

PARABLES

In the Gospel
of Luke



The Forum Terrace Church of Christ

Sunday Morning Adult Bible Class – Spring 2024

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The parables of Jesus comprise more than one-third of His teachings as recorded in the Gospel. Although the Son of God did not invent the parable when He came to earth, He certainly mastered the use of them. "All these things spake Jesus in parables unto the multitudes; and without a parable spake he nothing unto them" (Matt. 13:34).

Our English word for "parable" is a transliteration of the Greek word *parabole*. It is a compound word made up of "para" meaning beside and the verb "ballo" which means to throw or cast. Therefore, the word *parabole* means "a throwing alongside." Jesus would take a story and cast it down alongside of his teaching so that the two can be compared and contrasted so as to assist the disciple in comprehending His lesson. K. R. Snodgrass wrote, "The Greek word *parabole* has a much broader meaning in the Gospels than the English word parable. It can be used of a proverb (Lk. 4:23), a riddle (Mk. 3:23), a comparison (Mt. 13:33), a contrast (Lk. 18:1-8), and both simple stories (Lk. 13:6-9) and complex stories (Mt. 22:1-14)" (The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament 821).

Nearly forty parables are found in the Gospel of Luke. Almost half of these are unique to this gospel and not to be found in Matthew, Mark, and John. This study will focus on most of these.

Another thing these parables have in common is the use of the word "certain." The lawyer who came to Jesus in Luke 10 is described as a "*certain lawyer*." In the parable of the Good Samaritan which follows it speaks of a "certain priest" and a "*certain Samaritan*." The names are not given, but were the priest and Samaritan just as real as the lawyer?

Most of these parables with the exception of the parable of the friend at midnight are given to either a lawyer testing Jesus or a man demanding help from Jesus or for the benefit of exposing and correcting the Pharisees. Note after Jesus spoke the parable of the Unjust Steward "*the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him*" (Luke 16:14).

Additionally, many of these parables focus to some extent on the use of money or use of possessions. The Good Samaritan gave two denarii for the wounded man's care. The woman lost one of ten coins. The Prodigal Son wasted his inheritance. The Unjust servant wasted his master's goods. The Rich Man neglected to help poor Lazarus. The Rich Fool was willing to take care of the bumper crop and not his soul. He introduced the parable with this warning: "*Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses*" (Luke 16:15).

Note that the parable of the Prodigal Son is divided into two parables. The additional parable is that of the Elder Son.

Parable of the Two Debtors

Luke 7:41-43

41 *"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."*

This parable, like most, cannot be understood without reading the context, which is Luke 7:36-50. Many have confused this story with one found in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 12:1-8. There are some parallels. In both the supper took place in the house of one named Simon. However, Simon is a very common name in Palestine at this time. Peter was named Simon. Jesus had another apostle named Simon the zealot. Judas was himself the son of Simon. A man named Simon was compelled by the Romans to carry Jesus' cross. Even one of Jesus' own half-brothers was named Simon. Yet, closer observation reveals these are two entirely separate events. The Simon here at Bethany is not the same Simon in Luke 7. Luke tells us that Simon was a Pharisee whereas the Simon at Bethany was a leper. No doubt Jesus had healed him of leprosy and the supper was perhaps in gratitude for Jesus' compassion. The suppers were at two different times: one at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus and one at the very end during the passion week. One took place in Galilee and the other at Bethany near Jerusalem. The only other parallel would be a woman anointing Jesus. The woman in Luke was a sinner. Mary of Bethany was a devout follower of Jesus. Jesus forgave the sinful woman, but Mary is given honor for her devotion. Caldwell noted "the message of this story relates to association with sinners, while the message of the later story relates to love, caring for the poor, and wastefulness; and this story evidences decency and hospitality, while the later one is a preparation for the 'day of my burying'" (Caldwell 447). Clearly, these two suppers are two very different events.

As this story unfolds we find a pharisee by the name of Simon inviting Jesus to attend a banquet. It was customary for a guest Rabbi who had just spoke at the local synagogue to be shown this hospitality, As was His custom, Jesus accepted. Suddenly, a woman appears with an "alabaster flask of fragrant oil". She precedes to wash His feet with her tears and wipe them away with her hair. Then she kisses them and anoints them with oil.

Simon questions both Jesus' ability as a prophet and motives for allowing this woman to touch Him. Knowing Simon's heart Christ tells him a parable of two debtors who are both unable to repay their master and both are subsequently forgiven. At this point He asked Simon who loved the master more. *"Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have rightly judged.'"* In this parable God is the creditor, men the debtors, and sin the debt. What unfolds next demonstrates Christ's motive in telling this parable. He wanted Simon to see the contrasts between himself and this woman. Thus, Christ directs Simon's attention to the woman, *"Do you see this woman?"* Simon didn't see her as Christ did nor did he view himself the way Christ saw him. Even Simon's view of Jesus was different.

She Saw a Great Guest, He Saw a Lowly "Rabbi"

He had neglected to show his guest ordinary Eastern hospitality. No water for His feet, no kiss of peace for greeting, and no oil to anoint His head. He treated the Savior with the coldest informality as if He were his social inferior.

In contrast, this sinful woman went far beyond normal courtesy. She didn't use water to wash His feet, but her own tears. Instead of greeting Him with a kiss, she kissed His feet repeatedly. She not only anointed Him with oil, but she anointed His feet with oil. Which according to Pliny was regarded as an extreme luxury. Surely, if Simon even regarded Jesus as a prophet of God, he would have treated Him with at least the common courtesies of the day.

She Saw Her Sin, He Saw Her as a Sinner

She recognized her great debt of sin. He didn't want to have anything to do with this notorious sinner. The contrast in debt is not God's view of sinners, but Simon's. Fifty denarii is about two month's wages compared to 500 denarii which is almost 20 months pay. In Simon's eyes he was ten times better off than this woman.

The introduction of the woman begins with *"behold"*. The quest would have been started by the appearance of this well known sinner. The term "sinner" would have been applied to women known to be prostitutes or adulteresses.

Some have sought to identify this woman with Mary Magdalene who is introduced in Luke 8:2: *"certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons."* There is not evidence that the sinful woman is Mary Magdalene. If there was a connection between the two Luke would have had a chance to make it in the context.

What Simon needed to know is that *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23). Even the most righteous sinner is like the worst in that both have nothing by which to discharge their debt of sin.

Do you say like Simon "He or she is a sinner?" When instead you ought to say, "I am a sinner."

She Saw the Need for Forgiveness, He Saw a Blasphemer

Simon was a man who in his own eyes did not need any forgiveness. Whereas the woman was one who needed much forgiveness. Yet, he really didn't have any concern about her soul's future. Remember, he was appalled that a supposed prophet of God would even allow her to touch Him. Instead of rejoicing over the woman's penitence and Christ's forgiveness, he was aghast that He forgave her. The Pharisees had already accused Christ of blasphemy, because only God can forgive sins. Before Jesus *"said to the man who was paralyzed, 'I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house'"* (Luke 5:24). He told the paralytic, *"Man, your sins are forgiven you"* (Luke 5:20). *"And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, 'Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'"*(Luke 5:21).

She Showed Love, He Didn't Even Show Hospitality

The woman's love is seen in how she was willing to publically expend the fragrant, expensive oil from the expensive alabaster flask. It was "a container made of glassy, almost transparent, marble-like crystalline stalagmite gypsum rock or carbonate sulphate of lime" (Caldwell 449). Love for Christ corresponds to our appreciation for His pardon. Appreciation for forgiveness depends upon our recognition of sin. Simon could not love Christ more, not because he was not as great a sinner as the woman, but because he did not see his hopeless plight as a sinner.

Do not be deceived. This parable is not teaching that only great sinners can be great lovers of God. Simon loved little, because he had an inadequate perception of his guilt. All men from the chief of sinners to the young teenage convert who has very little experience in sin can love God. It depends on their equal degree of recognizing their irreparable debt of sin, and the gratefulness for deliverance. Remember, *"We love because he first loved us"* (1 John 4:19).

She Sought for Mercy, He Sought after Tradition

The Pharisees were "the separate ones." In an attempt to keep themselves religiously pure they became separatists. According to the pharisaic tradition, her very touch would have rendered Jesus

unclean. Yet in fact it was just as morally polluting for Jesus to sit at Simon's table as it was to be touch by this woman.

In contrast, she came to Christ with actions befitting a humble sinner seeking mercy. She found forgiveness. She could not more pay the debt of her many sins. So she need grace and mercy of Jesus to forgive the debt. She would leave the house debt free. Simon would stay in his house and in his debt of sin.

She Showed Humble Service, He Saw an Inappropriate Touch

The dining arrangements in a Jewish home of the first century would have been much different than customs. They would all sit on floor cushions at a low table. Leaning on the table with one arm and leaning over to eat with the other. So Jesus' His feet would have been placed away from the table. Uninvited guest would come in and line the walls and listen to the conversations. They would not eat with the guests. The woman was standing behind Jesus. As she knelt down to anointed his feet, she was overcome with emotion and her tears began to rain down and "wet" His feet. The term for "wet" is the Greek word *brecho* meaning "to rain". Not having a towel, she humbly uses her hair to wipe his feet. This act of service was often left to the lowest servant in the house.

Simon observed an embarrassing scene in his home that night. As a sinful woman. Who most likely was guilty of man sexual related sins came in and "touched" Jesus. The Greek term for "touch" is used in 1 Cor. 7:1 for sexual relations. Why did Simon use this term? As her tears washed over Jesus feet she let her hair down to wipe them. "The Talmud says that a woman could be divorced for letting down her hair in the presence of another man" (Hughes 277). She kissed His feet again and again. To put this in historical perspective one's feet are not as sensitive as they are today. The average man and woman wore open toed sandals. The poor had not foot wear. They all walked everywhere on dirty and at times muddy streets. The feet were calloused and not very sensitive. There is nothing in this her behavior to prove any improper or erotic motive. She was acting out of a penitent attitude.

She Had Many Sins, He Could Not See His Sins

Although he was acutely aware of her sinfulness, Simon was blind to his own sins. She had the 500 denarii debt and he had the 50 denarii debt. But this was illustrative of Simon's perceptive. Jesus had just been condemned for His association with sinners. Jesus summed up the pharisees' thoughts about Him when He said, "*The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'*" (Luke 7:34).

Jesus contact with this woman did not make him unclean. Simon's few sins were just a defiling as her multitude of sins. The Savior is not more defiled by the sin of others by their presence or touch any more than the sun is contaminated by shining upon a manure pile.

She Acted in Faith, He Acted Out of Skepticism

Simon was curious about Jesus' claims. Especially that of forgiving the paralytic man. He did not invited Jesus into his home because he saw the evidence and heard the proof of Jesus' being the Son of God. He was skeptical. This was a chance to judge Jesus in hope of finding something to expose Him as a fraud.

The woman was not forgiven on the basis of her loving service to Jesus, but her faith. She may have heard of Jesus' recent forgiveness of the paralyzed man.

She Saw a Savior, He Saw an Imposter

Simon assumed that if Jesus knew who she was He would not have permitted her to touch Him. He also assumed that Jesus did not know her sinful state because he was not a prophet but an imposter. Yet ironically as Simon was thinking this "*within himself*" Jesus knew his thoughts. Thus, proving He was at least a prophet of God.

The woman came to Jesus not to be healed but to who faith and love. Jesus out of grace and

mercy loved her enough to save her.

She Left in Peace, He Was Left in Sin

Jesus told the woman to "Go in peace" a phrase denote His good will toward her. As we might say "God be with you." He she could go away from him happy and content knowing her sins had been forgiven.

Simon was left with not such peace even though he was the host of Jesus in his own home. Jesus would have gladly have forgiven Simon's sins, if this pharisee was not self-righteous that he was blind to his own sins. Simon was so focused on her sinful past, he missed out on the joyful future that was to be hers. Simon missed his opportunity because he focused on his traditions to save him and give him peace. Christ could have forgiven him as easily and said, "*Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.*"

This is one of many stories where Jesus was able to transform lives through the message He preached and the love He demonstrated. He turned the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob into an evangelist bring many to see Jesus. As well as the demon-possessed man at Gerasene was turned into a missionary for the kingdom. He changed Simon the Zealot and Matthew the publican into apostles. An off course He appeared to and transformed Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle. He can still transform via Gospel those who have the same loving, faith of this woman who was so conscience of her sinful state. Who represents your attitude: the woman or Simon?

Questions:

1. In whose home did Jesus tell this parable?

2. Matching:

___ God	a. 500 denarii
___ men	b. creditor
___ sin	c. debtors
___ greater debt	d. debt
___ lesser debt	e. 50 denarii

3. What did Simon fail to provide for Jesus as a guest in his home?

4. How did the woman provide for the things which Simon did not?

5. True False The woman in this story is Mary Magdalene.

6. Matching:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ___ She Saw Her Sin | a. He Saw a Blasphemer |
| ___ She Saw the Need for Forgiveness | b. He was left in sin |
| ___ She Showed Love | c. He acted out of skepticism |
| ___ She Sought for Mercy | d. He saw an imposter |
| ___ She Saw a Great Guest | e. He Saw Her as a Sinner |
| ___ She left in peace | f. He Didn't Even Show Hospitality |
| ___ She saw a savior | g. He Saw a Lowly "Rabbi" |
| ___ She Acted out of Faith | h. He Sought after Tradition |

7. How much is five hundred denarii?

8. How did Simon respond to Jesus forgiving the woman?

9. T F Simon's love for God is less than the woman's because he was not as great a sinner as the woman.

10. Why was it so appalling to Simon that He allowed the woman to touch Him?

11. Research: What is an alabaster flask? What do you think it is mentioned?

Application & Discussion:

1. How are Christians today like Simon in their attitude and thinking?

2. What are the proper actions and attitudes toward a great sinner who repents?

Homework: Consider how much God has forgiven you and how much you love Him in return.

Parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" 27 So he answered and said, "'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.'" 28 And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." 29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Then Jesus answered and said: "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. 31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 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. 35 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.' 36 So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" 37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

As Jesus as seated and teaching, He was suddenly ("*behold*") interrupted by a lawyer who asked the right questions of the right person and had the right answers, but he had the wrong motive. This well-educated Jew of the Law of Moses did not seek an answer but in asking his question of Jesus, he "*tested Him*". Furthermore, we see his motives were insincere in that he tried to "*justify himself*" by asking Jesus "*who is my neighbor?*" This seems to be done to avoid personal application of the command as was common in the day to define a neighbor as only a fellow Israelite and never an enemy, like a Samaritan.

