

A Study of Luke's Gospel
Week Twenty-Four
Luke 16:13-17:19

Day One

13 "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he 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 men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

v. 13 – Jesus made a simple but profound statement. No man can serve God and something or someone else. God must have first place in your life or He has no place. And it seems that money has a special pull that causes it to command attention and even worship. I wonder why that is? I suppose that because we use money, in most cases, to obtain the necessities of life, so that we can begin to think that money is what we need to survive. But God is the source of money and our provider and we must not let what He uses to bless us become the object of our affection, attention or worship.

What does the Bible say about money? Here are a few highlights:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:10).

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:4-5)

"'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty" (Haggai 2:8-9).

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:11-13).

Where do you stand where money is concerned? Are you serving it, or does it serve you? Are you uptight about money?

v. 14 – The Pharisees sneered at Jesus. Can you imagine? They sneered at Him! And it was because they were in love with money and not with God. I know of leaders today

who are in love with money, and that is easy to do in our modern culture. But the word of the Lord is clear: You cannot love God and money at the same time.

v. 15 – Wow! What a statement! What is valued with men is despised in God's sight, and that includes money. What do men value? Men value money, power, prestige, outward appearances. What does God value? God values generosity, humility, service and a clean heart. It is easy to justify yourself or make yourself look good before men, but it impossible to fool God. He knows the heart. The choice is yours. Do you want to look good before men or before God? Your choice will determine what you pursue and who you worship.

Day Two

16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. 17 It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law. 18 "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

v. 16 – John and Jesus came to proclaim the kingdom of God. Those who heard the message and responded had a radical conversion with a radical mind change. You cannot come into contact with the kingdom of God and make it a part of your life. It must become all of your life. You must put it all on the line for God and press into the things that He honors and values, rejecting and abandoning your own agenda and values. Have you done that? Will you do whatever it is that God wants you to do? Give what He wants you to give? Go where He wants you to go? That is what it means to force your way into the Kingdom.

v. 17 – Jesus did not come to do away with the Law. He came to fulfill it. But when He did fulfill the Law, He then instituted a new and better covenant, a Law of the heart. In a previous study of Hebrews, we saw that one of the consistent themes to those Hebrews was that we have a better covenant than the old covenant.

But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another (Hebrews 8:6-8).

We also covered this topic in our study of Romans, where Paul wrote:

21 So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God-

through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, 4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (Rom 7:21-8:4).

v. 18 – Then Jesus addressed the issue of divorce and adultery. This is a contentious issue for many believers. All that I will say is that we need to study everything that the Bible says about divorce before we develop a divorce policy and doctrine. Don't let any one verse become the basis for any policy. Then we must also extend grace where divorced people are concerned. Divorce is serious, but it isn't the unforgivable sin. I am not condoning divorce, but I know that it is a part of life. Remember the grace that Jesus extended to the woman in John 4 who had had five husbands. He still ministered to her needs. We should do the same.

Day Three

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' 27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 30 "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

vs. 19-31 – I have chosen to keep this story intact and look at some lessons and thoughts that the story generates for me.

1. Feel free to disagree with me, but this doesn't read like a parable to me. This reads like a firsthand report! I wonder if Jesus wasn't presenting a report from heaven of how it is that we are judged when we die. After all, He would have known!
2. This seems like a case study. Perhaps Jesus had someone specific in mind and changed the name of this person who would have been well known to His Jewish listeners.
3. The rich man was oblivious to the needs of others, especially this poor man. Yet I wonder if this isn't a reference to the spiritual needs of the Gentiles, which the Jews ignored for the most part. Remember what the Gentile woman said to Jesus on another occasion: "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour (Matthew 15:27-28). She referred to the healing of her daughter as crumbs and Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.
4. Jesus had been speaking about the kingdom of God including more than just Jews. I wonder if Lazarus was one who was so unworthy in the sight of the Jews that it was shocking for Jesus' listeners to conceive of this poor man being in heaven while the favored Jew was in hell.
5. Notice how naturally Jesus talked about angels, hell, death, heaven and judgment. There is nothing fantasy about any of this talk. And if Jesus talked about these things literally, you can be sure that they exist. He wasn't catering to the superstitions of the people, as some critics as said. He was speaking of what He knew.
6. The rich man had a subtle arrogance that caused him to give an order to Abraham and to assume that Lazarus existed to help alleviate his pain.
7. The Jews had all the warning they would need to avoid hell in Moses and the prophets. Abraham, their father and the pride of their ancestry, would agree with their sentence to hell—that must have been shocking to Jesus' Jewish audience.
8. It would seem logical that someone coming back from the dead to warn the rich man's brothers would turn them to God and avoid the pains of hell. But Jesus was warning that even His own return from the dead would not convince many Jews of the proof of His divinity and claims to be from God. We see that this was indeed the case after His resurrection.

