

THE GUEST LIST

Luke 14:12-15

Intro: There are three parables here that the Lord gave while attending a dinner given by “one of the chief Pharisees,” a dinner to which He had been invited. As the Lord watched what was going on, He notice, first of all, that some of the guests were very ambitious to have the seats of honor at the dinner. There was a great deal of pride evident in the behavior of the guests. And so the Lord took the opportunity to speak to them about *humility*. And it was on that occasion that the Lord gave expression to a major Biblical truth. (Read Luke 14:11.) Man’s pride has always made him seek things for himself instead of showing a preference for others, but that kind of a life never produces the happiness and satisfaction that it appears to promise. Happiness and blessing and honor comes through humility.

There is no greater example of this than in what the Lord Jesus Christ did for our salvation. No one among men has ever been more exalted than He. But neither has anyone stooped to the depths which He went to save us. We have not seen the end of the story as yet. Angels view the Lord in His glory, but that sight remains to be seen by us. And yet as far back as the prophecy of Isaiah we have the prediction, ahead of the description of the humiliation of our Lord, that “He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high” (Isa. 52:13).

But then there was another thing which the Lord notice, which bothered Him. This brings us to the second parable that the Lord told at that dinner. The text is Luke 14:12-15. The observation that prompted the Lord to tell this parable was that He looked around and saw that most of the people who were there were friends of the host, i.e., other Pharisees, or family members, or rich neighbors. And so this parable was addressed, not to the guests, as the first one had been, but to the Pharisee in whose home they were eating. The parable opened with:

I. THE LORD’S REBUKE OF HIS HOST (Luke 14:12).

The last verse of my text, verse 15, seems to indicate that there were others who heard this parable, but it was probably spoken in such a way so that only those nearby could hear.

The Lord had no intention of embarrassing His host, but this particular Pharisee had evidently been attracted by the ministry of the Lord Jesus, and the Lord was giving him instruction in the ways of the Lord which

are always different from the ways of men. So the Lord told him that when he was preparing to have people over for a dinner or supper, he should not invite those who would be the most likely to reciprocate.

We should not think that the Lord was saying that he should *never* invite his family nor his friends, even if they were rich. What He was saying was that when he gave a dinner or a supper he should not limit his invitation just to his family and his well-to-do friends.

Then the Lord gave the Pharisee some instruction.

II. THE LORD'S INSTRUCTION FOR THE PHARISEE (Luke 14:13).

The Lord said that he should have times when he invited also, or possibly only, "the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind."

And then the Lord gave three reasons for telling the Pharisee what he should do.

III. THE LORD'S REASONS (Luke 14:14).

The first was:

A. "Thou shalt be blessed (v. 14a).

The second was:

B. "They cannot recompense thee (v. 14m).

And the third was:

C. A promise: "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (v. 14b).

Just how we are to take this last statement, I am not really sure. Was the Lord indicating that this Pharisee was already a believer and that he should think more in terms of the life to come than he did of the life here and now, or was He using this promise to make the Pharisee (and the others who were listening) think about eternal life? We are not really told which it was, but whatever may have been the Lord's meaning, for us not to know the specific purpose that the Lord had, does not lessen the importance of anything that He said.

Now let us turn to:

IV. THE EXPOSITION OF THE PARABLE.

Now we are not told what the motive was that caused this Pharisee to have his family and friends over for dinner. It may have been that he wanted them to hear some of the teaching that the Lord had been doing, and which the host Pharisee had heard and been impressed with. But even if that were the case, he needed to remember that there were others who needed to hear the Gospel as much as his guests did whom he had invited on this particular occasion. It is generally the case that if we invite only those whom we like to be with, we probably are going to neglect others when it comes to the preaching of the Gospel.

However, for the moment it seems that the Lord was thinking about the pleasure that “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” would have in receiving something which they rarely received: an invitation to dinner! The poor would not be financially able to invite guests to dinner. There is some question about the word “maimed” that is used here, but it probably means a person who has lost some part of his body--an arm, a leg, or perhaps a hand or a foot. The lame would be a cripple even though he had all of his body parts. Lastly, the blind--the person who could not see.

