story about a creditor and two debtors. One debtor owed 500 denarii, the other 50. A denarius was a Roman coin that equaled one day's wages for a day laborer in Palestine (Matthew 20:1-2). So, one debtor owed close to two year's wages, the other about two month's. Neither debtor had the ability to repay his debt, and the creditor freely forgave them both. "Tell me," Jesus pointedly asked Simon, "which of them will love him more?"

Simon reticently replied, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." Christ congratulated him, "You have rightly judged."

Then the Master drove home the application to which Simon had in principle already consented. Simon had neglected even the semblance of courtesy, and courtesy is an expression of love (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). The sinful woman had gone far beyond mere symbolic gestures of courtesy. She had poured out humble, even personally humiliating gestures of deepest love.

Then the Lord made the most shocking statement of all. For the first time He spoke to the woman herself, and He pronounced the greatest words of love that can ever be spoken. Words that only the Lord could effectively speak. "Your sins are forgiven."

The other guests reacted in the normal Pharisaic manner. "Who is this who even forgives sins?" This they considered blasphemous, exercising a right that belongs exclusively to God (Mark 2:5-6; Luke 5:20-21).

But Jesus had already proven His right to do so. He had done what Simon had concluded He could not do, He had known what was in Simon's heart (cf. Psalm 139:1-2; John 2:23-25).

But the second and final word of Christ Jesus to the woman did not mention her love. "Then He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.'"

Why faith? Unlike Simon and his other guests, she did believe in Jesus. She believed He had the power to do what He had stated. He had the power to forgive her sins. He was and is the Son of God. Her faith in His ability and willingness to forgive her sins led her to love Him (cf. 1 John 4:10,19).

So, does the parable teach that to love the Lord more we should sin more? Do the most depraved sinners become the greatest lovers of God?

No, those who have the deepest sense of their own sinfulness, their own unworthiness of divine favor and love, have the greatest love of the Lord. If our attitude is like Simon Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8), our love for Him will be intense when we have the obedient faith to be forgiven. If we can honestly say with Paul, "Christ Jesus

came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15), we will love our Savior from the depths of our being.

That anonymous woman was notoriously sinful. But her faith and love gained for her the hope of eternal life. Unless he repented, respectable Simon's skepticism, self-righteousness, and lack of love kept him from entering the kingdom. Who pictures you and me?

Questions

I. Definition

denarii

II. Fact Questions

1. Relate the story of Christ eating with Simon the Pharisee.
2. Tell the story of the two debtors

III. Discussion Questions

1. Explain these Jewish customs which help explain this incident.
 - a. acts of hospitality a host provided his guests
 - b. manner of eating
 - c. what was expected of women
2. What did Pharisees think about themselves?
3. How did they act toward sinners?
4. How did the actions of the woman contrast with those of Simon?
5. How did Simon judge both himself and the woman?

IV. Application

1. How did the Lord prove his power to forgive sins?
2. Why was the woman forgiven?
3. Should we sin more so we can love God more?
4. What is the lesson of the parable?
5. Are you more like Simon or more like the woman?

Lesson 8

Divine and Human Forgiveness

Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Matthew 18:21-35

Introduction

The story of the unmerciful servant is truly remarkable. The Master had just finished teaching His disciples - and us - what to do if a brother sinned against them and how to do it (Matthew 18:15-17). Peter's quick tongue provided the setting for this incredible parable. He inquired, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" "Rabbi Jose ben Hanina said, 'He who begs forgiveness from his neighbour must not do so more than three times' (Barclay. 2:213).

There is probably little doubt that Peter felt his proposal to be remarkably generous. Rabbinical tradition said three times (based erroneously on Job 33.29-30 and Amos 1.3 - 2.6), but sometimes never made that. The Talmud tells the story of a Rabbi who would not forgive a very small slight to his dignity though asked by the offender thirteen years in succession and that on the Day of Atonement! (Earnhart. 82).

The apostle was so generous with his forgiveness that he doubled the Talmudic standard and added one for good measure! And seven was the perfect number (Psalm 12:6).

But Peter was trying to quantify mercy, to set a limit on how many times we should forgive. Christ replied, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (verse 22). The number represents infinity. Mercy cannot be quantified. We must always be ready to forgive.

The Parable

The Master illustrated the principle with the story of The Unmerciful Servant. The kingdom of heaven is like a king settling accounts with his servants. In the parable the servant of a king owed his lord ten thousand talents. We are not told why the royal servant owed his sovereign such a sum, but the amount is staggering. A talent equaled in value 6,000 denarii (Vine. 617). Ten thousand talents was sixty million denarii or sixty million days' wages for a day laborer (Matthew 20:1-2). "That was a sum 50 times larger than the annual taxes which Herod Antipas collected from Galilee and Perea (200 talents) and more than 10 times the annual revenue of the whole of Palestine (Josephus, *Antiquities*, xi, 4)" (Earnhart. 82). No servant could ever even begin to repay such an incredible debt.

Very justly the ruler reacted with indignation, commanding that the man and all his family be sold into slavery and that all his property be sold in order to pay the debt. "So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything'" (verse 26, **NASB**). Give me a break! Of course no servant could ever hope to repay such a debt regardless of the grace period granted. The debt was too enormous to ever be

payable.

But amazingly, the ruler had compassion on his miscreant servant and forgave him the entire debt. “Compassion” is the emotion of pity which one feels for those who suffer (cf. Luke 15:20; 1 Peter 3:8-9). The debtor asked for patience and received forgiveness. Patience would put off until later the settling of accounts. When forgiveness takes place the debt is released, and the creditor takes the loss. By forgiving the debt the king suffered a huge loss he could never regain.

Leaving the scene of unparalleled mercy the forgiven servant found a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii. That was not a trifling sum. It was the amount a common worker would earn for one hundred days’ labor. It was a serious but manageable debt that was a drop of rain in the ocean compared to the ten thousand talent debt.

But the servant learned nothing from the compassion and mercy of his king. He grabbed the other slave by the throat and demanded immediate payment. After all, honest people pay their debts! This is mine by right! I demand justice!

The other servant made precisely the same desperate request the first servant had made to the king. Only, he might really have repaid it if given leniency. The debt was large but payable. But, no, the first servant threw his poor fellow into debtors prison until the entire sum could be paid.

His fellow servants were saddened by the lack of mercy and informed the king. Now the merciful king was enraged by the lack of mercy in his servant. The king addressed him as “You wicked servant.” His refusal to forgive was wickedness.

The **English Standard Version** correctly translates verse 33, “And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” Whereas “compassion” is the feeling of pity for the one who suffers, mercy is the action that compassion prompts. It is the actual help of the helpless.

The unmerciful servant should have learned mercy from the example of his king (verse 33) and acted as the king had done toward him. He demanded justice from his fellow servant, so the king gave him justice. “And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him” (verse 34).

“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (Matthew 18:35, ESV).

Application

Of course, the king of the parable is God. The ten thousand talent debt illustrates our debt of

sin we owe him. We can never repay it. It is so enormous that it took the death of the Son of God to square the account (Romans 3:21-26). His great mercy was and is manifested in the forgiveness of our own enormous debt of sin (Titus 3:3-7).

The one hundred denarii debt pictures the sins others have committed against us. They are significant but are as nothing compared to our debt to God. Forgiveness manifests compassion and mercy (verses 27,33, **NASB, ESV**). If we appreciate as we should how much the Lord has forgiven us, we will be longsuffering and forgiving toward those who wrong us (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-13). Asking for and receiving forgiveness from God obligates us to forgive our fellow servants. We cannot live under grace with God while we live under law with others. "... how many Christians rise from the Lord's Supper to go out and live with merciless hardness in daily life?" (Earnhart. 85)

Citizens of the kingdom of heaven are and must be merciful (Matthew 5:7). Thus we must forgive those who sin against us in the same manner God forgives our sins against Him (Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Luke 11:4). God does not overlook our sins but calls us to repentance (Acts 2:36-38; 8:22-23). We should not overlook a brother's sins against us, for they are also sins against God and separate him from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). We should in love rebuke him, and if he repents forgive him, even if the sin is repeated seven times in one day! (Luke 17:3-4)

Conclusion

If my Lord could pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34) for those who crucified Him, if Stephen could cry, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:60) for those who stoned him, I think I can forgive those who sin against me. If God has forgiven my unpayable debt, I can forgive my brother's much smaller bill. "With our Father we want mercy but with others we want justice. We can't have it both ways, and when we try we are truly 'wicked'" Earnhart. 85).

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Questions

I. Definitions

1. compassion
2. mercy

II. Explain What Each Represents

1. the king
2. the unmerciful servant
3. 10,000 talent debt
3. second servant
4. 100 denarii debt

III. Lesson

1. What lesson had the Master just taught about forgiveness?
2. What was the Jewish attitude toward forgiveness?
3. Relate the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.
4. What facts in the story are incredible?

IV. Application

1. What qualities does forgiveness manifest?
2. Why should we be forgiving of those who sin against us?
3. In what manner should we forgive?

Lesson 9
Who Is My Neighbor?
The Good Samaritan
Luke 10:25-37

As the Master was teaching a lawyer put him to the test. Though he was putting Jesus to the test, his question was excellent and one repeatedly addressed to Christ Jesus. “And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Luke 10:25; cf. Matthew 19:16; Luke 18:18) What question could be more important? (Matthew 16:26)

The lawyers of the Jews were the interpreters and teachers of the Law of Moses (Mounce. 1218). As a class they were diligent in binding requirements on the people while finding legal loopholes to excuse themselves (Luke 11:45-46), and they accepted neither John the baptizer (Luke 7:29-30) nor Christ (Luke 11:52).

No doubt the Lord surprised the lawyer by telling him to answer his own question. “He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?’” (Luke 10:26). You’re the expert on the Law. Answer your question yourself.

In giving this answer, the Lord pointed him to the Scriptures as the source of the answer to the inquiry how to inherit eternal life. The Pharisees and lawyers may have thought Jesus was a “loose constructionist” on the Law, but He directed them past their traditions and hypocritical hair splitting to the Scriptures themselves as the source of eternal life (Matthew 5:17-20; John 5:39; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The lawyer knew very well the answer to his own inquiry. He quickly and correctly replied, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’” and ‘your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:26). It was common knowledge among the experts on the Law that these two passages, Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, summarized all the requirements of the divine Law (Mark 12:28-33), and the Lord confirmed that these two commandments were the greatest in the Law (Matthew 22:35-40) and the key to eternal life (Luke 10:28). The Ten Commandments are correctly grouped under these two headings: commandments one through four under “love the Lord your God” and five through ten under “love your neighbor.”

But there was a crucial difference between the Master and the lawyer on these commandments, indeed on the Scriptures as a whole. To the lawyers the Scriptures were the objects of arid debates over minute points and a means of justifying themselves before men. But to the Lord the Scriptures were the practical guide to a way of living. Jesus replied to the lawyer, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28). It is not enough to know; you must do (James 1:22).

But the proud lawyer wanted to save face before the crowd. “But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” (Luke 10:29) Jesus had, as always, turned the tables on the one testing him. So the embarrassed lawyer used a lawyer’s trick long before Bill Clinton. What’s the definition of “is”? If he could narrowly define “neighbor,” his lack of love for his neighbor wouldn’t be exposed. To a Jew, “neighbor” couldn’t possibly be wider than fellow Jews. The exclusivity of the Law erected a barrier of animosity between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:11-16).

So the Master simply related a story, a parable. “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead” (Luke 10:30). The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was infamously dangerous as a place where bands of brigands violently attacked and robbed travelers. The road twisted and turned sharply for most of the journey through a rugged, barren landscape and descended about 3500 feet in its approximately twenty mile course. A perfect hangout for thieves. In the fourth century Jerome called it the “Bloody Way.” In the nineteenth century the trip was still notoriously dangerous.

There happened along this road two very typical travelers.

Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side (Luke 10:31-32).

Jericho had become such a city of priests that perhaps 12,000 lived there at this time. The priests were the divinely authorized intercessors between the Lord and His people Israel (Exodus 28:29-30). They were the sons of Aaron the brother of Moses (Exodus 28:1), and their job was to offer the animal sacrifices for the people, burn incense to the Lord, bless the people in the name of the Lord (1 Chronicles 23:13), teach the people the Law (Leviticus 10:8-11), and act as judges (Deuteronomy 21:5). They were divided into twenty-four courses by David (1 Chronicles 24:1-19), and each course ministered a week at a time in the Temple. Thus, there would be priests coming and going between Jericho and Jerusalem each week.

Levites, descendants of Levi but not of Aaron, assisted the priests in the Temple service (1 Chronicles 23:27-29).

They had the same excuses a traveler today would have not to stop on the road to assist an injury victim. The untended victim may have been bloody and filthy. They were in a hurry, and this could have been a set up to lure unwary travelers to be attacked by robbers themselves.

But in addition, if on their way to Jerusalem, they were going to minister to the Lord and did not need to delay or risk defilement. An Israelite who touched a dead body would be unclean seven days (Numbers 19:11). A priest was not to defile himself by touching any dead body except his closest kin (Leviticus 21:1-4). The priest and the Levite may not have known

whether the victim was dead or alive, and though he was living, he could have died while either of them ministered to him. If so, the one who touched him would not be able to minister in the temple for a week. If either was on his way to Jerusalem to serve, he would lose one of the two weeks out of the year he had the great honor of ministering to the Lord before the people in the house of God.

At least the Levite came closer to inspect the unfortunate traveler, but still he decided not to help. Both religious leaders were repelled by the sickening sight of the bloody victim rather than being attracted to show mercy. Each passed by on the other side.

They had forgotten a very important principle. The Lord desires mercy more than sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). Outward manifestations of piety cannot substitute for loving God and loving my neighbor. Not even being on time for worship is an acceptable excuse to refuse to assist the needy.

But there was one who understood what it meant to love his neighbor.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.

So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you' (Luke 10:33-35).

Samaritans were descended from the mixture of pagans and poor Israelites left in Northern Israel after the Assyrians conquered the Northern kingdom, Israel, and carried them captive. They maintained a mixture of corrupt worship of the Lord with paganism (2 Kings 17:6, 24-41). When the Jews returned from Babylon, the Samaritans wanted to assist in the rebuilding of Jerusalem, but Nehemiah flatly rejected their help, and they became inveterate enemies of the Jews. The Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, but John Hyrcanus, the Jewish leader, destroyed it in 128 B.C. Samaria lay between the Jewish regions of Judea on the South, where the Temple stood on Mount Moriah, and Galilee to the North. Jews journeying from Galilee to Judea would characteristically cross the Jordan River below the Sea of Galilee into Perea on the eastern side of the Jordan and journey south to cross the Jordan again at Jericho to go up to Jerusalem. The only reason for this was to avoid contact with the Samaritans, "for Jews have no dealing with Samaritans" (John 4:9). To a Jew, to call someone a "Samaritan" was to heap a gross insult upon him (John 8:48). To comprehend what Jews thought of Samaritans, think today of Jews and Palestinians.