Several years ago a company advertized that "like a good neighbor" they would be there for its customers. Just what does it take to be a good neighbor? Jesus in response to a question by a lawyer described several characteristics of a good neighbor. Although this lawyer asked "*Who is my neighbor?*" Jesus responded with the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). By doing so Jesus implied that the real question should be "Am I a good neighbor?," instead of "Who is my neighbor?"

- **Being a Good Neighbor to Inherit Eternal Life**

In studying a parable there is often the temptation to give it an allegorical interpretation as did many of the early Christians writers of the second and third centuries. For example: "Jesus is the Samaritan; the inn is the church; (the innkeeper an apostle, DRV); the road is the course of one's life; the victim traveling is a lost sinner leaving Jerusalem; the oil and wine are 'sacraments'; the robbers are the devil's angels; the priest is the Law; and the Levite represents the sacrifices" (Caldwell 639). The parable was not about the question of the role of the church and Lord's Supper, but about the obtaining eternal life by keeping the commandments. To allegorize the parable would hide the true meaning and application of the story from the lawyer and audience. Parables were designed to illustrate a truth in order for one to better understand Jesus' teachings and be able to make application.

The question of obtaining eternal life is a good one for all to ask of God. Eternal life is something

everyone knows cannot be obtained by man's own effort. The rich young ruler also asked this question of Jesus (Luke 18:8). Although the Old Testament did not explain how eternal life could be obtained, many believed in it nonetheless. Like Job who said, *"and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"* (Job 19:26-27). David's hope in being with his dead infant son rested in the belief. *"I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me"* (2 Sam. 12:23).

- **Being a Good Neighbor To Fulfill the First Commandment**

Jesus had the lawyer answer his own question concerning what must be done to inherit eternal life. He correctly told Jesus *"You shall love the Lord you God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind' and 'your neighbor as yourself"* (v. 27). This is a quote from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. It is called the Shema. It was to be quoted by heart by every righteous Jew twice a day. The pharisees wore a box bound to their forehead which contained the Shema written upon a piece of paper. Jesus approved of his answer. After all when Jesus was asked the question in His final week, He gave the same answer (Mark 12:28-31).

Those who fail like the priest and the Levite to demonstrate love for one in need shows they do not love God because they do not love their neighbor. Thus, the motivation behind being a good neighbor is the commandment to love God and others. Love conquers all the obstacles which keep men from becoming good neighbors.

- **Being a Good Neighbor Results from Loving Others**

The second commandment to love one's neighbor comes from Leviticus 19:18. The Greek term used by Jesus is important. *"Agapeseis* does not simply command found emotional feeling or affectionate friendliness (*philein*). It is a spirit which sets the interests of another before one's own and does all possible to meet the needs of its object" (Caldwell 628). Furthermore, love of neighbor is based on how one would love oneself.

To truly love God is to love one's neighbor. And one's neighbor is anyone in need of help. To fail to love your neighbor is a failure to have the love of God. John warned, *"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him; how does the love of God abide in him?"* (1 Jn. 3:17). The way we treat our fellow man will either validate that we love God or negate our love of God.

- **Being a Good Neighbor Is Part of True Religion**

Both of the men who passed on by were Jews with a special obligation to be good examples in obeying the Law. Like the lawyer this Priest and Levite knew the Law. The same Law which urged benevolence even to a beast (Ex. 23:4,5), also commanded love to a stranger. *"The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God"* (Lev. 19:34).

Assuming the Priest and Levite were returning from Jerusalem to Jericho after serving in the Temple, it would appear they had left God back in the Temple. Far too often, God's children have become so engrossed with the mechanics of religion that they have failed to practice it in their daily walk of life. Jesus so condemned the Pharisees when He said, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone"* (Mt. 23:23). The Law so encouraged this in many places like Micah 6:8: *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?"* New Testament Christianity is a religion which is to be faithfully practiced. *"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).

- **Being a Good Neighbor Involves Taking Risks**

The place of the attack on the man by robbers was a well traveled road connecting Jerusalem with Jericho. Many priests lived in the city of palms, so it would have not been unusual for a priest or a Levite to be traveling on that road. The passage correctly says they were *"going down from Jerusalem*

to Jericho.” This is a geographical fact in that there is a 3500 foot drop from Jerusalem in the seventeen mile journey to Jericho which is some 850 feet below sea level. The road passes through some rough terrain filled with caves and steep walls and winding roads providing a perfect place for thieves to await to ambush their victims. “Josephus tells us that Herod had dismissed 40 thousand workmen from the Temple, shortly before Christ’s recital of this parable, and that a large part of them became vicious highway robbers” (Lockyer 251).

The Priest and Levite may have thought: "He might already be dead. The robbers may still be in the area. Why risk two dead men?" Even today, robbers will stage events, and then pounce upon unwary rescuers. Some could have argued that the Samaritan was courting disaster. He got himself into a mess and needs to learn to get himself out of it.

The Samaritan's bravery and compassion triumphed over these fears.

- **Being a Good Neighbor Involves Inconvenience**

This Good Samaritan had to give up several things to aid the wounded man. It cost this traveling Samaritan his time. Because he used his donkey to carry the man, he had to walk. The Samaritan had to use his supplies of oil and wine. “Oil was widely used by the ancients as an external remedy to assuage the pain of open wounds (Isaiah 1:6). The use of wine was also an external remedy for wounds and bruises” (Lockyer 263).

Priests and Levites were important members of the Jewish community. They were busy men with many urgent concerns. There were twenty-four orders of priests. Each priest serving in the Temple two weeks a year. The Priest was perhaps in a hurry to get back home. The Levites assisted the priests in the Temple. The law forbade the priest from touching the dead (Lev. 20:11). Any Jew who touched the dead would be unclean for several days. The fact is there will always be other things to do. No one is going to schedule a robbery in order to fit your busy schedule. Christianity was never meant to be practiced upon the basis of a convenient season (Ac. 24:25). And serving others will often demand we get our hands dirty.

- **Being a Good Neighbor Includes All Men**

The lawyer's attitude would have eliminated a Samaritan from being a neighbor to a Jew. *"The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans"* (Jn. 4:9). In 722 BC the Assyrians carried off the ten northern tribes of Israel into captivity. They populated the land with other conquered nations who were pagan in religion. The Jews which were left intermarried with these people. These half-breeds formed a mixed Jewish religion which built a reviled Temple at Mount Gerizim. Even though it was destroyed by the Maccabees, there are still a few hundred Samaritans who worship at its destruction site to this day. Although a Samaritan is the hero of this story, they were not right with God. When the Samaritan woman asked Jesus whether it was right to worship at Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem He answered, *"You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews"* (John 4:22). There was open hostility between the Jew and Samaritans. "Between AD 6 and 9...Samaritans scattered bones in the Temple at Jerusalem during a certain Passover" (Meador 58). They were indeed religious heretics and the Jews also called them "dogs" along with the rest of the pagan population in Palestine. One rabbi had written, "Let no man eat the bread of the Cuthites (Samaritans), for he who eats their bread is as he who eats swine's flesh." (Boice 391). In anger and disdain of Jesus some of the Jews said to Him, *"Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"* (John 8:48).

Obviously not all Samaritans were sinful and evil. When Jesus healed the ten lepers all left without saying thanks to Jesus, but one returned to worship Him, a Samaritan (Luke 17:11f). It was particularly repugnant that Jesus cast the hated Samaritan in the guise of the good guy. However, the Law of Moses did contain abundant teaching on caring for strangers (Dt. 10:16-19; Lev. 19:33,34). Ironically, Jews and Samaritans were geographical neighbors. Samaria lay between the Jews in Judea in the south and the Jews of Galilee to the north.

We are to be a good neighbor to all men regardless of their race, color, education, economic condition, religion, etc. Like the Good Samaritan we should aspire to aid our fellow man without investigating these areas of his life.

Furthermore, all men who are in need must be considered neighbors we must help. Jesus does not tell us if the man who was robbed was a Jew. He left it open to opinion for the purpose of letting each reader identify with the man. As one reads the story he will think, "That could be me laying in the ditch moaning for help." The identify of the man is not as important as the need to be a neighbor to any such man or woman in need.

- **Being a Good Neighbor Is Not Limited to Location**

Most people only think of a neighbor as those who live next door. "Nearness does not make neighborliness." It takes more than a good fence to make for good neighbors. Being a good neighbor will require one to go beyond all geographic and superficial boundaries. It is not place but love that draws the boundaries of one's neighborhood. The Samaritan was a neighbor, because *"he came to where he was"*. This parable expands the size of our neighborhood. Our neighbor is as close as the next person in need who crosses our path.

Opportunity will determine who falls within the bounds of our circle of neighbors. *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith"* (Gal. 6:10).

- **Being a Good Neighbor Involves Showing Compassion**

What made the Good Samaritan good? It wasn't just a feeling of sympathy for the man's plight. Perhaps, the Priest and Levite felt for the man, yet passed by. However, the Samaritan showed compassion by becoming involved in his circumstance. The Samaritan cared for his injuries, lifted the man onto his own donkey, led him to the nearest inn, and arranged for him to recover there. There is a vast difference in simply feeling for a man or giving him something, and in seeking to show mercy by our action.

- **Being a Good Neighbor May Require the Assistance of Others**

Whether or not the innkeeper is another "good Samaritan" is not clear. After all, he was being paid to provide a place for the man to convalesce. The Samaritan trusted the innkeeper to help. He needed the help for the man. The innkeeper trusted the Samaritan to return and repay any additional expense for the man's recovery. We all may need partners to caring for our neighbor.

- **Being a Good Neighbor Can Be Costly**

Not only can being a good neighbor be risky and inconvenient, it can be costly. The Samaritan left two denarii with the innkeeper for the care of the victim. This may not seem like much to us, but it was equivalent to two days' pay. And depending on the quality of the inn this money could have provided the wounded man with room and board for at least three weeks.

The Priest and Levite displayed the attitude: "What's mine is mine". Such people would not kill a man for his money, but neither will they spend theirs to rescue him. Proverbs warns, *"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,' when you have it with you"* (3:27,28). On the other hand, the Christ-like attitude is: "What's yours is yours and what's mine is God's and will be there for you if you need it".

- **Being a Good Neighbor Requires Continuous Compassion**

Jesus commanded the lawyer to *"Go and do likewise."* In other words, "be like the Samaritan". This requires preparedness to be able to help when the opportunity arises and the vision to see the opportunities around you. Peter described Jesus as one *"who went about doing good"* (Acts 10:38). Many have went out to do good based upon this parable. There are many hospitals known as "Good Samaritan Hospital" and there are our benevolent organizations like "Samaritan's Purse". As Christians we are part of the royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 5:10) in the Kingdom of Christ. Let us look for opportunities to serve the needs of our neighbor and not pass by on the other side.

Remember that the lawyer had asked Jesus, *"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"* Jesus' parable demonstrated his need to love his neighbor and concluded His remarks to him by saying, *"Go and do likewise"*. Therefore, in order to obtain eternal life one must examine whether or not he is

living like a good neighbor.

Questions:

1. What roles did the priest and Levite have and where were they traveling to, possibly?
2. How was the Samaritan brave?
3. What purpose is there in having the Samaritan set up as the good guy?
4. Who do most people think of when they hear the word "neighbor"?
5. Who is really our neighbor, according to this parable?
6. What does behaving like a true neighbor cost the Samaritan?
7. Contrast that with the spirit of the priest and Levite.
8. What commandment does being a good neighbor fulfill?
9. What does this teach us about obtaining eternal life?

10. How can we practice being a good neighbor today?

Application & Discussion:

1. Explain the difference between “having good friends” and “being a good friend.”

2. What are some ways you can be a good neighbor? What opportunities can you see to help?

Homework: Go out this week and find someone to whom you can be a good neighbor. Look for someone in need whether a stranger, friend, enemy, relative, homeless, etc.

Parable of the Friend at Midnight

Luke 11:5-13

5 And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? 8 I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. 9 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 11 If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Ricky's birthday was approaching and the one thing he wanted more than anything else in the world was a large red fire truck. So he incorporated this wish into his evening prayers. "And please, dear God, send me a red fire truck for my birthday." he shouted at the top of his lungs. "But, Ricky," his mother protested. "You don't have to shout like that, God isn't deaf, you know." "No," said Ricky, "but Granny is."

When we pray is anyone listening? Does God listen to our prayers? If He doesn't then, maybe it isn't worth calling upon Him in prayer. Jesus gave the parable of the Friend at Midnight to reassure us that God is a Friend who is willing to hear and respond to our pleas in prayer.

The disciples asked Jesus, "*Lord, teach us to pray like you pray.*" Prayer was not an unfamiliar thing to them, but when they saw and heard Jesus pray it was as though they had never heard a prayer before.

Instructing His disciples in the elements of proper prayer, Jesus provides them with the model prayer (11:2-4). His brief prayer sharply contrasted the long prayers the disciples usually heard from the Pharisees (Mk. 12:40). Keep in mind that this prayer includes "*give us this day our daily bread.*" In this parable the object sought from a friend was bread for guests.

In Palestine travelers often traveled late in the evening to avoid the heat of the midday sun. A traveler turned in at a house late at night. He was welcomed, but since his arrival was unexpected there was no food to put before him. The obligation of hospitality in the ancient middle east was great. The man was required to provide food in abundance for his guest. In a typical village each family takes turns in baking loaves of bread for the whole village or one person would be the town baker. This individual would have left over bread. Bread was cooked daily and used up daily. It was not kept overnight by the average household. The point of the parable deals with the friend not wishing to get up and respond to the plea for bread. The man is persistent and the friend has to respond to the knock on the door if he is to get any sleep. Jesus instructs His disciples therefore, in what spirit they are to pray: persevering faith. In this parable, the reaction of the friend is in contrast to how God responds to our prayers.

