

BOOK 3

# PARABLES

The Stories of Jesus

A NEW HOPE DEVOTIONAL **BIBLE STUDY**



# INTRODUCTION

**P**arables are stunning word pictures that transfer reality from the throne room of God to the world of humans. Jesus told stories about commonplace activities to illustrate heavenly truth. He used parables to correct wrong thinking related to His kingdom, clarify biblical concepts and to explain how to properly relate with God (and others).

The Jewish religious leadership were wrongly convinced of what theologians' call "Compensation Theology". This theology teaches that humans must perform to a righteous standard and then be compensated with benefits like, in the case of the Pharisees, citizenship in God's kingdom. Jesus used parables to deconstruct the idea that God's verdict of "not guilty" can be earned through human means. God's righteousness must be gifted to unworthy recipients by faith. This book opens with a law teacher asking Jesus how righteous he needed to be to gain entrance into God's kingdom. Jesus shattered his self-righteous confidence with the parable of The Good Samaritan.

The Pharisees understood Jesus's clear message of grace apart from works but they bitterly rejected it. They hated Jesus with a vengeance. By the end of this book Jesus was living east of the Jordan where the religious leaders could not harm him. Everywhere Jesus went He healed, served tirelessly, loved on people and taught in parables.

My son, Ric Bruce III acted as editor-in-chief. Katie Scott, missionary to Haiti, painstakingly proofread each lesson. Darla Prether, New Hope's graphic designer labored with intensity to make this book so aesthetically pleasing. Samantha Fray, New Hope's website administrator, is doing a wonderful job establishing an online presence for The Parables of Jesus.

Some of you will be studying this book in a small group setting. You will be encouraged to listen to Pastor Mark's sermon(s) on each lesson before discussing it in your small group. Some of the topics will ignite lively conversation. Jesus used controversial topics like divorce, slavery, and money to help make His point. I interpreted each parable for you but the Spirit of God will apply it individually to your life. Trust God to enable you to **learn** from His Word, **love** others sacrificially, **worship** Him exclusively and **pray** diligently. We included a page with small group instructions that highlights both learning and doing.

God has gifted us with a mind to understand Him, a heart to love Him, and a will to choose Him. He gave us His eternal Word to lovingly communicate reality to you and I. He gave us the command, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth". (2 Timothy 2:15) Welcome to The Parables, The Stories of Jesus, Book 3.



Rich Bruce, Discipleship Pastor

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## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**T**he purpose of the Small Group Ministry is to be a vessel, through community, for discipleship. Small Groups are meant to reinforce the four scriptural principles set forth as the purpose of New Hope Church: "The purpose of this church is to glorify God by producing maturing followers (disciples) of Jesus Christ through the four scriptural principles of *Learning, Loving, Worship and Prayer*."

Small Groups will seek to accomplish this through creating a safe and supportive atmosphere for people to wrestle with the truths of God as they mature in their faith.

**Based on this week's Scripture, sermon, and devotional reading, please consider the following questions:**

### GOD

**Pastor Mark says, "What you believe about God determines what you do next."**

- 1 What do you believe about God? What do you learn about God's character from this week's Scripture passage, message, and devotional?
- 2 What stirs up praise, love, or thankfulness to God? During prayer time, PRAISE HIM for who He is, His character, His attributes, or THANK HIM for what He has done/is doing.

### DO

**Pastor Mark says, "What you believe about God determines what you do next."**

- 1 What do you learn about humanity or yourself specifically this week's Scripture passage, message, and devotional?
- 2 Is there something God is asking you to do? What do you believe you are to do next? How will you seek to be obedient to what you are learning?
- 3 What is the tension/challenge in obeying God? Can you identify what you are feeling or what's causing a reaction?
- 4 How can your small group support you in yielding to what God wants to do?
- 5 How can you pray for yourself or others according to these verses?

### PRAYER TIME

## CONTENTS

- 1** THE GOOD SAMARITAN
- 2** THE PERSISTANT FRIEND
- 3** THE RICH FOOL
- 4** THE FAITHFUL SERVANTS
- 5** THE FRUITLESS FIG TREE
- 6** SEATS AT A WEDDING FEAST
- 7** THE GREAT BANQUET
- 8** THE TOWER BUILDER & THE KING
- 9** THE SEARCHING SHEPHERD, WOMAN & FATHER
- 10** THE PRUDENT MANAGER
- 11** THE RICH MAN & THE BEGGAR
- 12** THE UNWORTHY SLAVE

## THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Jesus left Capernaum and began an intensely emotional 6-month journey that ended with His grisly earthly death.<sup>1</sup> On this last leg of the journey, He manifested a wide range of emotions - from grave concern for the disciples competing for kingdom importance to uncontrolled sobbing at the home of his dead friend Lazarus. He also expressed anger at James and John when they offered to call fire down on a Samaritan village that rejected Him (Luke 9:52-56). Yet through it all, He was the perfect God-man with perfect emotion.

For the next several months Jesus lived near Jerusalem. To avoid the Jewish leaders he sought refuge on the opposite side of the Jordan river. He continued to minister to the crowds publicly and defend His authority privately to those brave enough to challenge Him.

One day, an expert in Jewish law arrived to put Rabbi Jesus to the test. He intended to discredit Jesus and turn the crowds from Him. "Teacher," he asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded with two questions, "What is written in the Law?" and, "How do you read it?" (Luke 10: 26).

The law expert gave the expected self-righteous answer by rehearsing the commands to love God with all his "strength, soul and mind" and to love "neighbors" as much as he loved himself. He had memorized this as a mantra from a young age and probably recited it automatically, without thinking. Jesus told Him that if He performed those commands perfectly, he would inherit eternal life. However, the Law expert continued to hound Jesus by asking, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Jesus responded with the following parable.

### LUKE 10:30-37

Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' 36 Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" 37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

By this time, it was widely known that Jesus had rejected the legalistic righteousness of the esteemed Pharisees. Jesus demanded God's perfection as a prerequisite to enter the kingdom of God. This other-worldly prerequisite of Jesus likely prompted endless hours of private

debate and conversation by scholars. These pharisaic debates culminated in sending hostile delegations with loaded theological questions to Jesus. Jesus wisely responded with fitting word pictures that brought His accusers back to reality.