By nature we are all inclined to think in terms of what will give us the most pleasure, but the Lord was continually thinking about what would give others pleasure. And He was not thinking about that which would give Him a more prominent place in the eyes of men, but that which would be most pleasing in the eyes of God. People who were in the condition described here seem to have far outnumbered those who were rich and healthy in our Lord's day. We can see that from the way the common people flocked to the Lord not only for healing, but to hear what He had to say.

James gives us an important passage on this subject which we find in the second chapter of his epistle. (Read Jas. 2:1-10, noting especially what verse 5 says.)

And we can add to this what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church in 1 Cor. 1:26-29.

There have been many rich people who have loved the Lord Jesus Christ. Philemon in Scripture was one of them. David and Solomon are illustra-

tions from the OT. But somehow it seems that people who are faced with physical problems or money problems appear to be more prepared to hear the Gospel than are those who have good health and all of the material goods that they can possibly want. I repeat, the Lord was not putting down the rich, but He was seeking to emphasize that we should not forget the poor--in meeting their material needs, in giving them an enjoyable dinner, and certainly in making sure that they hear the Gospel. But we need to be careful that meeting the material needs does not crowd out the preaching of the Gospel as it has done with so many missions which have started out to use the provision of material needs as a door for the preaching of the Gospel. This was an important part of the ministry in the early church. An example: Paul's meeting with "the pillars" in Jerusalem:

9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

10 Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do (Gal. 2:9-10).

In 2 Cor. 9:1ff. Paul commended the church at Corinth for the willingness and preparedness to help those saints who were in need. So this was not just a matter of helping unbelievers where possible, but of helping the people of God as well.

Just recently in our study of 1 John where the Apostle John was exhorting the believers to love each other, you will remember that He said this:

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him (1 John 3:16-19).

There are limits, of course, to what anyone can do. And in our society we have people who expect to get their living by begging from others. They are not interested in working, and are where they are because of the way they have lived. Drinking and drugs and all kinds of immorality are responsible for the low living conditions which some people have. And

to be hardened to the needs of people just because we see some people taking advantage of others.

But we need to remember what the Lord said as incentives, or promises, for the Pharisee to do what the Lord told him to do. First, this is one way to experience happiness. The person who spends all of his money on himself is never a happy person. Neither is a selfish person happy. If we remember that what we have is what the Lord has given us, then we will be inclined to think more of helping to meet the needs of others. If we are looking for blessing, this is one of the paths that leads to blessing-- and the Lord will see to it that the blessing comes.

Second, it is good for us to do something for people who cannot return the favor. If we do to others so that they will do something for us, this is the way of the world. This is what our politicians do, and there are plenty of organizations that will obligate our politicians by giving them money. This is the world's way, but it is not God's way. When the Father sent His Son to die for us, what prospect did the Father have of a great return on what He was investing in us. No prospect at all! But God gave His Son knowing that He was not getting a good return from any of us.

Finally, this parable teaches us that we need to live for eternity. Our Lord said at the end of His charge in sending out the twelve:

And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward (Matt 10:42).

We are not to work for rewards here on earth, that is personal or financial rewards. We are to do our duty before God and men, and leave the promotions to the Lord. *But we are encouraged to seek the rewards that will be given in heaven.* And they come, not as men seek them here on earth, but they come in doing the will of our heavenly Father. And this parable deals with one of the ways in which the Lord will reward us. We want crowns if only so we will be able to cast them at the Lord's feet in the day that we stand before Him.

Do you remember the little chorus that we used to sing?

With eternity's values in view, Lord,
With eternity's values in view;
May I do each day's work for Jesus,
With eternity's values in view.