God Is a Better Friend

The friend did not wish to be inconvenienced or bothered. If the door was shut, that was a definite sign that the householder did not wish to be disturbed. The door is not merely closed; it is barred and fastened, and this is an unseasonable hour. For one to rise was inevitably to disturb the whole family. Soon it became obvious that if the family was to get any rest at all, there was nothing else to do but to get up, let the man in and give him what he wanted. When someone calls on us for a favor it seems always at the most busy time. Most of us experience a shudder when the phone or the doorbell rings in the middle of the night. Fortunate for us God is not too busy and does not sleep.

Where friendship failed importunity prevailed. The knocking continued, like a dripping faucet. If even a human friend will respond to persistence, how much more will God respond, even if He seems to delay.

God is not a "fear-weather friend." God does not answer our oft praying to get rid of us, but because He loves us. He is certainly not an unwilling or insensitive friend and He does not perceive us as nagging neighbors. We say that "a friend in need is a friend indeed." This is God's attitude in prayer. We do not have to force Him into giving, and He never gives what we seek reluctantly. It's not that God is asleep as Elijah suggested Baal might be when that false god failed to respond to his prophets on Mt. Carmel (I Ki. 18:26-29). Our God does not sleep (Ps. 121:3,4). Saying Luke 11:5-13 teaches that God must be worn down by persistent prayer before He will answer lessens the majestic kindness of our loving Creator. Yet there are time when God will delay answering for His own good reasons.

God Is a Great Giver

In giving further explanation to this parable, Jesus uses three acronyms: ask, seek and knock (11:9,10). This is not mere repetition, for to seek is more than to ask, and to knock is more than to seek; and thus an exhortation is given to increasing urgency in prayer. By His use of the trio of words, Jesus was prescribing prayer as an increasing urgency, and implying different degrees of intensity. Richard Glove wrote: *"If a child wants anything of a parent, what is his process? If mother is near and visible, he simply asks. If she is not near and visible, he seeks her, and having found her, he then asks. If, finding her, he finds her inaccessible, within her chamber, unwilling to be disturbed, he knocks till he gains her attention and consent."* Fausset said: *"We ask for what we wish; we seek for what we miss; we knock for that from which we feel ourselves shut out."*

God will answer. God answers because He is the good Giver of all things (Js. 1:5,17). God can supply all we need. Rejecting this would be like two mice coming to a food filled warehouse and refusing to believe that it can feed them for life. God has all that His children will ever need. We all have needs that we are unable to meet from our own meager resources, but God is an abundant giver.

God a Perfect Father

Earthly parents never really turn a deaf ear to their children's pleading. God is prepared and eager to do what His children ask (Is. 65:24; I Jn. 5:14,15). He never offers us stones or serpents, even if in our ignorance we ask for them. Giving a stone instead of bread would have to be a temporary joke or a terrible insult. The one serious difference here is that the serpent could be poisonous and therefore a threat to the health of the child. We know that a scorpion is an insect with a poisonous sting. No good father would give one to his son and thus endanger him. Pliny (NJ, xi.25) says that in Judea the scorpions are about the size of an egg, and not unlike one in shape. Jesus meant by "evil" that they were human and therefore imperfect. sinful humans. God is perfectly holy and all-wise. Those who pray must have faith that God will give them only what is best for them.

Christian's Duty in Pray

- **Persisting**

What friendship alone could not do, ardent persistence did. The man knocked on with shameless tenacity. Pray like Jacob who wrestled with an angel of God and said: *"I will not let thee go, except thou*

bless me" (Gen. 32:26) or Abraham's conversation with God to spare the cities of the plain (Gen. 18:23-33). A salesman finally received an audience with the president of a company at the end of the day. The president told the salesman: "Your lucky to have seen me, I've rejected seven salesmen today." The salesman said, "I know, I've been all seven of them." Human beings rarely persist in activities that they come to believe are futile. Too often we knock and then run away instead of waiting.

- **Requesting**

We may pride ourselves in our independence. It is far easier on the ego to give help than it is to ask for it. Men must pray, for like the host they stand in need of something which they cannot supply for themselves. The request of the host was definite: "*Friend, lend me three loaves.*" He did not ask for things in general, but he was specific.

- **Trusting**

If we can rely on humans to do the right thing for the wrong reason or because of "natural affection" for their offspring, cannot we be absolutely confident that God who is more than just a friend and father will both hear and give His best gifts.

A Christian missionary was discussing religion with a Hindu friend. In the course of their conversation the missionary asked, "Why do you always beat a gong when you enter your temple?" The Hindu was embarrassed. "You're not going to believe this, but we do it to get our god's attention." Persistent prayer is not needed to get God's attention, but it is needed for your faith in prayer.

Questions:

1. If God does not hear our prayers what motive could there be for praying?
2. What connection do you notice between the model prayer Jesus gives and this parable?
3. Why did the host fail to have bread for his guest?
4. Why did the friend not wish to get up and give his neighbor bread?
5. Why motivated the friend to get up and respond to the desires of his neighbor?
6. Why is God a better friend in prayer?
7. How is God a better giver than our friends?

8. Why did Jesus use the three acronyms: ask, seek, and knock?
9. Why does the Jesus call earthly fathers "evil"? How does He contrast them with the Heavenly Father?
10. Give examples of others who were persistent in their prayers to God.
11. If persistent prayer is not needed to get God's attention than why persist in our prayers?
12. Why might God not answer our prayers immediately?

Application & Discussion:

1. What is the difference between persistence in prayer and vain repetition? Is it wrong to prayer for the same thing over and over? Explain.
2. The neighbor made very specific requests of his friend. What are some specific requests that we should make of God?

Homework: Keep on praying to God everyday concerning the needs of others and help you need.

Parable of the Rich Fool

Luke 12:16-21

16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 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. 19 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." ' 20 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?' 21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Murder is dreadful; adultery is shameful; lying is serious; drunkenness is atrocious, but covetousness is common to all. Rarely does any man admit to coveting. Yet the Bible is resplendent with examples of covetousness. Balaam coveted the gold promised him by king Balak, if he could only curse the children of Israel. Achan caused the defeat of Israel at Ai, because of his coveting the things pilfered from the ruins of Jericho (Josh. 7). After Elisha healed Naaman of his leprosy, Gehazi greedily chased after him to procure goods from him. These rewards the prophet of God had already rejected (2 Kings 5). The rich young ruler would not give up his wealth to follow Jesus and obtain eternal life. Judas out of greed sold the Son of God for a mere thirty pieces of silver. Ananias and Sapphira coveted the money they received from the sale of land. The proceeds from this sale was already promised to the church (Acts 5). At the end of his life Paul lamented that Demas had forsaken him, "having loved his present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). Covetousness seems to have been just as much an issue back in Biblical times as it is today.

As Jesus was speaking important truths about fearing God, the people needed to be aware of hypocrisy and confessing His name before men. A man interrupts Him about something that has not in direct correlation with current subject matter. "Then one from the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me'" (Luke 12:13). According to Barnes, "Among the Jews the older brother had two shares, or twice as much as any other child, De. 21:15-17. The remainder was then equally divided among all the children" (Barnes 80).

It was not uncommon for the people to communicate their disagreements to a rabbi for his help. But Jesus refused to get involved. "But He said to him, 'Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?'" (Luke 12:14). God did not send Christ to be a mere referee over the day to day grievances of the people. Today, one would think that a preacher was unloving and lazy to refuse to get involved. Jesus' kingdom was a spiritual kingdom and His message was about kingdom righteousness. He is not about to neglect His mission to serve the secular and coveting desires of the people. There were plenty of other men in Palestine who could have helped with this man's inquiry.

This does not mean that Jesus is not going to help. He gives the man greater advice than he could have received from anyone else. Jesus knew that the thoughts and intents of the man's heart dealt with covetousness and not righteousness. "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). "Beware" is an intense term, like, "beware of the dog." It warns of great danger that lay ahead on the path of life. The man was so busy looking out for his individual rights, he forgot about his God given duties.

Note that Jesus will speak of the man in the parable as a fool. Foolishness is an inherent part of covetousness. The real issue or disease is coveting. The man foolishly thinks that the real need here is more money, which is, a greedy striving after more and more. He thinks that if Jesus would just supply this he would have all he needed. But Jesus is able and willing to supply the man with much more.

In Providing a Living, He Forgot to Live

“Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully’” (Luke 12:16). Here is a successful man in the eyes of the world. He is making a living in this life but has not made a life while he is living. Why? Because he forgot the source of real success and happiness. These are not found in the abundance of things. The richest man in the world, King Solomon, testified that riches do not bring happiness (Eccl. 2:3-11). Material goods may only provide temporary satisfaction to life’s desires (Eccl. 1:8). Success to many is measured by taking inventory of possessions. This can only tell a man what he has and never what he really is. To live a long life without a need or unmet desire in this world is not a successful life. Jesus lived less than thirty-four years on earth and died with nothing. Yet Jesus accomplished more in His short life than all men before or since.

In Planning for Himself, He Forgot His Neighbor

Notice the language of a self-centered man throughout this short parable of just over sixty words. Six times he uses “I” and five times “my.” *“And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’”* (Luke 12:17). He was concerned with self not really his soul. All in all there are about eighteen references to himself.

Surely, the rich man’s world did not merely consist of himself. Did he not have neighbors? Were none of his neighbors in need? Why are they not mentioned in regard to the sharing of his great bumper crop? Like so many “my money” is spent on “me.” The only one he needs to talk to is himself and the only one he needs to consider when spending his money is himself.

Paul gave some selfless advice to rich Christians. *“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life”* (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

In Reckoning His Goods, He Forgot the Giver

He forgot the true source of his possessions. It is as if he is the one solely responsible for his great wealth. *“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’”* (Luke 12:18). He no longer will need to look to God for his daily bread, but to his barns. God designed the seeds to reproduce in abundance, He gave the good weather, the sun, rain, soil, etc. Yet what mention of God is found in this parable? God gets no credit or thanks. Yet, God is the giver of every perfect gift (Js. 1:17).

God is left out of the rich farmer’s thought. He is like an atheist in that God does not exist in his little world. His atheism may not be actual, but for all practical purposes he is living a life without God. The abundance of things blind us to the existence and need for God in our lives. In fact, material goods and the desire for them will often take the place of God. This is why covetousness is a form of idolatry (Col. 3:5).

In Providing for His Body, He Forgot His Soul

Next, he makes plans for a long life enjoying his treasures, *“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’”* (Luke 12:19). He planned to enjoy his leisure time. He planned for a life of pleasure. He thought he could live by bread alone. In the end he lost his most valuable possession, his soul. Man is not just a physical being. He was created in the image of God and God is not flesh and bone. The soul is eternal and beyond value.

Wealth is temporal. Jesus warned, *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 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?"* (Matt. 16:25,26).

In Counting on Time He Forgot Eternity

"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 12:20). He forgot that the true owner of the future is God. Owning goods on earth does not mean one owns time or controls it. Tomorrow cannot be claimed by any man (Pr. 27:1.5; Js. 4:13-15). There is no guarantee of tomorrow. Security for the future is not found in the abundance of things, but in one's relationship with God. Instead the farmer ought to have made his plans with the condition "if the Lord wills."

The rich farmer failed to remember how sudden death can come and end life. He must have been healthy for he expected to live a long life of ease. His hope for *"many years"* is cut short by *"this night"* he will die. Death has a way of shattering our dreams.

Death and eternity have a way of nullifying the value of money. Wealth cannot buy time or eternity. Death cannot be bribed. It is a fool who forgets about death and eternity while only looking at the riches which will not follow him to eternity and after his death go to someone else.

We squander our health in search of wealth,
We toil, we sweat, we save.
Then we squander our wealth in search of health
And only find the grave.

In Striving for Riches, He Missed Heaven

Jesus adds a footnote to this parable which sums up His point, *"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God"* (Luke 12:21). The pursuit of treasure hinders the pursuit of heaven. Wealth tends to tangle the soul. Things tie us down to this earth and keep us from longing for heaven. Just as a camel cannot go through the eye of a needle, neither can a man who trusts in riches be saved.

Everyone knows that you cannot take your riches with you. Many have made efforts to take it with them. The pyramids in Egypt stand as monumental proof that this cannot be. When the body of rich man lay in a casket, one of the viewers asked, "how much did he leave?" The reply was, "he left all of it". The grim Spanish proverb has it, "There are no pockets in a shroud." J.D. Tant said, "Even if we could take our money with us, it would probably all burn up the first night!" Everyone goes bankrupt at death. Death causes even the richest of men to leave it all and lose it all (Eccl. 5:15).

Others will reap the material goods left behind. Ironically, he did not think of others when he gained his riches. Now others will think little of him while they inherit his riches. He will not enjoy it but they may.

He tried to store riches on earth, but only true riches can be stored in heaven. While wealth is not a vice and poverty is not a virtue, having riches in heaven is virtuous. Jesus spoke of laying up treasure in heaven in His sermon on the mount. *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matt. 6:19-21). These treasures in heaven involve being rich in faith (Js. 2:5); good works and fruits of righteousness (I Tim. 6:18); the riches of God's favor (Ps. 30:5); riches of wisdom (Pr. 8:11); etc.

Being "rich toward God" is the antidote to covetousness.

Questions:

1. List several men and women from the Bible how had problems with greed and covetousness.

Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

Luke 13:1-9

1 There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' 8 But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. 9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.' "

A tornado destroys a town. A tsunami sweeps the coast killing tens of thousands. An earthquake turns buildings into rubble trapping hundreds beneath. Financial disaster faces a family. A mother of five receives news she has terminal cancer. Why are people afflicted with adversities? Is it because they are bad? Jews confront Jesus with this question looking for His answer. Jesus turns their focus from the sin of those suffering to the need for them to repent of their sins.

Failure to Repent Does Not Necessarily Bring Individual Suffering

The Jews' question Jesus about a rather recent incident with Pilate and shedding of Galileans in the Temple. *"There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, '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 13:1-3). From historical accounts Pilate wanted to bring water into Jerusalem via an aqueduct. To finance this project he was going to use funds from the Temple. Some Jews at the Temple rejected this idea and were going to riot. Pilate had some of his soldiers armed with cudgels. These were short clubs which they disguised under cloaks. When the rioting started the soldiers threw off their cloaks and attacked. Josephus tells of us two incidents where Jews rioted. At one of these some three thousand were killed and two thousand during another. No doubt their blood was shed in the place where their sacrifices were bled. The sacrifices were to cleanse them of guilt but instead they were murdered.