## Consider the following about this parable:

**1** The law expert was literally asking Jesus how righteous he needed to be to make himself eligible for the kingdom Jesus was offering.<sup>1</sup> Jesus told the scholar that if He kept the law perfectly, he would meet the requirements. Feeling a tinge of uncertainty, the law expert pushed Jesus for a definition of his “neighbor”. Jesus shared a jarring example with him of a hated Samaritan’s selfless love and his neighborly acts toward an undeserving racist. Jesus was setting up an impossible scenario to prove that the Jewish Law teacher did not keep God’s law perfectly and therefore was disqualified for God’s eternal kingdom.

**2** Historically, Jews loathed the Samaritan people. The Samaritans considered Mt. Gerazim as the sacred meeting place of God (not Jerusalem). The only Old Testament prophet they recognized was Moses and they only accepted the first 5 books of the Bible as inspired. The Jews traced their lineage to Abraham while the Samaritans were gentiles mixed with Jewish bloodlines. In an ancient world of pedigree and privilege, the Samaritans provoked

thoughts of hatred and disgust in the Jews. The Jewish leaders disparagingly referred to Jesus as a “Samaritan” (John 8:48). Jesus showed atypical kindness to the Samaritans throughout His earthly ministry. As a result, many Samaritans came to faith in Jesus.

**3** The road from Jerusalem to Jericho descended 3,300 feet in just 17 miles. It was a lonely, treacherous road that gave bandits many places to lie in wait for unsuspecting travelers. The attack described in the parable was especially vicious since the bandits beat the man, took his clothes, and left him for dead. The two denarii spoken of in the parable would have been worth about two days wages.

This story would have left the self-justified law teacher speechless, as he realized that the Law he revered to save him was the same law that condemned him. He would have understood that he didn’t and couldn’t love as God prescribed in the Law. This parable served as a sobering epiphany of God’s definition of love and the law teacher’s inability to follow it. **NH**

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## POINT TO PONDER

As Jesus modeled laying down His life for us, we ought to do the same for others (1 John 3:16).

## FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

Look for a God-orchestrated opportunity to radically love a fellow human across cultural barriers. This could take the form of a simple smile, a warm handshake, or a gospel sharing opportunity.

## PRAYER POINT

“Thank you God for these compelling parable word pictures that you paint to bring me back to reality. May I admit my humble, needy state. Thank you for scooping me up off the road and being my good Samaritan.”

## THE PERSISTENT FRIEND

Jesus took full advantage of the Jewish feasts that occurred during His travelling ministry in Judea. During these festivals the city of Jerusalem would fill with worshippers from the four corners of Israel. Jesus quietly entered Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts and to minister to the crowds. The miracles Jesus performed there appealed to the sentiments of the crowds, but they incited the jealous hatred of the leaders. (John 7:31) The Jewish leaders looked for a way to arrest or harm Jesus, but they altered their plans because they feared the festive crowds. (Matthew 21:46)

During the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus gathered his disciples and He sent out seventy-two as missionaries in pairs. Jesus tasked them with healing the sick, announcing the kingdom of God, and preparing every town and village around Jerusalem for Jesus' arrival. The disciples returned

with enthusiastic reports of God's miraculous work through them. (Luke 10:17)

Lazarus, Martha, and Mary received Jesus into their home as He travelled east from Jerusalem. Mary evidenced a prepared heart by listening intently to Jesus's teaching while sitting at His feet. Martha became irritated at Mary for not being hospitable. Jesus rebuked Martha by saying, "...but only one thing is necessary, Mary has chosen the better part, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:42) Mary chose God's rule in Jesus while Martha chose lonesome, busy self-rule.

Ministry out in the Judean countryside was intense. After the disciples returned, Jesus taught them about prayer. They knew that throughout Biblical history prayer had been a marker of healthy dependence on God. He taught them the following prayer and shared another parable with them:

### LUKE 11:1-10

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." 2 And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. 3 Give us each day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

5 Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much 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.

Luke records many aspects of Jesus's prayers. Jesus offered prayers of

thanksgiving (10:21), prayers of communion with God (3:21: 5:16), Jesus requested

specific things from God (22:42) and He offered intercession on behalf of others (22:32). The only feature not evident in Jesus's prayers is confession of sin. The sinlessness of Jesus is continually re-enforced throughout scripture.

### Consider the following:

**1** It is important to note that until this time in Jewish religious history, intercessory priestly prayer was the standard for the children of Israel. Only male members of the tribe of Levi could perform ceremonial temple worship. Only male descendants of Aaron could serve as high priests. Just once a year, one privileged high priest passed beyond the temple veil to speak to God on behalf of Israel directly. A rope was tied to him in case God struck Him dead for being ceremonially unclean in His presence.

The Pharisees had developed their own system of approaching God in prayer. They prayed in public with great pretentiousness three times a day. Jesus rebuked these empty prayers as prideful and self-serving (Luke 18:9-14). John the Baptist's form of prayer showcased a fresh model of prayer that the disciples of Jesus wanted to understand better.

**2** Before the era of cars and airplanes, travelers carefully planned their trips to arrive at a destination safely before dark. Difficult, unforeseen circumstances must have caused the traveler in the parable to arrive at midnight.

Jewish houses typically consisted of one room. At night, the "living room" was converted into a communal bedroom. A door bolted shut meant that the family was sleeping and therefore unavailable. This interruption forced the entire family to wake up and attend to the visitor. The cultural setting and the wording of this passage in the original Greek language makes it clear that the borrower shamelessly pestered the slumbering family until the friend arose and gave him what he was asking for.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus presents a new model of prayer featuring closeness, proximity and privilege. The ancient listener would have heard the prayer begin like this, "Daddy God, Let your name be kept famously holy..." This indicates a new, previously unheard of relational closeness to God. The late-night availability of the owner of the house (God) to meet the pressing needs of the traveler and His weary companion indicates proximity and availability. The travelers in the parable are privileged to be identified as a friend of the owner. Likewise, we, as believers, are friends of God (Philippians 2:5-11). **NH**

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## POINT TO PONDER

The sincerity, intensity and regularity of my prayers indicates how much I truly rely on God and take advantage of His proximity.

## FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

Pray the Lord's Prayer this week. Pray for Daddy God to be made famous and for His rule to be accepted by faith everywhere. Surrender self-rule and look to Him to meet your daily needs (not wants). Humbly recognize that God's gracious forgiveness is the model for forgiving others. Pray for Daddy God to take your hand and steer you clear of temptation.

## PRAYER POINT

"Daddy God, you went to the slave market of sin, bought me with your innocent blood, and then took my place. You adopted me, gave me your name, and loved me unselfishly. May each moment of my life with you be marked by a grateful response of dependent, childlike prayer."

## THE RICH FOOL

Jesus often railed against the Jewish leaders. He indicted the Pharisees on charges of corruption, pride, hypocrisy and hardheartedness. On one of these occasions, the leaders rebuked Jesus for not washing ceremonially before dinner. Jesus responded, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools!” (Luke 11:38-41; Matthew 23:25-26). Jesus regularly issued sweeping indictments on the Pharisees, to the point they defined his ministry and life.

The weight of Jesus’s judgement on them

intensified when he called them, “unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it” (Luke 11:42-44). They became enraged when He told them they would be held responsible for all the blood of God’s martyred prophets from Abel to Zechariah (Luke 11:47-51).

An unexpected interruption caused Jesus to divert His attention. A petty, earthly-minded man cried out to Jesus asking Him to make a brother divide the family’s inheritance with him. Jesus responded to his untimely request with the following parable...

**LUKE 12:16-21** 16 And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.”’ 20 But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ 21 So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Jesus experienced waves of human emotion as God in the flesh. He lived to serve as Savior and King, but the people He came to save rejected Him outright or sought relief for their temporal needs. Some hoped for food, others sought justice and still others desired physical healing. What a tragedy!

### Consider the following:

1 Scholars identify seven distinct social classes in the Roman world.<sup>1</sup> Equestrians, Decurions, and Caesar’s household occupied the three upper classes. The Equestrians were wealthy landowners. The Decurions ruled provincial cities from vast, palatial estates. Caesar’s Household formed the primary ruling class. Caesar himself was at the top of the social order,

but more than 20,000 servants scattered throughout the empire held important administrative positions. They commanded respect and honor along with the expected economic advantages.

An impossible chasm existed between the three upper classes and the bottom four. Small business owners, the free poor, freedmen, and slaves made up these four lower classes. Butchers, bakers, barbers, etc. made up the small business owners’ caste. These men and women eked out a living by producing goods and services each day. Roman citizens unable to start their own business comprised the free poor. They worked for small business owners or practiced a trade. Paul, the tentmaker, was probably from this class. Freedmen were

slaves who had purchased their own freedom or had been set free by their owners. They typically worked as day laborers for a small wage. The lowest class were the slaves. The devastating effects of slavery were felt throughout the empire.

The three upper classes of Jesus' time were unspeakably wealthy. The rest lived with great economic uncertainty and many struggled to feed themselves. While Jesus capitalized on the tension of economic disparity to drive His point home about eternal priorities, it should be noted that this parable is not a sweeping indictment on those who have more than others. The rich man in the parable would have exploited day laborers to tear down barns

and build new ones to hold grain the builders could hardly afford.

**2** The Rich man in the parable committed three very grave errors in the use of his finances. First, he didn't recognize the earthly shortsightedness of desiring more. Second, he didn't gratefully recognize God as the ultimate source of everything he owned (stewardship), and finally, he didn't realize how his wealth could have been leveraged to help others on earth for rewards in eternity.<sup>2</sup> Jesus didn't condemn accumulating wealth with integrity. He simply exposed the error of misusing wealth by adopting shortsighted, indulgent, earthly thinking around it. **NH**



### POINT TO PONDER

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21)

### FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

Look over your bank statement this week and assess where your priorities lie. Are you investing an appropriate amount of time and money in eternity or do you seem to have a “I need it right here, right now” approach to life? Ask God to show you the next step.



### PRAYER POINT

“Dear God of eternity, You see all our yesterdays and all our tomorrows as the same moment. I pray that I'll keep in step with your Spirit and view the eternal souls of men and women as the wisest investment of my time and money.”

## THE FAITHFUL SERVANTS

**A**s finite human beings, we have limited attention spans. Jesus intentionally used brief parables to highlight heavenly truth with earthly word pictures. In the last parable, He discouraged his listeners from focusing on earthly wealth.

Jesus offered kingdom preparedness as a positive alternative to preoccupation with

life on earth. Try to picture the Lord Jesus gently offering His listeners a chance to live with anticipation for His kingdom instead of desperately longing for the things of this world. Carefully observe in the following parable how Jesus used a wedding, a potential home invasion, and a harsh taskmaster as earthly examples to illustrate the importance of having a “kingdom-ready” mindset.

### LUKE 12:35-48

“Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. 36 Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. 38 Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

39 “But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 40 You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect.” 41 Peter said, “Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?” 42 And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? 43 Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. 44 Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But if that slave says in his heart, ‘My master will be a long time in coming,’ and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; 46 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

**R**esponsibility and stewardship emerge as key themes in this parable. These principles would have resonated with His listeners. Ancient servants embraced their responsibilities as a call of duty. Deterministic thinking prevailed among rich and poor alike, leading to a strong sense of honor and obligation. The ancients believed fate (the universe) predetermined a person’s station in life and that he/she must fulfill their duty. The ancients believed that the fate of the entire universe hinged on each person humbly accepting their fate.<sup>1</sup> The

listeners of Jesus would have identified with the dutiful servants in the parable.

#### Consider the following:

**1** A binding marriage in the ancient world consisted of three festive but very distinct ceremonies. Engagement marked the first stage of a marriage. An engagement was arranged either by parents or a professional matchmaker. These “fixers” are often cast in modern movies as senseless busybodies but in the ancient world they were held in much

higher esteem. Serving as gatekeepers of cultural heritage, matchmakers commanded universal respect. The engagement was more contractual than romantic, since many times the bride and groom were still children or hadn't even met each other. The involved parties left the negotiations with a legally binding marriage contract.

