

The Parables of Jesus

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Lesson 1 – Wise & Foolish Builders

Matthew 7:24-27

This section is Jesus' final teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. As mentioned in the last lesson, the preceding three sections were all about how life only has two options: Follow God or follow something else. There is no third option. Jesus has taught us that there are two paths people can take (7:13-14), two kinds of fruit people's lives can grow (7:15-20), two groups who claim to follow Christ and what determines if they really do or not (7:21-23) and finally two foundations people build their lives on (7:24-29).

This is where the entire sermon comes together into one last teaching. Jesus talks about two men who were building homes. They each choose a foundation and they each built. The final results of their work was determined by who or what they used as a foundation for their houses. Most of us know these two guys well because we grew up singing about them in Bible class or Vacation Bible School.

What two kinds of men does Jesus mention in 7:24 & 26?

What does Jesus say makes the wise man wise?

What does Jesus say makes the foolish man foolish?

What is it about Jesus' words that makes it so important that we do more than listen?

Why is listening not enough from God's perspective?

Scripture teaches us that we cannot do enough good to earn our own salvation (**Eph 2:8-9**). While that is true it doesn't mean that God isn't looking in our lives for a response for all God has done for us. A life that truly appreciates God's salvation will be characterized by an effort to be obedient to God's commands and God's will. We are not saying our obedience earns our salvation but that doesn't mean obedience is not important in God's sight.

What two things does Jesus say the wise man must do?

You will notice that the storms hit both homes. They both encountered the same troubles, the same storms, and the same winds. The wise man's house stood firm while the foolish man's did not.

Jesus keeps talking about houses...is he really talking about houses or something else? What does the house represent?

Realize that just because you are a Christian doesn't mean that no storms will enter into your life. If anyone ever promises you that they are lying.

What makes following Jesus so important to help us through the storms?

What kind of storms have you been through?

How did your faith in Jesus Christ and relationship with him give you a solid foundation to make it through?

Jesus says that we have to build our lives on the right foundation, the rock.

What/who is that rock?

How does Jesus serve as a great foundation for life?

Have you ever known anyone who said they were a Christian but it was pretty clear that they didn't pay attention to Jesus' teaching?

Is it enough to say we are Christians but not act like it or really be obedient to God?

These verses are really about obedience. When we are obedient to God, it doesn't earn our salvation, but it does open the door for God to work through our lives in some powerful ways. Jesus even experienced this. Read Hebrews 5:7-9

Jesus learned something.

What does 5:8 say he learned and how did he learn it?

We don't often think about Jesus actually learning things because he was the divine Son of God. It might just be that the Hebrew writer is telling us it is one thing to know everything but it is quite another to learn through experience. Jesus suffered. He suffered because he was obedient to God. God calls us to be obedient just like he called Jesus to be obedient.

What did Jesus receive for his obedience to God (5:8)?

What will we receive if we listen to God and obey?

Again, we are not teaching that we earn our salvation but God does want us to be repentant, to be baptized and to follow Jesus Christ throughout our lives. God does call us to obedience and the only reason we can be saved is because, even though we won't be perfectly obedient, God will forgive us for our failures and save us anyway. That is called being saved by grace but it doesn't mean our obedience is no longer important.

Summary Questions:

Are there things you have heard from Jesus that you have a hard time obeying? How might this teaching from Jesus encourage you to get that right?

Have you ever been in the role of the "foolish man"? What encouraged you to begin putting what you were hearing into action?

If Jesus teaches with authority (7:29) what does that say about what we are to do with Matthew 5-7 as a whole? What if something in there is hard to do?

Lesson 2 – Wineskins & the Strong Man (Mark 2:21 & 3:23-27)

These two parables are paradigm shifters.

A paradigm is the accepted way of viewing something. There are times in history where the way something is viewed is altered forever.

Examples:

- The world is flat to the world is round – now certain things make most sense
- The earth is the center to the sun is the center (Copernicus)
- Newton – predictable, forces at work...Einstein's Relativity (things aren't as predictable as we thought)

Have you ever had something happen or something said that completely changed the way you saw something?

- I have known people who saw a butchered animal and couldn't eat another piece of meat again
- But this is more than that...Jesus came to shift our thinking and transform our minds.
- He did this through his words, his actions, his very existence.

Jesus uses these two parables early on in his ministry to talk about why he is here and to get his listeners ready to hear him well. In other words, the goal is to talk past them or over their heads...although that is bound to happen when you are divine, talking to humans.

Illustration – culture can consume us - Old fish swims by two younger fish and says, "How's the water?" the two young fish look at each other and say, "What's water?"

Whether we like it or not the world around us influences us, so much so that at times it can become easy to forget that God has given us an alternative view of the world around us and what is really going on.

Wineskins

[Make list on board of big stuff that all adds up to the wineskins teaching]

Read Mark 1:1-8

Ok, that's not the parable...but when you read that, how does that scream there is some kind of dramatic change coming to the world?

Read Mark 1:9-13

Again, dramatic events

- Father, Son and Spirit all present at the same time!
- Satan shows up
- Angels attend

No ordinary events...something is happening.

