

Luke: Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts, and Outlaws

Adam Hamilton

Chapter 3 Discussion

Parables from the Underside (pgs. 37-58)

Biblical Foundations Luke 8-9 (15-19)

Opening Prayer

Creator God, your gift of imagination allows us to spin stories that reveal your surprising ways and proclaim your astonishing love. As we read and reflect on stories your Son told, may your Spirit grant us, through Jesus' ancient words, new insights into your reign and new understandings of how you call us to respond. Amen.

The Parable and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Read Luke 18:10-14

- What about this story most interests, surprises, and puzzles you?
- As we learned in session 2, Pharisees were respected as righteous observers of God's law. Tax collectors in the first-century Judea were widely regarded as traitors to their own people, collecting more money than Rome demanded and pocketing the extra.
 - How does this information affect your understanding of this story?
 - How does the context in which Luke places the Parable (verse 9) influence your understanding of it?
 - If Jesus were telling this story today, who would be in the roles of the Pharisee and the tax collector, and why?
- Describing religious hypocrisy, which many who claim no religion cite as a problem. Hamilton writes, "I've found the problem isn't that religious people sin... The problem is that religious people are blind to their own sin but are far too willing to communicate their judgement of the sins of others" (Luke pg. 42).
 - Do you agree? ○ Why or why not?
 - How does this align with your own experience?
 - Does this story of the Pharisee and the tax collector illustrate Luke's theme of "lifting up the lowly? If so, how? If not, why not?"

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Read Luke 15:11-32

- Why do you think the younger son asks for his share of the inheritance?
- Why do you think the father grants the younger son's request?
- What prompts the younger son to return home to his father?
- Do you think the son's confessions of sin is sincere? Why or why not?
- What is surprising about the father's response when his son returns home?
- How much does the sincerity of his son's confession matter to the father?
- How much should it matter to us? Why?
- Why does the older son refuse to go into the house?
- Do you think the father's words to him persuade him to join the celebration? Why or why not?
- Do you identify more with the prodigal son or the older brother in this parable? Why?
- How does Jesus's parable relate to your experience of God's grace?
- Does this story illustrate Luke's theme of "lifting up the lowly"? If so, how? If not, why not?

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Read Luke 16:19-31

- What about this story most interests, surprises, or puzzles you?
- Why do you imagine the rich man failed to help Lazarus?
- How much, if at all, do the reasons for this failure matter?
- Abraham says, "a great crevasse" exists in death between Lazarus and the rich man.
 - How could the man have crossed this gap in life?
 - How do or how could you cross the gap between those who are rich and those who are poor in your own life?
- Why does Abraham say the rich man's brother would not have believed someone who returned from the dead?
- What does Abraham's statement tell us about how Luke saw Jesus's relationship to Israel's history with God?

- “The consequences of the rich man’s disregard for Lazarus in life have eternal significance,” write Hamilton (Luke, pg. 54).
 - What eternal significance, if any, do you believe regard and disregard for those like Lazarus has? Why?
- Hamilton shares some examples of how his congregation shares with those in need.
 - What examples from your own lives or congregations could you offer?
 - Does this story illustrate Luke’s theme of “lifting up the lowly?” If so, how? If not, why not?

Closing

We are encouraged to ask two questions about each of these parables.

- Which character are you in this parable?
- What does Jesus want you to know, think, or do in response to this parable?

Closing Prayer

By your grace and power, Lord Jesus, may the stories of our lives conform always more closely to the story of your life, death, and resurrection. Make us living parables, that others may experience your love through us. Amen.

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As We Begin...

Jesus, a teacher, a leader, but MOST of all Jesus was a storyteller. His stories were called parables, and they were intended to teach his hearers about the meaning of life and faith, who God is and what he loves for from us. Many of these parables spoke to and about outsiders, outcasts, and outlaws.

These parables were sometimes simple analogies or similes where he likens the kingdom of God to, to instance, am mustard seed (Luke 13:18-19). However, these can also be more detailed stories that ordinary people were able to relate to— fictional stories illustrating some spiritual truth that God or faith or how we're meant to live.

ALSO, remember that context is always important, but we are lucky that Luke always provides context of the things that he mentions.

Jesus' stories are easy to remember, come from everyday life, so they are relevant, and they contained one or occasionally two or three spirited truths. Many times they contrasted the life and heart that God intended with the life and heart of those who fail to "get it"— who truly struggled or failed to do God's will.

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:1-14) (Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible pgs. 1785)

CONTEXT: “Jesus told this parable to certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust.”

Reflect back to last session, we have Simon the Pharisee who held judgement on the sinful woman.

With this type of judgement the author reports that there has been a mass decline in Christianity in our country. This decline or exodus has also been very steep.

The Author labels two groups of people:

The **NONES** those who have had no faith or church, and the **DONES** those who have left the church after being turned off, judged, or scrutinized.

The churches judgmentalism, hypercriticism, and religious hypocrisy are the main cause for this decline. Those in positions of power fail to see or are blind to their own sin, but focus and judge the sins of others in the church, thus creating a barrier for those who attend. These criticisms as we mention will push many away.

