

Parables of Luke 12

Parable of the Rich Fool

The next parable recorded for us by Luke was told by Jesus in response to a man who was clearly concerned about worldly possessions. This parable could be one of the most poignant for our day, addressing the ever present problem of materialism.

While Jesus was teaching, he was interrupted (a seemingly rude action on the part of the speaker) by a man asking Jesus to address his brother, and tell him to divide their inheritance. Jesus' first response was to rebuke the man, asking, "Man, whom made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" This man had an idea that it was within the scope of Jesus' work to make a judgment concerning his physical inheritance. This may seem odd, but it probably reflects that there were rabbis that would have served in the role of judges over the people. It may have been a sign of his respect for Jesus' authority that made him think that Jesus would take on the judgment of his case with his brother. However, Jesus clearly did not intend to spend His time dealing with disputes over physical property.

It is interesting that this is the only gospel that records this particular interaction and parable. Another interesting feature of this parable is that Jesus identified His main point in the parable before telling the story itself. "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15). Jesus was able to look into this man's heart and know the source of his request. He was able to use the circumstances to teach him, and the rest of the crowd around him, about the danger of covetousness.

The problem that Jesus addressed here is prevalent in our society. Success is often measured by how many possessions can be

accumulated. Bigger houses, fancier cars, and expensive amenities are all used as a measuring stick for success. In short, far too many lives consist in the abundance of the things that are possessed! However, that is not the way things ought to be. If a person is intent on being a disciple of the Lord, he must learn this lesson, and avoid the deadly trap of covetousness.

To emphasize this point, Jesus told the parable of the rich fool. This man had much success in growing crops, so much so that he ran out of room in which to store them. He then decided that he would tear down the barns he had, and build new, bigger barns. He would therefore, have enough space for all the crops! After doing so, he would have enough crops to last him for many years, and he could “eat, drink, and be merry.” But, God had other ideas for him. Instead of being able to enjoy his profits, God said that he would die that very night, and then all that he had laid up would be gone. Finally, Jesus said, “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Notice how self centered this man was, giving no credit (and no charity) to God.

And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”’ (Luke 12:17–19)

This man was very puffed up in his own accomplishment, and prideful of what he had, and would accomplish. He did not use what he had been blessed with to help others, or to provide for the things of God at the temple. Rather, he was determined to hoard as much as he could for his own wellbeing. He could never get enough, and would always be seeking more. That is what covetousness is.

The man who brought his problem to Jesus in the first place had the problem of covetousness. Jesus would have been able to read his heart. However, even by his actions, one could judge his problem. He interrupted Jesus’ spiritual message to try and get a what

he thought he was owed by his brother. He was more concerned about physical things than spiritual. Anytime we put physical things ahead of spiritual, we are guilty of the same covetousness.

For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (Ephesians 5:5)

Covetousness is idolatry. That is, putting something before God, and our service to Him. While there is nothing wrong with enjoying the blessings that God provides to us, when we allow the desire for those possessions (or attaining those possessions) to drive all that we do, then we will be condemned just as this man's actions were condemned!

In the next several verses, Jesus showed that we can and should rely upon God to provide us with the things that we need. In fact, Jesus made it clear that we shouldn't worry about the physical things of life. God will give what we need. He will take care of His children, and will not leave them without provision. After all, if He can take care of the flowers of the field, and the birds of the sky, how much more will He care for His own children?

God expects His people to be generous with those around them. Here, Jesus speaks of selling what you have (rather than stockpiling it) and giving alms to the poor. By doing so, a person lays up heavenly treasure, rather than earthly. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34). When we are struggling with our heart being where it should be, that is, devoted to God, then we should look to see where we have been stockpiling our treasures. If we've been obsessed with material gain, then we should not be surprised that we have not developed a heart for serving the Lord.

Parable of the Expectant Steward

Jesus' next parable as recorded by Luke focused on being prepared. He began by telling His audience, "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning..." (Luke 12:35). If they would do that, they would be like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding. When he knocked on the door, they'd be ready to open it to him immediately. The master would reward those who were

watching and waiting for him upon his arrival. In fact, Jesus said this master would gird himself, and have the servants sit down to eat, and he would serve them. The master may not come back at an expected, or reasonable time. Instead, he might return in the second or third watch. If they were still waiting for him at those odd hours, then they would certainly be blessed.

Jesus transitioned the parable in verse 39. Instead of focusing on the return of the master, and the watchful, faithful servants, He began to speak about a thief coming to rob the master. If the master of the house had known when the thief would come, he would have been watching and waiting for him, and would have kept him from breaking into the house!