Jesus brings up another tragic event. *"Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:4,5). This tragic event was not mentioned by Josephus. Perhaps, these workers were connected with the aqueduct project paid by the Temple money. The Jews may have viewed this as no accident but divine retribution of the worst kind for traitors who would assist the Romans.

Mankind has often connected suffering with sin in the lives of others. Job's friend Eliphaz asked suffering Job, *"who ever perished being innocent?"* (Job 4:7). Jesus infers that the amount of one's guilt cannot be calculated based on the sum of their suffering. Although all suffering is in general a result of sin entering into this world, suffering does not prove a man a sinner. Those who thus perish may be far

more virtuous than many that live. The Psalmist would frequently reflected on the fact that the wicked often suffered less than the righteous. Suffering is not meted out fairly. Suffering and evil happen to sinner and saint alike.

The real issue Jesus points their attention to is the consequence of sin and the sinner's failure to repent. Whether they are suffering or not, sin will destroy the Jewish nation unless they repent. Jesus uses a parable to encourage them to avail themselves of God's longsuffering as He gives them ample time to repent.

Failure to Repent after God's Blessings

This parable (Luke 13:6-9) is not to be confused with Jesus cursing a fig tree at the end of his ministry in order to make a point to His disciples about the need for genuine fruitfulness (Mt. 21:18-22; Mk. 11:12-25). Luke alone records this parable. Fig trees were common in Palestine. Many homes would have fig trees even if they did not own a vineyard.

God is clearly seen as the vineyard-owner and Christ is the vineyard-keeper. Israelites are the threatened tree. God has blessed Israel. He gave the nation the best. God, therefore, expected the fruits of repentance. His expectations are just. *"For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required"* (Luke 12:48). With great privileges come great accountability.

Failure to Repent after God's Patience

The owner of the vineyard is very tolerant. The fig tree in Palestine is fruitful most of the year. They are not really large but their dense foliage makes them a great shade tree. Since fruit could not be taken from a tree during the first three years (Lev. 19:23), the tree was presumably six years old.

Likewise, God had graciously provided occasions for repentance among the Jews. He sent prophets whom they were quick to ignore, persecute and kill. John the Baptist came preaching repentance for the Kingdom was at hand. God even sent His Son.

Failure to Repent after God's Extended Mercy

After all that has been done by the vinedresser the owner of the vineyard shows mercy and gives the fig tree one more chance to be fruitful. This second chance for Israel is the call for repentance through the Gospel. On the cross He prayed for the fruitless nation rejecting Him, *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* Today, God is delaying His judgment, *"not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9).

God is longsuffering but is not willing to suffering the fruitless tree an indefinite existence. God is willing to wait a long time for man to repent, but even His longsuffering has limits. God gives them only one more year. The period represented by this last year included the preaching of John the Baptist, the public ministry of Jesus Christ, and the forty years of apostolic teaching which followed the Crucifixion and resurrection. Then came the armies of Rome in 70 AD to destroy the nation and the Temple.

Failure to Repent Brings Barrenness

Jesus spent His three years of ministry on earth among the Jews, so all Israel would be fruitful. Jesus spent so much time during the "three years" of His earthly ministry to help the Jews. All through these years He taught, by His life, by parable, with miracle and daily discourses, to make Israel fruitful.

A fruitless tree is a useless tree. It uses up time, space, and nutrients and yet gives no fig. "Die when I may," Lincoln said, "I want it said of me that I plucked a weed and planted a flower where ever I thought a flower would grow". Today, many Christians are unfruitful and are not redeeming the opportunities provided.

By wasting the space it occupies the fig tree hinders the fruitfulness that the ground could yield. The idea is to get to work or get busy or just get out of the way, so the work can be done. The Christian who merely occupies a pew is like the fig tree. He may be there but he does not work or help.

Failure to Repent Brings Divine Judgment

Although sinners may not always suffer in direct proportion to their evil, fruitlessness invites disaster. Soil and space in a vineyard was too valuable to waste on such a tree. Eventually there will be a moment of Judgement to cut it down and forget about it. Jesus said, *"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire"* (Mt. 7:19). Even in the laws of nature one must reap as he sows and that which does not reproduce itself will go extinct.

The Jews would have a final warning to repent. If the axe is already laid at the trunk of the tree it is too late start bearing fruit. If the Jewish nation kept on seeking an earthly kingdom and rejecting the Kingdom of God they could only come to one end. Eventually, Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD.

This same warning can be made to all Christians. Jesus warned, *"If a man does not abide in me he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown Into the fire and burned"* (John 15:6).

You cannot repent too soon, because you do not know how soon it may be too late.

Questions:

1. What motivated Jesus to tell this parable?
2. What is the historical background to the Galileans killed by Pilate?
3. Why did Jesus bring up the story of the eighteen killed in the collapse of the tower?
4. To what did Job's friends attribute his suffering?
5. True False Jesus infers that the amount of one's guilt can be calculated based on the sum of their suffering.
6. Matching:

___ God	a. Israel
___ Christ	b. fruit
___ Repentance	c. Another year
___ Fig Tree	d. cut down and turned
___ Divine Longsuffering	e. Owner
___ 70 AD destruction	f. Husbandman

7. Who has God sent to encourage Israel to bring forth fruits of repentance?

8. What happened to the Jewish nation in 70 AD?

9. True False The longsuffering of God has its limits.

Application & Discussion:

1. In what ways is God showing His longsuffering toward our generation?

2. What are the fruits of repentance?

Homework: Examine how fruitful you are for God especially in the area of bringing forth fruits of repentance.

Parable of the Great Supper

Luke 14:15-24

15 Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" 16 Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, 17 and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' 18 But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' 19 And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' 20 Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' 21 So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' 22 And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' 23 Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. 24 For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.' "

In the Jewish Talmud it reads, "Man is born with his hands clenched; he dies with them wide open. Entering life, he desires to grasp everything; leaving the world, all he possessed has slipped away." There is a parallel comment by Corrie ten Boom: "I've learned that we must hold everything loosely, because when I grip it tightly, it hurts when the Father pries my fingers loose and takes it from me!" Too many will lose out on the blessing of eating bread in the kingdom, because they failed to set forth proper priorities. Jesus said, "but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

In the background to this parable we find Jesus eating supper with Pharisees. He had been invited into the home of one of their rulers (14:1). The real purpose of this invitation was for the Pharisees to watch Jesus in hope of finding something against him. It was the Sabbath and they brought a sick man in. Christ asked them if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Not one of them would answer. Taking their silence as His cue Jesus heals the man. Then He asked if any of them had an ox or an ass fall into the pit, should he not immediately pull it out on the Sabbath day? Following this He spoke a parable advising them about being invited to a wedding feast and giving invitations to supper. This is the parable of Seeking the Chief Seats (14:7-14).

One of those who ate with Jesus interjected a beatitude, "blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (14:15b). The Jews believed that Messianic Kingdom would be ushered in with a great festival (Is. 25:6,9). Jesus gives the parable of the Great Supper as if to question their preparedness to receive an invitation to this great feast.

Holding a feast before the invitation of reliable and actual time pieces required the host to send out servants to initially invite guest to prepare themselves. Once the feast was prepared the servants would be sent out again to tell the invited guests to drop what they were doing and come (Est. 5:8; 6:14). Through the prophets God had already sent out an invitation. Now Christ is the servant sent out to call them to the prepared feast.

The dinner bell has been rung (14:17). The feast is waiting. As the song says, "All things are ready come to the feast." The Gospel invitation has gone out first to the Jews. Will they come to the kingdom? No, they just made up a bunch of excuses for rejecting it.

The Excuse of Property

The first excuse was *"I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused"* (14:18). Most men will not buy a piece of property without looking it over first. Furthermore, he was already told the feast was coming, he should have made other arrangements. It would be dark by the time the feast came, so why look at his field in the dark? Could not this visual examination of his property wait till morning? His property was not going anywhere. He said he *"must go"* when in fact he merely wanted to go. What was so important about this piece of land that he was willing to give up a seat at the feast?

The Excuse of Business

The second man invited said, *"I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused"* (14:19). Again, it is late in the evening and he is making plans to "prove" his oxen by putting them to the plow to check their strength and ability. Why could this not be done in the morning? What farmer would buy a tractor without testing driving it first. Good business men do not put off proving their equipment till after they buy. Why did he have to work? Why did he not find a way to get time off for the feast? No business is so important and pressing to leave of the business of God's kingdom which is ever so pressing.

The Excuse of Family

The final excuse was, *"I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come"* (14:20). This man does not even ask to be excused. He flat out says he cannot come. Maybe he could have asked to bring his wife along. Most men go anywhere they wish wife or no wife. Perhaps, he loves his wife more than the Lord. *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple"* (14:26).

The Real Reason Behind the Excuses

There is a big difference between excuses given for not doing something and a real reason for not doing it. Excuses are coverups. They are cowardly expressions in that they did not dare to give the real reason for the rejection of the invitation. God accepts no excuses. He did not accept Adam and Eve's excuses in the Garden (Gen. 3:12,13). He did not accept Aaron's in making the golden calf (Ex. 32:22,23). All three of the excuses may seem reasonable at first glance but on closer examination they are irrational. Although none of the excuses offered involved sin, the rejection of the invitation was a sin. They had been obligated to attend, but they did not have their priorities in proper order. All of the things mentioned were new: new field, new oxen, new wife. However, the new kingdom has come and they have made other engagements in the old kingdom. They could have said: "Yes, we'll come," for "where there's a will there's a way."

The Great Invitation

It is termed great because of the many invited and also because of the greatness of the one symbolized by the Lord providing the supper. The master sent the servant out to *"bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind"* (14:21). Jesus demonstrated His invitation to these when he healed them, fed them, and taught them. But there is still room so the master sends the servant out again (14:22). The master continues to broaden the guest list. *"Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled'"* (14:23). Apparently you cannot have such a thing as over population in the kingdom of God. The final invitation appears to be an general one to all men who can be found. Perhaps this is the invitation of the Gospel to the Gentiles. The invitation has gone out to the Jews, next to the poor and the sinners, and now to the Gentiles.

Note that the servant here is to *"compel them to come in."* Of course this means a moral compulsion. The original invitation simply said, *"come"* (14:17). The next time the servant went out he

was to “bring” (14:21).

Condemnation For Rejecting the Invitation

Jesus now appears to show that it is His feast under discussion, “*For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper*” (14:24). This parable is prophetic in that the Jews (Pharisees and rulers) would in general reject the Gospel invitation and the message would go forth from Jerusalem inviting all men, such as, Samaritan and Gentiles.

This rejection of those who rejected the invitation implies that they will not be a part of the Kingdom. They would be lost. Trench wrote, “Exclusion from the blessings of the communion of Christ, and that implies everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and glory of His power”..

Today, the invitation is still being sent out. Men are still offering up the same lame excuses. The time they waste making up the excuses could be better spent preparing their hearts to receive the Gospel invitation. Perhaps, when it is convenient they would find time to accept. No doubt the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Indeed our priorities determine our destiny.

Questions:

1. Why will many lose out on the blessing of eating bread in the kingdom?
2. What beatitude did one of the guest interject into the conversation?
3. What was first excuse and why is it unacceptable?
4. What is the second excuse given? Why is it a poor excuse?
5. What was the final excuse? Why is it a lame reason for rejecting the invitation?
6. What did all three things used in the excuses have in common with the Kingdom?
7. Who is invited as replacement guests to fill the banquet hall? Who might these represent?

8. What will become of those who reject the invitation?
9. Look at verses 17, 21 and 22. Note the three different words or phrases used in each invitation?
10. Research: List other excuse makers and their lame excuses from the scriptures.

Application & Discussion:

1. Examine the excuses given by the lost for their rejection of the Gospel invitation.
 - a) "I am already good enough."
 - b) "I am not good enough."
 - c) "I am afraid I cannot hold out."
 - d) "There are too many hypocrites in the church."
 - e) "I do not know enough."
 - f) "I still have plenty of time."
2. Examine the excuses given by brethren not to put the kingdom of God first in their lives.
 - a) "We missed church last week because company came."
 - b) "I would do more personal work if I knew how."
 - c) "We do not attend Bible Study because we can't get anything out of his class."
 - d) "I do not come on Wed. night because you can't prove to me that one has to attend on Wed. night."

Homework: List the excuses you are prone to use in regard to the work and worship of the church and find ways to overcome them.

Parables of the Lost Sheep & Lost Coin

Luke 15:1-10

To have lost a dog which has wandered off brings a deep feeling of concern as the owner roams the neighborhood calling for "Rover" over and over. When a dollar goes missing the purchase cannot be made with just nine dollars until the tenth dollar is found. The most horrifying loss of all is a missing child. Jesus in this chapter uses three parables to show the relief and joy of finding something of great value which had been lost. All three have in common: someone or something is lost, sought for, found, and rejoiced over with others.

The motive for these three parables is given in the first three verses. *"Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'* So He spoke this parable to them, saying:" (Luke 15:1-3). The singular use of the word "parable" indicates that these three need to be studied, compared, and contrasted together. Each parable is not an isolated drawing but three panels of one picture. It is the same story told three different ways. They represent Jesus' defense of His relationship with publicans and sinners.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

- **Lost**

All men like sheep have gone astray and are lost wandering in sin. Unlike a coin which had nothing to do with being lost, sheep tend to wander away from the flock. Unlike the son who deliberately chose to leave the father, the sheep are simple and careless.

- **Identity**

The identity of the sheep as part of the flock was known to the shepherd. The Good Shepherd said, *"I...know my sheep, and am known of mine"* (Jn. 10:14). Many of the prophets spoke of the lost multitudes of Israel as sheep in need of the care of shepherds (Ps. 23:1; Ezk. 3:4; Zech. 11:16,17, etc.).

- **Accountability**

If a shepherd lost a sheep, he must at least bring home the fleece to show how it had died. The Jewish leaders and religious leaders were constantly warned in the Old Testament to be responsible for the flock. In the church the elders are to shepherd the church of God (Acts 20:28). They must do this in order to give account for their souls (Heb. 13:17). Every eldership should have an ongoing list of sheep that have gone astray and actively seek their recovery. Never should they adopt the attitude of Cain who refused to be his "brother's keeper."