In the parable that we are visiting, the Pharisee is blind to his own sin, whereas the Tax Collector is very much aware of his sin, and the prayers that they are praying at the temple definitely reflect this level of blindness or awareness.

Pharisee- “God, I thank you that I’m not like everyone else— crooks, evildoers, adulterers— or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of everything I receive.

Tax Collector- “God, show mercy to me a sinner.”

However, its so easy to judge people, and assume the worst of them and, in the process, to feel a spiritual pride.

We need to remember that in the church, that pride is the most dangerous of all of the deadly sins.

To remind of us to not let ourselves be prideful, Jesus tells us the following:
“All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and this who make themselves low will be lifted up.”

We are reminded of the Canticle of Mary when she says he has lifted up the meek and the lowly, which is truly at the heart and soul of the theme of Luke's Gospel.

We also see in James 4:10 “Humble [ourselves] before the Lord, and he will lift [us] up. We see this recurring theme in scripture. Jesus will make this point again at the Last Supper when his disciples are secretly debating which of them is the greatest, and he tells them “The greatest among you must become like a person of lower status and the leader like a servant.” (Luke 22:26)

From the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the Pharisee is demonstrating hypocrisy, self-righteousness and judgmentalism that both Christians and non-Christians have experienced in churches. The Pharisee in this case is killing the church, driving others away from the Christ we proclaim.

We see in this parable that prayer must be persistent and well focused. However, none of us rarely pray for the return of Christ to earth. There is a prayer that concludes the New Testament “Amen, Come, Lord Jesus.” This is seldom heard in churches. Most believe that Jesus will return whether we pray about it or not. We find it hard to believe that God would make the execution of His plans based on our prayers and that certain promised events will not happen when we do not pray about them. But then the question is why the Lord taught us to pray: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven?”

It is important to note that readiness for his return will be conditioned by prayer.

One of the biggest problems is that we fail to see that that the world in which we live is not the one God intended when He created heaven, earth, and mankind. Paul describes clearly what our present what our general situation is like: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated

from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Now only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit.

Our redemption is part of the renewal of the whole universe.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) (Cultural Background Study Bible pgs. 1779-1781)

Read verse 18:11-24

Jesus was constantly surrounded by those the religious folks called “sinners and tax collectors.” We see that the context of next parable “**The Parable of the Prodigal Son,**” was for “All the tax collectors and sinners who were gathered around him listening and taking in his word.”

Jesus drew people to him in many ways, and he didn’t just draw in the lowly, but he drew in everyone. His kindness, his depth, his love and mercy, his lack of judgement, his willingness to stop and meet their needs, and his ability to speak about God in ways that were understandable to anyone of any educational background, was compelling. When they were with Jesus, they truly felt God’s presence.

So let us go back to our parable:

The youngest son demanded his inheritance, to which the father obliges and gives it to him. The son took his inheritance, left, went out and was foolish in how he spent the inheritance.

Keep in mind here for a minute that the word *prodigal* is defined as wasteful, reckless, or squandering in the use of wealth.

The boy then has to resort to doing the servants work, but still has not money to eat, then he has to eat what the pigs are eating, and in that time that was the true definition of rock bottom.

This boy then determines to return home, to his father, and repent for his foolish acts. He apologizes and seeking to be restored to his father's estate, however he no longer hopes to be accepted back as a son, but perhaps as a house servant.

Now the Pharisees see this an opportunity to punish the boy and teach him a lesson, but Jesus takes it one step further, and tells us that the father sees his son in the distance, runs to him, and then tells the servants to bring him the finest robe, and put a ring on his finger for the son that was once lost is now found. This is a true statement of forgiveness, unconditional love, and how God wants us all to act towards everyone, even the sinner with the worst sins.

Now the picture that God is truly painting for us in this parable is not one that is disdained with hatred, anger, and resentment but one that is full of love, unconditional love, the kind that only a parent gives, forgiveness, and the son is given a second chance. Just as the son we all deserve second chances, to redeem ourselves and prove otherwise of our acts.

God Jesus is the God of second chances, no matter how hard your work to do good, or even get him to give up on you, God will not give up on any of us. He truly refuses to give up on us. God will always take us back despite our foolish, prodigal ways.

In this time even though Jesus was found among the Tax Collectors and the Pharisees. Tax collectors, were despised greatly by many Jews because they had seemingly sold their souls to the Romans, purchasing the right to collect Rome's taxes, making their money off the extra that they charged the lawful citizens.

These individuals were outsiders, outcasts, and considered to be outlaws. However, Jesus is regularly associated with them, breaking bread with them, befriending them, and offering them grace. Grace only God can give. He does this knowing that they were not welcome in the synagogue, and alienated from people.

Jesus was also a friend of sinners. He sought these people out, befriended them and offer them grace, and worked to bring them back to God.

This parable announced grace to the prodigals of the day and today. However, we need to realize that this is not the end of the parable.

