

Luke 15:11-16:31 Chapter Study

VIII. The Judean Ministry 9:51-24:53

J. The Teaching of Jesus 12:1-19:27

We begin tonight, at v. 11 of ch. 15, and the middle of a set of 3 stories Jesus told about things that were once lost but were then found.

18. Lessons on repentance 15:1-32

- a. vs. 1-7 • the lost sheep
- b. vs. 8-10 • the lost coin
- c. vs. 11-32 • the lost son

The setting for these parables was the anger of the Pharisees & scribes at Jesus' *welcome* of social outcasts & spiritual riff-raff. Jesus sought to correct them by showing how eager heaven is for the repentance of sinners.

And that when sinners do repent, all of heaven rejoices.

As we saw on Sunday, when the shepherd finds the lost sheep, he not only rejoices himself, but he calls all his friends to rejoice with him.

When the woman finds the lost coin that was a part of her ceremonial head-band, she throws a party for her family & neighbors to join in her joy.

Then Jesus tells the story of the lost son in vs. 11-32.

While I referred to this story Sunday, we didn't get to read the verses – so let's begin there tonight.

11 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood.

As the younger son, this young man would have received one-third of the inheritance.

The firstborn would get a double portion, so the father's property and wealth would be divided into 3 portions with the elders on getting 2/3's while the younger son would get 1/3.

Normally the estate would be apportioned to the sons at the death of the father.

But this young man tells his dad he can't wait for him to croak; he

wants his portion of the family estate NOW!
This would be a terrible insult to the father, but he gives the son what he demands.

13 And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

This story is most often referred to as the *Parable of the Prodigal son*.

A “prodigal” is one who is *recklessly wasteful*.

While that’s a good description of this foolish young man, that is *not* the main point of this story as we will see.

14 But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed → swine.

Jesus is telling this story to who? JEWS!

At the mention of pigs, they would recoil in horror because pigs were unclean animals that were an abomination.

No pig bones are found among the ruins of Israelite settlements in Israel.

Jesus does a great job here of showing just how far down this young man fell.

He began as a playboy, partying it up & buying drinks at all the fashionable nightspots, but he ended up in the gutter, slopping the hogs among foreigners & strangers.

16 And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

Where were all his good-time pals, his fair-weather friends?

As soon as his money ran out, so did their friendship.

And now he’s so poor & pitiful, hunger drives him to think the pig slop looks good.

I had a friend years ago who decided to hit the road as a hitch-hiker, & travel where ever he could get a ride.

He ran out of money & ended up eating dog biscuits & digging in trashcans for food. That’s where this guy was.

17 “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to

spare, and I perish with hunger!

Finally, this foolish young man came to his senses – remembering the life he'd had in his father's house.

Knowing what kind of person his father was, he believed that while he'd forfeited his position as a son, his father would take him on as a servant. So he said,

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." ' 20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, He's got his lines all rehearsed . . .

'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

The son openly admits his sin.

We know this is *sincere repentance* because he identifies what he did, not just as an offense against his father, but as a moral failure in the sight of God.

He admits he's forfeited his right to claim sonship – but before he can ask to be accepted as a servant, his father interrupts and showers him with forgiveness & reconciliation.

22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; 24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

A robe, a ring, & a celebration are not things the father would bestow on a mere servant.

He wanted the younger son to understand that he was being welcomed back *as a son*.

Now – all of this was merely the set up, the preface to the *real story* Jesus intended to tell.

The lost son represented the tax-collectors & their loser friends who were coming to Jesus.

The elder son represented the Pharisees & scribes who were so upset with Jesus who was welcoming them.

25 “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’ 28 “But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.

And that is exactly what Jesus was doing right now with the Pharisees through these 3 stories of lost things that had been found.

He was urging them to lighten up & instead of looking down their long, self-righteous noses at the sinners who were repenting, to rejoice with heaven.

29 So he answered and said to *his* father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. 30 But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’ 31 “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. 32 It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’ ”

The elder son was sour when he ought to have been happy.

And it all stemmed from the fact that he didn’t care about his brother.

If he’d cared, he would have been as happy as the father at his younger brother’s return.

This is what the father tried to make him realize.

And it’s what Jesus was trying to make the Pharisees & scribes realize too; that the tax-collectors & sinners they so despised were people God loved.

If the Pharisees were **TRULY** the sons of God, as they thought, they would have rejoiced at the restoration of their **brothers**, the tax-collectors who were coming to Jesus.

Of course, the Pharisees *realized* the point of this story & proved themselves to be hypocrites.