- **Promptness**

The shepherd left the ninety-nine immediately in search of the one that was lost. This is not the careless attitude of Little Bo' Peep who lost her sheep leaving them alone in hopes they would come

home bragging their tails behind them.

- **Respect for the Value of a Soul**

One out of one hundred sheep were lost. For a shepherd every sheep and little lamb was to be accounted for. They were valuable. The shepherd could not keep his job or his flock with an attitude that this one percent loss was acceptable. He left the rest and sought for the lost one as if it were as valuable as the rest. God saves lost souls one at a time not in groups. True evangelism never loses sight of the value of the individual.

- **Courage**

The wilderness presumes danger. It requires courage to seek souls. It cost Jesus His life. Paul's missionary journeys were filled with constant danger (2 Cor. 11:22f).

- **Patience**

It takes time to save the lost. Token efforts will not find lost sheep. Seeking the lost involves more than just send one card and making a single phone call.

- **Mercy**

Once found the shepherd does not kick and chase the sheep all the way back to the flock. The good shepherd put the sheep on his shoulders and carried it home.

- **Joy**

Shepherds would know each other. They would mix their flocks when they were grazing in the fields. Each knew the pain of loss and could sympathize with the losses of their fellow shepherds. A shepherd who causes joy in Heaven is not working for the Devil. This joy in heaven is in contrast with the grumbling Pharisees and scribes.

Jesus did not mean that the pharisees did not need to repent. For the sake of argument He dealt with them as if their view of themselves was correct. John the immerser had made it clear in his ministry that the Pharisees needed to bring forth fruit unto repentance.

The Parable of the Lost Coin

8 "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' 10 Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

- **Accountability**

In ancient Israel a married woman had a headdress which had ten silver coins linked to make a chain. It was the equivalent of a wedding ring, called a *semedi*. It could not even be taken from her by debtors. It had sentimental value. It was hers and her duty to maintain it. If lost she would search her home for it. Homes were dark with limited light from the outside. The floor was pounded earth covered in reeds or straw.

- **Respect for Value**

She could have reasoned, "only one piece is lost". A coin worth a whole day's wage for a working man in Palestine. This parable would have had a great appeal to women. Many of whom may have lost or been very concerned about losing part of her *semedi*. One coin out of ten was still of great value to her. It was symbolic of her marriage. She would have looked for it as any woman would have if her wedding ring when missing.

- **Diligence**

She may have had to sweep every inch of her home before she recovered the coin. Her effort represents the earnestness which both Christ and His disciples had to have in order to carry out the mission of rescuing the perishing. She would not stop "till she find it." The pain of the sheep representing the lost is in contrast with the point of the one who has lost the coin.

- **Joy**

In the parable of the Lost Sheep the Shepherd said, "*Rejoice with me, ..which was lost*" in this parable the woman says, "*...for I have found the piece which I had lost.*" The Pharisees should partake in Heaven's rejoicing over the salvation of the lost. Whereas the pharisees knew no sense of loss or pain over the sinner. They would have had an equally hard time being able to rejoice over the repentance of a single sinner.

Questions:

1. What do all three parables have in common?
2. Who and what motivated Jesus to give these parables?
3. How are men like sheep?
4. Who are the shepherds of the local church? And prove from the scriptures that they are accountable for the sheep.
5. Why as the shepherd so prompt?
6. How does the shepherd show courage and patience?
7. Is Jesus teaching that the pharisees are not in need of repentance? Explain.
8. What is a *semedi*? Why was it so important for the woman to find one lost coin?
9. T F This parable would have had a great appeal to women.
10. What is the difference between these two parables in regard to rejoicing over what is found?

Application & Discussion:

1. How does respect for the soul's value impact our ability to rejoice over one who repents?

2. Contrasting and Comparing the Parables

	Lost Sheep	Lost Coin	Lost Son
a)			
b)			
c)			
d)			
e)			

Place under correct parable:

- a) human being - animal - object
- b) lost by owner - gone astray - - left of own free will
- c) focus on restoration - focus on being lost - focus on the search
- d) most valuable - valuable - more valuable
- e) one of two - one of a hundred - one of ten

Homework: Contact one of the lost sheep of the congregation and encourage them this week.

Parable of the Lost Son

Luke 15:11-24

11 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. 13 And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. 14 But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. 17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."' 20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

The parable of the Lost Son or Prodigal Son is one of the best known of our Lord. It has been called "the pearl of parables" and the "crown of all parables." This parable is found only here in Luke. Perhaps its popularity is due to its applicable nature to every generation. Parents since the time of Adam and Eve dealing with the loss of Cain due to his murder of their son Abel have known the pain and loss of a prodigal son. Many of the pharisees may have known first hand of a brother, son, nephew or cousin who became estranged from the family in a similar fashion. The parable of the Prodigal Son is a drama that is repeated frequently in real life every day across America.

This parable is the longest of the three parables dealing the joy of restoring the lost. It can be broken down into four parts: 1) the prodigal son's steps to self-destruction; 2) his road to recovery, and 3) the disposition of the elder's son, and 4) the father's response to the elder son. However, we will treat it as two parables. The first part dealing with the lost son and the second part dealing with the attitude of the elder brother.

Steps to Destruction

- **Self-Willed**

A father was to leave an extra portion of his estate to the oldest son (Deut. 21:17). However, there was no law which required a living father to leave a portion to a son. This was done by the generosity of the father. Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood" (Luke 15:11,12). It would appear from the tone of the son's request that the father owed this portion to him as if it were a debt to be collected. He wanted what was his and he wanted it right now.

Self-willed souls reject God's restraints and His authority. We receive so many blessings from God and yet are never satisfied or content to remain with him. The sinner thinks he can do it on his own

and do it his way without the consequences. In seeking freedom he would find complete loss of freedom in the bondage of sin. All subsequent sins grow from this one.

- **Selfish**

Although the father agrees to the son's request, this does not mean he is in agreement with the son's choice. The son's demand *"give me...falls me"* shows his only concern is for himself and what he thinks he must have. With his inheritance he launches operation gratification. He gave them the family inheritance. The prodigal spent on himself what his father had given him. "Prodigal" means wasteful and he wasted his inheritance on wasteful living. A modern way of saying what happened to the prodigal is that he got wasted.

- **Separation**

"And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country" (15:13a). Having taken all of his possessions from his father, he now is placing himself beyond the reach of his father. He must separate himself in order to do his own thing. He, like Adam and Eve, having given up paradise is now willing to live a wasteful life in the far country. God gives man a free will to take the gifts in life and go his way. All men will eventually do this (Rom. 3:23). But note the son leaves because he is sick of home and later returns out of homesickness.

- **Sensual**

Taking his inheritance to a far country he *"there wasted his possessions with prodigal living"* (15:13b). Sin is not as beautiful as it appears. Sin cost. It will cost a man all that he has not just his inheritance. Promising freedom sin quickly enslaves. Sin will waste time, talent, treasure, health, etc. The good things of life will often be wasted by alcohol, illicit sex, drugs, etc. The son would learn that evil companions corrupt and waste moral decency (1 Cor. 15:33).

- **Self-abasement**

"But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want" (15:14). The son brought upon himself: hunger, humiliation, and home-sickness. He was a Jew who lived like the Gentiles. These new friends were there to help him spend his money but they could not be found to help give him anything when bad times came. They were but fair-weather friends and a storm was coming.

So does he remember his father at this point? *"Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country"* (15:15a). Made himself a slave to the heathen. He *"joined himself"* indicates he "glued" or "cemented" himself to a citizen of the country that did not want him.

He became a servant to swine - *"and he sent him into his fields to feed swine"* (15:15b). Jesus paints the picture of a good Jewish boy falling so low that he is now feeding pigs. Just think of all the jobs he sought before he had to accept this one. According to Jews "cursed is he who feeds swine." Being a pig feeder in a far country was "as popular as selling bacon next to the Temple in Jerusalem". Remember, if you don't want to be classed with the hogs, don't wallow with them in the mire of sin.

- **Starvation**

This his money gone he *"began to be in want...and he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate and no one gave him anything."* (15:14,16). This may have been the first time in his life that he faced starvation. The husks in question were the long bean-shaped pods of the carob tree. Only the very poorest of the population occasionally use them as food.

Indeed, *"the way of the transgressor is hard"* (Prov. 13:15, KJV). The prodigal has hit rock bottom. Perhaps this was due to the chastening of God (Heb. 12:5-11). Things were going wrong and may have seemed to work against him, but it may in fact have been working through divine providence to cause him to come to his senses. A Jewish proverb sates that "when Israel is reduced to the carob-tree, they become repentant."

The Road to Recovery

- **Realization**

The very first step down the road to recovery is realization of one's true condition. *"But when he*

came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!'" (15:17). No one ever turns from sin until they first recognize they are a sinner. God knows that the only way we will overcome sin is to admit the sin separating us from fellowship with Him. Before a man sees his need to repent of sin he is out of his mind. For the hazard of a life lived in sin is temporary insanity. It is a life long sentence in the asylum. He lost his good reasoning when he left father, wasted possession, joined a pagan, took a job feeding swine, and ate their food.

- **Repentance**

With his mind thinking straight he remembers the goodness of his father. Paul asked the Romans, "or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). The goodness of God leads to repentance. If that father had not given decent food to those who worked for him the son would never had gone back. Parents and congregations need to plant good memories in the minds of the children if they are going to be able to reflect back on them. Deep in the conscience of many sinners is a memory of the goodness of God beckoning them to come home.

- **Resolution**

Repentance involves a resolution of the will to turn back to God. The prodigal said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants'" (15:18,19). It was his will to leave and it must be his free will which resolves to return. As his departure was voluntary so is his return. Notice he did not resolve to return after he picked himself up by his own boot straps. He did not wait till he was more respectable.

The son does not demand of the father to be placed back in the home as a son but to return as a mere servant. This shows just how deeply penitent he was. His father never gave him the chance to ask to be a servant.

- **Return**

"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him" (15:20). They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Yet, the son just did not talk a good talk when things were bad, he carried through. The father did not throw his arms around him while he was in the pig pen, nor while he was in the arms of a harlot. The father accepted him as he returned.

- **Renounce**

The lost son comes back renouncing his sin instead of down playing the whole ordeal. He did not speak of the sins of anyone else but his own. He did not finger his evil companions as to why he failed. He did not blame the pig farmer he attached himself to. He did not speak of his bad luck with the weather and the famine. He did not give the lame excuse that the was just in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong crowd. He did not beat around the bush by saying, "If I have done anything wrong, I guess I am sorry". Instead, "the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son'" (15:21).

- **Restoration**

His father must have been waiting and watching the horizon for his lost son for many years. Night after night after a days work, the father stood on the roof top scanning the hills for any sign. When he saw him his heart was ready to receive him. He meets him half way. There is not one word of rebuke. He does not scowl and say, "I told you so" or "I knew you would eventually come crawling back one day." Instead he hugged and kissed him. The point is if God the father does this for sinners how can the Pharisees condemn Jesus' efforts to restore the lost sheep of Israel and all her prodigal sons.

The father does not stop and put the son on probation. "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet'" (15:22). Look at all the father gave him which was demanded by the son. He gave him a ring. Rings were frequently used as family insignias and showed that the son was still in the family. The father gave him a robe. Perhaps one reserved for festive occasions. He gave him shoes. Sons wore shoes, but slaves did not.

All this means he was restored to full sonship. Everything is done by the father to demonstrate full forgiveness. He is totally restored to the position he had lost. He who returns to God in true repentance will receive more from God and God' people than he expects.

- **Rejoicing**

“And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry” (15:23,24). The fatted calf was to be killed. This was the custom; an animal was kept for guests. The lost son is a very special guest. The feast attests to the joy of a forgiving God and the joy of a forgiven man when sinners are restored.

Once a congregation had a young man who was greatly loved and encouraged. One day the young adult man decided he was going to leave his church family. Soon after he left, he was surrounded by those “friends” who used him and abused him with their ungodly examples. The man wasted his time, his money and his life pursuing the things of the flesh along with these fellow sinners. One day when he was without a job and money, he found himself living on the streets. He stooped lower and lower into a wicked life just trying to survive. Then he had a moment of clarity in the midst of his insane existence. A decision was made to return to his church family, because he knew they were good to him and loved him, and might give him at least some odd jobs and a little food. When he came forward the next Sunday repenting of and confessing his sins he congregation lovingly embraced him. One family gave him a room to stay in for free. Another gave him set of new clothes to wear and new shoes for his feet. Someone gave him a ring and they all went out to a restaurant for a celebration meal. This is the spirit in which God wants us to treat the returning prodigals in the church as God and the angels rejoice in heaven.

Questions:

1. Why do you think this parable is so popular?
2. The word "prodigal" means?
3. Why did he go off to a far country to live like he wanted? What does this represent in the life of the every day sinner?
4. How low does he go?
5. What are the pods he longed to eat?
6. What does it mean: *"when he came to himself?"*

7. What led the son to repentance?
8. What did he resolve?
9. What did the father give his son and what do they represent?
10. Why do you think the father did not go out looking for the lost son in this parable?

Application & Discussion:

1. Apply is confession of sin in verse 21 to our need to confess sin in our lives.
2. What should we be doing for the lost while they are away and when they return confessing and repenting of their sins?

Homework: Find a wayward Christian this week and encourage them to come back home and be ready to give they a welcome home party.

Parable of the Elder Son

Luke 15:25-32

25 "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' 28 "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. 30 But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.' 31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. 32 It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'

The design of the parables in Luke 15 was simply to justify Jesus' conduct in receiving sinners, and to show that to rejoice over their return was proper. The Pharisees did not like the Messiah hanging out with sinners. Although Luke presents this chapter as one parable most commentators divided it into three. For the sake of our study we will look at the parable of the lost son as if it has a second part of the previous parable. This half the story demonstrates why the Pharisees were rejecting sinners and why they were wrong in doing so. The lost son is represented by the publicans and sinners. The father is God. The elder son represents the Pharisees and scribes.

The Disposition of the Elder Son

- **Legalistic Service**

"Now his older son was in the field" (15:25a). The elder son is seen working in the field not sowing his wild oats like his brother had done with his portion of the inheritance. His relationship with his father was based on time spent in service to him. He pleads perfection which can be doubted. He explained his attitude to his father, "Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time" (15:29b). His claim is like saying, "I slaved for you for years." The father was a master to him. This well represents the attitude of the Pharisees. Though the elder son was morally correct, his disposition was wrong.

