

Parables of Luke 10-11

Parable of the Good Samaritan

The next parable does not appear in Luke's gospel until chapter 10. This teaching came on the cusp of Jesus being challenged by a lawyer, who had asked, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Jesus responded by asking this man what he thought the Law required. The lawyer rightfully answered, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27). Jesus told him that he was correct, and that if he would actually live by these principles, he would live. However, the man was determined to justify himself, that is confirm that he was doing all he had to do (perhaps the bare minimum in his mind), and so he asked, "And who is my neighbor?"

To respond, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. Clearly, this parable would shake up this lawyer's understanding of what God expected of him. He wanted to get by with the bare minimum in obligation, and this parable made it clear that God expects much more of those who follow Him!

Jesus told of a man who was attacked by thieves as he traveled the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. The man was beaten, and stripped of his clothing, and left along the road, half dead. Along came a priest, who saw him lying there, but he passed by him on the other side of the road. Then, a Levite came along, looked at him lying there, but he too passed by on the other side of the road. Finally, a Samaritan came along the road, and he had compassion on the wounded man. He bandaged his wounds, dressing them with oil and wine, and then brought him to an inn so that he might be cared for. He made sure that the innkeeper had all that he needed to pay for the care of the wounded man. Jesus asked the lawyer, "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to

him who fell among the thieves?” Again, the lawyer rightly answered, “He who showed mercy on him.” Jesus’ instruction to the lawyer was for him to go out and act like the Samaritan!

This parable was told in response to a man who was trying to “justify himself,” which indicates that he was trying to convince himself and others that he was doing enough in keeping the commands. He wanted Jesus to define “neighbor” in a way that conformed to his own thoughts, and his own practices. It is interesting to note the first set of questions that Jesus asked of this lawyer: “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” Notice that these are two different questions! He could understand what the law said, and still have a faulty understanding of what it meant. We can see that there is an application to be made here concerning God’s revealed will. There is an idea today that scripture is open to whatever interpretation a person might want. That is, they think that scripture can mean whatever they want it to mean. However, what we see through this parable is that there is a particular meaning that God intends for His word, and until we understand it as He meant for it to be understood, we do not really understand it at all! Jesus would make it clear to this man what God intended by “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus used three different men in his parable, each designed to convey a particular point about the circumstances. After the man who was beaten and robbed was left in the ditch, these three different men came along, each seeing his predicament. Once they had seen the man who was wounded, they were forced to make a decision about what they would do. The first man was a priest. The priest was a man who should have known the law, and should have known what God desired for His people to be. If there were anyone who should feel compelled to help others, it should be the priest! But, as Jesus told the parable, the priest crossed to the other side of the road, and passed on by. Next, a Levite came along the road. This man was a part of the priestly tribe, and was of the class of men that served as “helpers” to the priests in the duty of the temple. Their whole role in the kingdom was to be servants. Jesus said this man “came and looked” and then passed by on the other side of the road. This man actually came up to look at the

injured man, and then made the decision to walk away from him, leaving him in the ditch to die! Finally, a Samaritan came down the road. The lawyer would never have thought that a Samaritan would be willing to stop and help someone in this victim's condition! Most likely, he would have thought of the injured man as being a fellow Jew, which would have made it all the more unlikely that the Samaritan would stop to help (John 4:9). Yet, the Samaritan, the most unlikely, and least expected provider of help, was the very person who chose to stop and help. He not only helped, he was willing to spend his own money to care for the man even beyond his initial assistance. He left money with the innkeeper to provide for his convalescence, and also said that he would pay for any other expenses incurred by the injured man staying there to recover. This Samaritan truly had compassion for the one who was suffering, and he showed it by providing the care that he needed, even at his own personal cost.

Jesus asked, "So, which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" This challenged the lawyers preconceived notions concerning what a "neighbor" was, and how it applied to the law that he had espoused earlier. He was able to see the point of Jesus' teaching, and honestly answered that it was the one who showed mercy to the injured man.