Instead of repenting of their self-righteousness, they were **OUTRAGED** at Jesus' implying the tax-collectors were their brothers!!!

Since Jesus is on a roll of offending the Pharisees, He decides to turn up the heat even more by touching on an aspect of their lives that was near & dear: Money.

You see, the Pharisees were quite wealthy.

They were an elite club of about 6000 which held very narrow rules about how to obey God.

And part of their philosophy was that God rewarded obedience with material prosperity.

They were the original proponents of the health & wealth, prosperity message.

They'd reduced spirituality to a formula, a mechanism for obtaining wealth.

Obedience = Material Gain

Therefore, if someone was experiencing financial setbacks or physical distress, they equated that with the judgment of God on some hidden sin.

In the mind of the Pharisee, material wealth & religion were intimately linked.

Jesus faces this error head on, & by doing so, provokes the Pharisees to an even greater hatred & resistance of Him.

19. Parable of the deficient steward 16:1-13

¹ He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. ² So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' ³ "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' ⁵ "So he called every one of his master's debtors to *him*, and

said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷ Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' ⁸ So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. ⁹ "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. ¹⁰ He who *is* faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much. ¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

I have to tell you that this parable has always troubled me.

It's troubling because at a casual reading it seems Jesus is commending dishonesty.

But it's doubling troubling when He says in v. 9 –

"And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home."

I've discovered over the years I've studied the scriptures, that when challenged by a passage like this, one that's hard to understand, taking the time to dig deeper and ask the Spirit to unfold it, produces some real gems.

Difficulty in understanding a passage is like a sign the Spirit has placed over it saying something really rich is there – but it's only discovered by *mining* it.

So, I'm saving this passage for the message this Sunday.

20. The Pharisees Reaction Luke 16:14-18

14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.

Though Jesus had spoken vs. 1-13 to his disciples, as it says in v. 1, He'd purposefully said it loud enough to be heard by the Pharisees.

He wanted to challenge them on their attitude toward money & spirituality.

They took the bait, & reacted by "deriding Him."

The word "deride" is literally, to turn up the nose.

It describes the universal expression of scorn people give when they want to show their highest expression of rejection of something or someone.

The Pharisees utterly rejected what Jesus said in vs. 1-13 about money because it stood in complete contradiction to their desires.

They *loved* money, & that love had framed the way they interpreted the scriptures.

They'd bent their whole practice of religion at one thing – getting & keeping more money.

They would not tolerate anyone challenging their pet doctrines.

15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

The Pharisees might be able to fool other people, but their hearts lay bare before the eyes of God; He knew full well the greedy motive of their carnal hearts.

They might appear to be spiritually "all that" to other men & women, but God saw the truth – & knew they were *idol-worshippers*; men who worshipped a deity of worldly wealth.

16 "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. 17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

It's a tad difficult to understand how this *fits* in this context because we don't see the connection of Jesus' teaching in this section to the Kingdom of God.

If we did, then we'd understand just how seamlessly it all flows. The Pharisees believed they were first in line to enter the Kingdom of God, & that their wealth proved it.

People like tax-collectors and their sinner friends were on the outs & would never be allowed in the Kingdom.

But Jesus has just taught on the importance of repentance, & that the presence of wealth is no sure sign of godliness.

The Pharisees have it *exactly backwards* – those closest to the Kingdom are those who do *not* count their wealth in monetary terms *but* in spiritual terms and know that repentance is the pathway to spiritual riches.

While the Law & Prophets had been the main instrument God had used up until the arrival of John the Baptist, *he* had inaugurated a new era in which the law & prophets would find their *fulfillment* in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ.

Access to God & the Kingdom was no longer based on faith in the Law, but on Faith in Christ.

While the Pharisees & scribes continued to look to the Law, the common people were looking to Jesus.

While Jesus *fulfilled* the Law, not one of its precepts or requirements was diminished.

And He highlighted the hypocrisy of the Pharisees by identifying how they had conveniently reinterpreted the Word of God to condone their sin.

18 “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from *her* husband commits adultery.

I deal with this subject at length in my book on marriage, & for a fuller treatment of divorce & remarriage, let me suggest you check that out.

Let me sum it up – Jesus is giving His comment here on a debate that was running hot & heavy among the Jewish rabbis.

It was based on Deut. 24 where Moses gave guidelines for divorce.

Moses said a man could divorce his wife only if he discovered “uncleanness” in her.

There were 2 schools of interpretation on what constituted “uncleanness.”

The strict interpretation said it meant sexual uncleanness and referred to infidelity.

The looser interpretation said it meant anything that would cause a wife to lose favor in her husband's sight.

