

## 1. The parable of the Rich Fool Luke 12:13-21

### Man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions

#### Surprise!

Being familiar with the Gospel, this parable may not seem a surprise – but the Fool's actions are similar to Joseph's in Genesis 41. Jesus teaching often countered expectations. Other examples of Jesus' ministry of surprise?

#### What's the difference between wisdom and foolishness?

Same word also used of the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:25) and of the Pharisees 11:40)

Basic principle in Luke 6:48 (sand) – building logic on wrong foundation

Lack of wisdom (aphron) – are all character flaws lacks in what God intended us to be?

Contrast with surprising wisdom (phronimos) in other parables (eg. 16:8)

Storing vs. scattering 1:51-53 = contrast Scattering Generously and storing selfishly

Not seeing things God's way – Romans 12:16 – I Corinthians 1:20-25

#### What was Jesus view on wealth?

Rich is a negative term, see 6:24 (woe to...), 8:14 (strangled plants...), 16:19 (damned man...)

For two reasons

1. It may stifle Generosity (Luke 21:1-4) &
2. It can make people resistant to change (Luke 18:23-25)

Luke 12:34 Where your treasure is...

Treasure for oneself – not rich toward God – examples of rich towards God

Luke 9:23-25 and Luke 6:20 ask to what extent does wealth make us resistant to transformation?

Not wealth that is the problem – but selfishness. Rich and wealthy not the same thing. Eg. 33

Invitation to “eat, drink and be merry” (12:19) is directed solely to himself and is therefore an illustration of his selfishness.

#### What conclusions does Luke offer us (12: 22-34)

Meaning – expansion of relevant and connected points

1. “Why worry about” – but does this justice impulsiveness or imprudence?
2. “More value than the birds” – how much more than ‘Qal Wahomer’ – Jesus was a Rabbi!
3. “Add a cubit” – is life marked out?
4. Seek his kingdom – Economics & modern society

## 2. The parable of the two debtors Luke 7:41-42 (36-50)

**Whoever is forgiven the most loves the most**

### Parables

Metaphor drawn from nature or common life... longest is Luke 15:11-32... shortest is Luke 4:23. This is one of shortest. It is simple, but Mark 4:9-13 and Matthew 13:10-17 suggest Jesus didn't expect everyone to understand... Metaphors always reconcile illogical states of affairs. Who might have struggles with the meaning of this parable?

### Context

Sinful woman anointing Jesus is an event repeated in each Gospel. In Matthew and Mark the woman is unnamed, in Luke the woman is a sinful woman, in John the woman is Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus. This dinner is at Simon the Leper's house according to Matthew and Mark, John is ambiguous about whose house and in Luke it is Simon the Pharisee.

Jesus tells a similar parable in Matthew 18:21-35 and the two give a shared message.

### Forgiveness of Debt

How good is the idea of forgiveness of debt as a metaphor for how God treats us?

The presence of God seems to make people aware of their sin: Luke 5:8, I Tim 1:15, Isaiah 6:5

Does Forgiveness always lead to gratitude? Does gratitude always leads to love?

Why was Jesus such a friend of sinners?

### Sinfulness vs. Self Esteem?

Mary	Vs.	Simon
Benefits of knowing you are a sinner?	Vs.	Benefits of behaving righteously?
Disadvantages of knowing you are a sinner?	Vs.	Disadvantages of behaving righteously?

John 16:8 "The Spirit will convict the world of its guilt"

Is it a sign of Christian faith to be aware of one's own weakness/sin?

Is our culture right to encourage a move away from language about sin?

### Grace was a challenge for the early Church

Other parables with competitive individuals who don't like the grace another has received...

What's the point of being good? Romans 6:1

Why does Jesus so often criticise hypocrisy? Mark 7:6, Matthew 6:1, 6:16, Luke 20:46

**"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." Luke 11:4**

What ethics and actions does God's forgiveness of us demand in response?

### 3. The parable of the Ten Pounds Luke 19:12-27

#### **Making the Most of what God gives us**

This parable is the slightly less well known version of the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. The context of this parable is Jesus journey into Jerusalem and Luke includes it between the story of Zaccheus and his entry on a donkey (palm Sunday). What were the differences and why is that one better known? Does the context explain the different emphasis?

#### **The kingdom of God**

We see the phrase “Kingdom of God” heavily used in the New Testament. According to some experts, the phrase or mention of “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of Heaven” appears some 86 times in the four Gospels. What do we imagine the Kingdom of God is? Is it here? What part does the Church play? What’s the difference between the Kingdom of God and heaven?

**“In the Kingdom of God, at last, God reigns, and everyone, everything, every event, every item, every matter, every thought is finally subject to that sovereignty.”**

#### **God’s servants**

One image for followers of Jesus is servants – is this a happy/ comfortable image for us?

