

CONCERNING THE WAY

April 24, 2012

LESSON 137: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



Chapter 18

Luke 18:1-8 Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray all the time and never give up. (2) He said, "In a city there was a judge who didn't fear God or respect people. (3) In that city there was also a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' (4) For a while the judge refused. But later he said to himself, 'I don't fear God or respect people. (5) Yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice. Otherwise, she will keep coming and wear me out.'" (6) Then the Lord added, "Listen to what the unrighteous judge says. (7) Won't God grant his chosen people justice when they cry out to him day and night? Is he slow to help them? (8) I tell you, he will give them justice quickly. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

- There is a universal application for all believers here, but in context, what is the purpose of this parable? What specific kind of prayer is Jesus emphasizing here?
- This is the kind of thing that often happened in those days. However, this must not have been a Jewish judge. Jewish legal disputes were taken before the elders, not into the public courts at all. If it could not be resolved that way, it went to arbitration in front of three judges – one that the plaintiff chose, one the defendant chose, and one that was independently chosen.
- So this judge had to be one that was appointed by Herod or the Romans, and they were notoriously corrupt. If you didn't bribe the judge you had no hope of getting your case settled. This widow was completely defenseless; she had no chance of getting justice from this guy. But she had one weapon – persistence. She wore him out.
- This parable is like the parable of the Friend at Midnight. God, of course, is not an unjust judge. Jesus was saying, if an unjust corrupt judge can be convinced to give a widow justice, **how much more will God, who is a loving Father, give His children the justice they are crying out for?** He wants to help us! You don't have to wear God out to make Him do something for you.
- We should remember, though, that this doesn't mean we can "talk God into" anything we want. Sometimes a Father has to say no because He knows that His child is asking for something that isn't good for them. Only God can see all time, and all possible outcomes, so only He knows what's ultimately good for us.
- That's why Jesus tells us not to be discouraged in prayer, and if He would find faith on the earth when He comes at last. If we trust Him in all things for not only us but the people we are praying for, then we won't grow discouraged. **At the end of every request we should say, "Your will be done."**
- Verse 7 and 8 tells us that Jesus is speaking of the time of His return.
- In verse 8, Jesus wasn't questioning whether all believers would be gone when He returns. He asked the question to encourage them to keep on in their praying. This is another good lesson from a bad example.

Luke 18:9-14 Jesus also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves because they were righteous, but who looked down on everyone else: (10) "Two men went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector. (11) The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, 'O God, I thank you that I'm not like other people-thieves, dishonest people, adulterers, or even this tax collector. (12) I fast twice a week, and I give a tenth of my entire income.' (13) "But the tax collector stood at a distance and would not even look up to heaven. Instead, he continued to beat his chest and said, 'O God, be merciful to me, the sinner that I am!' (14) I tell you, this man, rather than the other, went down to his home justified. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the person who humbles himself will be exalted."

- Daily prayer times were 9 am, noon, and 3 pm, and prayers were considered to be specially effective if they were offered in the Temple, so at these times many people went up to the temple to pray.
- The Pharisee didn't really go to pray to God – he went to tell God how good he was. The only mandatory Jewish fast was on the Day of Atonement. But people like this Pharisee who wanted to get attention for being pious fasted on Mondays and Thursdays. They whitened their faces to look sick and wore shabby clothes to show everyone how much they were denying themselves.
- This wasn't just a story – some Pharisees actually felt this way. There is a prayer from a certain Rabbi which goes like this: "I thank, Thee, O Lord my God, that thou hast put my part with those who sit in the Academy, and not with those who sit at the street-corners. For I rise early, and they rise early; I rise early to the words of the law, and they to vain things. I labour, and they labour; I labour and receive a reward, and they labour and receive no reward. I run, and they run; I run to the life of the world to come, and they to the pit of destruction." It is on record that Rabbi Simeon ben Jocai once said, "If there are only two righteous men in the world, I and my son are these two; if there is only one, I am he!"
- When the tax collector said, "God, be merciful to me", the Greek word for "be merciful" here is the same word used in Hebrews 9:5 to mean the mercy seat. So, this man was claiming the mercy seat, the place in the Holy of Holies in the temple where blood was sprinkled so that God would forgive the sins of Israel. That was a picture of what Christ would do on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice for sin (Romans 3:25).
- "Justified" means to "legally acquit, make righteous". Now, in the church age, this happens to us when we directly trust in Jesus because of His finished work at the cross (Romans 3:22-24).
- The tax-collector was honest with himself and with God. That heart-broken, self-despising prayer got him accepted by God. This tells us some things about prayer:
 - No one who is proud can really pray. We must not elevate ourselves over other people. We have to always remember that we're no different than anyone else on earth; we are just another sinful, sorrowful, suffering member of the human race which kneels before the throne of God's mercy.
 - We must compare ourselves only to God. **The question is not, "Am I as good as this other person?", but "Am I as good as God?"** When we put our lives beside the life of Jesus and the holiness of God, we will never have a problem with pride. All that there will be to say is, "Oh God, be merciful to me the sinner that I am!"