Read Mark 1:14-15

Getting more specific.

Read Mark 1:21-28 – teaches with authority, acts with authority. Word spreads. People follow.

Read Mark 2:1-12 – Now he is healing bodies and forgiving sins and still teaching with authority.

Read Mark 2:18-22 (Wineskins teaching)

First, the question – disciples fast...why don't yours?

Why is that an important question?

The messiah would have devout followers. If his followers are not devout, he must not be the messiah. What is the sign of a devout follower? Fasting would be included, right?

Their question about fasting is them trying to wrap their minds around who Jesus is.

- Fasting twice a week = Monday and Thursday as well as the Day of Atonement and Rosh Hashanah (top of the year)

Jesus' answer – no one fasts during a wedding. That would be rude.

But it runs deeper into their history than that – **wedding feasts** had a symbolic meaning to them from the OT scriptures

- Isa 61:10
- Isa 62:5
- Jer 2:2, 32

Yahweh was the bridegroom and the feast was the messianic age, now Jesus takes that role upon himself!

You can't just patch up the Torah and work this out in your thinking. This is going to take a whole new way of seeing things.

Jesus' 2 examples

1. What happens if you take a new piece of cloth and patch up an old pair of jeans and throw it in the wash? The patch shrinks and the hole breaks open again.
 - a. This new way things work isn't going to be like the old
2. Wineskins – when you pour wine in a wineskin and it ferments it all ages together. Take those same old skins and pour new wine in there and let it ferment and eventually the wineskins will break.
 - a. Jesus is bringing new wine...what do you have to carry it in?
 - b. Don't bring your old ways...it just won't work.

Both new wine and new clothes were a big part of any wedding ceremony.

The Pharisees believed that holding on tighter to the Torah = the messianic age. Jesus was showing them that the messianic age was something entirely different than anything they could conceive of.

So yes, Jesus was breaking with the traditions of the past and of their current religious "leaders" the Pharisees by not fasting...but it was a needed break. **The real standard for what is a genuine, kingdom movement is not defined by the powers that be but by the moving and working of God.**

How Jewish weddings worked:

They didn't have a ceremony like we have. The bride would wait at her family's house for the bridegroom to arrive. When he arrived he would take her to his own place where all the guests were waiting for them. Once they arrived a feast would take place. That was the wedding ceremony! It was a meal. That is why you hear so much of that in the Gospels. *How weird would it be for everyone to reject the food at the reception?*

Application

What do we do when the Gospel runs against our way of thinking?

How do we use this information to help lead others to Christ, realizing that we are pouring new wine into their worldly ways of thinking?

How much does the world influence how you think, act, what you wear, how you spend your money, etc?

Strong man (Mark 3:23-27)

What is the accusation here against Jesus? - that he and the devil are working together. Well, more than that...literally they are saying that he is possessed by the Spirit of Satan (see 3:22 & 3:30)

Why would someone come up with that? – If you think he isn't pleasing to God for whatever reason (say because he was acting outside the tradition of the elders and Pharisees) so if you see he has power and you believe he is doing things God hates, where else might his power come from?

How does Jesus show them that makes no sense?

- Satan wouldn't work against himself...what would that prove?
- Baal (Canaanite god) + zeboul = **"house"** ----- **house** divided cannot stand

So what is going on instead?

- Jesus is on the offensive
- Jesus is greater than Satan
- Satan has things (people) Jesus wants to reclaim
- Jesus is going to take Satan on head on and win.

Application

Whose are you? How do you get out of the control of Satan and under the Lordship of Jesus?

Are there strongholds in your life that you haven't ever given over to Christ? What is keeping you holding on to them?

Why does Satan seem to have such a pull on us if, in fact, Jesus has tied him up for us?

Lesson 3: The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23)

Life cycles and the disconnect technology brings to life:

- In ancient times you prayed for rain – you had no other hope
- If the harvest didn't make it, you might not make it
- This put people in tune with the seasons because their lives depended on it
- Today – you can get some crops year round that don't grow here year round. Why? Technology and transportation – you can get fruits and vegetables when they don't grow because they are growing somewhere else...where? Southern hemisphere where it is spring there when it is fall here and summer there when it is winter here.
- We don't notice the seasons like they did – life doesn't depend on it to the same degree.

You have heard about the Jewish festivals – *Can you name any?*

- Passover, tabernacles, etc.

3 main festivals and their connection with agriculture

These holiday's were set up around the agricultural calendar of planting and harvesting.

Spring – Passover & Pentecost

Fall – Tabernacles

Passover – the beginning of the cereal harvest (lamb sacrifice)

Pentecost – 7 weeks later, the end of the cereal harvest (cereal sacrifice)

Tabernacles – harvest of figs, pomegranates, grapes and olives

- Tabernacles/booths reminded them of the time they spent in the wilderness
- It also had a practical purpose...while the harvest is going on, stay out in the fields in temporary shelters to protect the crops

3 main festivals and telling Israel's story

It is important that you know who you are. You know that by the stories you are told by your parents. This is passing on faith. They used these harvests to tell their story of faith

Passover – the story of the exodus was told (pre-Sinai)

Pentecost – the covenant given at Sinai (at Sinai)

Tabernacles – wilderness wanderings (after Sinai) when the people had to live in temporary shelters in the wilderness

They oriented their lives around this faith schedule.