Do you feel you’ve used your talents and gifts – what skills do you feel most accountable for – and are there any things you haven’t yet completed on your conscience?

Is Jesus’ challenge relevant for our wasteful society – how could we be better servants in this age?

#### **Fear and Familiarity**

“I was afraid of you”, check Genesis 3:10... Is it a problem that people today aren’t afraid of authority?

Jesus can rescue us from fear – Job 16:18-21. In him there is no condemnation - Romans 8:1 & 37-39. 1 John 4:18 suggests the same.

Fearing to sin against Him, because we want nothing else in this world than to be pleasing to Him may be different from being scared of God.

#### **Unfinished Business...**

Context of the parable may include reference to the expectation that Jesus will one day come again “to judge the living and the dead”... Important to the early church because they felt the Kingdom of God that Jesus promised hadn’t been fully realised... Other examples include Luke 12:40

How real does this feel?

Bible references: Revelation 1:7, Acts 1:10-11, Matthew 24:27, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17,

#### 4. The parable of the Prodigal Son Luke 15:11-32

##### One of the best known of Jesus' parables

What are the stand out features in popular culture? What does everyone know about the story?

Is it the right title for the story though- Should it be the story of the prodigal father? Who showed more reckless abandon?

##### God the Father

Despite the breath-taking and insulting audacity of the younger son's request, the father grants it! This reflects the amazing indulgence that God shows toward us. Even when we are acting as selfishly as the prodigal son, God indulges us. Why?

"But while he was still a long way off..." Reminiscent of Romans 5:8 and our communion liturgy, "Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory."

What is the difference between knowing there is a God and knowing God as father?

Do we need to have felt far off to know the joy of the Father running to us?

Arguments at the start of the Methodist Church (between 'Calvinists' and 'Arminianists') about who makes the first move – God or man. Why was this a subject of such importance then?

##### **"For this son of mine was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found."**

The parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin and the parable of the lost son are a trio of stories. All three parables are on the subject of recovering the lost, which is the implicit explanation of why Jesus receives sinners and eats with them: They are lost, and he wants to recover them.

Is this the heart of Jesus mission?

What about the Church's mission?

Have we made *salvation* something utterly spiritual when it was something more practical to Jesus?

Who are the lost today?

##### **"The older brother became angry"**

In Jewish society, there were laws regarding how inheritances were typically divided. The oldest brother got a double share (Deut. 21:17). The inheritance of the firstborn is a strange but consistent subject of criticism in the Bible (Cain and Abel, Isaac & Ishmael, Jacob & Esau, Joseph and brothers), but this is not the main theme of the brothers involvement. His jealousy is like that of religious folk when they see God's grace operating beyond their boundaries and expectations. Evidence that Jesus is thinking of the Pharisees here: Luke 15:2 is the immediate context of the parable. See also Luke 5:30, Luke 7:39.

Where do we see this same kind of indignation and resentment today?

What barriers to we put to up to include and exclude people from Grace?

Grace to one human always comes at cost of grace to another – a theme Jesus often explores, eg. Matthew 20:1-16. Does God have enough grace for all of us?

## 5. The parable of the Shrewd Manager 16:1-13

### Goodies and Baddies

The master's praise appears incongruous and without justification, for the steward has been doubly dishonest. If the steward was so dishonest, why was he praised? What other examples of rogues who have done praiseworthy things? What seems most likely at first glance:

1. Praise is offered for some reason that is now obscured because of mistranslation
2. Jesus' praises the steward ironically, to criticise those who seek to buy friendship
3. The rich man praises the steward because of some social or financial benefit to himself
4. Jesus praises the steward even though he is a cheat, because he has been generous
5. The steward is an example of shrewdness and this is why he is praised.

Whose the best film hero ever? Surprisingly the Bible doesn't have many goodies and baddies – even the most famous heroes have terrible flaws. What were the character failings of Noah, Moses, David, Solomon, Peter?

### Shrewdness

What does it really mean to be wise?

What does Jesus mean when he tells his disciples to be wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove (Matthew 10:16)

Where does business acumen fit into the Church?

### My Master vs The Master (No servant can serve two masters)

The story may fit into the 'servant out-witting his master' genre... Other examples?

The Master (16:8 *Ho Kyrios*) in Luke always refers to Jesus or to God, why does Luke use the same term for Jesus and for God?

This story implies that there is one Master whose verdict matters most, and he is the same at every level – inside the parable, in the world of Jesus' disciples and in our world. What does it mean for him to be Master?

### The Boundaries of Reality

In parables, the "reality part" invades the "picture part." In parables a reader is presented with "imaginary gardens with real toads in them."

We only see a small portion of the colour spectrum, some creatures are finely tuned for some senses. Is our version of reality unnecessarily narrow?

How about the brain – it takes in 10,000 times the information that passes into our consciousness.