Luke 18:15-17 Now some people were even bringing their infants to Jesus to have him touch them. But when the disciples saw this, they sternly told the people not to do that. (16) Jesus, however, called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and stop keeping them away. For the kingdom of God belongs to people like these. (17) Truly I tell you, whoever doesn't receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never get into it at all."

Mark adds:

Mark 10:16 Then he picked them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and tenderly blessed them.

- It was the custom for mothers to bring their children to some distinguished Rabbi on their first birthday to be blessed by them. That's what these people were doing. The disciples meant well, they were trying to protect Jesus and give Him some space and let Him rest. But Jesus, on His way to Jerusalem to die, even as tired and stressed as He was, took time for the children.
- What did Jesus mean about children and the kingdom? Let's think about some attributes of children:
 - A child's sense of wonder. As we grow older we lose that sense of being excited or awed by everything, we become jaded.
 - A child's trust – a child's whole world is based on trusting in his parents for his every need. It is absolute, as our trust should be in our Father God.
 - A child's desire to please his parents. Now, of course, this doesn't mean they are always obedient; they often are disobedient and complain when told what to do. But they know very well they should obey and when they've been disobedient. And they want so badly to receive praise and attention from their parents, and will do anything to get it.
 - A child's ability to forgive and forget. When we get older it gets much harder to forgive someone who has wronged us.
 - A child is totally dependent on others. We need to be totally dependent on God to enter the kingdom.
 - So people who receive the kingdom will have all these aspects of a child. Can you think of any others?

Luke 18:18-30 Then an official asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (19) Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? Nobody is good except for one-God. (20) You know the commandments: 'Never commit adultery. Never murder. Never steal. Never give false testimony. Honor your father and mother.'" (21) The official replied, "I have kept all of these since I was a young man." (22) When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still need one thing. Sell everything you have and give the money to the destitute, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come back and follow me." (23) But when the official heard this he became sad, because he was very rich. (24) So when Jesus saw how sad he was, he said, "How hard it is for rich people to get into the kingdom of God! (25) Indeed, it is easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into the kingdom of God." (26) Those who heard him said, "Then who can be saved?" (27) Jesus replied, "The things that are impossible for people are possible for God." (28) Then Peter said, "See, we have left everything we have and followed you." (29) Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left his home, wife, brothers, parents, or children because of the kingdom of God (30) who will not receive many times as much in this world, as well as eternal life in the age to come."

- This man could have been a member of the Sanhedrin or an official in a local synagogue. "To inherit eternal life" to a Jew in those days meant to enter the kingdom of God (see John 3:3-5). The man wanted to know what actions he had to take to make him right with God.