How do we orient our time? What marks it off for us today?

- Almost entirely secular – the school year, work schedule, various secular holidays. Exception would be Christmas marking near the end of the year.
- We aren't good at gaining or maintaining sacred rhythms that help remind us of who we are and what life is all about.
- Imagine the Jewish calendar when the next big thing was always a religious celebration with thanksgiving for God's provision involved.

What affect can/does technology have on our "sacred rhythms"?

What does this have to do with the parable of the Sower? – Everything. This was the way they saw life. This was the order of society.

So here comes Jesus using an image that has everything to do with how they saw deliverance, the Law/Covenant and salvation.

All of a sudden this parable doesn't read like people who just get produce at the grocery store (most of us) but we start to catch hints of the underlying message and back story of how they measured time and formed their faith/identity.

Read Matthew 13:1-9

[side note] The Gospel of Matthew is made up of 5 main teachings and this is the middle section of the 5:

- Matthew 5-7: Sermon on the Mount
- Matthew 10: Jesus Sends the 12 and teaches them about their sending
- Matthew 13: Parable section [middle section of teaching]
- Matthew 18: More parables
- Matthew 23: Warnings and Woes

Setting the stage:

Jesus sets out in a boat

- Because of the crowds
- Also because these inlets made perfect little amphitheaters where the crowd could all hear his teaching

Jesus sits, the crowd stands – that is how they taught in Jesus' day

Farmer sowed some seed – *how did he do it?*

Where did the seed land? Is that standard seed sowing protocol?

Why scattered seed in places it won't grow?

- Either the farmer is lazy, blind or he has a purpose in doing that

- The problem with people being lost isn't due to the fact that God failed at getting the word out
- The problem of being lost, missing out on the covenant blessings, has to do with our own receptivity of the seed in our lives.

That receptivity of the seed is represented by what in this parable? – the soil

Path – birds ate it

Rocky places – sprang up quick then scorched by the sun

Thorns – choked out

Good soil – produced an amazing harvest

This is how the Gospel works – it isn't just sown to "good soil" places. No, it is sown everywhere...come what may.

Why is it important that God doesn't discriminate in who he sows the seed to?

Think about Saul/Paul – what kind of soil was he when he encountered Jesus?

- What would have happened if God had decided he wasn't worthy of receiving the seed?

Truth is – none of us are worthy of it. It is all an act of **grace**

**So the sower is actually methodical in his sowing...
he sows generously because he sows gracefully.**

What is the harvest?

Read Matthew 13:10-23

Jesus' confusing language

Obviously, not everyone got it. People were confused. They wanted explanation. Two questions:

- 1 – Why would Jesus speak in confusing language in the first place (see 13:11-12)
- 2 – Why would he only explain it to a select group of people and not to everyone?

Jesus point is this – if their hearts are opened, they may not understand everything but they will continue to follow, continue to understand and continue to grow. But for those who are on the fringe, could care less...the truths of the kingdom of God wouldn't make sense even if you stated it more clearly.

So at the end of the day, it doesn't matter if you are confusing or not because those who truly want it will find it and those who don't care won't be swayed anyway (See 13:18)

Application: So what does this parable mean for us?

What kind of soil are you right now? – are you resisting God or residing in God? Are you fighting him or submitting to his will? How soft is your heart? How receptive are you to the truths of the Gospel?

How does this encourage you to continue to reach out to people even if you don't think they will accept the message right away?

Why is it that some of those who accept the message the fastest are also the quickest to fall away? (think Chase on the positive side of that)

Lesson 4: Three “Loses”

Luke 15:1-32

Before we read them, based on what you remember about these parables – what are these parables about?

Context is everything – Read 15:1-2

Jesus is teaching in response to the complaints of his critics. *What is their complaint?*

Realize, these same people who are accusing Jesus are listening to these parables. They are directed at those who scoff at Jesus bringing hope to people who seem to be far from God. In the process, the truth be told, the ones who thought they were close were actually far and the ones who seemed far off were closer to God than anyone thought they were.

Jesus has been having parties with sinners – listen for the party in each of these three parables and ask “Why does God celebrate with ‘sinners’”?

Now Read Luke 15:3-32

Read Luke 15:3-7 (Lost Sheep)

How much does this shepherd care for the lost sheep?

How much does he care for the 99?

Is his care mutually exclusive?

Have you ever lost something that you later found and were filled with joy?

Why does God love “sinners” so much? How about us?

God is actively seeking lost people. If they are lost it isn't because he got tired of looking.

Celebration - Jesus said that when lost people are found, heaven rejoices – do we? That is one thing in my experience in CofC – we don't often celebrate in a way that is in line with the size of what is actually going on around us.

Read Luke 15:8-10 (Lost Coin)

She may be so happy over this coin because chances are this may be her dowry (her financial and relational security looking ahead). Dowries ensured that a woman was taken good care of.