**2** As the couple approached marrying age, the parents and the community would have sensed the couple's readiness to move forward in the process. A one-year period of betrothal began with an elaborate feast. The betrothal fulfilled the engagement contract. Infidelity during this time was considered adultery and grounds for divorce. Mary, the wife of Joseph was pregnant with Jesus during this time of betrothal. This period culminated with the couple's wedding.

**3** After months of preparations, a loud festive procession picked up the bride at her home. The entire community escorted the bride to her wedding with boisterous singing, dancing, and even prophetic chanting describing the couple's happy future together. At the ceremony, the bride and groom were celebrated like a king and queen during the 7-14 day wedding feast.<sup>2</sup> Because the host had a full year to

plan, running out of wine or food would have insulted the guests and brought shame to the father of the groom. After the wedding, the couple returned to the groom's house to spend their honeymoon. The groom and his new bride returned home to his loyal servants after an exhausting week of feasting. The servants' eager anticipation for the master's unannounced return signaled selfless loyalty. He rewarded them with a celebration of their own.

Jesus addressed Peter's unasked question, "If you don't establish your kingdom now, what do we do while we wait?". Jesus patiently explained that the messianic kingdom will take place. In the meantime, God's people must live like prepared servants who expect the spontaneous return of their beloved master at any minute. Similarly, God's people must live like attentive homeowners, sleeping lightly to protect their family from possible intruders. Jesus also provides a negative example of a harsh taskmaster. This man lived without regard for his master's promised return and chose to indulge his fleshly, earthly desires by getting drunk and mistreating others. The wise servants lived with expectant hearts, preparing for the master's unscheduled return. **NH**

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## POINT TO PONDER

What percentage of my time do I spend getting ready in this life to be with the King of Kings in the next?

## FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

Make a list of the areas of your life that are not "kingdom-ready." Write down those areas that would bring you shame if the master came "home" early. These areas can include finances, relationships, etc. Pray and ask God for next steps to deal with faulty perspectives. Seek the help of a more spiritually mature person.

## PRAYER POINT

"Dear soon returning God, I pray that your imminent arrival may become the meditation of my heart. I pray that I will ponder my heavenly responsibilities while here on earth. Guard my soul from taking advantage of this waiting period by becoming entangled with the affairs of this short, temporal life."

## THE FRUITLESS FIG TREE

The crowds grew anxious. In the last parable, the master (God) cut the abusive, inattentive servant (unbelieving Israel) into pieces and assigned him a place with unbelievers (Luke 12:46). This indicated that not only could God's kingdom rule be ignored, but that devastating consequences awaited those who rejected God's rule. Each listener needed to evaluate their own willingness to trust Jesus.

The promised redeemer, Messiah Jesus, had arrived. Despite the overwhelming evidence, many still questioned and doubted His identity. Speaking directly to the crowds, Jesus sternly warned them not to dismiss Him as an imposter (Luke 12:47-48).

In a rare burst of emotion, Jesus spoke soberly of His crucifixion and of a time when clan loyalties would be shattered by His teaching. Continuing His difficult message, Jesus said that He didn't come to earth to bring peace, but rather marked division. Jesus prophesied that even fathers would be divided against their own sons (Luke 12:49-53). In an era when family loyalties were passionately held until death, this kind of prophetic utterance shocked the listeners.

He then rebuked the crowds for their failure to read the handwriting on the proverbial wall for both themselves and the nation. Jesus marveled that they could discern patterns in the weather but couldn't read the

messianic "barometer" of events unfolding right in their midst (Luke 12:54-56).

To further His point, Jesus likened their perilous situation to an offender being forcibly hauled into court by an angry adversary. (Luke 12:57-59) In their mind's eye, the people pictured a stern, accusatory plaintiff making a public spectacle of a disadvantaged defendant. In the same way a doomed defender would desperately try to settle out of court by begging for mercy, God's people should take advantage of the short time they have with the Messiah to repent.

Someone in the crowd raised a question about a situation where Pontius Pilate had slaughtered Galilean Jews in the temple court. The ensuing bloodbath caused their blood to mix with their sacrifices at the temple. The crowd wrestled with how God could have punished the Galilean worshippers with such a horrific death while vengeful thoughts against Rome burned in their hearts. Jesus responded to their conflicted thoughts by reminding them of a tower that unexpectedly fell and crushed 18 people at Siloam. Jesus pointed out that catastrophic events are not directly related to individual sin. Capitalizing on the obvious connection, Jesus somberly reminded them that the Jewish nation would suffer an unanticipated and catastrophic judgement like those Galileans if they failed to embrace Him as the Messiah (Luke 13:1-5). Read the following parable with this background information in mind...

### LUKE 13:6-9

6 And He began telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. 7

And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' 8 And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

Jesus chose the perfect illustration to remind His listeners of the dire consequences of rejecting His Messiahship. Planting fruit trees in family vineyards continues to this day in the Middle East. In the parable, a man had set aside ground that could have been used for other purposes to plant a fig tree. The household servants had tended it properly but no fruit appeared on the tree's branches. After a reasonable amount of time, the owner of the vineyard considered destroying the tree entirely to make space for other trees that would bear fruit.

**Consider the following about this parable:**

1 Adam and Eve made clothes of self-righteousness using leaves from a fig tree in a vain attempt to make themselves right with God (Genesis 3:7). Nabal's wife, Abigail, pacified David's anger with fig cakes and wise words as David rampaged toward Nabal's house to kill him (1 Samuel 25:18-25). God used baskets of figs to illustrate His judgement of Judah during the time of Zedekiah. Anyone familiar with the scriptures would have resonated with the parable of the fig tree. The rest would have heard a dreary story about a fruitless tree. That's the power of parables.

2 In a familiar passage in Isaiah 5:1-7, God, the dedicated owner of a vineyard, clears land to plant a vineyard (Judah). God removes stones, cultivates the soil, builds a tower and even hews a winepress out of solid rock. God finds a "choice vine" and plants it in the prepared section of the vineyard. After years of excruciating effort God expects His vineyard to bear fruit. When it fails to bear fruit, God promises to break down the surrounding wall and let the grapevine be destroyed by outsiders. This is another passage with an ominous warning to God's people to repent while there is time. God initiated a loving relationship but conditioned His next steps on the heart response of His people.

