

The Wisdom of Christ
Parable of the Rich Fool
Bible Study 6- Luke 12:13-21

Goals:

- 1) To be able to describe the core truth of each parable in a sentence.
- 2) To be able to explain crucial cultural and literary facets of each parable.
- 3) To be able to describe how each truth challenges the way you live your life day to day.

Expectations:

1-2 hours of prep work (reading the parable, answering the questions and preparing to discuss your findings and create a plan for real life application)

Note:

Much of the information in this study, especially the cultural observations, was taken from Kenneth Bailey in his books *Poet & Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes*. Both would be wonderful for additional reading.

Suggested Homework:

- 1) Print out these studies or have a way of filling them out and accessing them on your phone.
- 2) Read Luke 14:13-21 before completing this study. When you finish the study, reread the passage again.
- 3) Complete the following questions after the introduction.
- 4) Come to the group with 2-3 observations from the text/study and 2-3 ways you need to apply the lesson.
- 5) Read the parable three times this week. As you read through it, connect it to your experience of God's grace and seek to focus on that this week.
- 6) Meet with another member of the group to discuss issues of accountability and growth this semester.

Introduction:

DISCUSS: What was the best thing that happened this week? What made it the best?

DISCUSS: What situations can make you more possessive of the things in your life (i.e. money, a relationship, a position)?

Review:

Background for Luke: The original reader- Written to Theophilus, a patron who wanted to know more of Jesus Christ. Luke compiled Luke and Acts as the answer to how the Church got started and who Jesus was.

Purpose: **Luke's purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, who came to save the world through his death.** The parables we will study this semester will articulate different parts of that main thrust- the Son of Man's sacrificial death for all as Savior. The Son of Man is a distinctive title of note as well. It comes from Daniel, Son of *Man* focuses on the unique ONE of mankind who ultimately fulfills God's purpose of being the visible representative of the invisible God and in the process redeems the rest of humanity. There is only one OF US who has fulfilled God's plan. There is only one OF US who redeems us. And those who by faith express their solidarity with the SON OF MAN will also be redeemed to fulfill God's purpose for humanity. Luke contains a distinctive approach to humanity in the book (as noted below), and consequently an emphasis on Christ's humanity as the human Messiah.

Audience: Luke is writing specifically to Theophilus, and more broadly to Gentiles, especially those who are disenfranchised or ostracized by society. **Luke wants those people to know that the Son of Man cares for and died for them.**

Luke shows particular attention on the oppressed, unfavored and gentile recipients of Jesus' ministry, such as Samaritans, women, Romans, gentiles, children, tax collectors and other non-religious elites. Luke wanted to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, come to save all.

Luke 9-19 has been recognized as a great chiasmic artistic/poetic masterpiece. Known by many names, this account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is laden with brilliant poetry and magnificent composition of the parables and anecdotes within.

Review Questions:

- 1) Summarize the main point of Luke's gospel in your own words.
- 2) Describe the person Luke is trying to teach.
- 3) What was one truth from last week's parable that you had the opportunity to apply this week? Did you take advantage of that opportunity?

Literary Background

This parable Jesus tells follows an interesting literary style which focuses our attention on the main point of Jesus' teaching. There is an inverted parallelism, but the major unique facet of this parable is the use of wordplay within the text, which will be drawn into focus below.

Text: Luke 12:13-21

13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the *family* inheritance with me."

14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a **judge or arbitrator** over you?"

15 Then He said to them,

"Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was **very productive**.

17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'

18 "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink **and be merry**.'"

20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?'

21 "So is the man who stores up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God."

QUESTION: What are some relationships you see between the phrases which are paired (i.e. v. 15 and 21; v. 16-17 and 20)? What is at the central point of the parable (verses 18-19)?

Inverted Parallelism

In the inverted parallelism, the **middle term or section is accentuated**. The reason why an author includes an inverted parallelism is to draw our attention to the middle feature. This is used commonly in Luke and helps us to understand the meaning of the overall discourse. This is seen below in the whole of the Jerusalem travel document, but it is easier seen at first in small examples. Look for common words (I will italicize this when I give you these). Once again, the goal is that you know what an inverted parallelism means, that the **middle term or section is accentuated**, not necessarily that you can now find them on your own.

My silly example of an inverted parallelism

- A I love eating Chocolate chip *cookies*
B Their *chocolate chips* are delicious
C My tummy is filled with *warmth* when
D I think of my mom and the times she made them for me
C' I am *warmed* by the memories as
B' The *chocolate chips* melt in my mouth
A' and the *cookies* are eaten.

In this case, the point is not the cookies, but the fact that mom made them. Each of the supporting phrases should be understood in regard to how they relate to the central item (D). Remember, the inverted parallelism focuses our attention and the **middle term or section is accentuated**.

QUESTION: If the inverted parallelism focuses our attentions on the middle term, what could be the reason for Luke's focus on the point of decision in this man's dialogue with self?

Cultural background:

--Please highlight two sentences in this section you found particularly interesting or that helped your understanding of the parable.