In Matthew's gospel, we find that Jesus puts His stamp of approval on the strict interpretation; that the only time God grants a divorce is in the case of adultery.

But the Pharisees, because they were carnal & sensual in their desires, had adopted the *loose* interpretation, and were divorcing their wives left & right.

That interpretation of the law regarding marriage could not possibly be right because it flies in the face of the initial pronouncement of God about the sanctity of marriage and how two **BECOME** one!

Luke records Jesus' bold challenge of the Pharisees by confronting them with the *casual way* they were violating one of the most important commands of God.

If they were so casual regarding the covenant of marriage, what did that say about their view of their covenant with God?

The Pharisees knew well what the prophet Malachi had said to the men of Israel 400 years before about how wrong it was to dump their wives for younger, more appealing women.

While the Pharisees joined Malachi in his rebuke of such a casual attitude toward divorce, they were doing the very same thing the men of Malachi's day were doing!

21. The rich man & Lazarus 16:19-31

Now Jesus tells a story that set the Pharisees on their ear.

19 "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.

"Aha" the Pharisees would say, "This is one of US!"

- He's rich,
- Wears Armani, Yves Saint Laurent, & Dolce & Gabbana.
- Emeril makes his entrees,
- The Iron Chef makes his side dishes,
- And Wolfgang Puck makes his desserts.

Because the Pharisees equated such opulence with the reward of God for being obedient, they would jump to the conclusion this guy

was righteous.

One has to wonder how the Pharisees could make such a obvious mistake in their theology.

All they had to do was ask the question – “Who are the richest of the rich?”

The answer, of course, were the fat-cat officials who lived in Rome & men like Herod, who were anything *but* righteous.

In contrast to the rich man, was a guy trapped in the lowest levels of poverty -

20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, 21 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

This is a picture of abject, total, crushing poverty!

Nothing could have been more pitiful than the image of this poor guy.

His diet is so poor, he has open sores the dogs come and lick.

Dogs were not cute little pets people kept; they were vermin, vicious scavengers who wandered the streets in snarling packs.

People threw rocks at them to chase them away.

This guy is so weak, he doesn’t have the strength to chase them away.

The Pharisees would immediately conclude this guy had committed some heinous sin & that’s why his situation was so desperate.

As far as they were concerned, both the rich man & the beggar were getting what they *deserved*.

22 So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

Now, this was all backwards & sure to raise the ire of Jesus’ critics.

The story ought to have gone, “The beggar died & found himself in torment in Hades, & lifting his eyes, he saw the rich man resting in the comfort of Abraham’s bosom.”

The irony in the way Jesus tells it would have *infuriated* the Pharisees.

24 “Then he [the rich man] cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ 25 But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’

The rich man asked for Abraham to send Lazarus to ease his torment by bringing him water.

Abraham made it clear that that was not possible.

The choice one makes *in this life* regarding eternity, forever & finally fixes our fate.

There are no second chances beyond the grave.

27 “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, . . .

Jesus clears up a couple errors the religious experts were making.

The rich man called Abraham, “Father,” meaning he was a Jew. But notice where the rich man was → in torment in Hades.

The rabbis taught no Jew would go to hell. That’s where *this* Jew is.

His wealth was seen as a sign of his righteousness by the Pharisees.

Yet when he enters eternity, he finds himself with the *unrighteous*.

27 “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him [Lazarus] to my father’s house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’

Once Abraham made it clear to the rich man that the time for choosing was past & that his eternal destiny was sealed by the choices he made in this life, he begged that Lazarus go back & warn his family of this truth.

29 Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’

In other words, they’d *already been warned*. The Scriptures gave

ample testimony to the fact of the afterlife & the importance of faith in God.

30 And he [the rich man] said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

The rich man thought that all they need to believe & so avoid eternal torment was something **MORE DRAMATIC** than the Scriptures. If they just had a *miracle*, like someone rising from the dead, **then** they would be convinced.

31 But he [Abraham] said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "

The proof of what Jesus says here is that one *did* rise from the dead, & instead of turning the unbelievers *renewed* their hatred of God & determination to resist the work of the Spirit.

Jesus raised His friend Lazarus, who'd been in the grave for 4 days, from the dead!

When the Pharisees & other religious leaders saw Lazarus sitting with Jesus at table, eating a meal, instead of throwing themselves down at Jesus' feet to repent, they huddled to hatch a plot to *kill* Lazarus!!!!

Their reaction to Lazarus' rising was nothing less than an incredible fulfillment of what Jesus was saying here – that even if someone were to rise from the dead, it would not persuade those who have made a decision to reject God by ignoring His Word.

