

November 7
Luke 13-18
Matthew 20

Hello everybody my name is Lisa Ashton and it is good to be back with you for our Project 4:4 adventure. Today is November 7 and our readings covered some fabulous passages from Luke 13-18 with an excerpt from Matthew 20 to top it off.

Instead of giving an overview on all the great stories from what we read today I decided to pick a few passages that aren't as commonly taught and give you some insights on those. Sound good?

And the winners are: drum rolls.....The Parable of the dishonest manager, the Rich Man and Lazarus and the Coming of the Kingdom from Luke 17.

Let's get started.

The Parable of the Dishonest Manager

This could be a confusing one because it almost sounded like Jesus was praising or condoning dishonesty in business practice. After all, the steward was cheating his master after having already distinguished himself as a criminal worthy of being fired. I wanted to know why the passage said, "The master commended the dishonest manager for acting shrewdly." Why would Jesus commend him?

Looking at the passage we see that the unrighteous manager was already punished for being dishonest...he got fired! So, in no way is the master commending him for unrighteousness. Instead, what he was being commended for was his "street smarts" if you will after he knew he was fired. In the face of impending doom - being out in the streets, he took action that would be appropriate to secure him a place in the future. He thought that by cancelling the debts of others, he would make friends that would hopefully show him kindness when he became homeless. He was acting with an eye on the future.

From this parable we see that Christ makes these applications. Notice that I said Christ made these applications. This is an important principle when it comes to interpreting parables. It's important to look for place where Christ makes his own application instead of trying to come up with ones on our own.

- (1) Verse 8 – "the sons of the world are wiser in their generation than the sons of light." If we (as the sons of the light), were as ambitious to attain goodness, as they (sons of the world) are to acquire wealth, we would be much better people.
- (2) Verse 9 – "make friends for yourselves by unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into eternal dwellings." Material possessions should be used to cement relationships that promote eternal interests – our money, our resources will someday fail but if we choose to use them for building into relationships then they will have eternal value.
- (3) Lastly, whoever is trustworthy in little things will be trustworthy in large things as well, and conversely, if, as the main character in the story, you are dishonest in the small things, then being dishonest in the large things will be an expectation.

Rich Man and Lazarus

Like the last parable this is unique to Luke alone. In fact, there is a ready and clear connection between this story and the one we just studied? Do you have an idea of what it may be? They both underscore the very basic reality that the life we are living right now is transitory. It is passing - and we need to be living now in light of the life we will live for all of eternity!

One thing about this story that has caused commentators to raise their eyebrow from earliest times, and that is that the main character in this story is not a certain man, or a poor Jew, or a Good Samaritan. He is Lazarus -he has a name. No other character in any other parable or story is ever named. For that reason, many have concluded that this is not a parable at all, but a true story of two real men. I frankly don't know, but the main lesson is clear. Life here is but a prelude to eternal life. Some have suggested that Lazarus was named because he was the character who, in the end, had an eternal blessing. The rich man, though he had everything on earth, was poor in eternal things, so he was a no-name. On a side note, this is not the Lazarus known for being raised from the dead in John 11. Lazarus was a common name back then.

Ok so what is up with the part about Abraham? If you remember, Abraham was regarded highly by the Jews and Pharisees, because he was the man that God said he would use to bless all nations! His presence by Lazarus conveyed honor and blessing. Abraham's words about the "great chasm being fixed" implied that the rich man's eternal destiny was permanent. There was no way around it. Then when the rich man begged Abraham to tell his brothers, Abraham's answer is rather insightful. He basically said (and I am paraphrasing this). "Rich man, your brothers have the words of God through Moses and the prophets. Because they haven't chosen to believe through their words, there is no way that a miracle, like me appearing to them will change their hearts." You see the rich man wanted God to reveal himself to his brothers on his terms. In life, the rich man was very used to always getting what he wanted how he wanted it. However, in this case Jesus is showing us that we must come to belief in God on his terms. After thinking about that, I thought, that is very close to today! Many people think that if a sign or miracle is done for them then they will believe, but we all know that miracles don't always lead to belief. Take Christ's resurrection. He rose from the dead and people still chose to doubt him and did not want to follow him. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is a sobering reminder of our need to live our lives with an eternal perspective NOW and not to get caught up in the things of this world.

Ok, now for the 3rd topic of the day – Jesus' words, "The kingdom of God is within you."

When confronted with a question regarding the Kingdom of God, about which He talked so often, He told them that the Kingdom of God is "*within you.*" Now the actual construction of this passage in the Greek New Testament allows for a different translation -- one which, by the way, appears in the NASV. It says that Jesus told them "*The kingdom of God is in your midst.*" That seems to me to be the much better reading. For why would Jesus tell the Pharisees, many of whom (or most) were not yet believers, that the kingdom was within them? You will also notice that in your NIV footnotes it says *among* for the word *within* that was used in your reading. So the Pharisees wanted to know when the Messiah will bring Christ's kingdom and He answers, "It's already here in your midst!" Why? Because Jesus is the bringer of the kingdom. His presence WAS the kingdom and wants to make that crystal clear!

Unlike what most people thought - that the kingdom and the arrival of the messiah would be identified by signs, wonders, "by observation" Jesus came quietly and without pomp and circumstance. This baffled the Jews...in fact it even angered them. Because again, just like the rich man, the Pharisees wanted Jesus to reveal himself to them on their terms. They wanted him to prove his authority and his power on their terms. And Jesus wasn't going to do that. His presence had ushered in the Kingdom and they didn't know what to do with "this kingdom" that was in their midst.

Further on down the reading, the passage also made mention that the kingdom is still something yet to come! This 'now but not yet' motif, which we have already noted in another context, can be found all through the New Testament. The Kingdom of God came with Jesus, but there is more of it to come at the Second Coming. Our salvation is already a present possession, but the full reality of it is still out there - 'now but not yet!'

Well that's a wrap for today folks. This is Lisa Ashton and I will see you tomorrow for one of my all time favorite stories - Lazarus being raised from the dead!