In this masterful parable Jesus addresses the short window of time that existed for God's people to accept Jesus as the Messiah. The fig tree represented Israel. The owner had planted it expecting it would bear fruit. After two seasons of fruitlessness, He threatened to destroy the tree but a servant convinced him to give the stubborn tree one more year. Jesus alluded to the end of His earthly ministry and that God's people had very little time to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8). **NH**

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## POINT TO PONDER

The redemptive flow of biblical history is marked with examples of man's sinful stubbornness, God's relentless pursuit, and His careful warnings and fiery punishment.

## FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

God's inner work bears external fruit. Pray and ask the Spirit of God to show you of areas of your life where you can bear more fruit.. Confess known sin, pray for wisdom and study Bible passages of men and women of the Bible who bore fruit on God's behalf.

## PRAYER POINT

"Dear Pursuer God. You are slow to anger and quick to forgive. May we bear fruit as a loving response to your wonderful care and provision."

## SEATS AT A WEDDING FEAST

Jesus created an uproar by leaving his safe haven on the East side of the Jordan to attend the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem. The heart of Jesus yearned for the salvation of His people. As He was strolling through the temple court, a crowd of angry Pharisees pressed Jesus to tell them who He was plainly (John 10:22-24). Jesus boldly claimed He had already told them through miracles but that they refused to believe. He cites the evidence of “sheep” who hear His voice and respond in faith. Jesus then makes a clear assertion of deity claiming, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:25-30).

Hearing this blatant claim, the enraged Pharisees picked up stones to murder Jesus. In the heat of the moment Jesus asked, “Which miracle are you stoning me for?” They wanted to stone Jesus for claiming to be God, however, they hypocritically denied the miraculous evidence proving His deity. How blind! Jesus, “escaped their grasp” and they failed to kill Him. (John 10:31-39)

Leaving the place of His attempted murder, Jesus settled again on the East side of the Jordan. He began ministering where John the Baptist had served. The crowds transferred the affection they had for John to Jesus (John 10:40-42). Jesus enjoyed relative safety for a time in an area where the Jewish leaders had no jurisdiction.<sup>1</sup>

During this time, Jesus gave Himself to healing and teaching. A prominent Pharisee welcomed Jesus into his house for dinner (Luke 14:1-6). As he entered the feast, Jesus noticed a man with a condition called dropsy. Jesus loudly asked a provocative question, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” While the pharisees and experts in the law pondered their response, Jesus healed the man. As they gathered together for the meal, Jesus recognized that the guests had begun competing for the important seats at the table. He spoke the following parable:

**LUKE 14:7-11** 7 And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, 8 “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. 10 But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

True biblical hospitality meant welcoming strangers into the home and treating them as honored guests. For example, Abraham graciously hosted three angelic guests who predicted Sarai would have a

son (Genesis 18:2-8). The hospitality event described in this parable had drifted far from the biblical ideal. Pharisaical hospitality had descended into a power crazed display of wealth and political connections.

### Consider the following:

**1** The Feast of Dedication, (Hanukkah in Hebrew) , begins in late December and lasts for eight days. The Jews designated this relatively new holiday in 165 B.C. as a time of joy and gladness. It commemorates the cleansing of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus after it was cruelly defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes.

**2** In the ancient world, hospitality was practiced for many reasons. Commercial hospitality was practiced along travel routes, temple hospitality was offered to worshippers, public hospitality was given to foreign dignitaries, and private hospitality (feasting, etc.) was considered a virtue and an expected norm.<sup>2</sup> A person who didn't offer regular, sacrificial hospitality to others would have been viewed as odd and stingy. The practice of hospitality helped spread the gospel to the far reaches of the Roman Empire as persecuted Christians heralded the Good News of Christ while fleeing persecution.

**3** A system called "patronage" heavily influenced the practice of hospitality in the Greco-Roman world. In a time

period where much of the world's wealth was concentrated with only a privileged few, patronage gave the less fortunate a way to obtain needed favors. Wealthy benefactors known as "patrons" took on less fortunate "clients". In exchange for the requested favor, clients would pledge their undying loyalty. The men competing for the seats at the wedding feast were positioning themselves for betterment in the social, political and commercial realms.<sup>3</sup> In the heat of the competition any God-related reasons for getting together were lost.

Jesus used this parable to correct their politically-based thinking while He also offered a fresh kingdom-perspective on hospitality. Looking around at the guests gauging each other's worth using human, fleshly criteria, Jesus called out their obvious sin. On the positive side Jesus offered a fresh perspective in sincere humility. The guests could have graciously taken the lower seats like King Jesus did when He was born in a dingy barn. **NH**

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### POINT TO PONDER

In God's kingdom we can be both humble and significant.

### FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

Pray for a humble, hospitable perspective this week. In gracious humility, thank God for opportunities to show hospitality to someone outside your normal social circle.

### PRAYER POINT

"Dear God of Humility, may I gauge my worth and significance the way you do. Thank you for your gracious, humble hospitality. You drew me near, gave me Your best seat, attended to my desperate needs, and declared me Your child."

## THE GREAT BANQUET

Jesus turned to the host of the last parable and rebuked him for using hospitality for ego-driven reasons. Jesus offered him God's rule as a present reality by positing the following scenario, "What if at the next banquet you invite the poor, crippled, blind and lame?" By inviting people who could never repay him socially, the Pharisee could earn a reward in heaven by blessing unworthy recipients. Another man

overheard Jesus's teaching and inserted himself into the conversation saying, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" This vocal Pharisee exhibited sensitivity to a future messianic banquet. (Luke 14:12-15) Ironically the Pharisees who were rejecting Jesus didn't receive an invitation to that future banquet. Jesus rebuked the pious gathering with the following parable:

**LUKE 14:16-24** 16 But He said to him, "A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; 17 and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' 18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' 19 Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' 20 Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.' 21 And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' 22 And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' 23 And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled. 24 For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'"

In His parable, Jesus presents a heart wrenching scenario. A man had spent a year sacrificially preparing for a marriage banquet for his son and future daughter-in-law. When the time came for the joyous celebration, the invited guests excused themselves as the food grew cold! The master commanded the servants to invite "unworthy" people to his extravagant banquet. The groom's father vowed not to allow any of the original invitees to enjoy dinner (Matthew 22:1-10).