Jesus' parable teaches us that we have an obligation to those who are in need of our help. To "love your neighbor as yourself" is not a teaching that focuses on one's self. That is the application that many seem to want to make from the general principle, and which was probably in the mind of the lawyer as well. They think of "neighbor" as someone who is like them, whom they probably are friends with (or could be friends with). "Neighbor" is usually defined by either proximity or affinity. That is, we define the word by those who live close to us, or by those whom we like. But, when God instructed His people to "love your neighbor as yourself" He had no intentions for the word to be so narrowly defined. His idea was that He expected His people to treat all people just as they would want to be treated. This is very similar to Jesus' teachings in other places, where He emphasized the need to love others, and not just those that already loved you:

Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (Luke 6:30–32)

We often call this the “Golden Rule”, and understand it to be a basic rule for how we interact with others. We should, under all circumstances, treat others in the same way that we want to be treated. Can you imagine being in the position of the poor man who was robbed and beaten in Jesus’ parable, only to have a priest and a Levite walk by without offering any kind of help at all? They were certainly not showing any kind of compassion for a man who was in dire need.

The application of Jesus’ parable can become difficult in our current society. While there are certainly many opportunities for Christians today to step up and help those who are in need, we also have the responsibility of being wise with what we have been blessed with. We, unfortunately, live in a world where people seek to take advantage of those who are kind hearted and compassionate. Some have gone so far as to try and make a “career” of taking money from people who are inclined to be helpful. We should be cautious, and wise, but we also should not allow those who would try and take advantage keep us from having the kind of attitude that we ought to have. We should find those opportunities that need our help, and offer it up as much as possible! Jesus told this lawyer to “Go and do likewise.” He was to act like the Samaritan, which would most assuredly put him out of his comfort zone!

Parable of the Persistent Friend

Jesus’ next parable came immediately after He taught the apostles about prayer. At the beginning of Luke 11, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. This tells us that prayer is not a natural thing for us, and it requires a learning process to do it appropriately. Jesus started by giving an example of how to pray to God (Luke 11:2-4). Many times, the study of “how to pray” stops with the end of Jesus’ model prayer. However, the parable that Jesus told next is a part of His response to these apostles who asked Him to teach them to pray.

Jesus told of a person who had visitors drop in on them, and who was unprepared to provide a meal for them. He went to a friend in the middle of the night to ask to borrow three loaves of bread. The friend, not wanting to be inconvenienced, tried to send the man away. He was already in bed, and the kids were asleep! Jesus said that the man would not change his mind and get up and provide the what was requested just because they were friends. However, he would eventually relent because of the persistence that the friend showed. That is, if the man would continue to ask for what he wanted, the friend would eventually decide to give it to him so that he would stop asking.

Jesus' point in this parable is not convey that God doesn't care about us, and only gives us things in answer to prayer because He is just tired of hearing from us. Instead, the key is *persistence*. We need to be careful and not read too much into Jesus' teaching. He explained what He meant with the parable:

"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. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Luke 11:9-10)

He wants us to know that God wants to provide for us. However, He also wants for us to ask Him for what we want and need. God knows what we need, even before we ask. But that does not mean that He doesn't want us to ask! Even though He knows what we want and need, this parable seems to indicate that perhaps He will not provide it to us until we ask Him for it.

This is a direct response to the apostle's request for Jesus to teach them to pray. We need to be diligent about talking to God about the things that we want and need. Jesus was not, however, teaching that prayer is an "ATM card", where we just go to God, and He is obligated to give anything we want. We can look in other places to see this clarified. We must still ask "according to His will" (1 John 5:14-15). When we consider Jesus' teaching before the apostles concerning prayer, it is important that we understand it in the parameters of what we understand from other places. We cannot be self serving in our requests, and we cannot ask for things outside of the will of God.

Parable of the Good Father

The next parable recorded by Luke continues with the same theme, continuing to address the apostles' request for Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus told the parable of a son asking his father for bread. Would the father give his son a stone? Or if that son asked for a fish, would he give him a serpent? Or if he were to ask for an egg, would he offer him a scorpion? To explain His teaching, Jesus said that if humans know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more would God give the Holy Spirit to those who asked him?

This parable makes it clear that God wants to give good things to His children! Most notably, Jesus specifically said that God wants to give the Holy Spirit to His children who ask. We can further see applications to other "gifts" that God wants give to His people. James tells us that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the father of lights..." He is the giver of every good thing, and He wants to give them the us!