The Master employed a Samaritan to personify love for one's neighbor, even though the Samaritans had rejected Him shortly before this (Luke 9:51-53). There was place for neither prejudice nor grudge in the heart of Jesus, and there must not be in ours.

The venerated leaders of Jewish religious life refused to minister to the poor victim of violent robbery. But a despised Samaritan came to his aid. He gave of his time, his ability, and his money. He poured wine, an astringent, on the wounds, as well as oil to soothe the pain (cf. Isaiah 1:6), carried him on his beast to an inn, a little wayside shelter, paid the keeper of the inn to care for him, and promised to pay whatever further expenses were incurred on his return.

Then the Master forced the proud lawyer to answer his own question. “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” (Verse 36) The lawyer couldn’t bring himself to say, “The Samaritan.” But he had to admit it was “he who had showed mercy to him.”

Conclusion

Rather than being theoretical, the fodder for hair splitting discussions by theological lawyers, the doctrine of Christ points to a way of life that springs from faith in and love for Him. That life is one of deeds of mercy springing from a heart of compassion. That mercy knows no bounds. It is not just to my family, friends, and brethren. It is to my enemy (Matthew 5:43-48). It is to those who look different. It is to those who speak a language I cannot comprehend, have customs I find strange, and hold to beliefs I abhor. It is to the completely undeserving, just as I receive freely the love, grace, and mercy of God though I can never deserve them. It is to take to them the saving message of the gospel (Matthew 9:36-38) as well as ministering to their physical needs (Romans 12:20).

The question is not, “Who is my neighbor?” The question is, To whom will I be a neighbor?

Questions

I. Terms to Define

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. lawyer | 5. Samaritan |
| 2. neighbor | 6. compassion |
| 3. priest | 7. mercy |
| 4. Levite | |

II. Discussion Questions

1. What question did a lawyer ask Jesus?
2. How did Christ reply?

3. How did the lawyer then respond?
4. How did the Master reply to this question?
5. Relate the parable of the Good Samaritan.
6. How did Christ apply the parable?

III. Thought Questions

1. Is the Bible meant to be the subject of theoretical debates or a practical guide to living?
2. To whom should I be a neighbor?
3. How can I do this?

Lesson 10 Prayer

Friend at Midnight Luke 11:5-13

Late in the earthly ministry of Christ, when He had finished a prayer, His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray as John had taught His disciples (Luke 11:1). The Master had taught them how to pray before in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9-13). But that was a very brief prayer, and Jesus sometimes continued a long time in prayer (cf. Luke 6:12). It was evident prayer was very important to Jesus (cf. Mark 1:35; Luke 3:21; 5:16; 9:18,29), even as it must be for us (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Obviously the disciples felt they needed to learn more about prayer.

But the Master may have disappointed His disciples, for, rather than giving them something new to pray, He virtually repeated what He had taught them in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9-13). Except this version (Luke 11:2-4) was even shorter than the brief prayer He had already given them.

Christ was not teaching them to memorize a prayer and repeat it by rote, as audiences do with Matthew 6:9-13, for He condemned “vain repetitions,” the mindless quoting of the same formula over and over again (Matthew 6:7). Rather, He taught the basic composition of acceptable prayer. Our prayers are addressed to God as our Father, a blessed closeness unknown before Christ Jesus brought about our adoption as children of God because of our relationship to Him, the unique Son of God (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-6). We praise Him and set His name apart as holy (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). We pray for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2). Where human hearts submit to the will of God, there the kingdom of heaven is within their hearts (Luke 17:20-21). His will is to reign in the hearts of all people everywhere as they are saved by coming to the knowledge of the truth of the gospel (1 Timothy 2:3-4). As trusting children we ask him to supply our material necessities (Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3). We acknowledge our sins and ask Him to forgive us, as we forgive those who wrong us (Matthew 6:12-13; Luke 11:4), while at the same time we petition Him to deliver us from temptation and from Satan the tempter (Ibid), which He has promised to do (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The Master did add some further teaching about prayer. He spoke a parable about a man who had unexpected visitors who arrived late at night. In this humorous story the Master places us in the position of a man who, out of necessity, is very rude to his neighbor.

The houses of poor people in Palestine were one room earthen dwellings with dirt floors, covered in the front part with straw on which the animals lay, and having a raised platform in back where the whole family slept. Waking the owner of the house late at night meant awakening everyone and everything in the house! But because hospitality was (and is) such a

serious responsibility (Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1-3; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9), a Jewish man, if no food were in his own house for his unexpected guest, would risk seriously offending his neighbor by loudly, insistently asking for three loaves of bread - one for his guest, one for himself, and one spare - even though the entire household of his neighbor was asleep! The angry neighbor would give the needed bread, not out of friendship, but to get rid of the pest at his door!

Christ used an interesting word to describe what would cause the home owner to give the bread. The word rendered “importunity” in the **King James Version** and **American Standard Version**, “persistence” in the **New King James Version** and **New American Standard Bible**, and “impudence” in the **English Standard Version** in Luke 11:8 literally means “shamelessness” (Arndt & Gingrich. 54; Mounce. 1081). The Master pictures us as, because of our need, completely forgetting propriety and shamelessly, persistently standing at our neighbor’s door begging for bread in the middle of the night though his entire house is asleep!

The Master’s own application of His parable follows in verses 9-13. The passage is virtually a repetition of what He had already taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:7-11). He promises the Father will grant our requests if we keep on asking, seeking, and knocking (Matthew 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-10). What parent would be so cruel as to give something harmful or useless to his child who was simply asking for something to eat? (Matthew 7:9-10; Luke 11:11-12). God is good in the absolute, while none of us are (Luke 18:18-19). If we then give our children good things when they request it, will not our loving Father answer our prayers by granting us what we need and request? (Matthew 7:11)

All spiritual good comes to us by the Holy Spirit, who revealed the Lord’s will to us through His apostles and prophets (Romans 8:9; John 16:13-15; Ephesians 3:1-7). All the spiritual blessings from the Holy Spirit come to the children of God in answer to prayer (Luke 11:13; cf. Matthew 7:11).

What is the lesson? “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). If you believe that what you request is in accordance with the will of God, and He doesn’t at first grant your prayer, keep on praying. Be shamelessly persistent in making your requests to Him. He is your absolutely good, loving, faithful Father. He will give you what is best.

The Persistent Widow Luke 18:1-8

Jesus later taught another parable about a persistent widow and an unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). There is absolutely no doubt about the application of this parable, for the writer introduces it by explaining, “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (verse 1, **King James Version**). The **International Standard Version**, a modern, essentially literal translation, renders the verse, “Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray all the time and never give up.” The word translated “faint” in

the **King James Version** is rendered “lose heart” by the **New King James Version**, **New American Standard Bible**, and **English Standard Version**. The same word is otherwise translated “grow weary” (2 Thessalonians 3:13). Arndt and Gingrich state it can mean “*despair*” (214). Thus, the lesson of the parable is the same as that of the friend at midnight - persistence in prayer.

The Master told about a widow coming to an unjust judge demanding justice against her adversary. To fully comprehend the situation Jesus described, we must understand the plight of widows at that time and the teaching of the Old Testament about them. Widows were obviously relatively helpless in that they had lost the husband upon whom they depended for support. In ancient times there usually was no honorable occupation a woman could pursue other than home making. According to the Law people were to see that those unable to procure justice for themselves, including widows, received just treatment (Deuteronomy 24:17-18). Those who perverted justice due the widow were cursed (27:19). It would be easy to oppress them, as they had none to plead their cause and could not bribe a corrupt judge into rendering justice for them, so Israel was specifically commanded not to oppress them (Exodus 22:21-22). Isaiah thus condemned the apostate Northern Kingdom:

Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, Who write misfortune, Which they have prescribed To rob the needy of justice, And to take what is right from the poor of My people, That widows may be their prey, And that they may rob the fatherless (Isaiah 10:1-2; cf. 1:21-23).

He admonished them to “Plead for the widow” (1:16-17). Jeremiah warned backsliding Judah to stop oppressing “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow” (Jeremiah 7:5-7). Zechariah informed the Jews of the Restoration that God had sent their fathers into captivity because they refused to heed the warning to “not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor” (Zechariah 7:8-14). The Lord scathingly denounced the Jewish rulers of His day:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation (Matthew 23:14).

But the judge of the parable “did not fear God nor regard man” (verse 2). No reverence for the Lord led him to do right, and he didn’t care what people thought about him. He saw no reason to give a just judgment for some poor widow who had no influence and couldn’t bribe him.

But she was more than his match. She found the one thing he was concerned about, his own ease, and attacked it. She kept coming back, and coming back, and coming back until at last, in exasperation, “he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out’” (verses 4-5, **NASB**). She was about to drive him crazy, and he finally did what was right just to get her to leave him alone!

What’s the point? “And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?” (Verse 7, **ESV**). No our heavenly Father is not unjust. He is

preeminently just. If a rascal of a judge will finally do right if the injured party keeps on pleading, don't you think the righteous Judge of all will do right if we ask?

By the way, the specific application of this passage had real meaning to the Lord's disciples. They would go through terrible suffering (Luke 21:12), and they would cry out to God for justice (Revelation 6:9-11). If we are His disciples, we too will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12), and He will speedily hear our pleas for justice.

But the last verse of the passage contains a question that is particularly significant. "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Verse 8). Why faith? I thought the subject was persistence in prayer? Because prayer is the ultimate expression of our faith in God. How do we know the Father hears and answers our prayers? A rank infidel might scoffingly counter any "testimonials" about answered prayers by truthfully claiming, "I have better health and more money than you. Why should I believe God answers prayer?" The only proof I have that God hears and answers the prayers of His people is His promise.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him (1 John 5:14-15).

If we firmly believe His promise, we will pray persistently. Prayer is the ultimate expression of our faith in God. "Unyielding prayer rises from an unyielding faith" (Earnhart. 103). Pray always and never give up.

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Questions

I. Terms to Define

1. importunity
2. faint
3. avenge

II. Discussion Questions

1. Why did the disciples think they needed to know how to pray?
2. Relate the parable of The Friend at Midnight.
3. How did the Lord apply this parable?

4. Tell the story of The Persistent Widow.
5. What did the Law teach about the treatment of widows?
6. Why did the judge refuse at first to grant the widow's plea?

III. Thought Questions

1. Should we memorize a prayer to say repeatedly?
2. What is the basic composition of an acceptable prayer?
3. Why should we address God as "Father"?
4. Should we pray for the kingdom to come?
5. What lesson about prayer does each of these parables teach?
6. How do we receive the Holy Spirit in answer to prayer?
7. What is the relationship between prayer and faith?

Lesson 11 Wealth

The Rich Fool Luke 12:13-21

Years ago a young man asked me, “Keith, how much is your dad worth?” What do you mean how much is he worth? How much was he worth to me? How could I put a monetary value on that? How much is his soul worth? More than the entire world (Matthew 16:26). How much were his worldly possessions worth? Not much.

And isn’t that how most people determine a person’s value? If they are wealthy, they feel important. If an acquaintance has a large income, they want to be his friend and will boast about knowing him. How many people brag about knowing the school janitor?

But the Master teaches that to measure life or personal worth by a monetary standard is to be guilty of covetousness. “And He said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses’” (Luke 12:15). Life is more than things.

The church is to withdraw from covetous people (1 Corinthians 5:9-11), and they will be eternally lost unless they repent (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:5). God declares that a covetous man is a fool! (Luke 12:20) How might we be guilty of covetousness?

The Greek lexicon defines it as “*greediness, insatiableness, avarice*” (673). The **New American Standard Bible** translates it as “greed.” Covetousness is a form of idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5). Thus, it is putting material things ahead of God. The apostle Paul admonishes us to be content with the necessities of life and warns us against the desire to be rich, the love of money, and greediness (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

There is a popular belief that covetousness is limited to such desire for wealth that we would commit crimes or act dishonestly to obtain what we crave. But the rich farmer Jesus used to illustrate covetousness obtained his wealth honestly (Luke 12:15). For all we know he was simply a sterling example of hard work and prudent management. Now one who would cheat, steal, lie, or swindle to become wealthy is certainly covetous, for he puts wealth ahead of God, but we may be perfectly honest and legal in obtaining things we crave and still be covetous.

Jesus’ warning about covetousness was precipitated by the plea of a man from the audience as the Master was teaching vital spiritual truth pertaining to eternal salvation. “Then one from the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me’” (Luke 12:13). Under Jewish law the eldest son received a double portion of his father’s inheritance in return for the obligation of caring for the family (cf. Deuteronomy 21:15-17; Genesis 48:3-5;

50:15-21). But the younger brothers also had an inheritance coming (Luke 15:11-12). The man appeared to be a younger brother, and he implicitly accused his elder brother of misusing the power of his birthright to refuse to divide the inheritance.

Again, for all we know, the man's claim was just, and he was a victim of injustice. But that wasn't the Lord's concern! Christ was teaching people how to inherit eternal life, and all this man got out of it was the idea, Here's an influential man who can persuade my brother to give me the property I have coming. In the midst of a marvelous lesson about heavenly values, his concern was earthly riches. He was covetous.

The Lord emphatically refused to be drawn into this family squabble over finances. He rhetorically asked, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" (Luke 12:14) The **King James Version** renders the word "arbitrator" by its literal meaning of "divider." Our counterpart would be the executor of the estate. He wanted Christ to act as a magistrate to arbitrate a legal and financial issue. But that totally corrupts the nature of the Lord's kingdom. He declared to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). Paul observed, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). The kingdom of Christ is a heavenly rule involving spiritual blessings. He would not interfere in civil affairs but was concerned with eternal, spiritual issues.

Rather, He grasped the opportunity to teach a great lesson. "And He said to them, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses'" (Luke 12:15). A popular bumper sticker once claimed, "The one who dies with the most toys wins!" Many Americans live that way. It reminds me of the fellow watching a retired couple drive into town in a large motor home towing a car and a boat and carrying two bicycles. He observed to his friend, "I don't reckon they plan to walk much." There's more to life than the accumulation of things. Wealth doesn't determine a man's worth. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26)

The Master told a short parable that vividly pictures the problem of greed.

Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'

So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.

'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."'

But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' (Luke 12:16-20)

To see the point of the parable, let's inquire, Why did the Lord call the rich farmer a fool?

Well it certainly wasn't because he was a bad farmer or businessman, nor was it because he failed to save for the future. He produced enough crops in one year to more than meet his needs for many years, and he planned to save as much as possible for future, earthly needs.

But all he saw were his own worldly needs and desires. The only one he thought of was himself. Six times in verses seventeen through nineteen he uses the pronoun "I"; five times he says "my." He never thought of God or his poor brothers and neighbors. He thought his wealth belonged to him and was entirely for him. He was completely **selfish**.