- This ruler addressed Jesus in the highest way possible for a Jew. It was unheard of for a Rabbi to be called “Good Teacher”. The Rabbis always said that there is nothing that is good but the law. So this sounds like he was trying to flatter Jesus, and Jesus immediately turned his attention back to God. Jesus always made it clear that His power and His message came from God. **He was basically saying, “If you recognize that I am good, it’s because I am God.”**
- Jesus answered the man’s question by instructing him to keep the seventh, sixth, eighth, ninth, and fifth commandments (Exodus 20:12-16). The man said he had obeyed all of those commandments since he was a young man, which is highly unlikely. So he was probably lying! Jesus, instead of correcting him, blindsided him with what He said next.
- This official was what we would consider a good man, he tried to obey the law and do everything right. But Jesus said he lacked one thing – he was selfish. He really enjoyed his comfort and worshipped his wealth and possessions. That’s why Jesus told him to give it all away – it was a problem for him. This is not Jesus saying that having wealth is bad, but it’s your heart that matters. **Whatever it is, if it has become a god or an idol to you, then you need to get rid of it.** Your god can be anything that you give most of your time, thoughts, energy, and devotion to.
- This would touch on the 10th commandment against coveting, which included the idea of greed and holding on too tightly to things which are yours as well as wanting things that belong to others. Here’s where the man disobeyed the law. Jesus’ point was clear:
 - You must keep the Law perfectly to inherit eternal life (see James 2:10).
 - Only God was good—truly righteous.
 - **Therefore nobody can get eternal life by following the Law (see Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:21; 3:21). The only option is to follow Jesus to get eternal life.**
- He would have to be willing to become poor (see Luke 6:20), and he was not. To be saved, you have to come as one who is “dead” in sin, without any merit of your own. But, with God nothing is impossible (verse 27), and God can miraculously change a person’s heart and life so that he becomes a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- Again Jesus uses a very vivid picture to get His point across. Why is it so difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God?
 - Wealth and possessions tie us down to this world. The more we have, the more we will spend all our time thinking about it, trying to build on it and trying to protect it. **Having wealth is dangerous to us spiritually and a big responsibility.**
- Peter pointed out that he and his fellow disciples had left everything to follow Jesus; and Jesus promised that no person would ever give up anything for the kingdom of God but he would be repaid many times over. We can take that to the bank! Discuss the truth of what Jesus said in verses 29-30.

“For the man who walks the Christian way there may be things the world calls hard, but, beyond them all and through them all, there is a peace which the world cannot give and cannot take away, and a joy that no man takes from him.” William Barclay

Luke 18:31-34 Jesus took the twelve aside and said to them, **"See, we are going up to Jerusalem. Everything written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. (32) For he will be handed over to the gentiles and will be mocked, insulted, and spit on. (33) After they have whipped him, they will kill him, but on the third day he will rise**

again." (34) But they didn't understand any of this. What he said was hidden from them, and they didn't know what he meant.

- Jesus tells the disciples plainly what was going to happen to Him when they got to Jerusalem, but they didn't get it. They were still obsessed with the idea that He was a conquering king, that He was going to show His power in Jerusalem and blast His enemies off the face of the earth. Just like us so many times, we hear only what we want to hear.
- "Everything written by the prophets" would include Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, and Psalm 16.
- He knew exactly the terrible things that were waiting for Him there, and it wasn't just the physical torture of the crucifixion, but knowing that the full fury of God's wrath was going to be poured out on Him. **We can't imagine the kind of courage it took for Him to go through with it.**
- But Jesus also knew that after all the horrible things happened to Him, He would be resurrected. He knew that He would ultimately be victorious.
- Notice in verse 32 that He clearly says that Gentiles will be involved in His trial and death. Luke did not want his readers to think that the Gentiles were guiltless in Jesus' death. There has been much persecution of the Jews by so-called Christians in history because they considered them "Christ-killers". **But we are all "Christ-killers". The whole world is guilty of the death of the Savior.**

Luke 18:35-43 As Jesus was approaching Jericho, there was a blind man sitting by the road begging. (36) When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. (37) They told him that Jesus from Nazareth was coming by. (38) Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (39) The people at the front of the crowd sternly told him to be quiet, but he started shouting even louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (40) Then Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, (41) "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, I want to see again!" (42) Jesus told him, "Receive your sight! Your faith has made you well." (43) Immediately the man could see again and began to follow Jesus, glorifying God. All the people saw this and gave praise to God.

- As usual there was a large crowd following Jesus, and He was most likely teaching them as He went along. But Jesus honored this man's desire and faith and immediately stopped and healed him.
- When the blind man was told it was Jesus of Nazareth, he immediately realized that the Messiah was there, because he said, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! It was well known by the Jews that the Messiah would be a descendant of David and someday rule Israel from the throne of David.
- There's a lot of symbolism in this story. The man was a beggar sitting by the side of the road, waiting for something to happen. He was blind and couldn't do anything to improve his condition. The Messiah came through his town (as He had walked through many towns). Immediately the blind man recognized Him as the Messiah, the One who could save him from his blindness. Spiritual outcasts, unable to help themselves, easily recognized the Messiah and asked for His help, in contrast to the Jewish religious leaders. The people in front tried to make him keep quiet. In the same way the religious leaders tried to keep people from believing on Jesus.
- When Jesus said, your faith has healed you; He was not saying that the man's faith had some power. The man had faith in the Messiah, and it was the Messiah's power that had healed him (see 7:50; 17:19). In the same way, if the nation had faith in the Messiah, their faith would have healed them of their spiritual

blindness. Because of the man's healing, he and all the people who saw the miracle praised God.