This is what we are inclined to forget. By God's grace, we can live and

serve the Lord here on earth in such a way that the rewards will be reaped in heaven. Many people have faithfully served others here on earth without any notice from the world, but their good works are being registered in heaven, and some day the rewards will be given out.

Concl: How encouraging it must have been to the Lord to hear what one of the men said who had been listening to Him. He formulated his own beatitude, and it indicated that he had gotten the point of what the Lord had been saying. (Read v. 15.)

There will be no shortage of food then--no poor people, no maimed, no crippled, and no blind. The former things will have passed away, and God will have made all things new. Let us live today in preparation for that glorious day to come, and pray that the Lord will turn to us in that day and, reviewing our lives, will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

THE GREAT SUPPER

Luke 14:16-24

Intro: This is the third of three parables all of which were spoken at a dinner given by "one of the chief Pharisees" to which our Lord was invited on a Sabbath day. The first showed the disgusting behavior of certain guests who were anxious to get one of the chief places of honor at the table, or tables. The second was designed to show that the host had no ulterior motive in giving the dinner, but that he should have invited guests which could not have reciprocated with an invitation to their hosts. This third parable shows how the invitation was treated by the first guests who were invited, and what was done by the host later to fill his table, or tables, with guests.

There seems to be little doubt but that these parables each having to do with a feast, portray our salvation. For example we have this in Isa. 25:6:

And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

And then three verses later we read this:

And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation (Isa. 25:9).

In Isaiah 55 we have a passage which surely speaks of salvation in terms of a feast:

1 Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

2 Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

3 Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David (Isa. 55:1-3).

Then, of course, we have "the marriage supper of the Lamb" which is referred to in Rev. 19:9. These are all statements which liken salvation to a feast, or a supper--which was usually served in the evening.

Our Lord spoke of this supper in the parable as:

I. "A GREAT SUPPER" (Luke 14:16).

It was great because of:

- 1) The one who gave it.
- 2) The number of guests who had been invited.
- 3) That which it portrayed in the case of this parable.

When we carry this over into salvation, we know that God is the One Who ordained that there should be salvation. And we would all agree that anything that God does has to be of infinite importance.

As to the guests, it would seem that this parable speaks of the way the invitation to salvation was treated by the people of Israel--the people to whom the Lord came.

Then we realize that salvation is really the main theme of all of Scripture. There is nothing as important as anyone will ever face as to the question of their salvation.

So the feast was "a great supper" for all of these reasons. And, by the way, we need to notice, and to apply this point to God, that the man who gave the feast, gave it out of the goodness of his own heart--just as God has done in providing for the salvation of sinners.

The second part of the parable directs our attention to:

II. THE INVITED GUESTS (Luke 14:17-20).

To be invited to "a great supper" by any man who was capable of preparing such a feast, and then to reject the invitation for any reason, would have been a great offense to the one giving the feast. Nevertheless, this is exactly what happened.

A. The final invitation is given (Luke 14:17).

The servant went out when the dinner was prepared to tell the invited guests to come. We would set a date and time when the invitation was given, but this was a different situation in a different culture.

B. The excuses that were given (Luke 14:18-20).

It seems that many sent excuses, but the three that are recorded here were typical of what people said when the servant told them that the dinner was prepared for them.

1. The first excuse (Luke 14:18).

One thing that we notice about the excuses which the Lord mentioned, is that they all have to do with this life. That was true of Israel in our Lord's day and time. They had very little relish for the things of God. That was even true of the Pharisees. We know that they were, as a group, very covetous, very proud, and in many other ways, very sinful in heart. The Lord told the people to do what the Pharisees told them to do, but not to follow them as examples, because they said, but did not do what they told others to do.

Well, the first man who was mentioned had bought some property, and he wanted to go see it. Expositors are divided as to whether or not this man bought property without seeing it first, or that he simply wanted to go to his property glory over the purchase he had made. The second seems more likely, but people can be so foolish as to buy and then go to see what they have purchased. However, this is always a possibility.