He **trusted wealth** to bring him many years of happiness and security (verse 19).

He **forgot true joy**. He thought his stomach was his soul! "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry'" (verse 19). He thought a life of ease with plenty of good food was the key to joy.

He **forgot God**. Not once did he thank God for providing the sunshine, rain, and productive soil to provide his wealth (cf. Acts 14:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). He did not determine to return to the service of the Lord any of the bountiful harvest the Lord had provided him (2 Corinthians 9:6). There was no place in his life for his Creator and Sustainer.

And he **forgot death**. He looked forward to "many years" of earthly pleasure (verse 19). God declared, "This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" (Verse 20) We plan for years of pleasant retirement. But who knows if death will come before tomorrow? Then who will own that amassed wealth that could have been used to spread the gospel and help the poor? "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7).

The rich farmer was a fool because he was covetous.

What is the lesson? "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21). It's not wrong to save (2 Corinthians 12:14). It took two things to make the rich farmer a fool, and it takes two things for us. It's not just laying up treasure here. It's that plus the failure to be rich toward God. "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

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Questions

A. Terms to Define

1. covetousness
2. arbitrator

B. Discussion Questions

1. Is life all about accumulating things I like?
2. What should the church do with covetous people?
3. Will those who are covetous be saved?
4. Are those who commit dishonest or illegal acts to obtain wealth the only covetous people?
5. How did the man who asked Jesus to be an arbiter demonstrate covetousness?
6. Why wouldn't Jesus help him in his dispute with his brother?
7. Did God call the rich farmer a fool because of his lack of business ability or poor farming skills?

C. Thought Questions

1. How should we determine what a person is worth?
2. What is the most important thing in your life?
3. How can I determine if I am covetous?
4. Is it wrong to save for future needs?
5. What does it take to make a person covetous?
6. Can a poor person be covetous?
7. What does this lesson show about the nature of the kingdom of Christ?
8. Why was the rich farmer a fool?
9. What is the lesson?

D. Personal Application

1. Do I measure the worth of myself or others by the possession of material things?
2. Now ask yourself, Am I covetous?

Lesson 12 Bearing Fruit

The Barren Fig Tree Luke 13:1-9

As Jesus was teaching through Galilee for the last time, some told him about a group of Galileans who had gone to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and had been attacked by the Roman troops commanded by Pontius Pilate, causing their own blood to be mingled at the base of the altar with the blood of the animal sacrifices they had brought (verse 1; cf. Leviticus 4:27-30). The reply of the Lord indicates these people must have thought these tragic victims were worse sinners than others for having suffered so awful a fate (verse 2). They had the same conviction as Job's friends (Job 4:7). In fact, even the Lord's disciples so believed (John 9:1-2).

All suffering and death is the result of sin (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:16-24), but that doesn't mean each individual disease, accident, calamity, or death is caused by the sin of the one who suffers. Since sin entered the world, suffering and death are the common lot of the descendants of Adam and Eve (1 Corinthians 15:22). Job suffered terribly, though he was "a blameless and upright man, one who" feared God and shunned evil (Job chapters 1 - 2). Some suffer because of their own sins, but some suffer for righteousness' sake (Luke 23:39-41; Romans 1:26-27; John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12). This sin cursed world is not fair, but the scales will be balanced after death (Luke 16:25; Revelation 6:9-11; 20:12-15; 21:1-5).

Thus, Christ responded, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:2-3). The Lord didn't deny they were sinners. He just denied that their fate in this world proved they were any worse sinners than others.

Christ added to their example that of the eighteen who were killed by the collapse of a tower at the pool of Siloam (Luke 13:4). Again, their tragedy didn't prove they were any worse than the rest of the citizens of Jerusalem.

But while a tragic death cannot be used to pass judgment on the victim, it should be used as a warning of coming judgment. "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,5). We have all sinned, and we all fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). In all justice God could call the drama of human civilization to a halt, close the curtain, and cast us all into the lake of fire. Every untimely death is a dramatic warning to repent. We too face death. We too must meet our Maker. There's no place for smug, self-righteousness; there's only the call to repent or perish.

The Master taught a parable to illustrate the point (Luke 13:6-9). A landowner had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, a place where the soil was cultivated and suitable for producing figs. This was the third year the owner had come seeking fruit and had found none. Surely the tree had been given sufficient time to produce fruit. He commanded the keeper of the vineyard to

cut it down, for it was using up the nutrients and moisture of the soil unprofitably. The keeper asked for another year to fertilize the tree and to see if it would produce. If not, it would be cut down.

The parable teaches both the longsuffering and the justice of God.

Christians are the recipients of “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). We have been forgiven of our sins (Ephesians 1:7) and have the hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2). We have peace and joy, along with the blessed privilege of prayer and the watchful care of our heavenly Father (Philippans 4:4,6-7; 1 Peter 3:12).

But we can’t just take up space in the kingdom of God, soaking up the rich, spiritual blessings, while producing no fruit. The Lord expects us to produce fruit for Him (John 15:8). We must produce good fruit (Matthew 12:33-35), the fruit of righteousness (Philippians 1:9-11), the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” He expects us to seek to produce the fruit of saved souls (Romans 1:13).

If we have failed to produce the fruit He requires, the Lord is “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). But don’t presume on the longsuffering of God.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? (2 Peter 3:10-12)

He may say, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you”! (Luke 12:20)



What should I learn from tragedies that befall others? I should learn not to judge the victims on the basis of the tragedies they suffer but to see the goodness and severity of God illustrated (Romans 11:22). I should see the goodness of God manifested in His longsuffering, because I’ve been given another day to bear fruit. But I should see the severity of God’s judgment if I fail to take advantage of this new opportunity He has graciously afforded me. Are you bearing fruit?

Questions

I. Discussion Questions

1. What tragedy was told to Jesus?
2. What did he conclude about those who were killed?
3. What other example of calamity did the Master relate?
4. What lesson did He draw from it?
5. Relate the parable of the Barren Fig Tree.

II. Thought Questions

1. If people suffer an awful calamity, does that prove they are great sinners?
2. Why do people suffer and die?
3. What do Christians receive from the Lord?
4. What does He expect from us in return?
5. What should we learn from tragedies that befall others?

Lesson 13 Humility

The Best Place Luke 14:7-11

As the Lord was eating in the home of a ruler who was a Pharisee (Luke 14:1-6), He observed them, noticing the maneuvering each employed to obtain the petty honor of a better place at the table (verse 7).

In Jesus' day the Jews had accepted the Greek custom for placing dinner guests. Three low tables were arranged in the shape of a "U" with a flat bottom. The open end allowed the servants to easily serve all the guests. The diners reclined on couches with their feet outward, away from the table, and each leaned against the guest behind him. The guest of honor, usually a rabbi, was seated at the center of the middle table. The closer a guest sat to him, the more honored he was. The Pharisees, in their vain pride, competed for the best places (Matthew 23:6; Luke 14:7).

Luke observes that the Master "told a parable" to them (verse 7). What follows is not a story with a spiritual application as in other parables. Rather, the Lord simply gave some practical advice concerning attending wedding feasts capped by a proverbial expression He used repeatedly. But the Lord wasn't so much interested in where each of them reclined at a feast as He was in the spiritual principle this illustrated. Thus, His brief message was a parable in the sense of "an example by which a doctrine or precept is illustrated" (Thayer. 479).

Avoiding directly criticizing their efforts to occupy the best places at this feast, He advised them how to seek a place at a wedding feast (verses 8-10). If you take the most honorable place, you might be humiliated when a more important guest arrives, and the host directs you before all the guests to take a less honorable place. Since all the more important places would already be taken, you would suffer the embarrassment of having to take the lowest place as all watched your "come uppance" in amusement. Conversely, if you take the least honorable place, you will be honored before those assembled when the host calls you "friend" and asks you to take a more important place.

The Master interpreted His advice for the guests at this feast and for us. In doing so He stated one of the great principles of the heavenly kingdom. "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (verse 11; cf. Matthew 23:12; Luke 18:14). It summarizes proverbial advice Solomon gave (Proverbs 25:6-7).

After James and John had sought the distinction of sitting on the Lord's right and left hands in His kingdom, causing the other apostles to react indignantly (Matthew 20:20-24; Mark 10:35-41), the Master taught the principle of greatness in His kingdom.

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.'

'Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

*'And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave--
'just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give
His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28; cf. Mark 10:42-45).*

Greatness in the kingdom of Christ is the exact opposite of that in the nations of men. It is measured by humble service rather than honorable position.

Jesus Christ Himself is the paramount example. After His last Passover, the Master removed His robes, wrapped Himself with a towel, washed the disciples' feet, and directed them to follow His example (John 13:3-5,12-17). The Master portrayed in this act of humble service the greatest of all deeds of humility - His own renouncement of the glory and honor of divinity to walk upon earth as a man, a servant, a humble, obedient servant, and to suffer in service for us the greatest humiliation, the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

We express the mind of humility in the same way Christ Jesus did. When we promote peace and unity among our brothers and sisters in Christ, looking out for the good of others, not our own selfish interests, we are demonstrating the mind of Christ, the mind of humility (Philippians 2:1-4). We must be as Paul, to whom the prospect of a violent death as the result of seeking to instill faith in others brought joy (Philippians 2:17-18). We should imitate Timothy, who sincerely was interested in the welfare of his brothers and sisters (Philippians 2:19-24). We should follow Epaproditus, who gladly served Paul though he was so sick he almost died and was sorrowful only at the heartache his suffering would cause his brothers and sisters in Christ (Philippians 2:25-30).

But we as Christ Jesus also show our humility by willing obedience to the Father (Philippians 2:12-13). We must do this without complaining and arguing (Philippians 2:14). Both of these sins of the tongue are the result of selfishness rather than humility. Complaining demonstrates a lack of gratitude toward God, and arguing shows a lack of love for others. By humble obedience we become "lights in the world," showing Christ to others in word and life (Philippians 2:15-16).

Because Jesus so humbled Himself:

*Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is
above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of
those on earth, and of those under the earth,
and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of
God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).*

If we will likewise humble ourselves to obey and serve, God will exalt us with His Son.

To willingly obey God regardless of the cost and to gladly serve others no matter how demeaning the service with no regard for self is real humility. It is the mind of Christ. If we are to be exalted with Him, we must humble ourselves as He did (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:5-7). "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

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Questions

I. Term to Define
parable

II. Discussion Questions

1. What was the setting for this parable?
2. What advice did the Master give in Luke 14:7-10?
3. What principle did this illustrate?
4. How did James and John seek to be great?
5. What did Jesus do to illustrate His humility and ours?
6. How does Paul demonstrate humility?
7. What about Timothy?
8. What of Epaphroditus?

III. Thought Questions

1. How can we be great in the kingdom of Christ?
2. How important is humility?
3. What is the greatest act of humility?
4. How do we demonstrate humility?
5. How does God reward humility?
6. How does He punish pride?

Lesson 14

The Divine Invitation

The Great Supper

Luke 14:15-24

Background

Among the Jews of the first century, “It was a common belief, that in the day of Messiah redeemed Israel would be gathered to a great feast, together with the patriarchs and heroes of the Jewish faith” (Edersheim. 1:549). “Gentiles could have no part in that feast” (Edersheim. 1:550). This belief sets the background for a figure of speech the Master commonly employed.

The lessons the Master taught in Luke chapter fourteen are in the context of a Sabbath meal He ate in the house of a ruler from among the Pharisees (verse 1). The other guests were watching Jesus closely to see if He would violate their traditions concerning the Sabbath (cf. Mark 3:2; Luke 6:7). So Jesus healed “a man whose body was swollen with fluid” (verse 2, **ISV**) and challenged them to find fault with His work (verses 3-5). They were unable to answer His challenge but were seemingly unimpressed by the miracle (verse 6).

But as they had watched Christ, He was likewise watching them as they jockeyed for the more prestigious places at the table of this important host (verse 7). So He taught them a great lesson on humility (verses 8-11). Then He proceeded to teach His host proper hospitality as well (verses 12-14).

One of the guests, perhaps simply wanting to relieve the tension, stated the common Jewish sentiment, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (Verse 15). So the Master built upon this the “Parable of the Great Supper” (verses 16-24).

The Parable

A man made a great feast and invited many guests. As was customary among the wealthy at least as far back as Queen Esther (Esther 5:8; 6:14), the invitations went out early enough for the guests to clear their calendars for this important social event, and then the master of the house sent a servant at the proper time to inform his invited guests that supper was ready. Incredibly, those who were invited acted with one accord by insulting their host with excuses why they wouldn’t come. One had to go look at land he had bought, still another had to try out five pairs of oxen he had purchased, and yet another bluntly refused saying, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come” (Verses 19-20; cf. Deuteronomy 24:5). It really doesn’t matter whether the three rejections were for serious or flimsy reasons; they had all shown contempt for the host by refusing to come at the appointed time, and they had shown that their personal affairs were more important to them than was the host of the supper.

But this was a great supper, and the master determined it would have its guests. So, again incredibly to this elite audience, Jesus announced that the master then commanded his servant

to go to the wide streets and narrow lanes of the city and “bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind” (verse 21).

But the servant reported to his master that he had done as commanded, and there was still room for more guests. So the master commanded his servant to go out to the highways and the farms enclosed by hedges, go everywhere, and compel them to come in. He was determined his house would be filled for his great supper, but none of those who had spurned His invitation would eat.

Meaning

Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would prepare a great feast “for all peoples” (Isaiah 25:6). The Jews had made the feast literal in their traditions but had overlooked the “for all peoples” part. The feast of the kingdom of Christ is spiritual (Romans 14:17), “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3), but it is indeed “for all peoples.”

The Lord had invited the Jews to this feast through His prophets for hundreds of years (cf. Isaiah 55:1-3), and now He had sent John the Baptist and His Son Christ Jesus to announce the time had come and the feast of the kingdom was arriving (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17; Mark 1:14-15), but, the Jewish leaders rejected both the messengers and the message (Luke 7:29-30, 33-34; John 7:46-49). Regardless of the platitude, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God,” when the king came, the Jewish religious leaders, who considered themselves “sons of the kingdom” (Matthew 8:12), rejected Him.

So the Lord invited into His kingdom the common people, the riff raff whom the Pharisees viewed with contempt, and they would enter the kingdom (cf. Matthew 21:31; Mark 12:37).

But still there was room for many more in the Lord’s kingdom, so He sent the invitation to the Gentiles, even to all the people of every nation, to come to the great spiritual supper of the Lord (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). Believing Gentiles will sit down at feast with the patriarchs in the kingdom, but unbelieving Jews will be excluded (Matthew 8:11-12).

