

MONDAY, 11/18

Read Luke 16:1-15.

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

³ "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg— ⁴ I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

⁵ "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

⁶ "'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.'

⁷ "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

"'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

⁸ "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

¹⁰ "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

¹³ "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

¹⁴ The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. ¹⁵ He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.

It might seem strange to us that Jesus would use the image of a dishonest manager for a parable. We'll see why He does at the end of it, but let's look at the parable itself first.

The manager had "wasted his master's possessions," so now he must give an account of his dealings. He knows he's in trouble, so what does he do? He calls in those owing debts and settles their accounts before meeting with the manager.

Now, what are we to make of this? The admirable action here is that the manager acts. He

does something. Yes, he had squandered his trustworthiness and could no longer hold the position, but he picks up with his responsibilities regardless even if it is to protect himself.

One interesting thing to note is that the most unfaithful action in many of Jesus' parables is inaction. In Jesus' parables, it is those with responsibility who do nothing that receive the hardest words. Even those who miss the mark, like this manager, are looked upon more favorably than those who do nothing with what they have been entrusted.

That is something for us to consider. We too are stewards. We need to ask ourselves how we are using some of God's resources for His Kingdom. Disengagement from our responsibility is not an option. We want to be in the game. Even if we are far from where we would like to be with investing in the Kingdom, it's better that we start somewhere. We can grow from there. If it's a priority, we can carve some space in our lives to give more if it matters to us.

This parable is aimed at the Pharisees "who loved money". We would do well to pay attention to it because the love of money is considered a virtue in our culture. It could very well have a stronger hold on us than we might realize.

Jesus' point is that we cannot serve two masters, especially ones that are in opposition to each other. At some point, we will have to decide which one we will follow. One way we guard our hearts from loving money is to act generously with it. We use these resources to meet our needs and also to serve God and others. We build this practice into our lives because it is an expression of our deepest values, which we know cannot be found in money or any other earthly resource.

So, how might God be calling you to act in regard to your call to be a steward? I wonder what your practices with money say about what you value most.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, we cannot serve two masters. Money is a poor master; it promises much and delivers little. You are our Master. You alone give what we truly need. Amen."

TUESDAY, 11/19

Read Luke 17:11-19.

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" ¹⁸ Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

As Jesus continues His journey to Jerusalem, He encounters ten lepers. Lepers were shunned by their communities and forced to the fringes of society. It was a truly terrible disease as it not only killed you but stole your life well before you died.

They ask Jesus for pity. "Show us compassion" was their plea. Like the Good Samaritan who showed pity or compassion on the wounded man, so Jesus shows it on behalf of these disease-riddled men. On the way to the priests, they were healed.

After the healing, one returns to Jesus to show his gratitude. What of the others? We don't know, but it's fair to imagine their running back home to be reunited with their families. You could hardly blame them. They had been dreaming of that for years. At the same time, their unwillingness to turn back to Jesus reminds us of the times that we pray to Him about some urgent concern, yet once matters are resolved, we go on about our lives.

The one former leper returns. He was a Samaritan, who was seen as unfaithful and unclean to the Jewish people. His returning to Jesus to express his gratitude reveals a right faith and a right heart. Jesus pronounces that the man's faith has made him well.

This is an interesting thing for Jesus to say given his disease had been healed. While the leprosy had disappeared, his spiritual need remained. Our brokenness runs much deeper than our skin. The nine got the healing they wanted, but walked away not fully whole. This one, the one that returned, was made completely well, inside and out.

Jesus wants to bring us complete healing. Sure, He wants to move in the problem areas of our lives, but He also wants to bring true, lasting healing to our souls. Spiritual brokenness may not scream as loudly as our physical needs, but it is even more important. It must not be ignored. We have One who longs to make us well.

How might we know that we have been made whole by Jesus? Perhaps it is our gratitude that reveals His handiwork in our lives. The one who has been healed by Jesus will be drawn to Him. Gratitude will compel him to a closeness with Jesus--to know Him, love Him, and serve Him.

Praying Together:

"Lord, You have cleansed us and made us whole. Thank You. We are in awe of You and Your mercy. We praise You and thank You for all that You are. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 11/20

Read Luke 17:20-37.

²⁰ Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, ²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."

²² Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. ²³ People will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. ²⁴ For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. ²⁵ But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

²⁶ "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

²⁸ "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹ But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

³⁰ "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. ³² Remember Lot's wife! ³³ Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. ³⁴ I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left."

³⁷ "Where, Lord?" they asked.

He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

The coming of God's Kingdom was a popular subject amongst the religious communities, so they decided to ask Jesus how He believed the Kingdom of God would come upon them. Little did they know the Kingdom of God was already in their midst in Jesus, yet they did not even see it.

Jesus shifts from God's first breaking into the world through Himself to His second coming in verse 22. His second coming will occur after His resurrection and will be much harder to miss, like lightning flashing in the night sky.

When He comes again, people will be carrying on with their normal daily lives, just like the people in Sodom's and Noah's days. The question for His disciples is, will they be ready? Will Jesus find them waiting expectantly for Him to return, or will they be clinging to this life, hoping to hold onto it rather than Jesus?

When Jesus returns it is to claim His own. He comes to redeem this world from its broken state in sin. This cleansing comes in the form of judgment against all who oppose God's gracious rule. Anything or anyone that doesn't want to be under God's reign will be granted their request.

Jesus' return is both a wonderful and terrible day. There will be separation from those not of Him. There will also be glorious renewal. It will be the dawning of a new age in which God dwells with us.