The point is that this man was living for the things of this world, and this is what had crowded out any desire whatever to go to eat the dinner which had been prepared for him. He did not even recognize that it was God Who had made it possible for him to make such a purchase. Clearly God was not in all his thoughts. This is why it is so hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

2. The second excuse (Luke 14:19).

This man had bought five yoke of oxen. A yoke means two animals--horses, mules, or oxen. So he had purchased 10 animals. He was thinking in terms of the money he was going to be able to make. He is like the man we had in the parable who was going to tear down the barns he had so that he could build greater barns. He is also like the man whom James mentioned in his epistle. Let me read to you Jas. 4:13-17:

13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a

little time, and then vanisheth away.

15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Paul wrote to Timothy about men who were "destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness." And then he added this:

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:6-10).

What a fool a man is to seek that which he cannot take with him, and forsake that which he can never lose--the salvation of his soul. "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

3. The third excuse (Luke 14:20).

This, too, was an empty excuse. It is most likely that if a man were invited to a feast, his wife would have been invited also. And even if the invitation had first come before he was married, the host would most certainly have included the wife when he learned about the wedding.

What we actually see pictured here is the man who not only refuses to come to the Lord, but he keeps his wife from coming. And he would have done the same when the children came along. He pictures the man who has no time for God. His life may revolve around his family, and he may provide many things for them, but he is not thinking of eternity, nor God, nor the needs of his own soul nor the souls of his family members. There have been many men who were raised under the truth, but when they get married, their interest in the things of the Lord vanishes, and they never

bother to tell their family what they could tell them about salvation.

III. THE SERVANT'S REPORT AND THE SECOND INVITATION (Luke 14:21-22).

The report made the master of the house very angry, and it should. But instead of going back to those who were first invited to invite them again, he sent his servant to invite the same people that were invited in the parable that we had last Sunday. See Luke 14:13-14.

This was done. It seems that here we have a picture of the Gospel going to the Gentiles. And they came. They came because they were not only invited, but *brought in*.

But then the servant told the master of the house that there was still room. So this led to a third command that the master gave to his servant.

IV. THE THIRD COMMAND (Luke 14:23-24).

This time they were to go out of the city, to go along the well-traveled roads, and to cross over the "hedges" or we would say, fences, which separated one neighbor from another. And this time the people they met were to be compelled to come to the feast. To "compel" them meant that they were to use any means necessary to get them to come to the feast--even though it might mean the use of force.

And then the Lord said a very solemn thing which is recorded for us in verse 24. (Read.)

Concl: Did you notice the increase in influence that the master used? First there was *an invitation*. Then he told his servant *to bring* the poor and maimed and halt and blind. Finally he told his servant *to compel* them to come.

I believe we can say several things about the measures which the master used to get people to come to his great supper. First, no one at all would have come if the master had not taken the initiative. Second, we see in the commands that the master gave to his servant that the master was intent on filling his banquet tables with guests--and the assumption is that he did! But the parable combines not only a picture of the sovereignty of God in salvation, but the responsibility that people have to respond in a positive way to the preaching of the Gospel. Those who were first invited, were

never invited again. I think we have all seen people who at one time seemed to be under great conviction, but they did not come, and somehow they never got to that place again. The Lord was obviously emphasizing how important it is, not only to hear the Gospel, but to come and to come right away.

We know that the Lord has an elect people. This parable does not teach that part of salvation. We must not think from this parable that the Lord cannot save those whom He desires to save. All of His elect will be saved. But the Bible teaches human responsibility as well as divine sovereignty. And perhaps one of the main lesson of this parable is to teach us that we are to be like that servant who followed up with the original invitation, then who brought those who could not come by themselves, and finally showed such intensity of a burden for what his master wanted him to do that he went out to compel people to come to the feast.

How do we present the Gospel to people? Do we show a genuine concern for their salvation, or do they learn from us how urgent it is that they receive Christ now? May the Lord burden us with the awful fate of those who do not know our Savior, and who go out into eternity without God and without hope.