Application

The time is now, and the feast of the kingdom is prepared (2 Corinthians 6:2). “All things are ready; come to the feast!” Many whose family are Christians have heard the great invitation their entire lives. But you may allow finances, business, or family considerations to stand in the way. Regardless of whether your excuse for not accepting the invitation is serious or flimsy, real or insincere, it means your personal, worldly considerations are more important to you than the Lord and the rich, spiritual blessings in Him. There is no valid reason to refuse to come to the Great Supper.

The Lord sends His invitation to all. The religious leaders of the world will by and large reject it, and so will most of the wealthy and highly educated (1 Corinthians 1:26). Today as in every generation most who come to Christ are “the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind,” the riff raff of the world who are precious to God.

As others have commented, God in His infinite love and grace can no more accept emptiness in His kingdom than nature can endure a vacuum. The invitation is to all, to those in “the streets and the lanes” as well as the ones in “the highways and the hedges,” to Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, male and female, all of every nation, tongue, and race. There is still room in the kingdom.

The Lord through the gospel compels all to come in to His great supper. That which compels is not force, whether physical force of armed might or spiritual force of direct operation of the Spirit, but the moral persuasion of the Savior’s invitation. “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

But none who reject this gracious invitation will taste the sumptuous supper of the Lord.

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Questions

I. Definition
compel

II. Discussion Questions

1. How did the Jews think the kingdom of Messiah would begin?
2. What is the background of the Parable of the Great Supper?
3. Relate the parable.
4. What do each of these represent in the parable?
 - a. the man who gave the supper
 - b. those first invited
 - c. the ones in the “streets and lanes:
 - d. those in the “highways and hedges”

III. Thought Questions

1. Does the parable teach that the kingdom of Christ pertains to eating and drinking?
2. Is there any acceptable reason for refusing the Lord’s invitation?

3. Whom does the Lord invite?
4. What class of people usually accept?
5. How does the Lord compel people to come?
6. What is the result of refusing the invitation?

The Marriage of the King's Son Matthew 22:1-14

Differences in the Parables

This parable is strikingly similar to the Parable of the Great Supper, but there are important differences. Jesus taught the former earlier in His ministry when he was attending a supper given by an important Pharisee and there might still be hope for the Jewish nation. He spoke this one during the week before His crucifixion when He had already pronounced judgment on the Pharisees and the nation (Matthew 21:28-44) and in answer to the angry response of the chief priests and Pharisees over this condemnation (Matthew 21:45-46). In the Great Supper parable those invited were rude toward and contemptuous of a wealthy man and his feast, whereas in the Marriage of the King's Son they were contemptuous of and rebellious toward the king and his son. In the Great Supper they were shut out of the feast; in this they and their city were destroyed.

The Parable

A king gave a wedding feast for his son and invited guests, but they were not willing to come. So he sent out other slaves informing them the feast was ready and ordering them to come. But some paid no attention to the command and went about their usual occupation, while others reacted with outright hostility and abused and killed the king's messengers. Their rebellious, contemptuous refusal of the king's invitation was doubly inexcusable, for he was not summoning them to some onerous task such as military service but honoring them by inviting them to the wedding feast of the prince. So the king was infuriated and sent his army to destroy both those who abused his messengers and their city.

Then, since the feast was prepared and his intended guests were unworthy of it, the king sent his slaves into the highways to bring in anyone, good or bad. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king made his entrance, he saw a guest who was not wearing a wedding garment. The king asked him why he was not appropriately dressed, and when the guest couldn't give a reason, the king ordered him to be bound and thrown into the darkness outside the hall, a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Then the Master Himself drew the conclusion - “For many are called, but few are chosen” (verse 14).

Meaning

God is the Great King whose “name is to be feared among the nations” (Malachi 1:14) and Jerusalem was His city (Psalm 48:1-3). His Son Christ Jesus was about to be wed, His kingdom was compared to a wedding feast, and the Jews as a nation were the invited guests. God sent His prophets to invite them to His kingdom, but they were not interested. He also sent John the Baptist, as well as apostles, prophets, and evangelists, telling them the kingdom had arrived, but they abused and killed the messengers. Thus God destroyed both their nation and their city.

Because the Jewish nation rejected and killed the messengers of God, He opened the door to the Gentiles to come in. The invitation was not just to the morally upright but to all mankind, both good and bad. But those who fail to put on the wedding garment of righteousness will be cast out of the heavenly kingdom. Though the gospel calls all, only those who respond in obedient faith and turn to righteousness are chosen by the Lord for the eternal, heavenly kingdom.

Application

The gospel invitation is the summons of the King to the wedding feast of His Son. Those who refuse this call are rebellious to the Great King and face utter destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

He invites all, Jew and Gentile, morally upright and immoral wretches (1 Timothy 1:15-16), to come into the kingdom. But when He comes in the person of His Son in judgment (John 5:22, 28-29), even those who have responded by faith and obedience to the gospel call and have been saved will be cast out and punished eternally if they have not put on the garment of righteous living (Revelation 7:13-14; 19:8). Yes, a child of God, one saved by the blood of Christ, can be cast into outer darkness away from the light of God and spend eternity weeping and grinding his teeth in anguish.

God calls all mankind to His Son’s wedding feast through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14), but only those who accept the call, wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, put on the wedding garments of righteous living, and remain faithful to the Lord (Revelation 19:13-14) are chosen of God (Ephesians 1:4).

Questions

I. Discussion Questions: What do each of these represent?

1. the wedding feast
2. those first invited
3. the servants who took the invitation
4. the destruction of those first invited along with their city
5. the invitation to all, both good and bad, in the highways
6. the man without a wedding garment
7. outer darkness

II. Thought Questions

1. How are the Parable of the Great Supper and the Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son different from each other?
2. How can we be both called and chosen?

Lesson Fifteen Counting the Cost

It was late in the personal ministry of the Lord, He had already plainly warned His disciples of His impending death and the sacrifice they themselves would have to make (Luke 9:22-25), and the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Him (John 7:1), nevertheless great multitudes followed Him (Luke 14:25). He wanted them to understand what it means to be His disciple. In the context of this warning the Master spoke two brief parables each with the same point, the necessity of counting the cost.

First He reminded them how foolish it would be to build a tower without first stopping to compute its price (Luke 14:28-30). In vineyards and olive groves around Palestine, land owners built stone towers where a steward could watch for thieves and oversee workers. But before the landowner erected such a tower, he would do some planning. How tall would it be? How much stone was needed? How much would it cost to pay the stone mason who built it? How embarrassing it would be to start to build and to run out of money! Who has never witnessed the aging, incomplete shell of a house and thought of it as a stark reminder that someone started to build but couldn't finish? Even so, an old, partially complete tower would be a lasting monument to the folly of a man who began a project but couldn't complete it. He had failed to properly plan. An important and difficult task requires adequate forethought. Better not to begin than to start and not be able to finish.

Then Christ used the analogy of a king setting out to engage in battle with another king. If the king under consideration had only 10,000 soldiers, whereas the ruler he desired to conquer had 20,000, he had a potentially deadly problem. Ancient kings usually led their troops into battle. David did so until he was middle aged and was almost killed in combat (2 Samuel 21:15-17). Regardless of how much the king coveted the land of his rival, he would think long and hard before leading his army against one twice its size. Unless he could arrive at a plan he was confident would bring victory, he would meekly send a delegation to beg terms of peace from the foe. An important and difficult task requires planning. Better not to start than to begin and not be able to finish.

Could any undertaking be more important or more difficult than starting a life of walking in the steps of Jesus (Luke 14:33)? Those who begin the journey and then turn back are in worse spiritual condition than those who have never followed the Master. Salt that has lost its saltiness is worse than useless, it will sterilize the soil. The salty clay that is left is only fit to throw on foot paths. It doesn't help even there, but at least it doesn't hurt the land (Luke 14:34-35). Better not to start than to begin and not be able to finish.

So, what does it take to be a disciple of Christ? "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me'" (Matthew 16:24). These three requirements sum up everything expected of a Christian. Let us carefully examine each demand.

Deny Himself

The disciple of Jesus must “deny himself.” He must forsake “all that he has” (Luke 14:33). The Master doesn’t ask for a portion of your time, your ability, or your money. In fact, no amount of those will do. He wants you. He wants you to be able to truthfully claim:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

He demands that you agree with Paul, “For to me to live is Christ...” (Philippians 1:21). He will settle for nothing less than the presentation of your body as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-2). You must willingly suffer the loss of all things and count it as gain (Philippians 3:7-8). Your will must no longer matter. All that matters is the will of Christ.

The one who denies himself will hate his own family (Luke 14:26). Does this mean I must despise and turn against my loved ones? No, in fact there is no greater example of the love of a son for his mother than that of Jesus, as He was suffering on the cross, committing his mother to the care of beloved John (John 19:25-27). The word “hate” in the Scriptures commonly means simply “to love less” (cf. Matthew 6:24). The Lord demands that we love our own families less than we love Him (Matthew 10:34-37). Even though my family might turn against me because of my faith, I must follow on to truly be the Lord’s disciple.

To be Jesus’ disciple, I must put the Lord ahead of riches. In Mark 10:17-27, Jesus told of a young man who lacked just one thing to be pleasing to God - he put his riches ahead of Christ (verses 21-22). The Master observed the extreme difficulty for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (verses 23-27). I must faithfully follow Christ, even if it is damaging to my job and wealth.

To be a faithful disciple of Christ, I am directed to put Him ahead of worldly pleasures (2 Timothy 3:4). I must be willing to give my life for Him if necessary, rather than reject my faith (Matthew 16:25-27). I must willingly forsake all the sins that stain my soul (Romans 6:6; Galatians 5:24). I must truly put the Lord ahead of all else. He must be my everything.

Take Up His Cross

The disciple of Christ must “take up his cross” (Matthew 16:24). This does not mean to endure aches, pains, and hardships unrelated to being a Christian. Rather, this refers to willingness to cheerfully suffer the daily persecutions and hardships that come from following Jesus and to remain faithful (Luke 9:23).

The Jews insulted Jesus by calling Him “Beelzebub,” literally, “lord of flies,” a blasphemous insult (Matthew 10:24-25). Why should we be amazed if we are called “Campbellites” or “Antis”? All who faithfully follow the Master will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12).

To bear the cross, we must never be ashamed of nor hide the fact that we are Christians

(Mark 8:38). Christians are known, not by bumper stickers, special clothing, or self-righteous attitude, but by their lives.

Follow Me

To be a disciple of Christ, I must follow Him (Matthew 16:24). This means I will continue in His word (John 8:31-32), letting it be my guide each day. It means my life will be like Jesus' (Luke 6:40), as I walk daily in His footsteps. It means I will seek to save those who are lost, even as my Master did (Luke 19:10), thus bearing much fruit for God (John 15:8).

Is It Worth It?

The cost of discipleship is indeed high! Does the return justify the investment? The apostles left everything to follow Jesus (Mark 10:28). Jesus promised them that, for every sacrifice they made, they would be rewarded "a hundredfold now in this time, ... with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). The fellowship with those of like precious faith, the sharing we have with one another of both spiritual and physical blessings, the promise of life everlasting - what a wonderful reward! Will you not determine to pay the cost of discipleship?

Questions for Review

I. Define the following terms:

- 1. hate
- 2. Beelzebub

II. Short Answer:

- 1. What is the point of the parable about building a tower?
- 2. What about the story of a king going to war?
- 3. Why do so many people turn back to the world after having become Christians?
- 4. Why should we count the cost of discipleship?
- 5. What three things does the Lord require of His disciples? Explain what each of these requirements mean.

Requirement	It's Definition

III. Questions for Discussion:

- 1. Name some things which we are tempted to put ahead of Jesus.
- 2. Is the reward of discipleship worth its cost?

Lesson Sixteen

Christ Receives Sinners

Introduction

The Master certainly had a way of making the scribes and Pharisees angry, so angry they eventually killed Him. He tried to explain Himself to them, but they wouldn't listen. They were enraged by His failure to keep their traditions about the Sabbath (Luke 6:6-11) and outraged by his maddening practice of associating with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1-2). Of course, they were also jealous of His popularity (Matthew 27:12,18).

John 3:16 declares the greatness of the love of God for lost sinners. In Luke 19:10 Jesus declared His mission here was to save lost sinners. Luke chapter fifteen vividly pictures in three unforgettable stories, The Lost Sheep (verses 3-7), the Lost Coin (verses 8-10), and the Lost Son (verses 11-32), the intensity of the love of God for those lost in sin, the reason Jesus associated with these sinners, and the attitude the saved must have for all lost sinners. This chapter has been aptly called "The Gospel within the Gospel."

In the first two parables the Master boldly revealed to the Pharisees that He was even worse than they charged. He didn't just associate with the immoral outcasts of respectable society, He actively sought them out.

But, in all three parables He employed a method of reasoning that completely disarmed His detractors. Each parable implicitly argues, What would you do in this situation? In fact, in the first two the Master even asked this probing question (verses 4,8). The implicit argument is that surely a lost person is more valuable and important than a lost sheep or a lost coin.

To the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, tax collectors, who were traitors to the nation of Israel, and those who lived notoriously sinful lives were human scum unfit for their company. To touch them was to be defiled. They even believed the destruction of sinners brought joy to God.

But to the Lord sinners are lost children of God who need to be found (Luke 19:1-10). Their salvation rather than their destruction brings great joy to God and the heavenly host (Luke 15:7,10).

In the first two parables the emphasis is entirely on the attitude of God toward the lost. The last parable of the chapter broadens the focus to describe the lost sinner, the love of God, the self-righteous Pharisees, and all who today walk in their steps.

The Lost Sheep **Luke 15:3-7; Matthew 18:12-14**

Sheep were very important to Jews. Their forefathers, the twelve patriarchs, were shepherds (Genesis 46:31-32). The Lord took David from the sheepfold to become ruler of Israel (2 Samuel 7:8). Sheep provided clothing (Job 31:20), meat (2 Samuel 12:4), milk (Deuteronomy 32:14), and sacrifices to the Lord (Exodus 20:24).

Sheep were very dependent on the shepherd's supervision (Psalm 23:2). The shepherd knew each of his sheep, called each by name, and led them wherever they went (John 10:3-4). They knew the voice of their shepherd and followed only him (John 10:4-5). The shepherd who owned the sheep would defend them from all predators even if it endangered his own life (1 Samuel 17:34-35; John 10:11).

Domestic sheep were prone to wander into danger and lacked the instinctive sense to return home (Isaiah 53:6). If one went astray, the shepherd would search tirelessly and heedless of danger until he found it (Matthew 18:12; Luke 15:4). When he found the lost sheep, he would carry it home on his own shoulders, and gather all his neighbors together for rejoicing (Matthew 18:13; Luke 15:5-6).

All this pictures vividly the love of God for those who have wandered astray into sin. He loves all who are in the fold of safety, but because of relief when one lost sinner is found and returned, "... there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7; cf. Matthew 18:14).