### Consider the following:

1 Messianism is the belief that an anointed person or persons will save or right the wrongs afflicting a group of people. This idea dominated the sentiments of the people of Jesus's time. They looked

for a messiah who would close out human history with an assertion of uncontested rule. God's people began expecting the Messiah from Genesis 3:15, when God promised a final deliverance from Satan. He further promised to prosper Abraham with a Jewish kingly line (Genesis 49:10). In addition to these, the Jews would have recalled King David's reign as a world ruler while they clung to God's promises to renew Israel (Isaiah 11:1-6). They anticipated the Messiah even while Rome and others viciously oppressed them through the ages following the Babylonian captivity. Dr. Craig Evans, the editor of *A Dictionary of New Testament Background* says, "Some thirty texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls speak of anointed personages. About half of these are in reference to what

is probably a traditional royal messiah.”<sup>1</sup> Contemplate the bitter irony of not recognizing the long-awaited Messiah as He eats at their table.

The Pharisees learned that physical, earthly capacities would not earn them privileges in the kingdom of God. Jesus made it clear that those who were considered acceptable are accepted by Him.<sup>2</sup> The King

kindly invited everyone to the banquet feast. Most conservative scholars believe Jesus is alluding to His future kingdom. Jesus had invited the children of Israel to feast with Him, but they flatly refused. He offered their once exclusive kingdom opportunity to the previously unacceptable gentiles. The Pharisees followed their hearts and will now spend eternity in Hell without God. **NH**



### POINT TO PONDER

I can allow earthly priorities to take center stage in my life when instead I should give the “feast” that Jesus has prepared for me the time and attention it deserves.

### FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

Look for opportunities to reach out to someone considered culturally “unworthy” and recognize that they are worthy in God’s eyes.

### PRAYER POINT

“Dear Hospitable God, thank you for sacrificially preparing a seat for me at your banquet table. I was completely unfit to sit in your presence until You adopted me and made me your child. I look forward to feasting joyfully with you, basking in the glow of your eternal favor.”

## THE TOWER BUILDER AND THE KING

In the ancient world, survival depended on oaths of allegiance, sacrificial contribution, and undying loyalty to a religious community. The consequences of declaring loyalty to Jesus produced a very solemn scenario for contemporary men and women. This huge step of faith meant immediate social death. Their family and

existing religious community would have immediately disowned followers of Jesus. Many instantly became homeless, unable to provide for themselves, and destitute. The Jewish leaders prohibited everyone from socializing with His followers. Jesus encouraged the crowds to carefully consider the cost of following Him:

### LUKE 14:25-33

25 Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, 26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. 27 Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28 For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. 33 So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

Jesus used two poignant examples to convey His point. The first illustration was that of a tower builder. In that day, rock towers were used to guard pastures, vineyards and cities.<sup>1</sup> The ancient world gauged a person's value on accomplishment, therefore a partial tower would have signaled poor planning and mismanagement of resources. The unfinished project would have meant cultural shame for the owner. Once He captured the crowd's attention with the tower illustration, Jesus went on to give a second example featuring a king who counted the cost of winning a battle against great numbers. The king counted the cost, admitted weakness, and sought peace.

#### Consider the following:

1 The English word "hate" used in modern Bibles (Luke 14:26) doesn't correlate perfectly to the Hebrew concept Jesus conveyed. Jesus intentionally chose the concept of hate as a condition for His disciples. Jesus' listeners would have experienced love and hatred as decisions of the will rather than as uncontrollable emotions. In this case, "hatred" (miseo in Greek) signifies a "relative preference for one thing over another...or the disregard for, the claims of one person or thing relatively to those of another."<sup>2</sup> Jesus defined a disciple as one who deems loyalty to Him above all else. A disciple could love His family emotionally but should choose to love Jesus more. Loving Jesus more means to

“hate” all others in the relative sense.

Think back to the story of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27). God “hated” Esau and “loved” Jacob (Malachi 1:3, Romans 9:13). God did not have feelings of hatred for Esau. Esau sold his spiritual birthright so God showed preference (love) to Jacob’s descendants and disregarded (hated) Esau’s family line. Esau’s line eventually disappeared while Jacob’s line lives in the land promised to Abraham to this day.

**2** The graphic metaphor of taking up a cross shocked Jesus’s listeners. Most had seen a condemned criminal being led away to be crucified by Roman soldiers. The criminal picked up his cross and soberly made his way to the place of crucifixion. With his fate sealed, the condemned person knew he had no chance of acquittal. Jesus used this harsh visual to convey the cost of discipleship. To choose Jesus means to share the unjust earthly suffering He experienced followed by eternal glory in God’s presence.

Discipleship requires a humble admission of sinful helplessness and acceptance of God’s free gift in Christ. It means a declaration of loyalty to King Jesus and a forsaking

of other “loves”. Disciples are called to model their lives after Jesus’s yielded life. Commitment to Jesus will cause great tension (both positive and negative) with family and friends. It means taking up an instrument of torture and death and leading a life that is no longer your own. There is no turning back. **NH**



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## POINT TO PONDER

A historic hymn of the faith declares, “The world behind me, the cross before me.”<sup>3</sup>

## FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

Go before the Spirit of God in a quiet place and consider this lesson carefully. Who is the king of your heart? What hidden areas of your life betray your continued love for this world? What compromise keeps your life from being a divisive sword of loving truth?

## PRAYER POINT

“Dear Mentor God, You have placed a cross at my feet and have given me the choice to pick it up and follow after You. Help me to re-align my loyalties, pick up my cross and suffer well. Thank you, Jesus, for forsaking Heaven and loving me more.”