Jesus' explodes the frame – bursting into the parable, and bursting into our world. Is it fair to say that Jesus refuses to remain a character in a story? Does his Lordship/ mastery alter the shape of our reality like it muddles the conclusion to the parable?

## 6. The parable of the Great Banquet 14:15-24

### The Heavenly Feast

Third of three stories about the wonders of the Kingdom of Heaven. The first suggests that the humble will be exalted (Luke 1:52)... the second, that inviting those who honour you isn't particularly praiseworthy (Luke 6:32-36), and the third is this simple story with complex meaning.

Islamic image of Jannah, Chinese image of Peach Banquets, The Jewish Mishnah suggests "This world is like a lobby before the World to Come; prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall." Buddhist allegory of the long spoons. Why so many feasts?

What jumps out from the story first?

### Excuses

We've all made poor excuses... Best examples? What about examples of times we've made excuses to God? Are we ever like Jonah?

What about the worst excuses or rejections we've received?

In this instance, the socially elite of the host's community close ranks against him and shame him publicly. Whatever one makes of their excuses, their refusal to join the great dinner is a social strategy the effect of which is the host's defamation. We feel badly when we are rejected, but what about the Father – how does he feel when rejected? Think of his grief and broken heart. How does he balance anger and mercy?

God does not force people to come to Him; He merely invites. He says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Revelation:22:17) Could God be more demanding?

### A different angle – the view of the crippled, the blind and the lame

Inside the town would be the poor and the beggars, but outside the town would be the vagabonds and sojourners, those who were shunned and unwelcome in the towns. If we imagine we are a poor beggar on a cold night, outside the gates of a lavish mansion. With warm light in the windows and delicious smells occasionally in the wind, the party inside is a world apart. Now, imagine our disbelief and shock when a servant of the host comes to us and says, "Stand up, come inside." Staring, jaw dropped, we stammer "Me?" "Yes, he wants you." We are brought inside, tenderly cared for, cleaned, and fitted with new clothes. Led to the front table, you are seated next to the master and presented with the best offerings of the feast. A little later, the master announces to the guests that he is adopting us into his very own family.

When seen from this perspective, the story becomes a beautiful metaphor of our relationship with God. What happens when we see ourselves as are the poor and needy?

### Invitations

To what extent should we see ourselves as the servants, charged with offering an invitation wherever we are?

What's the difference between inviting people to Church and inviting people to the Banquet?

If deliberately rejecting the invitation invites greater judgment, to what extent are we at risk through our slow response to Grace?

## 7. The parable of the Mustard Seed Luke 13:18-19

### The mustard seed!

Jesus lived in an agrarian society in which the majority of people would have had experiences living on farms or working with food crops and/or livestock. His audiences would have included shepherds, grape growers, wheat farmers, labourers in fruit orchards, and families raising livestock as just a few examples. As the son of a carpenter Jesus would have had exposure to the agrarian lifestyle even if he never worked on a farm himself. His family might very well have raised chickens and tended a vegetable plot, which would have taught him about the manner of a hen mothering her flock, or the surprise of weeds growing up among the crop that had been sown, or how some seeds grow.

This parable suggests God is interested in the small things, is involved in them and cares about them. See also Ecclesiastes 10:1 (ointment), Matthew 10:39 (sparrows), Matthew 25:40 (the least of these).

### 'Do not despise the Day of the small things' Zechariah 4:10

Jesus suggests that a tiny seed can become a mighty force – also in the parable of the yeast, (Luke 13:20-21).

King born in a manger amid the stench and filth of animals.... Bunch of Galilean fishermen running round the countryside... Insignificant data entry in the long spreadsheet of Roman crucifixions. Just another crucified rebel. The stone the builder rejected... see Psalm 118:22, Matthew 21:42, Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:7.

Chaos Theory and the Butterfly effect suggest small things can make a disproportionate difference, as does the focus of cycling teams on 'marginal gains'.

What are the small things in our own lives that matter disproportionately?

Have we any examples of seemingly small moments that were actually 'kingdom moments' – turning points in our lives or the lives of others?

Who are the 'small people' that our society fails to care for?

### The Seed grew

What does growing look like in a Christian? 2 Peter 1:5-7.

How do we 'grow'? Do we have appetite to 'grow'? Do we need to 'grow'?

What are the conditions needed for the mustard seed to grow – and do we need similar conditions? (The parable of the sower is a good clue – see Luke 8:4-15)

Do we sometimes get too fixated on numbers though? What matters more, being successful or faithful?

### The Birds of the air

Do our lives give a home to all the different birds of the air? How could we improve?

Does our church give home to all the birds of the air? How could we improve?

What does, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done" Really mean?

Was the Dalai Lama right, "Anyone who thinks they are too small to make a difference has never spent a night with a mosquito."