Can you see any other lessons in this story? Why not list them along with the points above.

Day Four

17:1 Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. 2 It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. 3 So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins,

rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." 5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

v. 1 – Jesus was ever the realist. He knew that sin was inevitable due to the fallen state of man. Yet He did not look the other way or excuse the sinner. While we are often the source of offense and sin, we must humbly recognize our errors and seek to make things right with those whom we offend or cause to stumble. Is there anyone that you need to humble yourself with today?

v. 2 – The drowning with a millstone was a form of the death penalty in ancient times. This is how serious it is when someone causes another to sin; Jesus said it would be better for that person to die than to cause another to stumble. Wow! That's pretty serious. So I must be conscious of my actions and how they impact the behavior of other people. I can't just say, "Get over it!" or "It's none of your business." What I do is others' business, especially if my sin causes others to sin.

v. 3 – This doesn't mean that I am to be God's watchdog, rebuking everyone that I see sinning. But I have a duty to confront sin not just for the sake of the sinner, but also for the sake of the lives the sinner will negatively impact through his or her sin. My motivation for confronting sin must not only be the love for the sinner, but also the others who will be affected by the sin. My motivation for confrontation can't be that I don't like the sin.

I like what Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load (Galatians 6:1-5).

Any zeal to confront should be tempered with the knowledge that we too are sinners, instructed to confront fellow sinners. Our confrontation must be gentle and gracious, being aware of our own frailties and weaknesses.

vs. 4&5 – Jesus said that we should forgive our brother as often as he repents. The disciples were amazed at this and a bit unnerved. Their response was to pray for an increase of faith. Jesus then told a parable to help them understand that forgiveness wasn't a matter of faith but obedience.

Yet there is an element in forgiveness that stems from the attitude of the offender. If the offender repents, then our response must be forgiveness. But what if the offender doesn't repent and ask for forgiveness? What is our response to be then? I want to be careful

here, for I have heard some strange teaching on this over the years. But I want to look at two verses:

“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:23).

Is it possible that when I don't forgive a person that this person isn't forgiven by God? My un-forgiveness can in a sense imprison this person and affect their relationship with God.

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

We see in this verse that Jesus had to actively forgive the people who crucified Him. If we take John 20:23 seriously, that meant that the Father forgave the people because Jesus forgave the people.

This is why it is important to forgive, for we actually have some power to affect and impact another's standing with God when they have wronged us and we don't forgive them. I for one do not want to have that kind of affect on anyone. God has been gracious and good to me, so I don't want to be the source of God not blessing and being good to anyone else. I will allow God to deal with them as He sees fit and not as I see fit, and thus I choose to forgive. Does this make sense?

Day Five

6 He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you. 7 "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? 8 Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? 9 Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

v. 6 – Jesus responded to the disciples' request for faith, by saying that faith wasn't the issue in the case of forgiving a brother. He said a person could have the smallest amount of faith and uproot a tree. So a small amount of faith could do great things, but it could not be a substitute for obedience and a willing heart.

I had a seminary professor state, “We are often waiting for God to do what only we can do.” If you are waiting for God to increase your faith before you obey Him, you will be waiting for a long time. Obedience is about action, not faith. And you don't need a lot of faith to do great things, so a little faith can go a long way toward doing anything that God wants you to do.

vs. 7-10 – Jesus framed the issue in terms of the example of a servant who comes in from the field. The servant isn't congratulated on doing his or her job. The servant is expected to even do more when the assigned job is finished. So it is with forgiveness. Forgiving a brother isn't the "deeper life." It is the "standard operating procedure" for disciples. It is not magnanimous to forgive; it is expected. It is disobedience and not lack of faith whenever you don't forgive your brother who asks for forgiveness.