- **Angry over Father's Will and Mercy**

The elder brother shows his contempt for the father's relationship with his brother when he says, "but as soon as this son of yours came" (15:30a). He believes the father's mercy to his younger brother is somehow an injustice toward him. He argues that his goodness is being overlooked by the father and he is not rewarded for being good. He said, "and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends" (15:29b). He felt that the father was now rewarding his younger brother's immoral behavior. He described his brother as one "who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him" (15:30b). He not only had no room for mercy in his heart for his brother, he did not understand how the father could love his prodigal son.

As the Civil War came to a close vengeance seeking northerners asked Lincoln how he was going to treat the southerners now that the war was over and they were defeated. To their dismay he said, "I will treat them as if they had never been away." He understood forgiveness better than the elder son or Jonah. When Jonah was sent to Nineveh he turned out to be the most successful preacher of

all time in that the whole city from the king down to the least of them (including the animals) were in sackcloth and ashes repenting of their sins. He was so angry he had himself a little pity party upon a hill still hoping God would destroy them. The proper response toward the penitent is forgiveness and acceptance (cf. 2 Cor. 2:7).

- **Self-righteous**

The older son comes across very self-righteous when he claims to the father, *"I never transgressed your commandment at any time"* (15:29b). That is a very bold statement to make to any father. This represents the attitude of the Pharisees. What about the commandment to love and to forgive? This is indeed a "holier than thou" attitude which expects good deeds to be their claim to salvation. Pharisees were sinners in need of saving grace just like the rest of the world. Their self-righteousness is what would keep them from being right with God.

- **Self-centered**

During the elder son's speech to his father, he never does seem to care that his little brother is now safe and sound. All he can focus on is his pride in his righteousness. The father had not given him so much as a kid (a young goat) much less a calf to party with his friends. He would not go into the house to see his long lost brother. He would not join the party. The father had to come out to plead with him. So long as his brother was in the house he did not want to go in. His self-centeredness was robbing him of the joy of reconciliation with a loved one.

- **Unloving**

The older brother's response showed he did not love his brother and may have not known true love toward his father. He shows an utter lack of sympathy. He should have loved his brother and joined his father in rejoicing. Now the house that should be united in rejoicing is divided. His brother's love of pleasure caused his estrangement from the father and now the older brother is estranged from the father because of his lack of love.

- **Judgmental**

The attitude of the elder son is one that is judgmental. He contrasts himself with his brother. While he presents himself in a favorable way, he puts his younger brother's conduct in as unfavorable light as is possible. His brother was with harlots, while he was with good friends.

The Father's Response to the Elder Son

- **Lovingly Responded**

The father replied gently, *"son"* or in other translations it is *"my child."* The elder son's anger did not change the father's benevolent attitude. *"A soft answer turns away wrath; but a grievous word stirs up anger"* (Prov. 15:1). God and Christ love the self-righteous Pharisees. Later, Jesus would level several rebukes at them but not before He encourages them with several parables

- **The Father's Mercy is Right**

The father went on to explain his conduct, *"it was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found"* (15:32). Note the contrast between the attitudes of the father and elder son. The father had a heart of generosity. The father treated his son kindly. The father was good to his servants. The father recognized the free moral agency of man. The father was watching for his boy to come home. This father had compassion and forgiveness. The elder son demonstrated none of this attitude of mercy.

- **Reasons for His Son to Change His Disposition**

The elder son should not be so negative, because he has had the father all this time. The father pleaded, *"son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours"* (15:31). The older son had no reason to be angry or jealous. His place in the house was not diminished at all by the return of his brother. He has had the blessings with the father all these years and that was not about to change. Nothing was to be taken from the older brother and given to the younger.

Saints should never have the elder brother's attitude toward God's blessings given to the penitent. After all, all men sin and are blessed with more than they will ever deserve.

Another reason implied by the father is that they are still family. The prodigal son never stopped being the elder son's brother. Whereas he referred to his little brother as "*your son*" the father now refers to him as "*your brother*." The Pharisees regarded the sinner as hopelessly dead. The father in the parable agrees that he was dead but is now alive.

Summary

The story ends without Jesus telling us how the elder brother acted. Did he receive his brother back again? Did he leave home? Jesus did not finish the story because it was up to the Pharisees to demonstrate how it was going to end. He was waiting for their verdict. In general the Pharisees would not accept a Messiah who was a friend with sinners. Instead, they rejected him and had him killed. Forty years later the Jew's inheritance was taken away with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The point is one does not need to go on a long journey to a far country in order to leave God the Father. The parable begins with the younger son away from home, and his brother at home, and it ends with the younger son at home again and his elder brother refusing to enter the home. The prodigal son was lost. Now will the elder son be lost?

Questions:

1. How many parables does Luke indicate there are in Luke 15?
2. What is the purpose behind Jesus parable of the Elder Son?
3. T F The older son believes that father's mercy to his younger brother is somehow and injustice toward him.
4. How is the elder son like Jonah?
5. How would the Pharisees' self-righteousness keep them from repentance?
6. Why did not the elder brother go into the house? How does this reflect the disposition of the Pharisees?
7. Show that the older son is being unmercifully judgmental.

8. The father did not go out to seek the lost son but waited for him to return. He went out of the house to speak to the elder son. Why the difference?

9. Why was the father right to receive the younger son back the way he did?

10. What reason did the father give to the elder son for him not to be angry?

11. Why do you think Jesus did not finish the story and tell us what the elder brother decided to do?

Application & Discussion:

1. In what ways do Christians of today act like the elder son?

2. What can a local congregation do to help all brethren to be more active in restoring the lost?

Homework: Examine yourself as to your attitude to see if it is more like God's or the elder brother's.

Parable of the Shrewd Steward

Luke 16:1-14

1 He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. 2 So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' 3 "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4 I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' 5 "So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' 7 Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' 8 So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. 9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. 10 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. 11 Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? 13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." 14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.

The story of the wicked manager is the most difficult of the parables of Jesus. He seems to give His approval of the man's unrighteousness. Can the perfect Son of God use a wicked man's ungodly behavior to teach a lesson on righteous kingdom living? In Matthew 24:43 Jesus used a thief to describe the manner of His second coming. Paul uses the example of a "thief in the night" to also identify the manner of the unexpected timing of Christ's return (I Thess. 5:2). T.W. Manson wrote, "a world of difference exists between 'I applaud the dishonest steward because he acted cleverly' and 'I applaud the clever steward because he acted dishonestly.'" Jesus no more encourages His disciples to become unjust money managers than He is encouraging them to become thieves. The crafty profundity of this steward is what Jesus is focusing on not every aspect of the man's behavior and attitude. Parables are earthly stories with a spiritual application. This does not mean every aspect of the story has a spiritual application. J.W. McGarvey explains, "the whole parabolic machinery is borrowed from worldly and irreligious life, where dishonest cunning and rascality are freely tolerated."

Attributes of the Unjust Steward

■ He Foolishly Abused His Position Pursuing Mammon

The steward had been given a great deal of authority to act on behalf of the rich man's financial dealings with limited oversight. However, sooner or later dishonest men are going to get caught with their hand in the cookie jar. He was abusing his position for selfish gain. He was about to be fired. Instead of taking responsibility for his sin or crime, He decided to use his worldly cunning to get out of facing

up to the consequences.

- **He Used Money to Make Wicked Friends**

The steward appeals to the materialistic hearts of his master's tenants. They were likely leasing some of the land and would be repaying in kind. If they had an olive orchard, they would be repaying with oil. If they had been raising wheat on the land leased to them, they would repay with part of the harvest of wheat. The corrupt debtors joined with the corrupt manager to come up with a binding deal to save him and benefit them with either a 50% or 20% savings on their debt. They asked no questions. But the steward hopes they will be indebted to him in the future when he is kicked out by his boss for stealing.

- **He Used Material Goods to Only Supply His Temporal Existence**

The steward has not real concerned about dealing justly with the rich man. He is only taking advantage once again of his trusted position to steal more. Like so many in our world today he is giving no thought to the eternal needs of his soul only his temporary existence. He is worldly-wise like the parable of the farmer with the bumper crop who builds bigger barns. Both neglected their souls.

- **He Did Not Find Lasting Riches**

The accusation against the steward was that he was wasting his master's possessions or goods. The term for "wasting" is the same one used to describe the wasting of the prodigal's inheritance on prodigal (wasteful) living (Luke 15:13). The riches of this world are fleeting and not be trusted to be there in the future. This is especially true if one continues to waste them away.

- **He Did Not Recognize His Master Ownership**

All stewards are given a job involving great trust placed in their ability and integrity. This steward was unfaithful. He was not trustworthy. He embezzled what he was entrusted with.

- **He Loved Money**

The steward had the same messed up sense of priorities as many do who have a love for money. Remember, money is the root of all evil. *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"* (1 Tim. 6:10). The steward is acting shrewdly to avoid, at least temporarily, the consequence of his love affair with money. In this case, someone else's money. The Pharisees would see an application to them as lovers of money in verse fourteen.

- **He Was Diligent and Resourceful**

Everything listed above shows the steward to be a wicked man unworthy of any form of commendation. The rich man did not approve of the man's character and was going to fire him. But he was impressed with how quickly the man came up with a plan to save his hide. This is the point of the parable to which Jesus is drawing His audience's attention. *"So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light"* (16:8). Even though Jesus calls the man "unjust" in verse eight, he did possess one quality that was to his credit. Imagine if he has used this quick-witted industrious effort to do his job in a trustworthy manner for the good of the rich man.

Attributes of a Faithful Steward

- ◆ **Faithful Stewards Are Prudent and Diligent in Pursuing Righteousness**

Jesus, like the master, commends to us the shrewd ability of the steward for us to emulate. He is one of the children of this world as opposed to one of *"the sons of light"* (Jn. 12:36; 1 Th. 5:5; Eph. 5:8). Again, Jesus is not exonerating the actions of the man. Those who are following the light of God are not the same as this man, but they could learn something from him.

We too should be diligent to take advantage of every opportunity. Not to exploit our position or trust. Immediately following the destruction of one of the space shuttles in a tragic loss, some entrepreneur had "N.A.S.A. = Need Another Seven Astronauts" printed on t-shirts and sold them. This crude humor would have been very painful to the friends and families of the dead, but demonstrates the type of diligent opportunistic action being commended to the sons of light. If Christians would put this

type of effort into their service in the Kingdom of Christ as the worldly men and women do in their pursuit of unjust and crude ventures, there is no telling how much treasure they could lay up in Heaven.

The contrast with the children of the world is that they are not hindered by moral constraints like the children of light. They are wiser only in the sense they will cease the moment to use their wits to save themselves. They do it for love of money. We need to be so wise in regard to our love for God. They come up with plans to gain earthly security. We need to be so diligent to gain eternal security. The steward gained future “friends” for when he would be in need. We should consider being proactive in the pursuit of making friends of God’s children for mutual support in time of need.

Many Christians to act diligently in pursuit of worldly opportunities. They act this way with regard to their jobs, sports, hobbies, retirement, etc. How much more should be apply ourselves when it comes to the church, our souls, and sharing the Gospel with the world. If only the spiritually-minded were as industrious as the worldly-minded.

◆ **Faithful Stewards Use Material Goods to Make True Friends**

Jesus gives an example of how His disciples can benefit by using their worldly goods to secure spiritual benefits. *“And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home”* (16:9). Jesus is not saying that Christian should use illgotten gain to made friends. “Mammon” is used for the material things of this world many men worship and the term “unrighteous” shows that these things are not true riches. They are uncertain riches in that they are here today and gone tomorrow. The “friends” are those we help with our money. Just as eternally life involves being a good Samaritan to those “friends” in need, so we can make friends to being with in Heaven one day by the way we use our money. How we use our possessions can make God, Christ and the Holy Spirit our friends. If we use our funds to help make friends for God from this world, we can have friends for eternity.

◆ **Faithful Stewards Use Material Goods Towards Eternal Ends**

Paul’s teaching in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 gives a great commentary on verse nine: *“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”* Act quickly and save yourself and others. Just as thieves may lose heaven by their sins, Christians can gain eternal life by proper use of God’s gifts. Just think of the lives that might have been saved among the 1,517 lost if the Captain of the Titanic reacted more promptly to the warning of icebergs. Pearl Harbor might have been better prepared for the Japanese attack if the radar had been studied more closely. The rich young ruler may have found eternal life by follow Jesus instructions and give all to the poor.

◆ **Faithful Stewardship in Less Demonstrates Ability to Produce More**

Generally speaking we promote people who show ability while working successfully at a lower position. *“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?”* (16:10,11). If a man cannot run a classroom will he be able to run a school? And if he cannot run a school could he be a successful superintendent of a school district? If a man can handle investing a thousand dollars perhaps he can be trusted to invest a million dollars. “Unjust” and “unrighteous mammon” refer to worldly or carnal riches or money. These terms are used in contrast with “true riches”. Jesus is explaining that faithful stewardship in the material world is an excellent test of faithful stewardship with regard to the spiritual stewardship.

◆ **Faithful Stewards are Entrusted by God**

“And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own?” (16:12). Stewards are managers of that which belong to another. If one is faithful in regard to that which belongs to another, they are likely to be faithful to that which belongs to themselves. God has given mankind stewardship over the earth, blessings of wealth, and one’s soul. The word “Man’s” is not in the original. God is the one who can trust us with true riches. But will He trust us with more if He cannot trust

us with less.

◆ **Faithful Stewards Do Not Have Split Loyalties**

Jesus now warns that they will have to be faithful stewards of either God or mammon (the personified god of materialism). *“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.* Divided loyalties produce disloyalty to one master or the other or both. William Barclay wrote,

“No slave can serve two masters. The master possessed the slave, and possessed him exclusively. Nowadays, a servant or a workman can quite easily do two jobs, and work for two people. He can do one job in his working time and another in his spare time. He could, for instance, be a clerk by day and a musician by night. Many a man augments his income or finds his real interest in a spare time occupation. But a slave had no spare time; every moment of his day, and every ounce of his energy, belonged to his master. He had no time which was his own. So, serving god, can never be apart time or a spare time job.”