The point of both of these short parables is the same. There is a need to be prepared at all times. You cannot know when the thief will come, so be prepared all the time! You cannot know when the master will return, so be prepared all the time! But, what should we be prepared for?

Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Luke 12:40)

They could not know when the Son of Man was coming in judgment, so they needed to be ready! He was not going to tell them when that day would come, and it would not be at a time when they would expect it to occur. In other places (i.e., Matthew 24), Jesus clearly declared that the day of coming judgment would not be identified until it came. The only way to be prepared for the judgment was to be ready each and every day, without fail!

Parable of the Faithful Steward

The last parable of Luke 12 stays within the theme of a “steward.” This parable was spoken in direct response to a question that was asked by Peter: “Lord, do you speak this parable only to us, or to all people?” It is difficult to tell from the written question what kind of tone or intent Peter might have had with this question. Based upon Peter’s history and reputation, and along with the answer that Jesus gives, it seems probable that Peter was concerned that Jesus was asking more of him and the rest of the

apostles than He was asking of anyone else. Like when Peter was more concerned about what would happen with John when Jesus prophesied about his death (John 21:18-23), we see Peter here was concerned about what might be expected of others when Jesus was giving instructions. He should have been concerned about himself, and his own responsibilities!

Jesus' parable tells of four different paths the steward could follow, after being given instructions by the master.

1. *The faithful steward.* In this scenario, the steward hears the word of the master, and is faithful to his instructions. This is, it seems, a direct reference to the previous parable, and the steward who was watching and waiting for the return of the master. He, Jesus said, would be made "ruler over all that he has." He would be given the place of honor by the master!
2. *Rebellious steward.* The second option for the steward is to be completely rebellious against the word of the master. He is presumptuous, taking advantage of the fact that the master has not returned. He begins to mistreat the servants under him, and to live a raucous life of gluttony and drunkenness. Instead of considering himself the keeper of the master's things, he begins to think of himself as the master himself! The result for taking on this attitude is that the master returns unexpectedly "and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers."
3. *Disobedient steward who knew the will of the master.* This seems to be the servant who understands what the will of the master is, but does not do it. He is not as actively rebellious as the previous man, but he has failed to follow through on the expectations that the master had for him. He is judged as being worthy of punishment, but not to the severe state of the previous steward. Jesus said that this man will be beaten with many stripes.
4. *Disobedient steward who did not know the will of the master.* The last servant that Jesus introduced was the one who was disobedient, but did not know that he was being disobedient. He is not released from his obligation, because he still

did things that were “worthy of stripes.” He will, however, be beaten “with few” rather than “be beaten with many.”

This is a parable that needs to be handled with caution, ensuring that we are not drawing a lesson that Jesus never intended. Many believe that Jesus is talking about there being different levels of eternal punishment. However, that is a premise that is not borne out in scripture, and is beyond the scope of the point that Jesus was making here.

The question Peter asked had to do with the expectations that Jesus had for all people with the previous parable. Did everyone need to be ready, and awaiting the Son of Man? Or did Jesus just mean that the apostles needed to be ready and waiting? Was there some higher expectation for the apostles?

This parable reveals that the high expectations rest on those who have heard the word revealed to them. Once they knew, they had no excuse for not being ready, not preparing for His return, and for not being obedient.

The first steward was obedient, and he would receive a reward from the Master when He came. This one was the person who heard and did what he was supposed to do. The second steward was the one who was rebellious. He didn't just “mess up” or “stumble.” This is the person who is purposefully rebellious against the teaching of the Lord. He will even go so far as to put himself in the position of power, in place of the master. As a rebel, when the Master returns, he has no hope of salvation. The last two stewards are the ones that often give us trouble in interpretation. It appears that Jesus is saying there are different levels of punishment for different types of disobedience. However, the more appropriate application is found in verse 48: *“For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”* Jesus' examples were set to illustrate that when more was given, more was expected. The master was able to show mercy to the steward who did not know his will, because he didn't have as high of expectations for him. For the steward that understood, He expected obedience. The story here is not necessarily about eternal

judgment. Like other parables, He is using a physical example that the disciples could understand to make a specific point, which He clearly identified in verse 48!

Peter and the other apostles needed to understand that there were higher expectations for them. Jesus was expecting them to do more, to understand more, and suffer more than others around them. Peter should not have been concerned about what was expected of those around him. What Jesus expected of them did not impact at all what He expected of His disciples! They had been given much, from them much would be required. To them much had been committed, and so of them He would ask the more!