- So, to sum this up, the whole nation of Israel was like this beggar. They were blind and weren't able to do anything on their own to improve their situation. When they heard the Messiah come, they all should have responded like this beggar did, but most did not.

Chapter 19

Luke 19:1-10 As Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it, (2) a man named Zacchaeus appeared. He was a leading tax collector, and a rich one at that! (3) He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he couldn't do so because of the crowd. (He was short in height.) (4) So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way. (5) When Jesus came to the tree, he looked up and said, "**Zacchaeus, hurry and come down! I must stay at your house today.**" (6) Zacchaeus came down quickly and was glad to welcome him into his home. (7) But all the people who saw this began to complain, saying, "He went to be the guest of a notorious sinner!" (8) Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Lord, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor. I'll pay four times as much as I owe if I have cheated anyone in any way." (9) Then Jesus said to him, "**Today salvation has come to this home, because he, too, is a descendant of Abraham. (10) For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.**"

- This is a favorite story in Sunday School, because it really is kind of fun to picture – this little man running ahead of the crowd, climbing a tree so he could see Jesus, and Jesus knowing all about him and telling him to come down so He could stay at his house. It does seem a little like a children's story, and we could say that Zacchaeus is showing some of the aspects of a child that Jesus was saying would get a person into the kingdom. Can you name some childlike aspects that Zacchaeus has in this story?
- In this time Jericho was a very wealthy and a very important town. It was in the Jordan valley and was on the way to Jerusalem and near the crossings of the river which led to the lands east of the Jordan. It had a large palm forest and world-famous balsam groves which you can smell the sweet scent of for miles around. Its gardens of roses were also known far and wide. People called it "The City of Palms." Josephus called it "a divine region," "the fattest in Palestine." The Romans shipped its dates and balsam throughout the empire.
- All this combined to make Jericho one of the greatest taxation centers in Israel. Zacchaeus was a man who had reached the top of his profession; and he was the most hated man in the area. He was considered an outsider by the Jews because he worked for Rome.
- Zacchaeus was wealthy but he was not happy. He had to be lonely, because he had chosen a career that made him an outcast. Despised and hated by everyone, Zacchaeus was reaching out for the love of God. He was determined to see Jesus, and wouldn't let anything stop him.
- In his repentance he went far beyond what was legally necessary. Only when it was a deliberate theft which caused destruction of the property was it necessary to repay 4 times the value (Exodus 22:1). Otherwise the thief only had to pay back twice what was owed. (Exodus 22:4, 7). If a voluntary confession was made and he offered to pay back what he stole, only the value of the original goods had to be paid, plus one-fifth (Leviticus 6:5; Numbers 5:7). Zacchaeus was determined to do far more than the law demanded. He showed by his actions that he was a changed man.
- Zacchaeus responded to Jesus' message in exactly the opposite way the rich ruler had responded (18:18-

25). Zacchaeus, also wealthy, knew he was a sinner. When Jesus called on him, he responded with even more enthusiasm than Jesus had asked for. **This is also an example of Jesus' words that with God all things are possible (18:25-27), because Zacchaeus was a wealthy person who found salvation.**

- As usual, many complained because Jesus had gone to be the guest of a "sinner". But Zacchaeus stood up and publicly announced that he would make amends for the wrongs he had done. He wanted the people to know that his time with Jesus had changed his life. Interestingly he had no problem giving up a lot of his wealth, which the rich ruler could not do (18:22). Jesus' words, today salvation has come to this home, did not mean that giving to the poor had saved Zacchaeus, but that his change in his lifestyle showed his change of heart, that he was now in right relationship with God.