◆ **Faithful Stewards Do Not Love Money**

This parable steps on the toes of the Pharisees. *“Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him”* (16:14). Jesus of course was aware they were listening. Notice these money-loving Pharisees showed hate for Jesus for exposing them. The term *“derided”* is also translated “mocked” and literally means “to turn one’s nose up at someone or something.” The Jews thought that wealth was a sign of salvation and God's favor (Mk. 10:17-27). God's favor would be shown to those who had been faithful to the blessings of the Law of Moses which pointed them to Christ and His Kingdom.

The key to success is not having a lot of money. But having money without money having you. Money is not evil. It is a tool. The wise use of wealth requires seizing the opportunities. If every Christian worked for heavenly riches as hard as this crafty, crooked steward worked for mammon, how much more worship, honor, praise and glory would be given to God. How many more souls would be saved and local congregations be established. Being stewards of God over righteous things should motivate saints to be wise and industrious as much as the wicked steward was as he was motivated by love of money. Let us learn the lesson of this parable, otherwise even dishonest stewards will rise up in Judgment to condemn us for our foolish laziness.

Questions:

1. Why is this parable considered by some to be one of the most difficult to understand?
2. Why was the steward going to be fired?
3. What was his solution? Was this clever? Was this righteous?

4. What benefit was the steward hoping to gain from the rich man's tenants?
5. What was a commendable characteristic of the steward?
6. How are the children of the world different from the sons of light? What could the sons of light learn from the children of the world?
7. How do Christians stewards make friends?
8. True False "Unjust" and "unrighteous mammon" in verses ten and eleven are used in contrast with "true riches".
9. Who can entrust us with true riches?
10. Why can no man serve two masters?
11. How did the Pharisees react to this parable?

Application & Discussion:

1. Explain who a steward is and what he does? List areas of our stewardship in life and in the Kingdom?
2. Give some examples of industrious service found in false religions.

Homework: Examine this week how you can become a more resourceful, timely, and wise in your pursuit of spiritual duties.

Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

19 *"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. 20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, 21 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' 27 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' 29 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"*

In his book *90 Minutes in Heaven* written with Cecil Murphey, Don Piper tells of his near death experience and his short visit to Heaven which supposedly occurred back in 1989. The popularity of this book shows that many people wonder whether or not such a place exists and whether or not all those "out of body experiences" are genuine. Personally, I do believe that Jesus visited Paradise and returned to walk and talk among men for forty days. After which, Jesus ascended into Heaven. Samuel was brought back from the dead for a moment to prophecy one last time to King Saul. Jesus' friend Lazarus was raised from the dead after four days in the tomb. Others were raised by Jesus and by others in the Old and New Testaments. Jesus tells the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus as if it could have happened just like all His other parables. Jesus having knowledge far beyond that of a mere man could have known about the true events surrounding the life and death of a certain rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. This parable represents a truly reliable account of the soul's existence beyond death

Is this parable an accurate depiction of what happens after death? Jesus would know. This parable is perhaps relating an actual event only Jesus as the Son of God would know about. Jesus knew about the Hadean realm (Matt. 11:23; 16:18) which consisted of Abraham's bosom or paradise (Luke 23:43). In fact, Jesus would spend the time between his death and his resurrection in paradise (Acts 2:27,31). The Bible speaks about a place of torment known as tartarus (2 Peter 2:4). In Revelation 20:14,15 we are told of the ultimate end of Death and Hades after the Judgment of all mankind: *"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."*

In the immediate context, Jesus had taught the danger of the love of money and the dishonest and hazardous manner of fortunes (16:9-11). All good things come from God and men are mere stewards of their possessions. Men who do not use their property right could not be received into heaven (16:11,12). Just because man esteems riches on earth does not mean that these would curry any favor

with God (16:15). The rich had a duty to show kindness to those who are poor (16:16,17). As the Parable of the Unjust Steward teaches how riches are to be used, this parable sets forth the terrible consequences of the failure to use them.

If there is any real message to be learned from those who have passed from life through death to other side it would be...

Don't Be Deceived by Things

The rich man was clothed in purple. This dye comes from a rare shell-fish is found along the coasts of Tyre. Each one emits as tiny drop of dye. To have enough dye for a garment would be very costly. The rich man also wore fine linen perhaps produced from the flax which grew on the banks of the Nile in Egypt. It was very bright white and worth twice its weight in gold.

The rich man is in great contrast to that of Lazarus the poor man. He was not clothed in purple but covered with sores. He did not "*fare sumptuously*" but longed for the very crumbs which fell from the rich man's table.

Both the rich man and Lazarus died. They both found out soon that death was a great equalizer of men. Solomon discovered that death will be one of those thing which comes "*alike to all: One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; 5o the good, the clean, and the unclean; to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; he who takes an oath as he who fears an oath*" (Eccl. 9:2). While the rich man was most likely buried with great fan fare, hired mourners, and placed into a family tomb carved out of the rocks, the poor man's body was most likely just dumped into the valley of Gehenna to rot and burn and become food for the worms. While Lazarus' soul was carried to Abraham's bosom by angels, the rich man simply awoke from death to find himself in a place of torment. In the torment of the flame the rich man asks for a drop of water from one who had merely longed for crumbs from the rich man's table. The only relief the poor man received was from dogs licking his sores and now the rich man could receive no relief at all in death.

Many rich Jews believed that their wealth was a sign of God's approval. Those who were poor were merely receiving God's disapproval. In this way riches often would blind men to their sins. This is still a common concept today that God wants His faithful children to be rich according to the so-called "gospel of health and wealth." No matter how rich the man was it could not exempt him from the misery of his punishment. No matter how poor Lazarus was it did not keep him from enjoying the riches of paradise. The rich man was not being punished for his wealth any more that Lazarus was being rewarded for his poverty. After all, even Abraham was very rich in life yet was in paradise. It is not the gaining or even possessing of things that makes them wrong. "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*" (1 Tim. 6:10). Life is too short and eternity too long for the poor to envy the temporary blessings of the rich. When life is over what difference does the net worth of any man really mean in comparison to the riches of eternal life. Yogi Berra, commenting on being behind in a baseball game, is reported to have said: "it is not over until it is over." Those who seem to be ahead in life may find out otherwise in death. And when it is over, it is over.

Don't Be Deceived by Position

The rich man was in an honored position in society. Perhaps he was envied by many in the community. After death he was in torment in the flame while Lazarus was comforted in Abraham's bosom. The rich man once had servants to attend his needs and in Hades there was no one even to fetch him a drop of water. Lazarus, on the other hand, had angels to carry him to Abraham's bosom. The riches which separated them in life had become a great gulf in Hades to separate them forever.

Use Your Opportunities

The rich man had opportunities to use his riches to help others. Beggars were "a dime a dozen"

in Palestine. He had to go no further than his own gate to find Lazarus. Lazarus had need of food and he had need of care for his sores. Beneath it all was a man - a human being with a soul. Why did the rich man fail to seize the opportunity? Perhaps he felt the poor man deserved it or that he was someone else's responsibility.

Very little is known of the rich man's character. He may have not been an immoral man. All we know is that he failed to do good to others when the opportunity was continually before him. Perhaps he mistook being religious for being righteous. He was a child of Abraham by birth, but was no where near Abraham in death. It is obvious that in order to die the death of the righteous one must live the life of the righteous.

The rich man and Lazarus have changed positions in death. The one that was first is now last, and the last is first. Dogs licked the sores of the poor man and now flames lick the soul of the rich man. As Augustine wrote, "he lacked the drop, who denied the crumb".

Torment Is a Terrible Place

Awaking from death in torment would have been a very rude awakening for the rich man who would have expected something far better. The wicked do not cease to exist after death. The flame of the fire described his form of torment. Anyone who has been too close to the flame and burned knows how the rich man felt. So dreadful the discomfort that even the relief of a drop of water was craved. Down in torment his money was not good. His status or position carried no weight. His short lived comforts of life are in no way a relief now that he faces eternal pain.

The Afterlife is a Place of Memory

Both the rich man and Abraham have memory of life before death. He even recognized Abraham even though the two of them never would have met each other in life. Abraham told the rich man to "*remember.*" As if he could forget those lost opportunities and his wasted life. Memories for the rich man would have added to his pain with all the regrets and thoughts of what might have been. Memory of the saved must be one of their greatest blessings.

Death Sets Destiny

The Bible does not speak anything about purgatory. There is no hope of getting out of torment and going to a place like paradise. No amount of money, pleading or praying is going to change one's eternal destiny after death. The rich man could not do anything for his brother or even send Lazarus back. In like manner his brothers could do nothing for him. The time for repentance had past. He had no money to give to the poor. No matter how much one might want to change places, Abraham warned that there was a great gulf fixed between paradise and torment. It was too wide to jump or bridge. Groucho Marx: "You only live once, despite what Jesus or somebody said. That's bellywash. Harpo and Chico promised me if there was anything to that bit they'd get in touch with me. I haven't heard from them. Go out to the garden and tear a flower in four. It won't be a flower again." (N.Y. Times News Service, Apr. 1969). One thing about death it makes everyone a believer in the eternal soul given by the eternal God.

Earth Is the Place for Concern for Others' Souls

The rich man suddenly was concerned about the souls of his five brothers. As they died one by one, he feared they would end up where he was. The time to save one's soul or the souls of others is in life not after death.

The rich man tried to get Abraham to send Lazarus back to his brothers, so that they would see someone from the dead and believe. Often the religious leaders of Jesus' day clamored for a sign, so they would believe. Jesus promised them only the sign of Jonah which would be the resurrection of the Son of God after three days. By this time Jesus had already raised the widow of Nain's son and Jarius' daughter. In the future he would raise his friend Lazarus. Still they did not believe, but instead crucified

the Christ. Abraham was right. The five brothers had Moses and the Prophets. If they did not believe them, then someone coming back from the dead was not going to be believed either. The Scriptures are powerful enough to lead one to salvation. It is the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) not signs which were seen by a few and could be rejected by all. Those who ignore the Word of God in life will not be ignored by the God of the Word in eternity. The five brothers had ample opportunity to hear the truth.

Earth Is the Place for Concern for Self

The Word of God contains all we need to guide us. Many of the Pharisees reject the counsel of God against themselves by rejecting the baptism by John (Luke 7:29). Since then, many souls have been condemned by not believing and being baptized (Mk. 16:16). Others are lost because they would not repent (Luke 13:3). Still more fail to confess with their mouth before men their faith in Christ as the Son of God and will miss out on salvation (Rom. 10:9,10) and will be denied by the Lord before God (Mt. 10:32,33). The simple plan of salvation was design to save people from Hell. But salvation is a limited time offer.

Questions:

1. Is the story of Lazarus a parable? Why or why not?
2. How did the Pharisees perceive wealth? What doctrine today promotes the same idea?
3. What kind of companions did Lazarus have during his life? What kind did the rich man have?
4. How did the two men's positions change after their deaths?
5. Is it A SIN to have great wealth? Why or why not?
6. Why shouldn't we envy the wealthy?
7. What do we learn about the gulf between Abraham's bosom and the place of torment?

8. What do we learn about the memory of the lost ones?

9. What could of the rich man have done for his five brothers while he was alive?

10. In verse 31, Jesus says that even if a person were to rise from the dead, some would still doubt Him. How do we know this is true?

Application & Discussion:

1. What is Abrahams's bosom referred to elsewhere in scripture? Did Jesus go there during the three days he was in the tomb?

2. Be ready to show from the scriptures the three areas of Hades and what will finally become of Death and Hades.

Homework: Start sharing the Gospel today with family and friends and others while you have the breath of life.

Parable of the Unjust Judge

Luke 18:1-8

1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" 6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Once a friend of mine was selling books door to door one summer in order to make some money. Every once and a while he would run into some hostility. While knocking at one particular door a middle aged man snapped the door open and hollered at him, "What do you think you are doing at my door? I have no need of your books..." The man was mean and hateful words flew out of his mouth. And just as quickly as he came, the man slammed the door and was gone. Not to be discouraged my friend the book salesman walked around to the side door of the man's house and knocked on the door. When the man snapped open the door, he was so shocked to see the young salesman standing there he did not say a word. My friend merely smiled and said, "good day sir, I sure hope you are a whole lot nicer than the last man I spoke to..." At that point the man smiled and burst into laughter. It turned about to be the best sale he made all day, in fact, all week.

Persistence won the day. And many a salesman have learned the value of not giving up too easily. The same should be said of Christians who do not give up on prayer after one time.

Only in a very few of Jesus' parables does He give the reason for teaching the parable. The purpose is *"that men always ought to pray and not lose heart"* (18:1). Too often a Christian prays as if he were a naughty little boy who runs up and knocks on the neighbor's door and than runs away before the neighbor has a chance to answer. Prayer is to be done *"always."* This is also commanded in Ephesians 6:18: *"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saint"* and 1 Thessalonians 5:17 which says, *"pray without ceasing"*. Keep in mind that Jesus is not encouraging vain repetition of prayer as practiced by the Pharisees. There was an old rabbinic maxim: "Everyone that multiplies prayer is heard." Christ forbade the mechanical repetition of a formula as if it were a magical charm to get God's attention or to use prayer to get man's attention (Mt. 6:7,8).

Motives to Pray Always

- **God Is a Righteous Judge**

Many of the judges of the first century were paid magistrates appointed either by Herod or by the Romans. Often they were known to pervert justice for a dish of meat. The judge in the story *"did not fear God nor regard man."* In other words, he dispensed justice as if there was no God watching him and had no compassion for the rights and well being of his fellow man. Such judges often acted contrary to the Law which strictly forbade the wresting of judgment, showing respect of persons or taking bribes. *"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the Lord your God gives you, according*

to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God is giving you” (Deut. 16:18-20).

The judge ignored the widow's plea. A widow in the first century was the very picture of helplessness. Judges were bound to show peculiar attention to widows (Is. 1:17; Jer. 22:3). Yet the judge in this parable was not moved. Perhaps, like Felix (Ac. 24:26), he was delaying the matter, expecting a bribe. Widows often were destitute of any money or power to bribe or force a judge to listen.