So this is a big deal and a big reason to rejoice!

Read Luke 15:11-32 (Lost Son?)

Look at internals and externals of each son

Younger son – disrespected his father, wishes he had just died so he could get the stuff, wanted to return as a servant, got a big blessing

Older son – seems to have in theory respected his father (accept at the end) by being “faithful” at least in deed. He seems to have done it all right.

Now, the way a good story works and is developed – *who are you pulling for?*

- You are pulling for the older son
- *WHY?* – because he was “faithful” and stuck it out. Younger one spit in his father’s eye
- *What makes the younger son so unlikable to us?* – he was wasteful

Is there a difference between doing things out of love and doing things out of duty?

What three items did the father give the younger son?

- Robe, ring, calf
- signs of reinstatement and acceptance as son

How did the older son actually disrespect his father?

How should the younger son have reacted?

This is not about fairness and who gets what. This parable serves as a corrective in how we see two people – Our Father/God and Others.

Problem #1 – How older brother saw himself (Servant or son – a twist)

Problem #2 – How he saw others/his brother

- Life is not a game of comparisons – find someone worse than you and feel self-righteous.

Problem #3 – How he saw himself

- 5:9 – younger brother wants to come back as servant
- 5:29 – older brother saw himself as servant the whole time.

Application

How do we see others around us?

Andy Stanley - Challenge is to see everyone as someone Jesus died for.

How might things change if we did that?

How might we treat people?

Lesson 5: Growing Seed & The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:26-32)

Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29)

- Only thing in Mark that has no parallel in Matthew or Luke
- Just how small is a mustard seed?
 - 1 millimeter in size
 - For those who like to count – 760 seeds to make a gram!
- 4:27 – whether he sleeps or rises (Resurrection word in Greek)
 - He doesn't know how = he didn't cause it to happen/not by his power (turn this into a question)
 - “night and day” – **Jewish day begins at sunset**
 - Genesis 1:4 – there was evening and morning the first day, 2nd, 3rd, etc
- 4:28 Greek is “automate”/all by itself – no human effort
 - How does it grow? The power of God!
 - Rabbit trail – how do plants know to grow up?
 - Gravity receptors
 - Space experiment – roots and shoots went every which way.
 - Gravity receptors tell roots which way is down and shoots which way is up!
- The critics want to say the kingdom hasn't come – Jesus answer is “look all around you...its pretty obvious guys”. It's like saying, “Crops won't grow here” while standing in the middle of a field full of crops.
- 4:29 is basically a quotation of Joel 3:13 – harvest = Day of the Lord

Jesus' contemporaries were seeking the day of the Lord and they expected that it would look a certain way.

Jesus is saying the way the kingdom grows is more subversive than that – it happens under the surface as much or more as over. It takes root in secret and grows when and where you don't know it is growing. It is expansive and vast and uncontainable and uncontrollable.

That is the kind of kingdom we are a part of!

Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-34)

- Old flannel graph when I was a kid – mustard tree was the big oak tree looking thing, at least that is the one my teacher picked. I still remember. But they don't look like that. They aren't that tall (6-10 feet). But they are vicious at spreading out.
- Mustard plants don't grow where you hoped they would grow...it is like Bermuda grass in St. Pete...you would seed and it would only grow under your mulch in the flower beds and playground!
- Point – out of such a small looking, insignificant looking seed, the kingdom sprouts and grows (Jesus from Nazareth?)
- This same kingdom imagery is used by Ezekiel (17:23, 31:6) and Daniel (4:12, 21)

Application

What does this teach us about the church?

- What if we had a vision to embrace the ways of the mustard seed/mustard plant? We just expanded and grew and affected everyone and everything around us for the good!?!
- We all want to be a part of something noted for its worth, its growth, its effectiveness toward its greater purpose

How might we as individuals learn to be like the mustard seed? – taking the little we have and turning into great things for the Lord.

How might we rely on God more to do his “automatic” way of doing things...apart from our ability or smarts?

Lesson 6: The Unforgiving Servant & Two Debtors (Matthew 18:23-35 & Luke 7:41-43)

Read Matthew 18:21-35

Re-tell the story in your own words

What is the Context?

- Immediate context is Peter's question – "How many times should I forgive my brother?"
- Broader context goes back to 18:15 – "If your brother sins [against you]..."

This parable is further elaboration on Jesus' teaching on dealing with a brother who is in sin back in 18:15ff

That teaching caused Peter to ask for clarification - Jesus tells this parable to answer that question.

Do the math:

- Denarii – day's wage
- Talent – 6,000 denarii ($6000/365 = 16.4$ years wages)
- 16.4 years wages = 1 Talent
- 16.4 years X 10,000 talents = 16,400 years wages!
- Put that into dollars
- $\$50k \times 16,400 = \$820,000,000$
- 100 denarii = 100 days wage @ $\$50k/\text{year} = \$13,700$

Now hear it again:

- Guy begs to be forgive his billion dollar debt and king lets him off "scott free"
- He bumps into a guy who owed him \$13k and attacked him.

How would you feel if you had been forgiven a billion dollar debt?