Is not a lost person with a soul in the image of God worth more than a lost sheep? If we would rejoice over the return of a lost animal, shouldn't we rejoice over the return of a lost child of God? God does. The angels do. Shouldn't we?

The Lost Coin **Luke 15:8-10**

A woman had ten silver coins. These coins were the Greek *drachma*, each of which was worth approximately the same as a Roman *denarius*, which was one day's wages for a day laborer in first century Palestine (Matthew 20:1-2). Thus, although it might seem very insignificant to us, it could mean the difference between a meal and a day without food for this woman's family.

The homes of common people were poorly lit, having one small window, and had dirt floors covered by straw. Thus, it would be difficult to find a lost coin, and she would need the light of an oil lamp to search for it.

But she would search diligently until she found it. Upon finding it, not only would she rejoice,

she would call together her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her.

The lesson is the same as that of “The Lost Sheep.” There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents. If there is rejoicing in heaven, shouldn’t we rejoice?

The Lost Son **Luke 15:11-32**

The third parable is more complex and is one of the truly great short stories in all literature. In it not only do we learn more about the love of God for lost sinners, we also learn about ourselves as sinners, and we receive an unforgettable warning against self-righteousness.

This parable “ups the ante.” A lost sheep is bad; a lost day’s wages is bad; but a lost son! Many parents have experienced the heart-rending agony of having a child turn his back on the family. And each of those parents has experienced a sample of the pain the Father in heaven feels when one of His beloved children foolishly, selfishly turns away from his God and Father to wander away to the alluring far country of sin.

The story has three characters - a man and his two sons (verse 11), and each segment of the parable develops one of the three.

The Younger Son (verses 12 - 21)

The younger son demanded his part, one third (Deuteronomy 21:17), of his inheritance while his father was still alive - selfishly, coldly treating his father as if he were already dead. He set out feeling freedom from the constraints of his father’s rule, declaring his independence, even though all his wealth was lovingly bestowed by his father. He foolishly wasted all his inheritance on prodigal, “loose” (NASB), “reckless” (ESV), living.

Those who turn to sin show complete disregard for their loving Father and act as if they don’t need Him, whereas everything good we have is a gracious gift from Him (James 1:17). If you can do without the air you breathe, the water you drink, the food you eat, the clothing you wear, the home in which you live, you can do without God - for awhile.

As they always do eventually, hard times came. Out of alternatives, the young man found the worst job imaginable for a Jewish youth - he fed the hogs, unclean to Israelites (Leviticus 11:7; Deuteronomy 14:8), of a Gentile. In his pitiful circumstances he would willingly have filled his belly with the pods off the carob tree that the hogs ate, but no one even allowed him this small sustenance.

He was reduced to desperation. His pride was broken. Finally, all self-esteem was gone. He realized even the most humble servants of his father had sufficient food, while he perished

with hunger. He had reached rock bottom.

“Self-esteem” is just a modern word for pride. Rather than instilling it in our children, both they and we need to replace it with the humility of a broken and contrite spirit (Psalm 34:18; 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2). Only such contrition will lead a rebellious, head strong sinner to humbly turn to the Lord.

“He came to himself.” He had been beside himself, spiritually insane. He came to his senses, waking from his insane course. Sin is insanity. Those living in sin are foolishly pursuing a course of self-destruction, both in this life and in eternity (Proverbs 13:15).

The younger son then returned to his father, confessing he had sinned against heaven and him, not asking for a return to his status as a son, but only to be a “hired servant,” a status in some ways even lower than a slave, for a slave belonged to his master and was fed, clothed, and housed, but a “hired servant” received a meager pay and could be dismissed at any time.

Children of God who have left the Father must turn from their sins, humbly acknowledge them, and ask His forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). The most humble station in the household of God is far better than any position in the world of sin (Psalm 84:10).

The Father (verses 20-24)

The father saw his son while he was still far away and ran to him and embraced him. Like any broken-hearted father, he had been gazing daily down that road by which his son had brazenly left, longing for the day he would see him return. And there he was! Oh, he was older, tattered, torn, emaciated by sin, but it was his son! Even far off he could recognize that boy he longed to see. No waiting for him to come. No “I told you so.” Just the expression of love - the embrace, the paternal kiss. How our Father loves us. How He misses us when we stray and longs for our return.

The son made his confession and asked for the place of a hired servant. But this was not the return of a hired servant. This was the return of a son! Put the ring on his finger, the robe on his back, the emblems of a son.

Kill the fatted calf! Rejoice! My son was dead, but he is alive. He was lost, but he is found! The Lord doesn't extract penance from us when we repent. He and the heavenly host rejoice over the return of one lost sinner. What a beautiful, happy picture of the God whom we serve. How can we not love Him?

The Elder Brother (verses 25-32)

The picture of the older brother is not pretty. When he learned what all the commotion was

about, he had no joy over the return of his brother. He was only angry and peeved. He was envious of the attention his father gave to the returned wanderer. He wouldn't even go into the house, even though His father came out and begged him! He refused to recognize the penitent sinner as his brother - "this son of yours." He complained he had never even been given a young goat to celebrate with his friends, unappreciative of the fact that he was the heir to everything his father possessed. He accused his brother of wasting the father's substance on prostitutes. He may or may not have been right in his accusation, but that was past, and his brother had repented. He self-righteously claimed he had never even once transgressed his father's will. Can any of us claim we have never sinned? (1 John 1:8)

What a description of the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who were scandalized that the Lord associated with tax collectors and sinners. They should have been seeking the repentance of sinners themselves (Daniel 12:3). Did they really think they themselves were without sin? (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

What a picture of self-righteous Christians who refuse to rejoice over the return of a prodigal child of God. "Oh, he's done this repeatedly." How many times will God forgive if the sinner repents? How many times should we? (Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-4) Instead of complaining about the return of a sinner and his acceptance by the church, we should be diligently seeking his repentance (Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20).

Questions

I. Definition
silver coins

II. Fact Questions

1. What qualities of sheep in Palestine made them a good illustration of lost sinners?
2. Relate the Parable of the Lost Sheep.
3. Relate the Parable of the Lost Coin.
4. Relate the Parable of the Lost Son.

III. Thought Questions

1. Why did the scribes and Pharisees hate Jesus?
2. What is the primary truth taught in the three parables of Luke chapter fifteen?
3. What did Christ do in regard to sinners?
4. What method of reasoning did He use in these parables that disarmed his accusers?

5. What did scribes and Pharisees think of tax collectors and sinners?
6. What does God think of them?
7. How does the Parable of the Lost Son expand the focus of the first two parables?
8. What is the lesson of the Parable of the Lost Sheep?
9. What is the lesson of the Parable of the Lost Coin?
10. What does the Parable of the Lost Son teach us about sinners?
11. What does it teach us about God?
12. What does it teach us about the attitude the saved should have toward the lost?

IV. Application

1. What should our attitude be toward those lost in sin?
2. What should we do about them?

Lesson Seventeen

Shrewdness: The Dishonest Steward

Luke 16:1-13

Everyone in this story is a rascal! The main character is a swindler, who, upon learning he is about to be fired for mismanaging his boss' finances, quickly cheats him twice more before he's put out of office. This manager is too lazy to work and too proud to beg, but not too proud to cheat. The two debtors were willing accomplices. And the master of the story admired the shrewdness of his ex-manager!

How could the Lord possibly use such a story to teach a spiritual lesson? Well, He did, and it very effectively makes a crucial point about our use of wealth.

But be careful. This is not an allegory, such as Galatians 4:21-31, in which each character symbolizes something. It's a parable, with one main point. The characters don't symbolize anyone or anything. They're simply necessary to make the story.

This story is intended for the Master's disciples (verse 1), not just the twelve (Luke 9:1; cf. Matthew 10:2-4), or even the seventy (Luke 10:1), but a group of disciples that included the "tax collectors and sinners" the "Pharisees and scribes complained" about (Luke 15:1-2). The tax collectors especially needed to know to handle their finances in such away as to receive eternal life (cf. Luke 3:12-13), and that's what this parable is about. Probably some of these "tax collectors and sinners" had behaved in much the same way as the unjust steward of the parable, and they may have appreciated the clever misuse of his position as much as the master in the story did.

A rich man calls the manager of his estate onto the carpet because he's heard accusations of mismanagement. The steward is unable to prove by his books that the charges are false, so he is summarily fired. He is dishonest with others but honest in his self evaluation. He's not up to "digging," i.e., farming, and farming is still called "digging" in East Africa, and his vain pride won't permit him to beg. So he quickly comes up with a scheme to cheat the boss yet again and to gain for himself a retirement income. A debtor owes the rich man 100 measures - a measure (bath) equals 8 or 9 gallons - of oil, probably olive oil. He quickly cuts the debt in half. Another debtor owes the master 100 measures (cors, equaling 10-12 bushels each) of wheat. He slices it to 80. Now the debtors are indebted to him. In fact, he has knowledge he can use to blackmail them as willing accomplices to his known thievery. So he'll have room and board when he's unemployed. When the boss finds out, instead of being furious with his crooked manager, he commends his shrewdness! "Worldly people are more clever than enlightened people in dealing with their own (Luke 16:8b, **International Standard Version**).

There's no mistaking the Master's point. "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home" (Luke 16:9). "Mammon" is "wealth, riches ... personified" (Mounce. 1205). Wealth is

“unrighteous” in that it is deceitful. It promises security but can be taken away in an instant, even as the steward suddenly loses his source of wealth (cf. 1 Timothy 6:17). Quickly, while you yet have the uncertain riches, before the opportunity is forever lost, use them to gain the true riches, eternal life (Matthew 6:19-20).

And how do we do that? Be generous in contributing to the church (2 Corinthians 9:6-7), in helping the needy (Matthew 25:31-46), and in sending the gospel to the lost (Philippians 4:14-18).

A principle of business is, in order to be entrusted with large responsibilities, one must prove himself by faithfully handling small ones (verse 10). Would you trust your child with a thousand dollars, if he spent his entire five dollar allowance on candy? The Lord will not entrust the riches of heaven to us if we can't handle the material wealth with which He blesses us here (verse 11). If He can't trust us to faithfully use the physical blessings that are not really ours, He won't give us that which we cannot lose, eternal life in heaven (verse 12).

It is impossible to be a slave to two masters (verse 13). To love one is to hate (love less) the other. To be loyal to one is to slight the other. If you live for wealth, you cannot live for God. Be shrewd. Use your wealth as a tool to serve God and so gain the eternal riches.

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Questions

I. Definitions

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. steward | 6. generation |
| 2. measures of oil | 7. sons of light |
| 3. measures of wheat | 8. unrighteous mammon |
| 4. sons of this world | 9. hate |
| 5. shrewd | 10. despise |

II. Fact Questions

1. Tell the story of the dishonest steward.
2. For whose benefit does the Master tell this parable?

III. Thought Questions

1. Do the characters of the parable represent anyone or anything?
2. What is the primary lesson of the parable?
3. Does Jesus commend the dishonesty of the steward?
4. What is commendable about him?
5. How can we apply the lesson?

Lesson Eighteen Self-Righteousness vs. Humility The Pharisee and the Tax Collector Luke 18:9-14

Introduction

Two men prayed. One man's prayer was heard; the other just talked to himself. The Master used the occasion of prayer to teach, not just the right attitude in prayer, but the proper spirit in which we at all times are to serve God. One man was justified before God; the other congratulated himself on his righteousness but was not right with the Lord. Wherein lay the difference?

The place they prayed wasn't the difference, for, as was proper for Jews (1 Kings 8:28-54), they both went into the temple to pray. Nor was their posture in prayer the distinguishing factor, for they both stood (Luke 18:11,13). Posture in prayer is unimportant - whether one falls on his face (Joshua 7:6-10; Matthew 26:39; Luke 5:12; 17:16), kneels (Ezra 9:5; Daniel 6:10; Acts 20:36;), stands (Matthew 6:5; Luke 18:11,13), or spreads out his hands (Ezra 9:5; 1 Timothy 2:8) - except as it expresses the attitude of the heart. Why was one man justified before God and the other not?

The difference was in the men themselves.

The Two Men

Surely the Pharisee was the one God received. The Pharisees grew out of a sect of Jews that arose during the second century before Christ known as the "*Hasidaeans*" a transcription of the Hebrew '*chasidim*,' i.e., 'pious ones,' ... a society of men zealous for religion." (Vine). The name "Pharisees" means "separatists." They "carefully kept themselves from any legal contamination, distinguishing themselves by their care in such matters from the common people" (**ISBE**). "They considered themselves as protectors of the law; they were accused of 'building a fence around the law,' which meant they built around the law a wall of their own traditions" (Lightfoot. 141). They "despised," that is, they "viewed ... with contempt" (**NASB**), the common people, thinking them to be ignorant of the law of God" (Luke 18:9; John 7:57-59). The Pharisee was on the top rung of respectability and honor.

Conversely, the tax collector wasn't even on the ladder! The Romans followed a system of taxation borrowed from the Ptolemies, the rulers of Egypt before the Romans, that virtually demanded corruption. Rather than collecting taxes themselves from their conquered subjects, they gave the job to the highest bidder. The head tax collector had an assessed amount he had to provide the Romans. Whatever he collected in excess of this was his to keep. Roman

soldiers enforced the collection. Common people were ignorant of the tax laws and easily defrauded. So the tax collectors were infamous traitors and thieves. They were lumped with notorious sinners (Matthew 5:46-47; Luke 7:34). They didn't win any popularity contests!

A Prayerless Prayer

The Pharisee actually didn't even pray. He talked to himself under the guise of prayer (Luke 18:11). He pretended to thank God, but this was a cover for self exaltation, bragging on himself (Ibid). He was very thankful he was better than other men. It's easy to think we are righteous if our standard is other sinners (2 Corinthians 10:12).

He was not an extortioner, one who takes "the goods of others by force and violence" or takes "advantage of the necessities of others, the poor and the oppressed," to "extort their property" (Barnes), an apt description of the typical tax collector, and, by the way, of many Pharisees (Matthew 23:14). And he was certainly not like that despised tax collector way back there in the back of the auditorium making a scene beating on his chest! Who let him in?

And his goodness wasn't just negative. He fasted twice a week. Although the Law only demanded one fast a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 6:29-31), the Pharisees fasted every Monday and Thursday, because Moses supposedly ascended Mt. Sinai on Monday and descended on Thursday. He gave tithes, not only of his income, as the Law demanded (Leviticus 27:30-33; Deuteronomy 14:22-23), but of everything he possessed (Luke 18:11).

