

April 11: Luke 16-17

Chapter 16

Vs. 1-18, Jesus next tells the parable of the dishonest manager to his disciples to highlight the dangers of wealth. The manager uses whatever means necessary to sure up his own salvation after he is fired. The power he holds over the debts of others is the only bargaining chip he possesses, so he uses the last little bit of time of his employment to cancel debts, which makes him friends. He behaves dishonorably, but shrewdly. The master commends him, but in an ironic or bitter sense. This parable is linked to Jesus' teaching in vs. 10-13. Wealth itself is not the problem, but our relationship towards it. When we are serving wealth and using all of our time and energy to sure up and protect our wealth, rather than using wealth as a tool to serve God, then we have made it our idol. All that we have belongs to God, we are but the managers of it.

The Pharisees are described as "lovers of money", meaning, according to what Jesus had just said, that they were not "lovers of God." The Pharisees were notorious for trying to make themselves look good, to justify themselves in front of others, Jesus says that no matter what our hypocrisy is, God knows the heart and judges us rightly.

Jesus does not want to get rid of the law, but rather to hold the law and prophets in tandem with the kingdom of God that he is ushering in. Jesus strongly urges everyone to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus' teachings on divorce are meant to highlight the importance of the promises made, but also as a safeguard for the women in these relationships who were often discarded by their husbands on whim.

Vs. 19-31, The Rich Man and Lazarus seeks to highlight Jesus' statement that what is prized by human beings is an abomination to God, namely the economic injustice and lack of basic dignity for the poor as revealed in this story. The rich man is not named, but the poor man is named Lazarus. This is a different Lazarus than Jesus' best friend from Bethany (the brother of Mary and Martha). The poor man was unclean (covered in sores), in pain, and starving at the gate of one who feasted sumptuously every day. Lazarus died and was carried away to heaven, to the bosom of Abraham, where he experiences comfort and grace he was never shown in life. The rich man died and went to Hades (to the realm of the dead). Even in death, even with the tables of their fortunes turned, the rich man still views Lazarus as "beneath him", asking Abraham to send Lazarus like a servant to bring him comfort and to go to his brothers and warn them. Abraham replied that "they have Moses and the prophets" to warn them to live righteously, they should listen to scripture. This parable reveals the importance of not just reading, but living according to the Word. One of the most common themes throughout both Old and New Testaments is social justice and care for the poor. There's nothing wrong with wealth in and of itself, but God hates when those who have everything turn a blind eye to those who have nothing. The disparity between rich and poor that has existed in our world for millennia, and persists still, is an abomination to God. This parable states this in a poignant way.

Chapter 17

Vs. 1-19, Luke's version of "seven times seventy" shifts the focus to "seven times a day"! Yes, a mark of discipleship is persistent forgiveness. Notice, Jesus says "if they repent"... this is not forgiving someone who's not really sorry, who doesn't change their ways. Jesus doesn't want us to be a doormat or to be emotionally abused. But rather, some people just can't help themselves, some people have the best intentions to change their ways, and keep on messing up anyway. In those cases, Jesus urges forgiveness. The apostles find this a hard teaching to swallow, and ask for increased faith. I think that's a very human response. Many times we can't forgive on our own, but need God working through us, through the gift of faith, to be able to forgive and love others. Faith is a powerful force! And it's a gift of the Holy Spirit. As we exercise our faith and trust in God, so it grows and grows and grows into a mighty tree.

In the story of the 10 lepers, Jesus heals them and tells them to show themselves to the priests because only the priests had the authority to declare them "clean." They started walking towards the Temple BEFORE they saw the healing happen. When they realized they'd been healed, only one turned back to thank Jesus (a Samaritan). Technically that one disobeyed Jesus, while the others did what was expected of them, but Jesus connected his healing with faith, because he returned to thank the one who had healed him.

Vs. 20-37, The Pharisees were once more looking for signs of the end times, but Jesus gives them no such satisfaction. Jesus says that the "kingdom of God" is already active in our world, because it is within and among us, Jesus' disciples. The kingdom of God is emerging gradually over the course of time, through the work of the Church. However, the "days of the Son of Man" (which is the same thing as what the Old Testament calls "the day of the Lord") will be the definitive day when Jesus comes again "to judge the living and the dead" as the creed says. This event will be obvious and undeniable (like the flash of lightning that fills the night sky with light), and will occur quite suddenly (as the flood of Noah and the destruction of Sodom). The only thing that matters on that day is the Lord, we mustn't try to sure up our own security, for our eyes must be firmly fixed on Jesus, in whom we put our faith and trust. Remember, the Lord's judgment is good news for those who are righteous, who trust in Jesus. This is the day of the Lord's vindication of the poor and the oppressed in our world. God does not desire the death of sinners, but that all might turn to the Lord and be saved. This is why it's taking so long for Christ's return, because God is patient, gracious, and merciful. Vs. 37 offers a grim retort to the question of "where this will take place", when the days for repentance draw to a close, the vultures will feast.