How might that inspire you to treat the guy who owed you money?

Notice, both promised to pay it back – which one was actually more likely to make good on that offer?

Two points here

- Point about the master:
 - He had every right to the money
 - 18:27 – "took pity on him"
- Point about the first debtor
 - He had every right to the money

- Read 18:26 & 29 – exact same plea – different response by the lender

These actions caused what (18:31)?

- Outrage
- Why?

Is there ever a time when someone's actions should outrage us?

Has God ever been outraged about you?

The point is this – this guy owed an impossible amount to ever pay back and he was forgiven.

God has forgiven us all so much that it is impossible to work our way back to even with God.

So how do we treat people who sin against us and say they can “work it off” too?

We let them go gracefully – forgive them as we have been forgiven.

Application: Dealing with perpetual sin

Let's say a fellow Christian does the same sin against you 77 times...then what? How do you deal with that?

It is possible to forgive but you don't have to forget – be smart about it!

Is there anyone you really need to forgive, that you have held things against?

The Two Debtors (Luke 7:36-50)

Read Luke 7:41-44 (The actual parable)

Context: *But what is the context?*

- We are starting to see that many of these parables weren't just random teachings but were connecting with real things going on around them.

What about the historical context?

- When guests came in your home – wash their feet
- Women weren't usually amongst the men's business
- She wasn't welcome in the room
- Pharisees – didn't like being around “Impure” people like her
- Simon hadn't shown Jesus any respect and this woman did for him what Simon would have been expected to do.

Simon's attitude – discredit who Jesus is

This “sinful” woman – give honor to who Jesus is

It is a reversal of expectation in society. We expect the “in crowd” to get it and the outcasts to miss it but it is exactly the opposite.

What does Jesus do to show his acceptance of her? – forgives her sins.

The crowd seems to find this as even more reason to doubt Jesus.

Lesson 7: Good Samaritan & Lamp Under Bushel (Luke 10:25-37 & Matthew 5:14-15)

Path of this Study:

- 1. Understand the details of the parable**
- 2. Then context**
- 3. What context means for this parable:**

The parable Read Luke 10:30-35

We read that and moralize it – be a good person who helps
More than that!

Read in Context: Luke 10:25-37

Teacher in the law does what a good “lawyer” does – ask for the right definition of the terms being used!

CONTEXT: Learning from context – what is this teaching there to address/do?

Like all the others – this is not just a random teaching of Jesus to a random group of people.

Luke 10:30 – *“In reply Jesus said”...in reply to what?*

Luke 10:30-35 is bookended by its context:

- **Luke 10:29** – “Who is my neighbor”
- **Luke 10:36-37** – Which of these was the neighbor? The man had to answer his own question based on the choices Jesus gave him.
- It is like when you give your kids three choices (priest, Levite, Samaritan) and there is only one you know they will choose.
- Jesus doesn’t tell the man the answer, he lets him say it himself.
- *Why does Jesus have the man answer his own question?*
 - The same reason I am asking you the question rather than just telling you
 - When you say things out loud, based on the conclusions you formed...it is more powerful than just being told something and moving along.
- Jesus’ surface goal was to change the way this man defined “neighbor”
- Jesus’ deeper goal was even more impacting
 - *Why did the man ask who his neighbor was? Odd question without context...*
 - **Read Luke 10:25-29**

This is a confrontation of sorts:

- This man asks a question of Jesus
- Wants to come out on top...asks for clarification.

- Surely, Jesus will show that he is not well aligned with the kind of Israel that everyone else believes in
 - One that is pro-Israel, anti-Gentile, etc
 - Popular Jewish belief – Jews are my neighbor, others aren't.
 - So who are the Samaritans? – tell the backstory
 - Return from Babylonian exile
 - Those who stayed in the land had developed their own system
 - Some intermarried with others
 - Wasn't a good mix
 - Instead of Jesus saying, "love your neighbor means everyone" to which the man will say he is a false-teacher...Jesus brings the man along to see his point.

Language means something:

Contrast – "The other day I went down the Grapevine to LA" vs "the other day I went down to the store"

- Granny – "Let me carry you to the store" – huh?
- "Let's run over to Panera for lunch?" – really? And get all sweaty?
- Trip from Jerusalem to Jericho – geographical descent (17 mile trip down toward Dead Sea – from 2700 feet above sea level to 800 below = 200 foot drop/mile - Snodgrass)

Dangerous road – opinion today is that many in Jesus' day would by-pass it and take a longer route

- So when Jesus tells a story about a lone man taking that road...trouble was brewing.

What makes a good story:

- Likeable guy – build up his character...make you start out liking him
 - He was a Jew – kinship
 - Good enough – check
- Create tension
 - Robbed!
 - Worse – good guys come by...they don't help!
 - Worse – a Samaritan comes by...what will he do?
 - Beat him up worse!
 - **Why? Back story on Samaritans**

Explore The power of stereotypes:

- Change these three from Priest, Levite and Samaritan
- Let's line it up with the parable – Peace corp worker, fireman and Nazi
 - You hope the first two help him before the third gets there!
 - But they don't!
 - Now what?!?
 - He's in real trouble now...someone who would do him harm at the drop of a hat is coming next. He's toast!