## THE SEARCHING SHEPHERD, WOMAN & FATHER

The legalistic Pharisees hated those they viewed as sinners. They naturally believed that God shared their hatred and even delighted in their death. Jesus, on the other hand, demonstrated God's love for

sinners by eating meals with them. He attempted to expose the hypocrisy of these supposed religious leaders by demonstrating God's love for lost people. Read the following parables with this in mind:

### LUKE 15:1-32

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

3 So He told them this parable, saying, 4 "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

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

11 And He said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. 13 And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. 14 Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. 17 But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' 20 So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly 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 fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

25 “Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.’ 28 But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’ 31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.’”

**Y**ears ago, we took a trip to Canada with dear friends. We had taken a day to enjoy an amusement park. We emerged with a large group from one of the attractions when our friends suddenly froze. Their little 6-year-old boy had vanished! Every parent’s worst nightmare suddenly became our reality. The mother assumed the worst and sprinted for the parking lot fearing someone had taken him. Dad looked frantically about while we made

plans to divide and conquer. He was eventually found but not before we all had a good scare. Dad lovingly scolded the poor guy. Mom wrapped her loving arms tightly around him and cried for joy. In a similar way, the moment you trusted Jesus with your heart, God found you and danced for joy with myriads of angels (Luke 15:10). Jesus used these parables to illustrate God’s heart for the world. **NH**



## POINT TO PONDER

“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so...”<sup>1</sup>

## FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

Ponder thoughtfully how desperately Jesus searched for you and what it cost Him to find you. Think of others in your world you have historically despised. Now trust God to see them as valuable and worthwhile like He does. Choose one person to pray for specifically.



## PRAYER POINT

“Father God, you searched the world over and found me in a slave market of sin. You purchased me sacrificially with the blood of Your Son. You adopted me, took me home, rejoiced over me and lavished on me untold treasures.”

## THE PRUDENT MANAGER

Jesus had already rebuked the religious leaders on several issues. He called them out as hypocrites (Luke 12:1), disapproved of their love of power (Luke 14:11) and corrected their view of God's attitude toward sinners (Luke 15:2).<sup>1</sup> Now, after observing the Pharisees fawning over each other at feasts and competing for higher positions in social circles, Jesus

delivered corrective teaching on wealth and stewardship. Jesus began by relating a parable about a manager who had the foresight to gather available resources and prepare for a future time of need. He used the following parable to teach tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and His disciples about the impossibility of serving two masters.

### LUKE 16:1-13

Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions. <sup>2</sup> And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' <sup>3</sup> The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup> I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.' <sup>5</sup> And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he began saying to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' <sup>6</sup> And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' <sup>7</sup> Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He \*said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' <sup>8</sup> And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. <sup>9</sup> And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.

<sup>10</sup> "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. <sup>11</sup> Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? <sup>13</sup> No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

The parable began with a rich man calling out a corrupt servant. He called the servant into his "office" and stripped him of his household duties. The disciplined servant reasoned he was too old for menial labor and too proud to beg. He desperately created a plan to endear himself to his boss's debtors so they would befriend him after his current position ended. He called them in and curiously settled their debts for

less than what was owed. The amazed owner complimented the manager for being shrewd (*Phronimos* in Greek). This word indicates that the corrupt manager acted, "uprightly with a sound mind"<sup>2</sup> by settling the debts for less. Many scholars believe that the previously corrupt manager was reversing the interest that he had unjustly charged the debtors. He had illegally added interest to each debt so when he called in

the debtors, it was to settle up fairly.<sup>3</sup> This endeared him to the debtors for future favor and also caused his boss to praise him for acting uprightly.

Jesus goes on to say that the "...sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light" (vs. 8) Jesus likely directed these words at the disciples who would have heard this as an encouragement to leverage their present situation (like the corrupt manager) for future reward (in eternity). Ironically, Judas, the corrupt disciple who managed the disciple's money collectively, likely heard this message.

Jesus sums up this challenging parable with two resounding points:

**1** Jesus observed that a cashier who faithfully handles change in a cash drawer will also faithfully handle their own store. Those who responsibly handle little will dependably handle much. In a similar way, Jesus challenged the disciples to execute small opportunities faithfully and in return He would task them with more challenging assignments later.

**2** Jesus asserts that like the corrupt manager no one can serve two masters. A devotee of God's kingdom cannot follow the world's system of wealth and power while claiming loyalty to God. Our heart attitudes about wealth indicate which kingdom rules our hearts. The Pharisees adored and worshipped the worldly gods of money and power rather than serving the one true God. **NH**



## POINT TO PONDER

God created me with the capacity to obey the master I choose (Romans 6:12-19).

## FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

Read Roman's 12:1-2 several times. Every area of your reality comes under God's authority if you claim citizenship in His kingdom. Ask the Spirit of God to faithfully reveal to you the areas in which you attempt to serve two masters.

## PRAYER POINT

"Dear Generous God, I'm grateful that you are the king of all reality and possessor of all things. May I recognize that when I am lusting for more money and power, I am trying to serve both you and money. May I steward your daily provision with eternity in mind."

## THE RICH MAN & THE BEGGAR

**T**he previous parable further embittered the Pharisees toward Jesus. Scripture records, “the Pharisees who loved money...were sneering at Jesus” (Luke 16:14 NIV). The Greek word for sneering, *ekmukterizo*, describes a person “scoffing in disgust with an upturned nose”.<sup>1</sup> These influential leaders made rude gestures meant to discredit Jesus and to turn the crowds from following Him.

Jesus argued the evidence that people had already entered the kingdom that John preached, implying that the Pharisees should too. He appealed to His legalistic listeners by admitting that it would be easier for Heaven and earth to completely disappear than for one letter of the law not to come to pass (Luke 16:16,17). This comment allowed the Pharisees to breathe a self-justifying sigh of relief but their reprieve was short lived.

Jesus then metaphorically slammed down the gavel, convicting the Pharisees on two counts based on the law they loved. First, He condemned them for rejecting His kingdom. John the Baptist had faithfully preached what the Law and Prophets foretold. God’s kingdom was right under their upturned noses!