Luke 19:11-27 As they were listening to this, Jesus went on to tell a parable because he was near Jerusalem and because the people thought that the kingdom of God would appear immediately. (12) So he said, "A prince went to a distant country to be appointed king and then to return. (13) He called ten of his servants and gave them ten coins. He said to them, 'Invest this money until I come back.' (14) But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation to follow him, saying, 'We don't want this man to rule over us!' (15) "After he was appointed king, he came back. He ordered the servants to whom he had given the money to be called so that he could find out what they had made by investing. (16) The first servant came and said, 'Sir, your coin has earned ten more coins.' (17) The king said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities.' (18) "The second servant came and said, 'Your coin, sir, has earned five coins.' (19) The king said to him, 'You take charge of five cities.' (20) "Then the other servant came and said, 'Sir, look! Here's your coin. I've kept it in a cloth for safekeeping (21) because I was afraid of you. You are a hard man. You withdraw what you didn't deposit and harvest what you didn't plant.' (22) The king said to him, 'I will judge you by your own words, you evil servant! You knew, did you, that I was a hard man, and that I withdraw what I didn't deposit and harvest what I didn't plant? (23) Then why didn't you put my money in the bank? When I returned, I could have collected it with interest.' (24) "So the king told those standing nearby, 'Take the coin away from him and give it to the man who has the ten coins.' (25) They answered him, 'Sir, he already has ten coins!' (26) 'I tell you, to everyone who has something, more will be given, but from the person who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. (27) But as for these enemies of mine who didn't want me to be their king-bring them here and slaughter them in my presence!'"

- This Parable of the 10 Minas sums up Jesus' teaching to the disciples. Each disciple had duties given to him by Jesus, and each was to carry out his responsibilities. But the parable was addressed not only to disciples. It was also addressed to the nation of Israel, to show that it too had responsibilities. If the nation did not turn to Jesus, it would be punished.
- The prince obviously represented Jesus. Because His followers thought the kingdom was to be set up immediately, Jesus said the prince in the parable had to go to a distant country to be appointed king and then return. He would have to leave them before the kingdom would be set up. Before leaving, he called 10 of his servants and gave them 10 minas, 1 apiece. A mina was about three months' salary, so it was a valuable amount of money. They were supposed to invest the money while he was gone. Another group of people, the citizens of the country, did not want him to be king. Obviously this group represented the religious leaders and the nation in general.
- When the king returned, he called the servants in to find out what they had done with the money he had

entrusted to them. The first two servants had used the money to be productive for the king. One had earned another 10 minas (verse 16), and the second had earned another 5 minas (verse 18). These two were highly praised by the king and given a reward that was related to the amount of money that was earned (verse 17, 19).

- Another servant had done nothing with the mina that was given to him. His excuse to the king was used against him (v. 22). If he was right about the king then he should have at least put the money in the bank — then the king would have received his money back with interest. The implication is that the servant did not really expect the king to come back. He wasn't thinking about the king's return so he didn't bother with the king's business. Matthew says in his gospel that the third servant was thrown out of the kingdom (Matthew 25:30). That tells us that this servant really belonged to the group of people who did not want the king to reign over them (Luke 19:14). His money was taken away and given to the one who had done the most for the king.
- Then, the enemies of the king were put to death in the king's presence. The analogy of this parable was clear to Jesus' listeners. Jesus was going away to receive a kingship. When He returned, He would establish His kingdom. Until that time His followers were to fulfill the responsibilities He gave them. On His return He would reward the people that were faithful to him, and His enemies would be judged before Him.
- This is exactly what is prophesied to happen when Christ returns. He will judge His enemies and reward His followers.
- That is the meaning and context of the parable, but it also illustrates some facts of the Christian life:
 - It tells us about the king's trust in us. He gave his servants the money and then went away and left them to use it however they could and as they thought best. He did not in any way interfere with them. He left it totally up to them on how they used that money. That is the way that God trusts us.
 - It tells us about how the king's tests us. As always, this trust was a test, of whether or not a person was faithful and reliable in little things. God uses the routine mundane duties of life to test people, and see how much they can be trusted with.
 - It tells us of how the king rewards us. The reward that the faithful servants received was not the kind of reward where they could just sit back and do nothing. One was put over ten cities and the other over five. **The reward of work well done was more work to do!** The greatest compliment a person can get is to receive more responsibility and harder tasks to do. The great reward of God to the person who has passed the test is more trust. This tells us that at least part of our reward in the kingdom of God will involve being given higher positions of responsibility. There will be work for us to do, but it will be joyful work, and it will fit us perfectly, because, after all, what do you think God is grooming us for in this life? It's certainly not to float around on clouds polishing our halos!