By doing even more than the Law demanded, he trusted in himself that he was righteous (Luke 18:9), that is, he thought to have earned his right standing before God by bringing God into debt to him. That is a spiritually fatal mistake. None of us can ever do enough to bring God into our debt, that is, to earn our right standing before Him. We have all sinned (Romans 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). From the day the first sin entered our lives throughout all eternity, on the basis of earned righteousness, we will always "come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). You can't do enough community service to negate the death penalty! Besides, nothing we can do benefits God (Job 22:2-3). We have nothing He needs (Psalm 50:12; Romans 11:35). When we do everything He demands of us, we remain "unprofitable servants," in debt to Him (Luke 17:10). You cannot earn your salvation.

The Pharisee thought he was spiritually self sufficient. He didn't confess his sins; he announced his goodness. He asked nothing from God, and he received nothing.

A Real Prayer

The tax collector's prayer manifested his humble realization of his own unworthiness. He would not even approach the altar but stood far away. His head was bowed in shame. He beat his breast in anguish over his sins (cf. Nahum 2:7). His prayer consisted of just seven words.

“God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” (Luke 18:13, **NASB**). He pleaded for mercy, the help of the helpless, from God (Romans 9:16; Ephesians 2:4-7; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 4:16; 1 Peter 1:3). In his own estimation, he wasn’t just a sinner, he was **the** sinner, the chief, the foremost, of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

The tax collector went home justified before God rather than the Pharisee (Luke 18:14).

Conclusion

It took some nerve for the Master to portray a tax collector favorably. Furthermore, they often were found in His company (Matthew 9:10; Mark 2:15; Luke 5:29). In fact, Matthew, also called “Levi,” one of the Lord’s apostles, was a tax collector (Luke 5:27; Matthew 10:3). But the tax collectors willingly heard Jesus (Matthew 15:1), and they entered the kingdom ahead of the Pharisees (Matthew 21:31). Why? Because the Pharisees “trusted in themselves that they were righteous” and the tax collectors, in grief over their many sins, humbly sought the mercy of God.

Two men went into the temple to pray. One really went to brag. One went to seek the mercy of God. The bragger went home a sinner; the sinner went home justified. Which pictures us?

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Questions

I. Definitions

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Pharisees | 3. extortioners |
| 2. tax collectors | 4. merciful |

II. Discussion Questions

1. Does it make any difference where we pray?
2. Is our posture in prayer important?
3. What was wrong with the prayer of the Pharisee?
4. Why did the Lord accept the prayer of the tax collector?

III. Thought Questions

1. Is this just a lesson about prayer, or is it broader?
2. Can we earn our salvation?
3. Can we do so many good works that we have extra ones to give to others?
4. What attitude must we have to be righteous before God?
5. Is it possible for Christians to be like the Pharisee? How?

Lesson Nineteen Reward for Labor Laborers in the Vineyard Matthew 20:1-16

A rich, young ruler had come running to the Master asking what to do to inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:16). The Lord's reply caused the ruler to sadly turn away and the twelve disciple to be astonished (Matthew 19:17-26). Peter then asked a logical question.

"See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" (Matthew 19:27)

So Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:28-29).

Pretty heady stuff! Undoubtedly Peter and the other eleven were very pleased with thus answer, though they totally misunderstood the part about twelve thrones.

But then the Master, as He customarily did, threw in a paradoxical statement that seemed to throw cold water on His grand promise. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Matthew 19:30). He then taught the twelve the parable of "the Laborers in the Vineyard" (Matthew 20:1-16). And He concluded the parable by announcing, "So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen" (Matthew 20:16).

I think we can safely conclude that the parable primarily teaches that "many who are first will be last, and the last first" and secondarily "many are called, but few chosen." The story, the parable, is just a vehicle to illustrate and impress these truths. But what do these statements mean?

It was grape harvest time - late summer, early fall. The farmer had to harvest his grapes before the September rains. As farmers have always done, they worked from sun up until sundown. At the beginning of the day the land owner hired day laborers to help in the harvest. They worked for an agreed upon wage, one denarius for one day's work, the usual pay for a day laborer in ancient Palestine. But the farmer needed more workers to get the harvest in, so he went out at midday, mid afternoon, and just an hour before sunset and hired more laborers. He did not promise these later workers a set amount. He just promised to pay them what was right, and they trusted him and went to work in his vineyard. Those hired later were not shirking work. Rather, no one had hired them.

As the Law required Jewish employers of poor day laborers to do (Deuteronomy 24:14-15), the land owner paid his workers at the end of the day. But then the master acted in a most unusual way. He paid the last laborers first, so those hired at the beginning of the day would know how much those hired at the last were paid. Imagine the surprise and heightened hopes when the land owner paid those who had worked only an hour a full day's wages! Wow! He

must plan on paying us a really handsome salary!

We don't have to imagine their disappointment. They looked on with "evil eyes," the angry leer brought on by jealousy. These late comers who worked but an hour in the cool of the evening were being paid as much as those who had labored long and hard through the burning heat of the day. It just didn't seem fair. They openly complained.

But the logic and firmness of the owner's reply put an end to all complaints.

But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?

Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good? (Matthew 20:13-15)

He had paid those who worked through the day all they had contracted to receive. They had not been shorted at all. He had been just with them. It was his business if he wanted to be gracious and pay the other workers a full day's wages, though they had only worked a short while.

The parable has nothing to do with "death bed repentance." And it really has little to do with length of service in the Master's vineyard. Remember, salvation and all the spiritual blessings that accompany it are gifts from grace, undeserved favor, not earned wages (Romans 6:23).

Peter was in danger of proudly believing he had earned a great reward for great service. After all, he had done what the young ruler wouldn't do, and, the Lord had promised he would sit on a throne! Such a proud attitude would not only cause him to be last, it would leave him - and us - out of the number of God's chosen.

If you think you contracted with God for so much reward for so much work, you're well on your way to becoming a Pharisee, and you need to learn the basic nature of our salvation in Christ. We must labor in His vineyard through trust that He will give us far more than we can ever earn if we but faithfully labor.

When I get to heaven, I shall see three wonders. The first will be to see many persons there whom I did not expect to see; the second will be to miss many whom I did expect to see; the greatest wonder of all will be to find myself there (John Newton, quoted by Lightfoot. 151).

Questions

I. Terms to Define

1. denarius
2. evil eye

II. Discussion Question

1. What is the context of the parable?
2. To whom was the parable primarily directed?
3. Relate the story of “The Laborers in the Vineyard.”

III. Thought Questions

1. What lessons does the parable teach?
2. How do these lessons apply to us?

Lesson Twenty
Lip Service vs. Repentance
The Two Sons
Matthew 21:28-32

From the beginning of His ministry the Lord had spoken of “His hour,” the time of His sacrifice. Previously His hour had not yet come (John 2:4; 7:6,8). Now it had come (John 12:23). Previously He had withdrawn from confrontations that would lead to His death (Matthew 4:12; 12:14-15; 14:13; 15:12,21; John 6:15;10:31,39-40). But now He presses His claims and His denunciations of the leaders of the Jewish nation with the devastating and infuriating force that would lead the scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests to carry out their plot to kill Him.

The purpose of this, His last trip to Jerusalem, was to die for the sins of the world. So He brazenly entered Jerusalem in the role of Messiah (Matthew 21:1-16), asserted His authority by cleansing the Temple of commercial trade (Mark 11:15-18), publicly exposed the moral inability of the chief priests and elders to deal with the question of authority in religion (Matthew 21:23-27), and immediately denounced in a parable their refusal to believe John and obey God (Matthew 21:28-32).

The Master began the parable by letting the Jewish leaders know He wanted them to pass judgment on a case. Of course, in their arrogance, they were more than willing. The result is that they announced their own guilt before the multitude.

Christ spoke of a man who owned a vineyard and had two sons. He told the first son to work in His vineyard, but he rebelliously refused, not even bothering to make an excuse. But afterward this son regretted his sin and went and worked in the vineyard. The father went to the second son and told him the same thing. This son politely, respectfully agreed to work but didn't do so.

Now the Master springs the trap. Jesus simply inquired, “Which of the two did the will of his father?” What could the Jewish leaders say? Everyone knew the answer. Perhaps they were too blind to realize the second son was an exact parallel to them. They replied, “The first.”

The Lord immediately and with devastating force applied the lesson of the parable. The tax collectors and prostitutes would enter the kingdom of God rather than the proud, self-righteous Jewish rulers. John the Baptist came preaching the way of righteousness (Matthew 3:1-2). The tax collectors, known for their extortion (Luke 3:12-13), and prostitutes, believed him and were baptized, confessing their sins (Luke 7:29; Matthew 3:5-6). They had been openly defiant of God, but at the preaching of John they repented.

But the self-righteous Jewish leaders, who claimed to love and obey God (Matthew 15:7-8), rejected the preaching of John and refused to obey God by being baptized by John (Matthew 21:25; Luke 7:29-30). Thus, in exonerating the first son and implicitly condemning the second, they publicly proclaimed themselves guilty.

Incidentally, it is interesting that Christ does not employ the usual word for repentance in verses twenty-nine and thirty-two. The same Greek word, “*metamellomai*,” is translated “regretted” (verse 29) and “relented” (verse 32) in the **New King James Version**. In the **King James Version** it is rendered “repented” in both verses. Although this word can be used for “repentance,” this word especially stresses the emotions (Hendriksen. 779). It can be used of regret that leads to despair rather than true repentance (Matthew 27:3-5). Here the Lord obviously uses it to mean real repentance, for the first son went to the vineyard after he “regretted” his rebellion (Matthew 21:29), and if the Jewish leaders had “relented” they would have believed John (verse 32). The Master’s use of the word in this parable describes the emotional regret of a son for having rebelled against his father.

The usual New Testament word for “repent” is “*metanaeo*.” True repentance always involves three changes. It is a change of mind or will (Matthew 21:28-32; 12:41; Jonah 3:10), preceded by a change of feeling, called “godly sorrow” (2 Corinthians 7:9-10), and leading to a change of conduct (Luke 3:3,8-14).

Repentance is absolutely essential to forgiveness for both an alien sinner (Acts 2:38; 3:19) and an erring child of God (Acts 8:22).

We can talk all we want about loving the Lord, but if we fail to obey Him, regardless of our claims, we will not enter the kingdom of God.

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Questions

I. Terms to Define

1. regretted
2. relented
3. repented

II. Discussion Questions

1. What is the background to this parable?
2. Relate the parable.
3. What was the effect of the parable on the Jewish leaders?

III. Thought Questions

1. How did the Master manage to get the Jewish rulers to admit their own guilt?
2. What is involved in repentance?
3. Will we be forgiven of any sins if we do not repent of them?

Lesson Twenty-one Ownership of the Kingdom (The Wicked Vinedressers)

Matthew 21:33-43; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19

The Master had just led the Jewish leaders to publicly condemn themselves (Matthew 21:28-32). As if that were not enough, the Master then taught the most infuriating parable of all, openly leading the Jewish leaders to pass sentence upon themselves (Matthew 21:33-43; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19). The rulers would have arrested Him then and there but for their fear of the multitude (Matthew 21:46; Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19).

The Master told of a land owner who created a vineyard on His property. After planting the grape vines, he put up a hedge, either a stone wall or a thorn hedge, to protect the vines from thieves and wild animals. He dug a wine press where the workers could tread the grapes, allowing the juice to flow into a vat below. He built a tower of stone in which the workers could rest and on which they could watch for anyone or anything that would damage the vines or steal the grapes. Then he rented out the vineyard to vinedressers and left for another country. The owner had done all he could reasonably do to ensure the renters produced a bountiful crop (cf. Isaiah 5:1-4).

The land owner was an absentee landlord, and the vinedressers were share croppers. This was a common arrangement in Israel, since the country was often in turmoil, and landowners preferred to live elsewhere.

When harvest time came, the owner sent messengers to receive his part of the crop. But the vinedressers were wicked men who abused the messengers, even killing some, and refused to pay the owner his share. Amazingly, instead of immediately destroying those evil tenants, the owner sent other messengers, but the vinedressers treated them just as badly.

Finally the longsuffering owner decided to send his only son whom he loved dearly to them, reasoning that surely they would respect him. But the wicked tenants absurdly reasoned that if they killed the heir, they would get the vineyard themselves. So they threw the owner's son out of the vineyard and killed him.

Then the Master allowed the Jews to pronounce sentence upon themselves. He inquired, "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" (Matthew 21:40) Some in the crowd answered honestly and justly, "He will bring those wretches (Greek "*kakos*") to a wretched (Greek "*kakocē*") end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons" (Matthew 21:41, **NASB**). Others, seeing the obvious point of the parable, cried, "Certainly not!" (Luke 20:16) The Parable of the Two Sons judged the Jewish leaders as guilty; in this parable they decide their own punishment.

But the Lord pressed His point and His claim to be the Christ. Quoting Psalm 118:22-23, Jesus claimed to be the stone which the builders rejected but which the Lord made the chief cornerstone upon and about which the whole building is constructed (Matthew 21:42; cf. Acts

4:11; Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:7).

Finally, He moved to individual application of the lesson. Christ is the stone that, if people stumble over, refusing to believe in Him, they will be broken, and if He falls upon them in judgment He will crush them (Matthew 21:44; Isaiah 8:14-15).

This parable is almost an allegory. An “allegory” is “ a story, play, poem, picture, or other work in which the characters and events represent particular moral, religious, or political qualities or ideas” (**Cambridge**). Galatians 4:21-31 contains an allegory in which real historical characters and events of the patriarchal age represent the covenants. A parable is usually a story about something that didn’t happen but could have happened that has one primary point and the details are just to make it a story. The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers is both. It has one primary point: “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it”(Matthew 21:43). But the details of the story are more than just storyline; they represent important aspects of the Lord’s relationship with Israel.

The vineyard of the parable represents the kingdom of the Lord. The kingdom of God is His rule (Psalm 45:6). In a sense His rule is universal, for He rules everything (Psalm 103:19) including all the nations of men (Daniel 4:17,25,32). That rule is also eternal (Daniel 4:2-30). It is true that Old Testament Israel was metaphorically the vineyard of the Lord (Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21), but that is because they were in a special sense the kingdom of God at that time (Exodus 19:5-6). God was King over Israel (1 Samuel 8:1-7), and the throne of Israel was the throne of God (1 Kings 2:12; 1 Chronicles 29:23). The law of Moses was the law of God for Israel (cf. Ezra 7:6,10; Nehemiah 8:1,14; Deuteronomy 5:1-3).

The owner of the vineyard is God. The vinedressers represent Israel as it was represented by its leaders (Matthew 21:45). The messengers represent the prophets of God, whom the Lord sent many times to call the nation to bear fruit for Him, but whom they would not heed (Jeremiah 7:25-26) but mistreated and killed (Nehemiah 9:26; Matthew 5:11-12; 23:34-37). The son represents Jesus, the Son of God. He was not simply one of the prophets but God’s only Son (John 1:18) and the heir of the kingdom (Mark 12:6-7; Hebrews 1:1-4).