The contrast between God and this unjust judge is clear. Everything God is the judge is not. Whereas God is always listening and his court is open 24/7, the unjust judge only opened his ears when it was to his advantage. God cannot be bought off, threatened or haggled with for justice or even a hearing. God delights in answering prayer. He is not reluctant to help as was the judge.

- **Men Are Helpless like the Widow**

The comparison between mankind in their helpless state and that of this poor widow can be seen. The early church concerned itself much about the welfare of widows (Ac. 6:1; 9:41; Js. 1:27; I Tim. 5:3). Pure religion includes caring for widows in their affliction (Js. 1:27). Even as children of God their enemies are abundant and powerful. Christians are always dependent upon God for His help. As children of God His sons and daughters are not self-sufficient. Instead they are dependent upon the Heavenly Father for every need.

- **Persistent Prayer Produces Positive Results**

In the New King James Version the widow's plea consist of just seven words, “*get justice for me from my adversary.*” She did not have money for a fancy, educated lawyer with a shrewd tongue to plead her case. Her only weapon was persistence. The judge was going to give into her request, because she “*wear me*” meaning “to wear out.” Paul uses this same word to describe a boxer who gives his opponent a series of punches resulting in a blackened pair of eyes (1 Cor. 9:27). Justice was to be hers not because of her fancy plea or the judge's kind heart, but because he did not have the patience to put up with the constant nagging of a widow. Keep in mind that Jesus is not saying that God only responds to nagging and pestering. In fact, God is ready and willing to hear the sincere cries of His children. His point is that if a corrupt self-centered judge can be moved by the persistent pleas of a helpless widow how much more will a loving, caring God answer the prayers of the saints who continue in prayer.

- **God Will Avenge the Elect**

The word “adversary” comes from the Greek term *antidikos* meaning “an opponent in a law suit.” The Christian has adversaries who persecute them “*for righteousness sake*” (Mt. 5:10). God knows our enemies all too well. After all, our enemies are the enemies of God. God will in due time avenge us of our enemies. As God heard the cries from the Israelites as suffering slaves in Egypt during the long period of the bitter bondage, so He will hear the petitions of His saints today.

Vengeance belongs to God, not man. Paul wrote, “*Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord*” (Rom. 12:19). The word used here for “*avenge*” is not in the sense of retaliation, but of vindication or justice. God will avenge His own in His own time. In the Revelation when the fifth seal was opened John saw “souls” beneath the alter - those who had given up their lives for Christ, and they are asked for vengeance. God delays His punishment because He is longsuffering and wishes to save as many as possible (2 Pet. 3:9). When it is the proper time, God will move quickly to avenge the saints. Until then the saints must keep on praying.

Reasons Why Many Don't Pray Always

- **Many Will Lose Heart or Slacken**

The real problem is not with God in not answering prayer. The danger is that the saints will give up praying far too soon, because they are too easily discouraged. The basic question is not whether God will react to persistent prayer, but whether there will be faithful men, who have persisted in prayer. Keep

praying and keep trusting God to answer in His time.

- **Persecution**

During trials and tribulations many professed disciples might faint and turn back. Christians must have faith that God will one day avenge them "speedily".

- **Slow Answer**

For a time the judge was deaf to the widow's petition; God often seems to man to be slack concerning His promises. As the disciples rebuked sleeping Jesus in the boat on the storm tossed sea: "*carest thou not that we perish?*" Once the disciples pleaded with Jesus to come to Bethany and save his sick friend, Lazarus. But for reasons unknown to them Jesus delayed (John 11). He finally showed up after Lazarus had been dead and in the grave four days. In the end He raised his friends from the dead. Why the delay? He responded in His time, so that they could see the miracle of the resurrection and believe that He is the resurrection and the life. He was wondering whether they had faith in Him. Perhaps when He comes again He will find saints with faith having demonstrated it by continuance in prayer.

- **No Answer**

God has promised to answer the prayers of His faithful children. Just because God may say "no" to their petitions does not mean He has not answered. In fact, "no" is just as much an answer as is "yes." Remember when David committed adultery with Bathsheba and the child born was to die as a consequence of their sins. In spite of David's pleading, his little child died (2 Sam. 12:15-24). When God answered "no," David got up from prayer and went on with life accepting God's "no." Three times Paul pleaded with God to remove his "*thorn in the flesh.*" Though it was not taken away, he gloried in God (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

Perhaps, as children of God a lesson in thanksgiving is learned by accepting God's "no." There have been many times when Christians have prayed for one thing only to learn later that God knew best when He answered: "no." Like Jesus let all Christians pray with obedient, humble resignation: "not my will, but thy will be done".

Christians should pray for their needs; pray habitually; and never lose confidence in God to give the right answer at the right time. God has assured us that He hears and answers prayer, and this should induce us to continue our petitions.

Questions:

1. What is the difference between mechanical repetition of prayer (formula prayer) and persistence in prayer?
2. What is the difference between the judge in this parable and God?
3. How were widows treated during Christ's time?
4. Who does the widow in the parable represent?

5. What does she symbolize about our current state as Christians in this world?
6. Why did the judge give her justice?
7. How is the judge's reasoning contrasted against our prayers to God and His response?
8. Why does God delay in answering our prayers at times?
9. What does Romans 12:19 tell us about how to react when we have been wronged by this world?

Application & Discussion:

1. How should a Christian react to God's answering "No" to their prayer request (see 2 Cor. 12:7f)?
2. Why might God be slow to answer or require us to keep on persistently petitioning Him?

Homework: Engage God persistently in prayer this week about something near and dear to your heart.

Parable of the Pharisee & Publican

Luke 18:9-14

9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

It is possible for two individuals to appear to do the same thing and yet have completely opposite results. In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican both men prayed but with total opposite results.

Prayers very similar to this one are preserved in rabbinic sources. When Rabbi Nechounia Ben Hakana left his school, he used to say, "I thank thee, O Eternal, my God, for having given me part with those who attend this school instead of running through the shops. I rise early like them, but it is to study the Law, not for futile ends. I take trouble as they do, but I shall be rewarded, and they will not. we run alike, but I for the future life, while they will only arrive at the pit of destruction" (Berchoth) (Pulpit 109).

This is a parable of contrasts. The Pharisee sees himself as a good and faithful Jew, and views the publican as a traitor. The Pharisees were the spiritual elite of Judaism in the first century. They were the "separate ones." They took pains to keep themselves far from sin even to the point of making traditions to help keep them free from the contamination of sin. Later these traditions were bound upon others as if there were equal in force with the Law of Moses. At the other end of the moral spectrum was the publican, who was more a tax contractor of the Romans than a collector. In general, a publican was known to abuse their power and overcharge in the collection of taxes. Jesus' parable would have won Him no favor with Pharisees. By parable's end God justifies a publican which would have been impossible in the eyes of most Jews. They felt that one could never be a publican and be right with God at the same time.

Posture in Prayer

- **Pharisee: Stood and Prayed with Himself**

Jews were known throughout the scriptures to stand when praying (1 Ki. 7:22; 2 Ch. 6:12; Mt. 6:5). Yet there were Jews who prostrated themselves in prayer before God as a gesture of their humility (Dan. 6:10; 2 Ch. 6:13; Ac. 21:5). The "faithful" Jew prayed three times a day at one of the fixed times of prayer: the third, sixth, and ninth hour of the day. To utter one's prayer in the Temple, rather the temple grounds, was to increase the acceptableness of one's prayer before God. It is interesting to note that the Muslims pray five specified times a day in a particular kneeling position with their faces on the ground and head pointed toward Mecca. To offer a prayer up in a mosque is said to be several times more acceptable to Allah.

Jesus has already condemned the hypocritical prayers of the Pharisees who sought a public audience for their prayers (Mt. 6:5-7). The Pharisee's prayer is not about talking to God but about talking about himself to others. He prayed by himself with himself because he saw himself separated from other

who were sinners. His prayer was not one of self-examination before God but self-promotion before others.

- **Publican: Standing Afar off**

The publican was not wanting to pray center stage. He was perhaps as far back as the court of the women or even that of the Gentiles. He would not have presumed to approach the front as close as he could to the Holy of Holies. Someone has well said, "The church is a redemption center for sinners, not a showcase for saints."

View of Righteousness

- **Pharisee: Looked down on Others**

Jesus gives this parable as a warning against those who pray while they "*despise*" others. The word "*despise*" means "to count as nothing," a term Paul oftentimes used in his writings (Rom. 14:3;16; I Cor. 16:11). The Pharisee used prayer to build himself up while tearing others down. No man will ever prove himself to be a saint by comparing himself to sinners. To show he is better than this publican would never prove to God that he is as good as he ought to be.

For this Pharisee there were just two classes to men in the world: the righteous and the sinner. The Bible and its Author only recognize one class of men in this world: all are sinners (Rom. 3:23). Yet the Pharisee was thankful he was not like other men. In reality he was just like every other man in the world: a sinner. Pharisees were often known to thank God for three things: 1) he was not created a Gentile; 2) he was not a plebeian, or ordinary Roman citizen 3) he was not born a woman. Rabbi Simeon ben Joochai wrote: "If there are only two righteous men in the world, I and my son are these two; if there is only one, I am he!" He went on to inform God how good he was.

The Pharisee eyed the publican while he was in the midst of his prayer. Perhaps he would not have made the mistake of being detracted by another sinner if he had kept his eyes closed during prayer. But seeing the publican he drags him into his prayer before God and the world to condemn him as an extortioner. Publicans were considered thieves who were given the right by the Roman government to at times unjustly force taxes from their fellow Jews. He was also unjust in that he dealt unfairly in his collecting of taxes. The Pharisee has moved from exulting himself in prayer to insulting the character of the publican. His prayer was one of pride not pity.

- **Publican: Would Not Look up to Heaven**

The publican never contrasted himself with any other man. He did not have anything good in his life which allowed him to look up and boast about to God in Heaven. Whereas the Pharisee only saw his spiritual superiority, the publican only saw his spiritual inferiority. Perhaps, he knew the vanity of comparing oneself with others (2 Cor.10:12). The real question in prayer is not "am I better than others" but "am I as good as God wants me to be?"

Recognition of Sin

- **Pharisee: Patted Himself on the Back**

It is not a wonder that the pharisee did not throw his shoulder out of joint by trying to pat himself on the back. He fasted more than was required. Not only did he keep himself for all those sins mentioned, this Pharisee's goodness goes above and beyond what is required in the Law of Moses. According to the Law of Moses, only one fast-day in the year was appointed, the great Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29). Perhaps this pharisee fasted on Monday and Thursday which were market days. Thus showing his devotion to God not food for his belly. More likely this was the best time for a bigger audience to show off their fasting. Again, Jesus had already condemned the Pharisees for their public fasting.

This Pharisee gave more than was required. He tithed all that he had. The Law only required a tenth of all his gain (Dt. 14:22,23). The Pharisee tithed all that came his way (Mt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42) even the smallest matters as mint, anise, and cummin. Flaunting these righteous deeds he attempted to make God his debtor. God is not seen as the giver of all these things for which the Pharisee ought to

give thanks. But this man thanked God not for what God had done, but for what he had done for God.

- **Publican: Smote His Breast**

Instead of patting himself on the back the publican shows self abasement by smiting his breast which was a cultural symbol of mourning. He was sorrowful because he failed to meet up to God's perfect standard. He felt separated from God because of his sin. Whereas the Pharisee lacked a genuine sense of sin in his own life, the publican was overwhelmed by his sin.

Confession of Sins

- **Pharisee: Confessed His Greatness**

This Pharisee confessed his virtues rather than his vices. He is the perfect example of the self-righteousness of the first century Pharisee whom Jesus often used as a contrast with the righteousness required of the citizens of His kingdom. Paul a former Pharisee, came to realize he had nothing in himself to allow for self-glorification. He wrote "*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross*" (Gal. 6:14).

- **Publican: Confessed Himself a Great Sinner**

The publican had to agree with the Pharisees' evaluation of him. He was a sinner. But the passage literally reads that he confessed to be "*the sinner.*" The Pharisee could not even find one sin. Like Paul, the publican saw himself as "*the chief of sinners*" (1 Tim. 1:15). It was this proper view of himself which caused him to realize the need for God's mercy.

Need of Forgiveness

- **Pharisee: Requested Nothing**

The Pharisee was self-sufficient. He had no need of anything from God. He expresses no true gratitude to or adoration for God. He asked for nothing, confessed nothing, and as a consequence he received nothing. He was not justified or forgiven, because he did not see any sin and therefore he saw no need for mercy.

- **Publican: Begged Mercy**

The publican offer no excuses. He did not try in vain to prove to God that he was not as bad as some people. He did not point out the good he had done. He did not point out that some of his sins were not all that bad. He simply begged for God's mercy.

Need for Justification

- **Pharisee: Self-righteousness**

In his prayer the Pharisee used some thirty-four words depending on the translation used. Five times in his prayer he used the term "I" to promote himself before God. He trusted in his own acts of merit. He did not need God's mercy, he only needed God to reward him for his goodness. The Pharisee went home a worse man than when he had come, but the publican went home forgiven.

- **Publican: Divinely Justified**

The publican was justified by God because of his prayer. Justified means "declared righteous." As one preacher explained it years ago as he wrote on the black board: "Just - if - I'd never sinned." It is a legal term that means all the evidence has been destroyed, and there is no record that the sinner had ever sinned. The word "justified" is used passively meaning that the justifying was an act of God, not a work of man.

God does not require a list of our virtues, He requires a humble heart in prayer. After his sin with Bathsheba David observed, "*the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise*" (Ps. 51:17).

Questions:

1. How were Pharisee seen by Jews at the time?

2. How did the Jews see the Publicans? Why?
3. What does "Pharisee" mean?
4. How did a "good Jew" pray?
5. What does this tell us about public prayer?
6. What three things did the Pharisees thank God for each day?
7. By parading his virtues what did the Pharisee try to make God?
8. What does Galatians 6:14 teach us about this attitude?
9. Are we to be self-sufficient in God's presence? Why?
10. What defense did the publican offer God? Why?

Application & Discussion:

1. Should prayers like that of the publican be uttered during public worship?

2. What might a Christian proudly proclaim of his righteousness comparable to those of the Pharisee in this parable?

Homework: Pray prayers of humble submission to God and admission of sin this week, showing your utter dependency upon the mercy of God.

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