Although their first sentence constituted sufficient grounds for a clear conviction, Jesus also called the Pharisees out on the issue of divorce, which the law forbade. The Pharisees hypocritically ignored God’s Law by arbitrarily divorcing their wives for selfish reasons (Luke 16:18). This heartless act left their wives impoverished as social outcasts. These stinging rebukes left the religious elitists seething. They probably thought Jesus could do no worse. They thought wrong. Jesus gave the sneering, self-righteous Pharisees a healthy dose of reality with the following parable:

### JOHN 16:19–31

#### The Rich Man & Lazarus

19 “Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20 And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and \*saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’ 25 But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.’ 27 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house— 28 for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ 29 But Abraham \*said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ 31 But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Jesus painted the picture of an aloof, heartless glutton who feasted like a king every day. He paraded about in luxury while Lazarus lay in poverty at his gate, too weak to shoo away unclean dogs that licked at his oozing sores. Lazarus and the indulgent man eventually died and entered the eternal state where they were able to observe each other's situation. This picture of the afterlife agreed with Jewish and early Christian tradition.

### Consider the following:

1 While we must caution ourselves against building an entire theology around one parable, we can and must make several crucial observations about the eternal state. First, we will maintain our identity in eternity. We will recognize one another as the rich man recognized Lazarus. Second, we will have the ability to reason through our situation there yet we will still need teaching. Humans will enter the eternal state as whole persons able to feel, enjoy, and suffer torment. Finally, this parable reminds us that what we did and said in this life will temper our experience of eternity.

2 God considers His written word to contain all the information a sinner needs to accept salvation. The rich man begged for someone to miraculously return from the dead to convince his brothers not to end up in torment. Abraham assured the man that if his brothers refused the testimony written in the Law and the Prophets, even resurrection from the dead would not convince them. Similarly, today, this parable teaches us to pick up God's Word, read it, and believe it. You and I can proclaim His Word with humble confidence, knowing that we possess the complete seed of God's message to the world.

This parable and the last parable began in the same way, "There was a rich man...". These two parables addressed similar tensions around wealth. The Pharisees used wealth as an erroneous indicator of personal righteousness. The merciless rich man depicts the Pharisees who took great comfort in the belief that their personal wealth indicated God had declared them fit for Heaven. Instead, this misguided belief landed the Pharisees in eternal torment.

NH

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## POINT TO PONDER

The homeless person begging at the stop sign could be your brother or sister in Christ who you will share heaven with. They have a name and they matter to God.

## FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

Look for effective ministries in your area that expertly help destitute people without enabling poor choices. Discover what ministries like this do and get involved wisely.

## PRAYER POINT

"Dear God of matchless wealth, thank you that my earthly condition does not reflect my heavenly position. You declared me righteous and unspeakably wealthy once for all time by Your grace alone. May I live as a reflection of You considering the needs of others in this life knowing it makes a difference in Your presence."

## THE UNWORTHY SLAVE

In the last two parables, Jesus shattered the idea that personal wealth and earthly influence indicates heavenly favor with God. In the parable of the prudent manager, for example, Jesus warned of vainly trying to serve two masters. In the last parable about the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus gave another negative example of Pharisees lording their position over others and believing that their wealth indicated that God saw them as righteous.

We know that the Pharisees were the antithesis of an appropriate “kingdom of

God” attitude. They posed as wolves in sheep’s clothing, holding the people hostage with laws that they routinely broke themselves. They conveniently made up their own version of god who exalted their own ideas of righteousness. They “served” God like entitled, indulgent tyrants who scoffed at the very kingdom they claimed to be waiting for. As Jesus dismantled the religious heroes of their day, the crowds must have wondered what a servant of God was supposed to look like. Jesus addressed this tension with the following parable:

### LUKE 17:7-10

7 “Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat’? 8 But will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink’? 9 He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? 10 So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”

The slave, after working all day caring for the master’s possessions, arrives home late in the day tired and hungry. Jesus points out that the master doesn’t go out of his way to attend to the needs of the tired slave, rather the slave attends to the desires of the master. The slave puts the needs of his master above his own. He doesn’t get a pat on the back for simply doing his job.

#### Consider the following:

1 Jesus chose a master-slave relationship to paint a picture of life with God in His kingdom. His use of slavery as an example doesn’t validate the dehumanizing practice of slavery. However, in the same way that a slave has an ongoing attitude of submission, God’s people should approach Him with the same humble demeanor. Remember God creat-

ed us and therefore He owns us. He owns our time, our money, our plans, etc.

We struggle to understand how we relate to God as slaves. To resolve this misunderstanding, God gave us biblical stories of real people submitting humbly to Him. God didn’t ask Moses’s permission to use him to save the Israelites. He didn’t choose to grow up apart from His birth family. Pagans raised him as an adoptee in a debauched environment. God ordered Moses to deliver His people from Egypt, yet God didn’t allow him to experience the land he sacrificed so much for. We share a rich spiritual heritage with men and women who humbly submitted to God as obedient, sacrificial servants. When we wonder what life as God’s slave looks like, the lives of Old Testament saints serve as gentle reminders of life under God’s kingly rule.

**2** The apostle Paul used the strongest Greek word for slavery (*doulos*) to describe his relationship to the Lord Jesus. A slave was, “subjugated, reduced to bondage under someone...it means to be deprived of freedom”.<sup>1</sup> The Apostle Paul comfortably refers to himself as God’s slave while we recoil in horror (Romans 1:1). He saw himself as a helpless, sinful slave child

who the Lord Jesus had purchased with His blood (Ephesians 6:5-6; Galatians 3:13-15). The apostle Paul then obediently modeled his life and ministry after the pattern set by his “owner” Jesus. Even the Lord Jesus modeled submission to God the Father by dying on a cruel cross that His humanity resisted (Luke 22:42). **NH**



## POINT TO PONDER

You are either a slave to God, a slave to your own lusts, or a slave to the desires of others. You choose. (Romans 6:15-18)

## FROM LEARNING TO LIVING

Get alone with God’s Word and the Spirit of God. Ask Him to shed His convicting light on areas of compromise where you consistently choose to obey your own lusts instead of conforming to His righteous character. Consider areas like media, relationships, moral choices, etc.

## PRAYER POINT

“Dear Master God, You created me and you own me. May I disregard my own desires for comfort and carry out Your will in humble submission.”

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