Praying Together:

"Lord, just as You have come to us, so You will come back to us again. We wait expectantly for You. In the waiting, we take up Your work and seek a deeper life with You. We look forward to Your recreating us and this world. Amen."

THURSDAY, 11/21

Read Luke 18:1-8.

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ²He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

⁴"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

⁶And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

This is one of those parables that can get us. If you found this troubling, the reason likely is that we often look at parables as moral stories or narratives that reveal who God is. So we're always trying to look for the moral lesson or identify who God is in the story. If you look at this parable in that way, you will end up confused.

This is what is called a "how much more than" parable. Jesus shows us the lowest denominator of human behavior and then holds that up against the glory and goodness of God to illustrate "how much more" He is to be trusted.

This is why Jesus introduces an unjust judge. He doesn't have many redeeming traits, yet he will do the right thing even if it is for the wrong reason. If he, an unjust judge, can be trusted to do the right thing, "how much more" can we trust God, who is good, to do what is just? Do you see what Jesus is saying now?

This is a parable about trust. It is a call to confidently pray to God that He will work and act in our lives. We may get the very thing we ask for or something we needed more than even that. Regardless of how God answers our prayer, we pray believing that God answers us and that He is for us and is at work in our lives as an expression of His love for us.

Praying Together:

"Father, You are good. We come to You in prayer laying down our needs and burdens. We ask You to be at work in our lives. We trust You. May You find faith in us that blesses You. Amen."

FRIDAY, 11/22

Read Luke 18:9-14.

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

¹³"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

¹⁴"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Sinner was spoken to those who were filled with self-righteous pride. They thought much of themselves and their religious efforts.

In this parable, Jesus shows us the importance of our posture before the Lord. Is our posture one of pride or humility? Are we prideful in our own goodness, or do we realize that we are completely reliant upon His mercy to be saved?

The beauty of the Good News of Jesus is that He makes much of us. In Him, we are transformed from sinners to sons and daughters of the King. We become a glorious new creation just like He is, but this is His work in us, not our doing. Therefore, pride has no place. We are always humble, knowing that we are what we are because of His goodness, not our own.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, while I am not worthy of Your sacrifice, You love me still. You made me new, giving me life in You. I do not deserve Your love, but in Your grace, You are pleased to love me with a perfect love. Amen."

SATURDAY, 11/23

Read Luke 18:18-30.

¹⁸A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"

²¹"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶ Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷ Jesus replied, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

²⁸ Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!"

²⁹ "Truly I tell you," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰ will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."

One thing--that's all he lacked. Given the amount of things in one's life that could steer him away from eternal life, it seems like he's ahead of the curve. What if I told you there is always at least one thing.

Yes, he had many things right, but Jesus exposes that there was one thing he loved and trusted more than the Lord--his wealth. He was not willing to take the step necessary to show that the Lord was the chief love in his life. Yes, it was one thing, but that one thing was a major obstacle to true life with God. Faith is trusting Jesus more than the one, or perhaps many things, we might look to otherwise. It is believing that He leads us to life, not anything else. It is making sure that our actions and lives reflect that belief.

This leads Jesus to share one verse we often find challenging: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God," He said. Why is this the case? The wealthy have more things to pull at their heart and vie for their affections. Money, power, and social prominence can all serve as stumbling blocks.

This leads the disciples to ask, "Who then can be saved?" Look at Jesus' answer: "What is impossible for man is possible with God." It is impossible for us to save ourselves. Anyone trying to save himself is like a camel trying to squeeze through the eye of a needle. We all have things that have a hold on our hearts. We need the Lord to transform us, to make possible what is impossible for us.

So our trust is that the Lord can and will save us. When we come to Him, putting our hope and trust upon Him, He gives us renewed life in Him.

Praying Together:

"God, what is impossible for us is possible for You. Thank You for saving us. We put our whole trust and all of our hopes upon You. Amen."

SUNDAY, 11/24

Read Luke 18:31-34.

³¹ Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. ³² He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; ³³ they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."

³⁴ The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

Here Jesus once again predicts His death. He has done it twice before already. This time, however, is different.

There are two things that stand out about Jesus' prediction here in Luke 18. The first is that He gives more detail than He did before. In Luke 9, after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus told them that He must "suffer, be rejected..., be killed and then be raised." The disciples failed to understand what He meant. Later in that same chapter, Jesus told them that He would be "delivered into the hands of men". Again, they were kept from understanding Him.

Look again at what Jesus says here in Luke 18 with the third announcement of His death. Jesus said He will be "delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him, insult Him and spit on Him; they will flog Him and kill Him. On the third day He will rise again." In Luke 9, Jesus pointed to the involvement of the Jewish religious leaders. Here, He speaks of being delivered to the Gentiles. His point is that the whole world will reject Him. He will be handed over by the very people who were chosen to identify and glorify Him. The Gentiles will finish the job. Together, they will destroy the Son of Man, so they think.

While the disciples still do not understand what Jesus meant, they soon will. That's the other thing that makes Jesus' third and final prediction of His death here in Luke 18 stand out. It takes place in the shadow of Jerusalem. The fateful trip leading to these very events is coming to a close. Within days, He will enter the streets of "God's city" and the disciples will see with their very eyes the things He has told them. Their hopes will be battered as their Master is beaten and killed on that cross. However, that fearful Friday will soon give way to that glorious Sunday. Let's say it together--"He is risen. He is risen, indeed!"

Praying Together:

"Lord, You endured rejection so that we may be accepted. You suffered so that we could be saved. You died so that You might show Your mastery over sin and death. You raised us to life as a testament to Your grace and goodness. Amen. "