COUNTING THE COST

Luke 14:25-33

Intro: Verse 25 in our text indicates that this was a time when the ministry of our Lord was very popular. Luke tells us that “there went great multitudes with Him.” After considering the low level of spiritual life to which Israel had fallen, it must have been encouraging to godly people in Israel, and to the disciples, that “great multitudes” were following the Lord. It is no wonder that the apostles would not let the Lord talk about His death; that must have seemed out of the question to them at this time in our Lord’s ministry.

In our day the megachurches are getting the attention. People like to go where the action is, and there is no question but that there is plenty of action in large churches throughout our country. And many of the pastors of large churches are holding seminars to help the pastors of small churches increase their numbers. It seems that little attention is being paid to what is going on in the hearts of the individuals who are following the crowd.

But our Lord was never deceived by these mass movements. Neither was John the Baptist. You may remember that at the time when Matthew recorded,

5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,

6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins (Matt. 3:5-6),

it is also recorded that “he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism” (Matt. 3:7a). Most people would have been inclined to believe that this was the greatest possible indication that his ministry was being blessed of God. But instead, John the Baptist greeted them as a “generation of vipers,” and told them to “bring forth...fruits meet for repentance” (Matt. 3:7-8). What their motive was in coming, we do not know, but John the Baptist realized that they were not truly repentant of their sins, but that they were hypocrites. He was not deceived into thinking that they were sincere and real.

In our SS lesson this morning, we had another example of this very thing. We are told at the end of John 2 (verses 23-25) that when the Lord was at the Passover in Jerusalem, there were “many” who believed in His Name, but added, “when they saw the miracles which He did. But then we are told that “Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because he knew all

men”; “He knew what was in man.” The word “commit” is the common Greek word for *believing*. And so this means that He did not trust Himself to those whom He knew were not sincere in their faith. The Lord knew how quickly people will respond to a miracle-worker, but whose faith is not a genuine faith.

Spurgeon had a good word about this in his sermon on our text in Luke 14. This is what he said:

Moreover, our Lord knew what sometimes we may forget--that there is no heartbreak in the world to the godly worker like that which comes of disappointed hopes, when those who have said, “Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,” turn back unto perdition, and when the hot breath which shouted, “Hosanna!” turns into the cruel, cold-blooded cry, “Crucify Him! crucify Him!”

The Apostle John also includes that statement which followed our Lord’s teaching about the sovereignty of God in salvation. John said that “many ...of His disciples...said, This is a hard saying: who can hear it?” (John 6:60). And then we read what happened:

From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him (John 6:66)

Toward the end of the first century the Apostle John wrote that the same thing was going on then:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us (I John 2:19).

Usually such breaks come with the teaching of the Word of God, either with respect to the doctrines of Scripture, or the application of the Word of God to the lives of those who profess to know the Lord. It was to that *great multitude* that the Lord addressed these words which we could certainly describe as:

I. “A HARD SAYING” (Luke 14:26-27).

And it is particularly hard because of the Lord’s use of the word “hate.” Here, as you can see, our Lord spoke of hating our parents, our wives, our children, our brothers and sisters, and even our own lives, if we choose to be His disciples.

Now in order to come to a true understanding of Scripture, we must compare Scripture with Scripture. We are told to honor our parents, and the importance of this command is that it was the first of the ten commandments to which our Lord attached a promise. We are told to love our wives as Christ love the church and gave Himself for it. There can be no greater love than that. And our children are an heritage of the Lord, and much in Scripture has to do with the way we are to provide for our families, and love and care for the children whom the Lord has given us. Our brothers and sisters are naturally very dear to us. There is no question but that the Lord was speaking of those who are the most closely related to us with the deepest affections. The Lord could have gone on to speak of grandchildren. But what did He have in mind when He used the word *hate*? Are we to reject everything in Scripture which we are taught about our families if we are to follow the Lord Jesus Christ? Some have taken this passage of Scripture that way, but it has always had disastrous results.