“We don’t retell these stories because Jesus said what we expect him to say – we repeat these stories because they have a twist”

That twist – designed to get our attention BUT MORE THAN THAT – to instigate heart level change in our lives:

- Jesus is trying to change the way we see and value people.
- Takes 2 people they think they know – show it isn’t always as they think
- Takes 1 more person they think they know – show them it isn’t always as they think

Hearing it how they heard it:

- Priest – who he is
 - 24 groups of priests – each group did 2 weeks/year of service in the temple
 - Most lived outside Jerusalem
 - Entirely possible he is on his way to the temple to perform his duties
 - Meaning – religion trumps ethics
 - Blood = unclean, unable to perform his duties
 - So he refuses to help this man
 - That is one possibility
 - An even worse option – he is just trying to get home and doesn’t want to be bothered.
 - Even worse – he just doesn’t care and isn’t up to anything much that is important.
- Priest – what they would expect of him
 - To help!
- Levite – who he is
 - Also divided into 24 groups – 2 main categories (singers and gatekeepers – Fergusson, 566)
 - Worked to maintain and secure the temple and its music.
- Levite – what they would expect of him
 - Help!
- Samaritan – who he is
 - See below
- Samaritan – what they would expect of him
 - To finish the man off!

Now, here is what actually happened...

Application - Connecting love of “neighbor” with love of God

- Jesus is saying – if your neighbor is the furthest person from yourself that you can conceive of...who else is your neighbor? Everyone from that “furthest” person all the way to you. Everyone.

What makes this parable important for us today?

- We have to be open to all, even those we might not expect to be open to Christ
- Welcoming but not affirming
- Expect the unexpected in people.
- Do we have an environment here where a “Samaritan” would feel welcome or do we only welcome our own?
- How do we form a culture that is open to outsiders
 - Pray for them regularly
 - Welcome when you see someone you don’t know
 - Invite them to something deeper
 - Be willing to take the heat.
- **Westside – known as a friendly place**
- **But we are only as friendly as the first person we alienate, ignore or leave out.**

Being “Neighbor” – more than acknowledging presence – priest and Levite did that!
Being “Neighbor” takes action, sacrifice, and involvement in the lives of others.

How can we better do that as individuals, as a class, as a church?

It cost the Samaritan something – involving ourselves in “kingdom work” will cost us something, make us uncomfortable at times and expand our view of people.

Salt/Light (Matthew 5:13-16)

That connects us directly to Matthew 5:13-16

- You are...salt
- You are...light

We exist in this world to show the world how a neighbor acts...as Jesus did.

Lesson 8: Unjust Steward & Master and Servant Luke 16:1-13 & Luke 17:7-10)

Unjust steward (Luke 16:1-13) [referenced Wright's Luke for Everyone heavily here]

Read the parable

What is going on here?

Work them through:

- Information
- Interpretation
- Application

Then apply that on face value to this parable:

- Information: Servant used deceit to make friends
- Interpretation: Jesus appears to be saying that the master (God) will commend you for being shrewd.
- Application: Jesus seems to straight up give us the application...buy your way into heaven and its all good. *What do you do with all of this!?!*

Our Problem with this parable – we know there is something else going on here but can't put our finger on it.

Problem of our filters: we don't live in the world they lived in. We aren't immersed in their culture. We don't hear things the way they heard things. Instead, we pass everything through our 21st century, Western filters.

Background illumination: Let's allow Jewish law and tradition to help illuminate what is going on here so we can figure out who is who and what is what.

The master:

Jews couldn't lend cash money – Deut 23:19

Loophole! Lend 100 of an item but then have them repay you with 110 of that item or more value of another item you need. Interest without getting paid cash money interest

The steward:

His "deceptive" practice is actually the honest practice – he is reducing the bill to its original amount

The master cannot accuse him of anything because he is getting paid back exactly what was owed, which was actually what the Law said to do.

Smart man!

What was Jesus then teaching his followers?

Well, a little more background. The common teaching of the Pharisees of Jesus' day was in order to move ahead you had to bind things more tightly. Here Jesus is going the opposite route, not condoning sin but lightening the regulations we hold each other to because the days ahead are going to be rough (they had great persecution coming in their day they didn't know about yet).

What does this teaching have to teach us?

The church already has a rough go in the world, don't go beating each other up and restricting where God doesn't restrict.

Master & Servant (Luke 17:7-10)

Erase all of that out of your minds...who the master is and who the servant is. Start fresh for this parable.

Read the parable

What is this parable about?

It is about expectations

Contrast Entitlement vs obligation and duty

What is the difference between someone who is entitled and someone who has a sense of duty?

It is easy to think the entitled people are someone else, but what if it is us?

I have met entitled Christians....entitlement isn't about social issues. You can be religiously entitled.

What would religious entitlement include?