Read 18:25- 32

At this time in the parable the older brother is returning home from the field, hearing the celebration is immediately upset and angered. He refuses to come into the house, the father begs him to join the celebration, because the son that once was lost now is found.

The brother was upset and tells his father “I have served you all these years, and I never disobeyed your instruction. Yet you’ve never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours returned after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.” (Luke 15:29-30)

However, the father responds in a way that only a father could respond. “Son you are always with me, everything I have is yours.” (Luke 15:31)

This parable is speaking to the younger and older brothers, to the sinners, and to the saints. All at one time. This is truly a great moment in how Jesus reaches all of his hearers.

This is because the older son has never fallen away and always been faithful to God. Because of that trait it is harder for him to have compassion on the prodigals.

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) (Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible pgs. 1782-1783)

This parable is to many an adaptation of a popular folk-tale, perhaps originating in Egypt, which contrasted the eternal fates of a bad rich man and a virtuous poor man. If Jesus has taken over a popular tale, he has given it a stamp of his own.

Some people doubt whether this is a parable, believing that Jesus may have been describing an existing situation at that moment. This story is not a parable in the sense that it illustrates a truth that is not reflected in the details of the talk. The parable illustrates the remark Jesus had made earlier: "What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight."

CONTEXT: "The Pharisees, who were money-lovers, heard all this and sneered at Jesus."

Prior to this or leading up to this part, Jesus had been talking about wealth, maintaining a right relationship to it, the importance of giving it away, and how we cannot serve both God and money.

We hear for the first time that Pharisees are money-lovers. This is not something that he has mentioned up to this point.

However, the Pharisees are a foil for Jesus throughout the Gospel of Luke. They represent a form of religion that misses that point. Some scholars believe the Gospel of Luke was written at a time when the Pharisees and other religious authorities were excommunicating Jewish Christians from the synagogues in the decades following the destruction of Jerusalem, and that Luke's descriptions of the Pharisees reflect the growing animosity between the Christian community and the Pharisees.

However, this small picture of the Pharisees does not tell the entire story. Theologically, Jesus shared much in common with the Pharisees; they were drawn to him for that very reason.

Luke 5:17 (pg. 1752)

Pharisee today is synonymous with self-righteousness, judgmentalism, legalism, and religious people who miss the point, in the first century, there were many Pharisees who were good and pious and drawn to Jesus. Of course, they were jealous of Jesus, had a bit of disdain for him, and resented his teaching, and his willingness to associate with *Am ha-Arez*.

In this parable Jesus is contrasting individuals again- a rich man and a poor man. The rich man who is often called Dives, and the poor man who Jesus named was Lazarus. "The poor man died and was carried by angels to

Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. While being tormented in the place of the dead, he looked up and saw Abraham at a distance with Lazarus at his side." (Luke 16:22-23)

The main point of this parable is unmistakable: If you ignore the poor, step over them, do nothing to help them, you've utterly failed at what it means to be human, a Jew or a follower of Jesus. There are dire consequences for this.

We heard in the Beatitudes "Happy are you who hunger now, because you will be satisfied." (Luke 6:21). This beatitude and this parable, illustrate the great reversal in Luke's Gospel. (The notion that in the end God will turn everything we know upside down.)

The consequences of the rich man ignoring Lazarus in life has eternal significance. God brings aid and comfort to those who suffer in life, while those who step over and ignore the poor and suffering will themselves suffer.

We can again reference the Canticle of Mary:

He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.
He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed. (Luke 1:51b-53)

This parable is not the only parable in Luke, pointing to Christ's teaching on caring for the lowly, the poor, and the sick or injured.

Jesus wants us to remember this one Major point he is trying to make in his teaching: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." If we do this we will truly live. Be the GOOD SAMARITAN for everyone, not just those we think deserve it.

To be the Samaritan, of all people, who stops to help the injured man, bandaging his wounds, placing him on his donkey, and providing a place for him to recuperate, along with food, clothing, and medical care. ***This is what is means to love your neighbor.***

Just as Jesus said *“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me a to preach good new to the poor.”* Instead of trying to make ourselves right in our eyes let us be the good new to the poor.

In the end, we see that the rich man’s attitude shows that he has never taken God seriously in his life; otherwise, he would have have left Lazarus die at his doorstep. The fact that Lazarus hoped in God can only be deducted from the fact that he ended up in Abraham’s moose after death. The parable does not condemn riches or glorify poverty. The rich man ended up in hell, not because he had been rich on earth, but because he had not loved his neighbor as himself. That, in itself, was proof of the fact that he had not loved the Lord with all his heart, soul and mind. His lack of neighborly love indicated that he never believed and obeyed the Word of God: “Moses and the Prophets.”

The Pharisee was sent to hell, however, it has been said that two minutes in hell made the rich man into an evangelist.

In closing we were left with the following statement: “We can ignore Lazarus as Dives did. OR we can see the people like Lazarus we encounter and offer help, as the Good Samaritan did for the man left for dead on the Side of the road. Which will you choose?”

Closing

We are encouraged to ask two questions about each of these parables.

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