The parable teaches us about God. It teaches His longsuffering. He was patient with Israel’s stubborn disobedience, sending prophet after prophet, though they would not heed (Jeremiah 7:25-26). His longsuffering is an expression of His loving desire for the salvation of every lost sinner (2 Peter 3:9). But the story also declares the severity of God on those who persist in rebellious disobedience (Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16; Romans 11:22).

There is no excuse for anyone who believes the Scriptures to insist that fleshly Israel is still the chosen people of God. After fifteen hundred years of refusing to heed God’s servants the prophets, they killed His beloved Son (Acts 7:52). They exhausted the longsuffering of God, and He removed the kingdom from them and gave it to another nation, spiritual Israel, all both Jew and Gentile who come to Christ in obedient faith (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

Lesson Twenty-two
After Death
The Rich Man and Lazarus
Luke 16:19-31

We are studying the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus among the parables, but it is certainly unique as a parable. The Master does not provide a name for any of the characters in His other parables. And His earlier parables compare scenes familiar to His audience with eternal truths, whereas this story is one of the few biblical passages (cf. Revelation 6:9-11) that discusses the state of the dead, information unknown by experience to any living mortal. It is certainly true that the story begins with precisely the same formula, “There was a certain rich man” (verses 1,19), as the parable that immediately precedes it and with which it is connected. “The story seems to be its own message, one that uniquely comes from beyond the grave. We conclude that it is both history and a special sort of parable (cf. R.L. Whiteside, *Bible Studies*, Vol. 4, p. 424)” (Earnhart. 149).

Regardless whether it be considered a parable, an historical account, or a unique combination of the two, as the facts of all parables were things that could have really happened, this story is not a fable, and it teaches us important reality about life beyond the grave, facts available only from this short, remarkably compact story.

This is a story in three scenes.

Scene One: Life

In life the rich man had everything good. His daily clothing was purple and fine linen, the clothing of royalty and the extremely wealthy (Luke 16:19).

Along the coast of Tyre there was found a rare shellfish (Murex purpurarius) from which a costly purple dye was obtained, each little animal yielding about one drop of it. Woolen garments dyed with it were worn by kings and nobles, and idol images were sometimes arrayed in them. This purple robe formed the outer, and the linen the inner garment. The byssus, or fine linen of Egypt, was produced from flax which grew on the banks of the Nile. It was dazzlingly white, and worth twice its weight in gold (McGarvey. 511; cf. Esther 8:15; Proverbs 31:22).

He was “joyously living in splendor every day”(Luke 16:19; **NASB**). If there had been Hollywood tabloids, he would have been on the covers. There would have been a TV series called “Keeping Up with the Rich Man.”

In total contrast, there was a very poor man named “Lazarus” who had been laid at the gate of the rich man’s compound. I’ve seen scenes like this in Africa many times. His name is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name “Eleazar” and means “whom God helps”(Thayer. 367). His life was daily misery. Along with his companions, the dogs, which licked his open sores, he just wanted to eat the scraps thrown out by the rich man.

The text doesn’t reveal whether or not the rich man helped Lazarus. Certainly the “law and

the prophets” demanded that Israelites assist their impoverished brethren (Leviticus 25:35; Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Isaiah 58:6-7), and Abraham pointed the rich man to “Moses and the prophets” as the way his brothers could avoid eternal torment (Luke 16:29). We certainly must generously help the worthy poor (Matthew 25:31-46; James 1:27).

Scene Two: Death

Then they both died. There is no mention of Lazarus’ body even being buried. But the angels of heaven accompanied his soul to Paradise. Angels minister in behalf of the Lord’s people (Matthew 18:10; Hebrews 1:13-14). The Master revealed Lazarus was in “Abraham’s bosom,” a Jewish way of denoting “Paradise” (cf. Luke 23:42-43), since the Jews viewed the coming kingdom as beginning with a great feast at which Abraham, their forefather, would be the host. Lazarus was in the chief place of honor in Paradise, reclining against Abraham. All the care for the rich man in his death was on the earthly side. He was buried, no doubt a grand affair. Nothing is said of any angelic or even demonic accompaniment of his soul.

Scene Three: After Death

Immediately after their deaths their conditions are dramatically reversed. Lazarus is comforted in Paradise (Luke 23:43). The rich man is in torment in Hades (verse 23). Hades is simply the abode of the spirits of the dead, where even the spirit of Christ went at His death (Acts 2:25-31), though He was in paradise. But the realm of Hades where the soul of the rich man went is torment.

Primary Point of Story

Although we remember Lazarus the most from this story, the leading character is the rich man. He went from a life of luxury to eternal, abject misery, but we’re not told why. It is not a sin to be rich (cf. Genesis 13:2; Job 1:1-3; 42:12; 1 Timothy 6:17-19), nor is it wrong to enjoy wealth (Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:12-13; 5:18). It is neither stated nor necessarily implied that the rich man neglected to help Lazarus.

What is the Master’s point? Luke sixteen begins with the Parable of the Unjust Steward. Jesus taught the proper stewardship of wealth (verses 10-13). He concluded by warning against serving mammon, material wealth (verse 13). “The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him” (Luke 16:14, **ESV**). The Lord rebuked them with a series of short admonitions (verses 15-18). Then He taught them that riches now may end in eternal torment. This is the point of the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. **A life blessed with great wealth and all the joy that accompanies it could very well lead to endless sorrow. Don’t trust money!**

Unique Lessons

Because this passage is almost unique in Scripture in that it pulls back the veil to the realm of the dead, it has great lessons for us besides its primary point.

The rich man awoke in torment (verse 23). **After death, the souls of both the righteous and unrighteous continue to have conscious existence.**

The rich man, awaking in torment pleaded with Abraham as his father to send Lazarus to provide the tiny comfort of placing a drop of water on his tongue (verse 24). Abraham didn't deny being the rich man's father, but was unable to help him. **The Jews' descent from Abraham would not save them** (Luke 3:8).

Abraham also pointed out the justice of their respective lots (verse 25). Whereas Lazarus suffered evil in life, but the rich man was blessed with good, now their lots were reversed. **Eternal punishment is just.**

Furthermore, the situation was irremediable. There is a great gulf, or chasm (**NASB, ESV**), between paradise and torment, and none can cross it (verse 26). **At death our fate is sealed.** "It was unchangeable in nature, unalterable in condition, and eternal in its establishment" (Boles. 323). There is no purgatory where sins can be burned away, so the tormented may enter paradise. Our loved ones can neither pray nor pay our way out of that endless misery.

So the rich man pleaded with Abraham, If he could not get relief, then send Lazarus back to warn his five brothers about this torment (verses 27-28). He remembered Lazarus and he remembered his father's house and his brothers. **Death does not destroy memory.**

But Abraham rebuked the request. "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (verse 29). **There is sufficient testimony in Scripture to lead any honest soul to faith and salvation** (John 5:45-47; Romans 10:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

But the rich man was insistent. "And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent'" (Luke 16:30).

But Abraham was adamant. "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'" (Luke 16:31). Not long after this, Christ did raise another Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43-44). Rather than believing, the chief priests and Pharisees plotted to kill both Jesus (John 11:46-53) and Lazarus (John 12:10-11). When the Lord was raised from the dead, rather than believing, the Jewish leaders sought to silence the witnesses (Acts 4:18). The belief that miracles are needed to cause the lost to turn to the Lord is absolutely false. Never underestimate the power of divine truth. **The logical, moral persuasion of the Word of God is sufficient to lead any honest soul to salvation** (Romans 1:16).

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Questions

I. Terms to Define

- | | |
|---------------|------------|
| 1. purple | 4. torment |
| 2. fine linen | 5. hades |
| 3. Lazarus | 6. gulf |

II. Discussion Question

Tell the Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

III. Thought Questions

1. How is this story unique?
2. Is it sinful to be rich?
3. Is it wrong for rich people to enjoy their wealth?
4. Did the rich man fail to help Lazarus?
5. What is the primary point of the Story of the Rich man and Lazarus?
6. What does this story teach about the condition of the dead?

IV. Answer “Yes” or “No” to the following questions, then give proof for your answer.

1. Do the wicked cease to exist after death?
2. Are the spirits of the dead conscious?
3. Do the dead keep their memory?
4. Will descent from Abraham keep Jews in God’s favor?
5. Is eternal punishment just?
6. Can we get a reprieve from punishment after death?
7. Will miracles lead one to repent if the Scriptures don’t?

Lesson Twenty-three **Ready for His Return** **The Ten Virgins** **Matthew 25:1-13**

The Lord taught the last three parables Matthew records to His disciples alone (Matthew 24:1) on Tuesday before He was crucified that Thursday (Matthew 26:1-2). As the Lord's last few days upon earth passed in turmoil and confrontation, He diligently prepared the disciples for events after His departure. After He had pronounced His final woes and condemnation upon the religious guides of the Jewish nation and upon the nation itself (Matthew chapter 23), He foretold the destruction of the Temple and the nation and gave His followers signs by which they could know when this was about to occur (Matthew 24:1-34). Then He urged upon them the necessity of being prepared for His eventual return (Matthew 24:35-51). Finally He spoke the parables that would encourage all His disciples to be ready for His return (Matthew chapter 25). The first is the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

In the context of the parable the Master repeatedly warns us we must be ready for His return, for we do not know when it will be. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36; cf. Mark 13:32). "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42). In fact, He warns us He is coming when we don't expect Him. "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:44). The point is "Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is" (Mark 13:33).

The Lord and His apostles repeatedly warn us to watch (Mark 13:33-37; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; Revelation 3:3). This is not a command to gaze at the sky. To watch is to be ready, to be prepared. The command to watch is accompanied by the admonition to pray (Mark 13:33), to "stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13), to "be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:6), and to "hold fast and repent" (Revelation 3:3).

It is not certain exactly what was involved in Jewish weddings in the first century. The father of the bride had to consent, and the groom had to give a dowry for his bride (Exodus 22:17; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:36). Marriage was certainly preceded by an engagement that was so binding it took a divorce to break it (Matthew 1:18-19). There was a wedding feast (John 2:1-2,9) at which festive garments were expected (Matthew 22:11-12), and the bride wore special attire (Jeremiah 2:32; Revelation 19:7-8; 21:2). The parable before us relates there was a time the groom came, it could vary, and at least these virgins (similar to bridesmaids?) were to be ready whenever he came, so they could participate in the festivities.



The virgins each took oil lamps and waited for the arrival of the groom. Due to the lengthy wait, they fell asleep. At midnight the cry was heard, "Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" (Matthew 25:6) Panic time. As they trimmed their lamps, five of the maids realized they hadn't brought sufficient oil. Such a foolish lack of

preparation! They couldn't borrow from the wise virgins, else all ten would run short of oil. They had to go at midnight to find oil to buy. By the time they got back, the doors were closed to the party, and the groom wasn't letting in any more guests.

Being refused entrance to a wedding party might be temporarily devastating to a bridesmaid, but the lesson speaks to the horror of being shut out of the eternal kingdom when Christ returns because we were foolish and failed to make adequate preparation.

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matthew 25:13). That is really the only point of the parable, but it is a terribly important lesson. Christ could return at any time. It will be too late then to prepare (2 Corinthians 5:10). Those who are not watching will be lost. Death could come at any moment, and there will be no second chance after that (Luke 16:26). How foolish not to be watching for the Lord's return.

Questions

I. Fact Question

Relate the Parable of the Ten Virgins.

II. Discussion Questions

1. For what was the Lord preparing His disciples?
2. What warning sets the context for the parable?
3. What does the warning to watch mean?
4. What was involved in first century Jewish weddings?

III. Thought Questions

1. What is the point of the parable?
2. How important is the lesson?

Lesson Twenty-four Faithful Service

Parable of the Talents Matthew 25:14-30

The word “For,” with which this parable begins, connects it to the preceding story, the Parable of the Ten Virgins. That parable teaches us to keep watching to be ready for the Lord’s return; this, the Parable of the Talents, teaches us to work to be ready for His return.

*...the Parable of the Talents serves as a perfect complement to the Parable of the Ten Virgins. In the preceding story the maidens are pictured as **waiting** for their lord, in this story, the servants are represented as **working** for their lord. One stresses the duty of constant alertness, the other the duty of faithful service” (Lightfoot. 172).*

The Story

A wealthy man was making a long trip. He had three servants (slaves) to carry on his business while he journeyed.

Slaves in the Roman Empire were not necessarily “field hands” who couldn’t be trusted with important business. Many were like Joseph in Potiphar’s house, capable and highly trustworthy. An Israelite could not hold another Jew for longer than six full years (Exodus 21:1-2) or until the year of Jubilee (every fiftieth year; Leviticus 25:39-40). Jews were allowed to keep foreigners as permanent slaves (Leviticus 25:44-46). In Roman society slaves might even be able to purchase their own freedom.

This rich man entrusted one servant with five talents to trade with so he could increase his master’s wealth, another with two, and a third with one. In New Testament times a talent was “the Roman-Attic ‘talent,’ comprising 6,000 denarii” (Vine. 617). Since a denarius equaled one day’s wages for a day laborer (Matthew 20:2), a talent was the equivalent of 20 years’ wages. So all three servants received very large sums with which to trade. Of course, the master was wise enough to entrust each man with the amount he was capable of managing.

After a long time the rich man returned and settled accounts with his servants. The man entrusted with five talents had doubled his master’s money. The lord congratulated him, “well done” (good job!) and commended him as “good and faithful.” His character was good, and he was trustworthy in his stewardship as a servant (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2). Although the two talent man had less ability and was entrusted with less money, the lord equally congratulated and commended him. Furthermore, each man was rewarded by being entrusted with even greater sums and being allowed to enter “the joy” of their lord. They apparently were allowed to dine with him at his feast, perhaps implying he was granting them their freedom.

But the man who had received one talent slandered his lord, claiming his master was “hard,” i.e., “*harsh, severe, stern*” (Mounce. 1271), and greedy. He served his master through fear

and was afraid he might lost the money. He just hid the money in the ground and returned it to his master neither increased nor diminished.

If he expected commendation and reward because he hadn't lost his master's money, he was extremely disappointed. Rather than "good and faithful," he was "wicked and lazy." If he was really afraid of losing the money, he could have deposited it with the bankers, where he could safely receive interest. He was wicked to fail in his trust, and his fear of his master led him to laziness.

The lord took from him even the one talent he returned and gave it to the man who had been given five. He was cast into out darkness, excluded from the joy of the feast with his master.

Christ stated an important principle. "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away" (Matthew 25:29).

Meaning

Of course, the man traveling to a far country represents Christ Jesus Who was about to leave His disciples for heaven. The servants are the disciples of Christ, you and I, brother and sister. His return "after a long time" is the return of Christ to judge the world (Matthew 25:31-32; John 5:26-29).