C.F. MATT. 10:34-39.

No, we are not to reject everything that the Scriptures say about our families. The word "hate," while it is a very strong word, is sometimes in Scripture used to describe a comparison. We are to love our families. We really can't love them too much. But when it comes to the Lord, our love for Him is to be greater than our love for those who are the dearest to us here on earth. The point that the Lord was making had to do with the magnitude of our love. The command to love Him with all of our heart and soul and strength and mind is the first and greatest commandment. He must be first in our lives. His will must take precedence over everything else, and everyone else. We may deny our children the opportunity to do certain things, or to have certain things, because we know that to give our permission would be to disobey the Word, and would not actually be the best for our children. We often are tempted to compromise with the truth because of our love for those who are the closest to us. But the Lord and His will must prevail in our lives.

This, of course, is what a disciple is. He, or she, is a person who puts God and His Word and His will ahead of everything else. We are to give our very lives to Him. If we love our lives, and seek to live our lives the way we want to, we will lose them. Listen to the words of our Lord which are recorded for us back in Luke 9, beginning with verse 23:

23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

24 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

25 For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and

lose himself, or be cast away?

26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels (Luke 9:23-26).

What is our cross? It certainly was not the Lord's cross. But our cross is the will of God for us just as the Lord's cross was the will of God for Him. You see, it is the Lord and His will which must be first in our lives. And when it comes to our plans for ourselves, or the plans that others may have for us, it is always God's will which must take precedence--not out of fear, but because we love Him so much and find our greatest joy in pleasing Him.

Let me remind you again of verses like Rom. 12:1-2 and 1 John 2:15-17.

Those who will have the worst time in doing the will of God, will be those whose parents or spouses or other loved ones do not know the Lord. This is the reason, young people, you must not enter into marriage with anyone who does not know the Lord. Ask the Lord to give you a mate who loves Him just like you do, and the foundation of your marriage will be secure.

But now we come to our parables. This is where we see the need to count the cost.

II. COUNTING THE COST (Luke 14:28-32).

We have here two parables, and they present two aspects of the Christian life. One is that of building; the other is that of spiritual conflict. And yet the two are related because it seems that the tower has reference to what was done in those days to spot the approach of an enemy, and then to be able to defend one's self against the enemy. There is no question but that the Bible presents the life of a child of God as spiritual warfare. This is why it is important to get started in the right way, putting the Lord first in our affections.

A. The tower builder (Luke 14:28-30).

Many times during my life I have gone by a house that has been all framed up, but which obviously has been standing for some time, weathered by season after season, only to be told that "the builder ran out of money, and was not able to finish the house."

This parable pictures a person who professes to be a Christian and who starts out to live the life, only to find out that he did not have in himself that which was necessary to finish the job. You see, those who are simply following the Lord because others do, has no idea of how absolutely necessary it is to trust the Lord in living and serving, and so when his own resources are exhausted, he quits, and the job is never finished.

A parable like this finds its illustration in what the children of Israel faced when they went back from captivity to build the temple and the walls of the city of Jerusalem. They faced opposition from the very first. They had to work and carry their weapons. And they never would have been able to finish their work if the Lord had not blessed and protected them. This is the way it is in the Christian life--but mere professors of religion do not understand how God works. I fear for those who are seeking to do the Lord's work in their own way. They are doomed before they start even though it might seem at times that they are making good progress.

But let us go on to the second parable which illustrates the same thing.

B. The king who considers going to war (Luke 14:31-32).

The Christian life is not just a defensive life, but there is an offensive warfare to be waged. The king in the parable was outnumbered 2 to 1, so the prospect of victory was anything but good. We are to recognize that we, too, are outnumbered, could we say, three to one--but it is actually more than that. We face the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

Normally a king who is outnumbered would realize that he was facing defeat, and so he would send "an ambassage" whose task it would be to work out conditions of peace. These conditions would be at best a compromise, and would be to the greatest advantage of the enemy.