Lesson 9: Pharisee & Tax Collector & Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 18:9-14 & Luke 16:19-31)

Context – To people who were self-righteous & had a problem of looking down at others

Contents of their prayers:

- Pharisee's list of accomplishments
- Tax-collector's plea of dependence

Pharisees – Thought the way to get God to deliver them via the Messiah was to follow all the rules and to bind the traditions (over and above the law) on themselves but also on all the people. That's why Jesus said they tie heavy burdens on people,

⁴⁶ Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them." – **Luke 11:46**

Tax collectors – Jews collecting for Rome (treasonous) and keeping whatever overage they collect for themselves (deceitful and thought of as stealing).

From a worldly/surface perspective - This Pharisee sounds like he does a lot of righteous deeds. This tax collector sounds like he has done a lot of evil things.

Power of Stereotypes:

Jesus is taking the two people in their world that were at the very end of the righteousness spectrum:

Super Righteous Pharisees	Normal righteous Everyday Joe	Unrighteous Sinners/Gentiles	Super ungodly Tax collectors
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Jesus is about to, as he usually does, turn their world upside down.

What is the difference between these two men? – attitude of pride vs. humility

What did God do in this situation and why?

- God justified the tax collector
- *What does "justified" mean?*- some say "just as if I'd never sinned" – that is close. It is the act of God making us right in his sight.

What do you think Jesus means when he says those who humble themselves will be exalted and those who exalt themselves will be humbled?

- Immediate sense – get too big for your britches and you will get taken down
- Eternal sense – at the end of the day God will sort all of this out.

Do you want God to hear your prayer and answer?

If so, better be humble.

What tempts you to be prideful?

How does this parable put that into perspective?

Why is self-righteousness so distasteful to God?

Matt 5:20 – righteousness should exceed the Pharisees. Does this tax-collector’s righteousness exceed the Pharisees? Depends on your view of righteousness.

- Pharisees – righteousness that comes from self – which is no righteousness at all

Where does real righteousness come from? – God and God alone

Disarming Stereotypes: There are people in this world we might be very uncomfortable to be around but be careful in how you judge – they might be more righteous in God’s site than you are.

Honduras experience – the generosity and love of the Honduran Christians was overwhelming.

Rich Man & Lazarus **(Luke 16:19-31)**

Again, the power of stereotypes...contrasting to polar extremes to make a point about how God and the kingdom operate.

Key phrase – “at his gate”

- That means the rich man passed by Lazarus every day.
- They knew each other
- Rich man had an obligation to help his fellow Jew and didn’t.
- He only cared about himself
 - Now, that is evidence before his death (luxury)
 - It is evidenced after his death (I want something – help me out)
 - Still not interested in Lazarus
 - Only in himself and then his brothers
- Told “no”

Luxury of the Rich Man

- Imported clothes – dressed in purple
- Imported underwear – “fine linen”

Poverty of Lazarus:

- Lying – literally “thrown down”

- He is probably disable
- He is definitely destitute
- The dogs are even licking him and he can't even get to the scraps before the dogs do – **disabled?**
- Dogs – not usually pets but more like nomad, rogue dogs. Not your friend.
- Sores all over his body – unable to take care of himself, and no one is doing it for him.

Burial

- Rich man died and was buried
- Lazarus just died and was carried to Abraham's side. Probably didn't even get a decent burial may be implied here.

Lazarus – name means “God helps” – irony until the end.

Quite a contrast.

At the end of the day, when it is all said and done – what really matters?

Now, take that principle and apply it back into this life. If we lived in this life by the principles we will value in the next, we would be way ahead.

Law and Prophets – If they read that they would know what to do with the poor

- Deut 15:7-8
- Amos 2:7
- Isa 58:6-7

Scripture should be as convincing as resurrection.

Lesson 10: Workers in the Vineyard & Great Banquet (Matt 20:1-16 & Luke 14:15-24)

Read Matthew 20:1-16

Restate what happened in your own words

Who is the land owner?

Who are the workers?

Where it breaks down – we don't earn our reward but we do receive something from God.

What do you expect to receive from God?

What if someone else got something you didn't think they should get from God?

Would that happening change what you believed you "have coming to you?"

So what's the point?...God will do what God will do.

Read John 21:18-23 – "What about him?"

Why do we get so worked up by comparisons?

Would you be okay if God did exactly as he promised?

How can things like cancer, death, etc shake our faith and make us wonder if God is going to do what he said he was going to do?

- Remember, God didn't promise us we wouldn't die
- God did promise us the second death wouldn't harm us – **Rev 2:11, 20:6, 20:14**

How can God be faithful and yet things on this earth still seem so unfair?

Application:

Don't make comparisons...ever. God isn't comparing and neither should we.

Take God's promises seriously.

Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24)

Context

- 13:34 – some will refuse to come to the party
- 14:12-14 banquet invitations and resurrection reward
- 14:15 – “blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God” – connect that to 14:24 “not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet”

“Invite” - Key word here

- Kaleo – appears 12 times in Luke 14:7-24 means “to call”
- Not a phone call! To call out to someone = invite

In the first parable we just studied, those invited came and did as they needed to do. In this parable those initially invited don't show.

What do they do instead of come? – Make excuses

How good were their excuses?