Lessons

This parable is so well known that the word "talent" has passed into the English language as a synonym for "ability." But that is not what the talents represent in the story. The master gave to his servant talents "to each according to his own ability" (verse 15). The talents stand for our opportunities to serve the Lord. He gives us opportunities to serve Him in keeping with our abilities. The great lesson of the Parable of the Talents is **Ability Plus Opportunity Equals Responsibility**.

Each of us has different ability and is given varying opportunities. But each of us is equally responsible to use his abilities and opportunities in the service of the Lord. We are stewards, servants entrusted with what belongs to our Lord to be used in His service (1 Peter 4:10). Stewards must be faithful, trustworthy, in the Master's service (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). We must do what we have the ability and opportunity to do (Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:16).

Small ability is no excuse. The Lord is neither harsh nor greedy. He is loving, kind, and generous (1 John 4:8; Luke 6:35; James 1:17). Those who fail to serve Him through fear do not know Him, and if they really fear Him, they should serve Him the more diligently (Hebrews 12:28-29). We should not fear that our diligent service will not be good enough but that our laziness will cause us to be cast into outer darkness. He doesn't care that you lack the abilities some others may have; He cares what you do with the abilities and opportunities you have.

Those who use their abilities and opportunities are granted more opportunities. Those who fail to use them will lose the opportunities they once had. The Lord opens doors of opportunities for each of us to serve (Colossians 4:2-4). If we fail to walk through those doors, they will be closed to us and opened to another. We lose what we fail to use.

We may think one must be a murderer or a thief to be wicked. But a lazy Christian is a “wicked and lazy servant.” He has wasted the abilities and opportunities graciously given him by the Lord.

Why did the one talent man fail? Not because of lack of ability but because of lack of work. Not because of evil intent but because He thought evil of his lord. Not because he did wrong but because he did nothing. He lacked the courage to work. His fear of failure was the cause of his failure.

There is a time of reckoning. The Lord will return and settle accounts. If we have been faithful in our service, He will congratulate and commend us, welcome us into His joy in heaven, and grant us opportunities to serve Him greater than we can now know. If we have been lazy and wasted our opportunities, He will condemn us and cast us into outer darkness. “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Are you working to be ready for His return?

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Questions

I. Term to Define
talent

II. Discussion Questions

1. Relate Parable of the Talents
2. What was the slavery of the Jews and Romans like?
3. Why did the master give each servant a different amount of money to manage?
4. What was the responsibility of each servant?
5. What do each of these represent
 - a. the man who traveled into a far country
 - b. his journey
 - c. the servants

d. the talents

e. the return of the man

III. Thought Questions

1. What is the great lesson of the parable?
2. What determines my responsibility in the Lord's service?
3. What will happen if we use our abilities and opportunities to serve the Lord?
4. What if we fail to use them?
5. Are those with small ability and few opportunities excused for doing nothing?
6. Why do some Christians fail to work in the Lord's service?
7. Is it wicked to be lazy in the Lord's service?
8. Will we have to answer to the Lord for how we have used our abilities and opportunities?

IV. Personal Application: This is for each of us to answer to himself.

1. What abilities do I have to serve the Lord?
2. What opportunities have I been given?
3. Am I using them?

The Minas Luke 19:11-27

The Parable of the Minas (**King James Version**, "Pounds") is similar to the Parable of the Talents, but there are important differences. The time was different. The Master spoke the Parable the Talents the day before His arrest as He was preparing His disciples for His death. It was spoken to His disciples alone, and the lesson is limited to His followers. On the other hand, He gave the Parable of the Minas at the beginning of His final week while He was in the home of Zaccheus in Jericho while He was on His last journey to Jerusalem (Luke 19:1-10). Both disciples and enemies were present (Luke 18:31-33; 19:1-3,7).

As the Lord was approaching Jerusalem, the disciples were anxiously anticipating the immediate establishment of the kingdom of God (Luke 19:11). But His enemies were waiting to arrest and kill Him, and speculation over what was about to happen was rampant among the people (John 11:55-57).

The Parable

A nobleman went into a far country to receive a kingdom and return, but his citizens hated him, and declared they would not have him to rule over them. This certainly resonated with the Master's audience. Not only was this manner of receiving rule a standard practice in the Roman Empire, since the Romans preferred to rule locally through native rulers loyal to Rome, but Judea itself repeatedly was forced to submit to such reigns. Herod the Great went to Rome to receive the rule over Judea, which, by the favor of Antony and Augustus he gained in 37 B.C. and ruled until his death in 4 B.C. (**ISBE**). Archelaus his son likewise went to Rome to gain the rule of Judea, and, though a delegation of Jews opposed him, Augustus made him ruler anyway, and he began his reign by slaughtering those who opposed him (Edersheim. 1:220).

Before the nobleman left to receive his kingdom, he called ten servants, gave each of them ten minas, and commanded them to do business until his return. The mina was a Greek coin worth about 100 denarii or one hundred days' wages for a common working man. A mina was worth only one sixtieth of a talent. Thus, the servants were given a significant but not impressive amount of money with which to trade, and each servant was given the same amount.

When the nobleman returned, "having received the kingdom," he called his servants so they could give account for their stewardship. The first servant had turned a mina into ten, and his lord rewarded him by making him ruler over ten cities. The second had turned a mina into five, and the king gave him five cities to rule.

But a third servant, as in the Parable of the Talents, feared his master as "an austere ('exacting,' **NASB**) man" and hid his mina in a handkerchief. His lord called him a "wicked" servant, and judged him by his own words. He could have at least kept the mina safely with the bankers, so his master would receive interest on his money. He directed his servants to take the mina from him and give it to the man who had ten.

The servants objected that this slave already had ten minas. Then Christ stated again the maxim of the Parable of the Talents: "For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him" (Luke 19:26).

Then the ruler commanded his servants to bring those enemies who refused his rule and slay them before him.

Lessons

Whereas the Parable of the Talents is exclusively directed to the disciples of Christ, the Parable of the Minas has very forceful lessons for both saints and sinners. The Parable of the Talents emphasizes different amounts of opportunities to serve, but that of the minas only teaches the necessity of service.

The disciples hoped Jesus would immediately set up His kingdom (Luke 19:11), and they,

with their fellow Jews and modern premillennialists, completely misunderstood His kingdom (Matthew 20:20-21). But Christ had to go away to receive the kingdom, and He did in fact receive His kingdom (rule) when He ascended back to the Father (Daniel 7:13-14), and He actually rules now as King (Acts 2:29-36; 1 Timothy 6:13-16).

We, His disciples, must faithfully use the opportunities to labor for the Lord that we have. Whether we are highly successful or moderately so, He will reward us.

But our reward is more work. We will be given rule. When the Lord God created the heaven and the earth, He gave man rule over the earth (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:3-8). Man lost this rule through sin and subsequent death, but through Christ this lost dominion has been restored (Hebrews 2:6-15). Christians now reign over sin in life through Christ (Romans 5:17; Revelation 1:6; 5:8-10), but when Christ returns we will have the complete victory and endless rule over sin and death in Paradise restored (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:25-27; 3:21; 22:1-5).

This is not an earthly rule over literal cities. The kingdom of Christ is not material and civil but spiritual (Romans 14:17), not earthly but heavenly (John 18:36).

If we use our opportunities to serve, we gain more. If we fail to use them, we lose all opportunities at service. Faithful service in small things, leads to greater opportunities, greater service.

Those who refuse to submit to Christ as King will be slain when He returns - not a physical death by sword but eternal separation from God in Hell (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

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Questions

I. Definition

minas

II. Fact Question

1. Relate the Parable of the Minas.
2. What historical events in Judea were similar to the parable?

Thought Questions

1. What are the differences between the Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Minas?
2. What is the context of the Parable of the Minas?
3. When did Christ receive His kingdom?
4. How do Christians rule?
5. What is the reward for faithful service?
6. What is the penalty for failing to serve?
7. What will happen to those who refuse to submit to Christ as their King?

Lesson Twenty-five

Ministering to Needy Brethren

The Sheep and the Goats

Matthew 25:31-46

In Matthew 25:1-30 the Master taught two parables, the Ten Virgins (verses 1-13) and the Talents (verses 14-30), to teach His disciples to be ready for His return. Now, two days before His ultimate humiliation (Matthew 26:1-2), He teaches a lesson, also primarily for the benefit of His disciples, about the time when He returns in glory (Philippians 2:9-11) and sits upon His glorious throne, the throne of judgment (Matthew 25:31).

This is not strictly a parable, but, as virtually all of the Lord's teaching, it does contain figurative language. "It is more a poetic description of the prophecy Jesus had spoken earlier that year at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16.27)" (Earnhart. 191).

In this dramatic story Jesus reaches the climax and end, not only of all He had been teaching the disciples since they left the Temple that day (Matthew 24:1 -25:46), but of all He had taught while He walked upon earth. This is the description of the Final Judgment. All He had said, all He had done and would do upon earth, was to prepare men for this great day, and His final, real, personal return will be to execute that judgment.

Jesus walked upon earth as a man and endured the humiliation of the cross as a man (Philippians 2:5-8), but He shall return gloriously as the Lord of glory. "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory" (Matthew 25:31). A "throne" is the symbol of rule (Psalm 47:8), but a function of that rule is judgment (Psalm 9:4,7). Christ now sits on His throne (Acts 2:30-31), "the throne of grace," from which obedient believers "obtain mercy and grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16). When Christ returns He will sit on the throne of judgment.

Then He shall be the judge of all nations (Matthew 25:32; John 5:22-23; Acts 17:30-31). This doesn't mean judging them as nations. Just as the gospel message is to individuals of all nations (Matthew 28:19), so Christ will judge as individuals all of every nation (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Christ Jesus came once to save the world (John 3:17; 5:24-26), but when He returns it will be to judge all mankind (John 5:27-30). None shall be exempt; both the righteous and the wicked will be raised and appear before Him (John 5:28-29).

He shall then separate people "one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:32). The Master's disciples are compared to sheep (Mark 14:27; John 21:15-17) because sheep in Palestine recognized their shepherd's voice and followed where he led (John 10:3-4, 27). They are placed on the right, the place of honor (1 Kings 2:19; Acts 2:33-34).

Those who are blessed by the Father will "inherit the kingdom prepared for" them "from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). To "inherit" the kingdom is to "*come into possession of*" (Arndt & Gingrich. 435) it (cf. Romans 8:16-17). Obedient believers enter the kingdom now in baptism (John 3:5; Colossians 1:13), but we will inherit the kingdom at the

end of time when we enter heaven and gain eternal life (Matthew 25:46; 19:29; Revelation 21:7; 22:1-5).

In this story, the sole basis of judgment seems to be whether or not we have given benevolent help to needy disciples (Matthew 25:34-45). But passages may be multiplied indicating additional criteria of judgment (cf. Matthew 7:21-27; 15:13-14; John 3:18,36; 8:24; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Jude verses 14-15; Revelation 21:8). This is a figure of speech called “synecdoche,” specifically synecdoche of the part for the whole (Dungan. 300). For example “confess” is put for all the conditions of pardon for an erring child of God (1 John 1:9; cf. Acts 8:22). Parallel to this, James teaches, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). There is much more to “pure religion” than the items mentioned in this verse, but James wants us to understand that the religion of Christ is manifested by action (James 2:14-16; cf. Galatians 5:6). And the Master wants us to understand that, if we are to inherit a home in heaven, we must be merciful even as our Master is. Thus, the passage, while not limiting the standard of judgment to acts of benevolence, certainly teaches we must demonstrate love and mercy in acts of kindness to receive eternal life. “... selfishness and lack of compassion ... will cost its owner eternal life with a merciful and selfless Christ and put him in an eternal hell with a merciless and prideful devil” (Earnhart. 192).

Christ is so identified with His disciples that to help them is to help Him (Matthew 25:40), and to neglect them is to neglect Him (Matthew 25:45).

Incidentally, the passage teaches us what true benevolent needs are - the necessities of life: food, drink, clothing, shelter, medical care, and comfort in affliction (Matthew 25:35-39,42-44). Once a member of a congregation where I preached wanted the church to pay her cable TV bill.

Finally, the Master emphatically, tersely makes a point that few people believe. Yes, there is heaven, and the blessed will enjoy it eternally. But just as truly there is hell, a place of eternal torment (Mark 9:43-48) that is equal in duration to the eternal life in heaven of the blessed. The terms “everlasting” and “eternal” in Matthew 25:46 are both translations of the same Greek word, which means “without end” (Arndt & Gingrich. 28).

Christ Jesus invites you to come to Him for salvation now (Matthew 11:28-30), but one day He will come in judgment. If we have been merciful as He is merciful, we will inherit a home with Him in heaven for eternity. If not, we will be eternally punished in an awful place prepared for the devil and his angels. Which will it be?

Works Cited

Arndt, W.F. and F.W. Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.**
Dungan, D.R., **Hermeneutics.**
Earnhart, Paul, **Glimpses of Eternity.**

Questions

I. Terms to Define

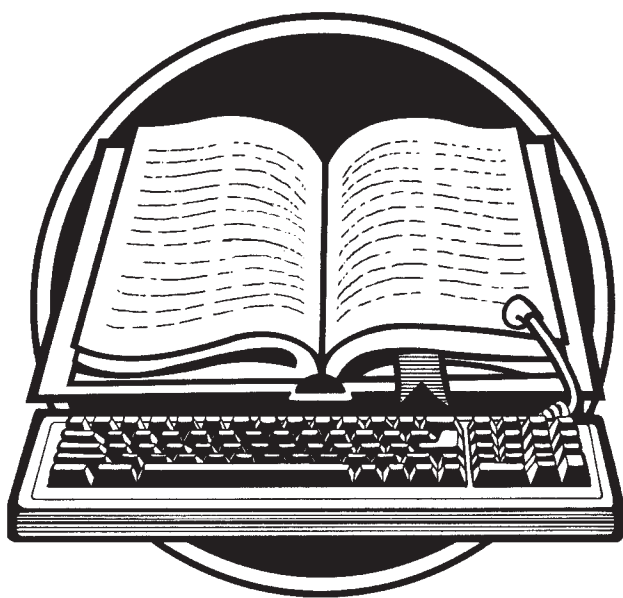
1. throne
2. everlasting
3. eternal

II. Discussion Questions

1. What is the nature of Christ's throne now?
2. What about when He comes again?
3. What will Christ do when He comes again?
4. Will we be judged as nations or as individuals?
5. What does it mean to inherit the kingdom?
6. What will be the basis of judgment?
7. What are true benevolent needs?
8. How long is the life in heaven?
9. How long is punishment in hell?

III. Thought Questions

1. What kind of story is this?
2. How does this passage stand in relationship to Matthew chapters 24 - 25?
3. What is the relationship of its contents to the teaching and work of Christ?
4. Why is ministering to the Master's disciples the same as helping Him?



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