Parable of the Divided Kingdom

The next brief parable came in response to accusations that were mounting against Jesus from his detractors. This may be more of a proverb than a parable, but we will include it here anyway. They began to question the source of His power, and how He cast out demons (Luke 11:14). To that end, some speculated that Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. Of course, this was a ridiculous accusation, and Jesus made that clear with His example: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls." What benefit would Satan gain by casting out his own demons? Why would he want them removed?

Jesus pointed out that if He were working by the power of Satan, then Satan would be working against himself, thus bringing destruction to his own kingdom. He also showed that these Jews had those of their own people who had also performed the miracle of exercising demons. If He was working by the power of Beelzebub, then, He asked, by what power were their "sons" working? The answer to that question would provide judgment on their spec-

ulation! They could not condemn Jesus as being the servant of Satan without condemning their own sons of the same thing! Just to make sure they understood, Jesus concluded this thought by providing the other option for His power. It was not from Satan, but rather “the finger of God” (Luke 11:20). If this was the case, then “the kingdom of God has come upon you,” which meant that they had obligations to Him. They were looking for a reason to not follow Jesus, and He had taken that away from them. They needed to follow Him, as He was the messenger from God!

Parable of the Strong Man

Jesus’ next parable comes in the midst of this same defense against these Jews that accused Him of working by the power of Satan. He told of a strong man, defending his property. As long as he is there, the property is protected and at peace. However, if one stronger comes along, he can overthrow the strong man and divide his spoil.

In this parable, Satan is the strong man, and Jesus is the stronger man. Satan had a strong hold on the earth, but when Jesus came, he was defeated. Even in this act of casting out demons, Jesus was showing His power over Satan, and how He was the stronger man.

However, in the case of casting out demons, being successful in the task was not the end of the matter for the one who was possessed. Jesus told of how the evil spirit, after being cast out, could eventually return to his host, and even bring with him “seven other spirits more wicked than himself” and reenter the man who had been possessed. This teaching indicates that the person who was possessed had some ability to control whether he was initially possessed by the evil spirit or not. When the spirit returns to his host, he finds the house to be “swept and put in order,” that is cleaned and prepared for habitation, but empty! The man did not bring in the good to take the place of the evil, and so the evil found the house ready for his habitation once again. Unless, and until the man was willing to actually take on the good, he was susceptible to (perhaps even inviting) being overtaken once again by the evil spirits. Jesus said that his last state “is worse than the first.” He would be worse off than he was when he was first pos-

sessed!

Jesus made it clear that there could be no “fence sitting” with those who saw His power. He told those gathered on this occasion that they had to choose who they would be with:

He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. (Luke 11:23)

That is the same choice that everyone has to make. We are either with Him, and against evil, or we are against Him, and serving the power of Satan!

Parable of the Lighted Lamp

The final parable of chapter 11 has similarities to a parable in Luke 8:16-18. Jesus told once again of how a person who lights a lamp does not “put it in a secret place or under a basket.” Instead he puts it “on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light” (Luke 11:33). In the previous parable, the lamp represented the word of God. In this parable, Jesus is going to make a little different application. He identifies the lamp of the body as the eye. It allows all manner of things into the body (especially the mind). If the eye is good, it will only let the good light into the body. The “light” is the good things of God, righteousness, allowed into the body so that they can conform the body to that light--to be what God wants it to be!

However, if the eye is bad, then darkness fills the body. Darkness is evil, wickedness allowed into the body. Darkness is that which corrupts and leads us farther away from being what God wants us to be. Jesus warned that we must be careful “that the light which is in you is not darkness.” He is using a play on words to show that something is coming in through the eyes. Is it going to be good, or is it going to be bad? Wickedness or righteousness? The choice belongs to us. We have to take control over the kinds of influences we allow to enter us. Our goal should be to have our “whole body full of light, having no part dark...” That is certainly no easy task! It takes dedication and commitment. It takes a true desire to be “filled with light,” and it takes a commitment to turning off the sources of darkness that can corrupt us!