Day Six

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.

v. 11 – Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, but He was never "off duty." He ministered and probably taught on His way. Remember that Jews did not like Samaritans, so Jesus had the disciples with Him on the border between comfort and discomfort, which is always an uncomfortable place, but one where we can confront our "dark areas" and grow.

Where is your Samaria? What areas of your life are you confronting right now? My Samaria recently has been fear. I am walking a fine line between what I know and new areas in which I must trust the Lord. It is not easy to walk this border, but I know it is a time of growth and an opportunity to learn—about myself and about God.

v. 12 – I wonder how the lepers knew who Jesus was. They recognized Him and, as the Law required, cried out to Him from a distance. There are many people who don't think they are worthy to come close to Jesus. They know they are unclean by their own standards because they smoke, use bad language or have some other problem that makes them "leprous." There were ten lepers, which still wasn't too many for Jesus. We can never put demands on God that He can't handle.

v. 13 – Jesus knew what these men wanted, even though they didn't specifically ask for healing. Jesus knows your heart. You don't have to pray professional or polished prayers. You just have to make your voice heard. You don't even have to end your prayers saying, "In Jesus' name." You simply must come in humility with faith.

v. 14 – Jesus commanded the lepers to do what the Law commanded without even touching them. What did the Law prescribe?

The LORD said to Moses, "These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing, when he is brought to the priest: The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some

cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed. Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the infectious disease and pronounce him clean. Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields (Leviticus 14:1-7).

Jesus asked the lepers to go to the priests, which they were required to do *after* they were healed of leprosy. I would imagine they went in faith before they saw their healing. They had to obey the word of God and ignore their own circumstances. As they did, they were healed. There is a lesson there for you and me. We must learn to walk in the reality of what God said and not the unreality of what we see. We must walk in His promises for us regardless of how hopeless it looks. Put your hope in God and not in your own perspective.

The lepers obeyed Jesus and they were healed! Praise God! Jesus is so powerful that He only needed to speak their healing—He didn't have to lay hands on them. You can put your trust in what Jesus says. His word cannot fail.

Day Seven

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 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

v. 15 – One of the ten didn't follow through on Jesus' instructions, at least not right away. Instead of going to the priest, He came back to Jesus, praising God. In a sense, I guess the healed man was showing himself to the great High Priest. He saw something in Jesus that the others did not see.

Also, the man who returned was a Samaritan. It is interesting that Jesus still required him to do what the Law required; Jesus saw the Samaritans as subject to the Law's requirements even though they weren't fully Jews.

v. 16 – This man worshipped Jesus. If Jesus wasn't God and received men's worship, He would have been a false prophet. No religion can maintain that Jesus was a prophet (as Islam does) and ignore this fact. Of course, we know that Jesus was more than a prophet—He is God and was worthy of this and every man's worship.

v. 17 – While Jesus didn't command the men to return to Him once they were healed, He obviously thought it proper that they would do so. Jesus never coerced or required worship and obedience, but He certainly expected it. But it had to be freewill; it could not be coerced. Some leaders in the body of Christ should be mindful of this.

v. 18 – Again, Jesus was showing the disciples that Jews had not “cornered the market” on God. Here was a foreigner who recognized God and Jesus and worshipped with a thankful heart. But it took the disciples many more years before they could open their hearts to the Samaritans and even longer to open to the Gentiles. But Jesus did not force His followers to go to the world before they were ready, for their prejudices would have undermined their work and ministry. So He steadily worked to expand their understanding, changing their hearts to do His will.

v. 19 – Jesus stated that the man’s faith had been the key to his healing, but that he was correct in recognizing that God had done the work of healing. The man did what only He could do—go show himself to the priests—and trusted God to do what only He could do—the actual healing. It was a partnership and it worked. But the man realized God’s role. Perhaps the others felt that they had done the work or deserved the credit for having faith and obeying Jesus. It’s never about us, however, even when we have a role to play in the work of God. It’s always about Him.