Dividing the inheritance:

Our story begins with a certain man bringing a question before Christ. He addresses Jesus as "Rabbi" and jumps into a legal question. The man wants Christ to order his brother to divide the family inheritance. This is a strictly legal question, and the motive and heart of the hearer are brought out in Jesus' response, but it should be known that there was a reason for his appeal to Jesus. In Roman law, both parties had to agree in order to divide the inheritance, but according to Jewish Rabbinic thought, only one party desiring to split the inheritance was enough. This man expects Jesus to fall in line with other Jewish teachers and order his brother to divide the inheritance. It is likely he appeals to Jesus because his brother is particularly interested in Jesus' teaching, or at least because he thinks Jesus' command will cause his brother to split the inheritance. Once his brother agrees, both parties can proceed legally according to Roman law. **This brother goes in to the conversation with Jesus already having determined his rights**- this man just wants Jesus to award him what is rightfully his.

Wordplay: Divider-Reconciler:

This parable and text are rich with wordplay, and an understanding of these devices helps us see the fundamental comparison Jesus is drawing our focus toward. The first unusual word used in this passage is divider. Jesus claims that he has not come to be a divider. This Greek word is used once in the new testament and has a quite obvious alternative, a reconciler. The Greek word for reconciler as well as being the opposite is different by one letter in the form Jesus used. **What he is saying is "I didn't come to be a divider (meristes), but a reconciler (mesites)**. This kind of wordplay to the original hearer is obvious and draws attention, just like a well-placed pun or double entendre in English.

QUESTION: How does this claim that Jesus is not divider, but reconciler fit into the greater context of Luke?

QUESTION: In Matthew 10, Jesus indicates that his coming will cause even family members to be divided. How does this concept mesh with his teaching here that he did not come as divider but reconciler?

Wordplay: Soul on loan:

The next set of wordplay we see in this section comes with the concept of who owns this man's profits and who owns his soul. Go back to the passage and underline each of the times this man refers to something as "my _____." This tells us a lot about the focus of the rich man. Also look back at verse 16. What does Jesus tell about this land? Who was responsible for the increase according to the narrator? What we see in this text is a great reversal in verse 20. This man, who has assumed that all belongs to him, is now addressed by his Creator, the true owner of everything, and the lender not only of "his" crops, but also his very soul.

QUESTION: What in this man's attitude do you see reflected in your own heart? How does our perception of reality sometimes vary greatly from the way things really are (in regards to our possessions, time, etc)?

Wordplay: Enjoy the Good Life:

The last bit of creative wordplay found in this parable is a connection between the words "was very productive" in verse 16 with the phrase "be merry" at the end of verse 19. Those words in Greek are once again, strikingly close and quite rare. "Was productive" is euphrosos, and "be merry" is euphraino. This similarity is of note because this device is utilized by the author to draw those two parts of the story into comparison and focus. The wordplay is heightened when God calls him an aphron, a "fool." This rare word for fool is used to in conjunction with this man's plan. "eu" is a prefix used in greek to intensify an idea. "a" is a prefix used to negate ideas and give the opposite. What is being expressed is that this man believes that many good possessions (euphrosos) will bring the really good life (euphraino), but he is a fool – without life, spirit, good things (aphron).

QUESTION: How do we subscribe to the same philosophy as this man of what will make us happy? What is the result?

Conclusion:

The end of the parable answers the question posed by this brother at the beginning of the parable. The brother tells Jesus to make his brother honor his legal rights. Jesus responds by reminding our audience that all they have is God's, not theirs. Jesus concludes this parable by ordering not the

“legal” upholding but instead the recognition of who the originator of justice is and who is the giver of all. In the end, it’s a matter

Discussion Questions:

- 1) **DISCUSS:** Describe the main point of Luke. What is the main point of this parable in your own words? How do the two relate?

- 2) **DISCUSS:** What is the man whose brother will not split the inheritance asking Jesus to do for him? How do we sometimes make similar demands to God?

- 3) **DISCUSS:** What is one element of wordplay or literary structure that helps you understand the parable better? What made that one significant to you?

- 4) **DISCUSS:** What do you think is the hardest part of what Jesus is asking?

- 5) **DISCUSS:** What tools do you have available to do this very difficult thing Jesus is asking?

- 6) **DISCUSS:** Please write one practical way you can cultivate this attitude in your life this week.

ANSWERS: (spoiler alert)

- 1) Luke's main theme is that Jesus is the Son of Man (a distinctive title meaning he came to save people). This parable is about recognizing what we have as being God's not ours. Therefore we can trust him with everything. This relates to the main point in a variety of ways. One example is that when we realize our very souls belong to God, it causes us to run to him, the Savior of us, for we cannot save ourselves. This is only one example- answers should vary here.
- 2) He is asking Jesus to help him obtain what is rightfully his, but without an acceptance of God as owner of everything. Answers will vary.
- 3) Answers will vary.
- 4) Answers will vary.
- 5) Answers will vary- my intent here is to remind us of the amazing provisions of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, God's power to overcome temptation, his promise to never leave us, etc...
- 6) Answers will vary.