Why does that so displease a guy throwing a banquet that his first invitees don't care to come?

Their culture – honor and shame...shaming the master by not attending the feast.

- Family reunion – have had some families not want to come for various things they disagreed with. That is similar but this is worse in their world.
- Small town shame – when you live in a big city it takes a lot to make the news. When you live in a town of 500, small things seem bigger and big things seem smaller.
- This is a big deal to not come to his banquet.

So what does he do? – Invites others you wouldn't expect and they get to party with the master!

Concludes with judgment against those who refused to come.

So what is this parable about?

If this parable is about God inviting us to his banquet table...now how lame do the excuses sound?

How lame do our excuses for not following Jesus sound to God?

What has God invited us to – heaven yes – but in addition to that?

How do we respond and what excuses are we tempted to make?

Lesson 11: You Can Learn a Lot from a Fig Tree (Matthew 24:32-35 & Luke 13:6-9)

Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9)

Context runs from Luke 12:54-Luke 13:9

- Luke 12:54-59 he warns them about coming judgment
- They know how to tell if it is going to rain but they still aren't discerning what God is up to through Christ.
- The only way to see it is to repent or be punished.

2nd piece of context is 13:1-5:

- Those telling Jesus what Pilate did are responding to his accusation in 12:56 that they aren't doing a very good job knowing the time in which they live and what the events mean
- So they tell Jesus about an awful thing Pilate did
- Jesus responds to that and mentions the falling of a tower in an area of Jerusalem (Siloam) that also killed some people.

Foreshadowing – when Jerusalem falls more things like these will happen:

- Murderous atrocities similar to what Pilate did
- More walls and towers and even temples falling
- The things that are being mentioned point ahead to something worse.

That brings us to the fig tree

- What is a fig tree doing in a vineyard?
 - They were common there and were thought to be good for the grapes
- Why the fig tree?
 - Fig trees became associated with judgment
 - Fig trees had sweet fruit and were a favorite place to find shade (protection from the sun). **Isaiah 36:16**
 - Cursing a fig tree symbolized the removal of God's provision.

The events:

- **Land owner – God**
- **Caretaker – Jesus**
- **Fig tree – Israel/Jerusalem**

For three years – Jesus' three year ministry?

Application

What should we be on the lookout for?

The way this world works shouldn't surprise us

What kind of fruit is God looking for in us? – think more than fruit of Spirit, think also evangelistically.

Budding Fig Tree (Matt 24:32-35)

Context – go back and read **Matthew 24:1-31**

What is all of this about?

- AD 70 – The Romans had enough and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem.
- It was mass chaos and upheaval
- Jesus predicted it in John 2:19 as well but also double prophesy talking about his death and resurrection

This is not about the second coming:

- Notice specifics – those in Judea, Sabbath, etc.
- This was written to a particular people in a particular time who would need this advice in about 30 years.

24:34 – key verse says this will all happen in that generation. Jesus really meant that.

Now, the fig tree – you know how fig trees work...when the fig tree acts a certain way you can be sure summer is almost here. Well, just like that there are some certain, specific signs you can look for that tell you destruction is on its way to Jerusalem. Know the signs and know how to react.

Application

We won't face the destruction of Jerusalem but some day Jesus will return. We don't have any idea when the second coming will be (Like a thief in the night) but we know it will happen.

How do we ready ourselves for that great day?

How do we ready others for that great day?

Lesson 12: Faithful Servants & 10 Virgins (Matthew 24:42-51 & Matthew 25:1-13)

Read Matthew 24:42-51

Backup and Read **Matthew 24:36-39**

Why do you think it is important for us to know Christ is going to return?

24:36 – not even Jesus knows!

Why is it such a mystery as to when it is going to happen?

What does Jesus tell us to do in 24:42? – Keep watch

How do we actually do that?

- It doesn't mean we are actually looking at the sky every day
- It means we live for him...watch your way of life

We are like servants put in charge of some special things:

- *What are we put in charge of while the master is gone?*
- *Why is it important we do what we are supposed to do?*

First group of servants – does what they were told to do.

Second group of servants – those who are disobedient, even abusive

Brutal judgment in 24:51 – emphasizes the importance of paying attention.

Easy to miss

- Our faithful actions honor our heavenly father
- Our trustworthiness is crucial to his getting done what he has required of us
- The responsibility we have is not just toward God but also toward others

10 Virgins

Read Matthew 25:1-13

Explain these cultural practices and the way weddings worked

Application – keep watch

There is an expectation of these women that the groom wouldn't come back any time soon.

Applying that to the second coming of Christ, *why is that tempting to think?*

Does 2000 years passing dull us to the importance of talking about our Lord's return?

We aren't carrying lamps but reflect the call to be ready – How do we demonstrate our level of readiness as Christians today?

*“Don't read too much in but **they all fell asleep** – perfect readiness is not required...what is required is living in light of the fact that you really do think he will return.”*

The first group did and the second didn't.

Application – What tasks has God given us and how do we carry them out

What is our purpose and mission as a church?

How are we carrying those things out?

How ready, then, are we for Christ and how seriously have we taken his words?