While signs & wonders are wonderful, marvelous things that bring us great joy at the power of God in conquering strongholds of the enemy, we must never think that signs & wonders will lead people to faith in Christ.

Miracles are only meant to *affirm* the truth & authority of the Word of God.

Evangelism that *depends* mainly on signs & wonders doesn't produce solid disciples; it produces thrill-seekers who never mature because their faith needs a continual shot in the arm of the exciting & dramatic.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not down-playing or denigrating the power of God!

On the contrary – Jesus said signs & wonders would *follow us* as

we faithfully proclaim the Word to the world.
But that's the whole point – signs and wonders are to *follow us* as we go out – we are not to go out *following signs and wonders*. As Paul makes clear in 2 Thess 2, following signs & wonders is the path of the Antichrist.

The Afterlife

The story Jesus tells here is an important one because it gives us some insight into the afterlife.

Notice that no where is this story referred to as a parable.

There's a very good chance what Jesus relates here is a *narrative* of something that really happened.

One of the things that confuses many Christians is the afterlife.

What precisely happens when we die?

Where did OT saints go?

What's the difference, if any, between hell & Hades?

Let's use this story as the backdrop to see if we can't clarify some of these things.

Jesus said that Lazarus died & was carried by the angels to a place called "Abraham's Bosom" where he was in comfort.

The rich man died & awoke in torment in a place called "Hades."

Hades is a Greek term that referred to the abode of the dead.

Acts 2:27 & 31 indicate that prior to the Resurrection of Christ, Hades is where ALL the dead went.

In this passage, Peter is quoting Psalm 16:10 which uses the Hebrew word "sheol" for Hades.

Prior to Jesus' mission, no one could go to Heaven because sin had not yet been atoned for.

So the souls of all we gathered into Hades, which had 2 compartments, as we see here in Luke 16.

One side was a place of comfort that those who looked to God in faith went to. It was referred to as "Abraham's Bosom" because that's where Abraham, as the Father of the Faithful was.

The other side of Hades, separated from Abraham's Bosom by an impassable barrier, was what we also call "Hades."

This was where the ungodly went. It was a place of torment, but it is not what we usually think of when he use the word

“Hell.”

Hell is a specific place the Book of Revelation calls, “The Lake of Fire.”

The last chapters of the Bible tell us that those who are in Hades will be poured *into* the Lake of Fire at the very end of history, after the final judgment of the Great White Throne.

In the OT, Hell, the Lake of Fire, is referred to as “Gehenna.”

So, here’s the way the afterlife works . . .

Up until the Cross & Resurrection of Jesus, when people died, they went to 1 of 2 places -

If they died in faith in God’s provision of salvation, they went to Abraham’s bosom.

If they died outside of such faith, they went to Hades.

When Jesus died, as Eph. 4:7-10 says, He went & preached to those in Abraham’s Bosom, declaring to them the fulfillment of their hope & faith.

He then led them out of that side of Hades and into the glory of heaven, effectively doubling the capacity of Hades.

In Phil. 1:19-23, Paul says that to be absent from the body is to be present with Christ, because now when believers die, we go to heaven.

What goes to heaven is not the body, but the Soul & Spirit, which await the Resurrection that will occur at the Rapture.

As Paul makes clear in 1 Cor. 15 & 1 Thess 4 – at the Rapture, those who’ve died will come back with Christ to receive their resurrection bodies, at the same time that living believers will be instantly transformed from mortal to immortal.

So, at present, when believers die, their spirit goes to heaven.

When unbelievers die, their spirit goes to Hades, where they will await their own resurrection at the end of time.

Then, at the Great White Throne, all the lost dead will be raised, judged, and sent for eternity to the Lake of Fire.

Someone might ask what Jesus meant then when on the cross he said to the thief who came to faith in Him, “Today you shall be with me in Paradise.”

What did Jesus mean by “paradise?”

Paradise is a *moveable* term, referring to *where ever* people can be *closest* to God.

The Garden of Eden was the original paradise because that's where Adam & Eve walked with God.

But sin banished them from Paradise, and it was relocated to Abraham's bosom, which until the work of Christ was the closest place human beings could be to God. That's why it's a place of comfort.

Once Jesus ascended into heaven, the location of Paradise became heaven itself.

And there it remains, although its boundaries will extend during the Millennium to include Earth because Jesus will come again & reign visibly on Earth as its Supreme Monarch.

The OT prophets tell us Jesus will restore Earth to a Paradise – & it's fitting He do so because He will rule on Earth.