A Christian cannot face his enemies that way. He cannot be satisfied with compromise. There must be all-out victory, but that can only be attained if we have the resources to win the battle. And this battle that we are engaged in is a life-long battle, and the resources that we have in ourselves are not sufficient for the first engagement. But this is why it is important to count the cost. As we do, we recognize that we do not have what it takes to win the victory. But we also are brought to realize that what we lack, we have in our God. Where we would fail, He is the victorious One, and in Him we have endless resources to guarantee victory today and tomorrow and for as long as we shall live--or until the Lord comes.

Concl: What is the conclusion then? See Luke 14:33.

We renounce our dependence upon all that we have, and upon all that those who are dearest can provide for us, and we put our trust wholly in the Lord Who alone can give us the victory. Those who love the Lord the most, and those who trust Him the most, are the ones who have counted the cost, have realized their own insufficiency, and have put their trust in the Lord to enable them to build the tower and to wage a war that both will lead to completion and victory.

May we learn that lesson in a deeper way every day that we live. If we do, we will be very careful to spend time every day with the Lord to draw our resources for that day from the Lord Who will never fail us.

FLAVORLESS SALT

Luke 14:34-35

Intro: This parable regarding “salt” is found also in Matthew and in Mark, but the form is somewhat different in each one. This must have been an illustration which the Lord Jesus used on many occasions.

Matthew’s account, which is probably the best known, reads like this:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men (Matt. 5:13).

In Mark 9:49-50, this is what we read:

49 For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.

50 Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

Salt is mentioned only two other times in the NT. The only other time that salt is mentioned in a positive way is what we find in Col. 4:6:

Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

James mentions “salt water” in James 3:12, but that applies to speech that is not proper for a child of God, and so it is not a text which we need to include in our study tonight.

In the context in which it appears in Luke’s Gospel, we find it attached to the two parables we considered a couple of weeks ago—about the man who was deciding whether or not to build a tower, and about the king who was contemplating whether or not he should go to war against another king. Both would count the cost first to make sure that they had the resources to finish what they might start.

And these illustrations followed what the Lord was saying about the conditions of discipleship. The Lord must be put ahead of “father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also.” See Luke 14:26. This did not mean that any of the above were to be neglected, because the Word has a great deal to say about how husbands are to love their wives and to care for their children, and so on.

But it means that the Lord must come first. His will must be supreme in the lives of those who would be His disciples. And so we need to look at our text in the light of what the Lord had been speaking about. It was in

this connection that the Lord said,

I. "SALT IS GOOD" (Luke 14:34a).

Charles Simeon made a statement which I want to read to you in which he indicated what he believed the Lord had in mind when He told His disciples, as we read in Matthew 5:13, "Ye are the salt of the earth." This is what he said:

Little do [the people of] the world think how much they are indebted to those very saints whom they "revile and persecute for righteousness' sake." The extirpation (extermination) of them (which is so desired by many) would leave the world an entire mass of corruption, without any thing to heal its disorders, or to stop its progress towards utter destruction. Wee they removed out of it, the rest would soon become as Sodom and Gomorrah... The use of salt, as intimated in this expression of our Lord, is to keep other things from putrefaction and corruption (Vol. 11, p. 80).

And in this sense we can see the meaning and wisdom of the Lord's statement, "Salt is good." This would mean more than simply that it is beneficial; it would mean that it is indispensable. The world cannot get along without it. If there were no salt for society, as Charles Simeon indicated in his statement, civilization is impossible. Even with the salt we see that society is becoming more and more corrupt all of the time, but think of what it would be if there were no salt at all!

Charles Simeon, in the quotation I read to you, mentioned Sodom and Gomorrah. Let me use that as an illustration of the point that it appears the Lord was making here. Please turn in your Bibles to Genesis 18.

The Lord had announced to Abraham that He was on His way to investigate the great cry that had reached heaven from those two wicked cities because of the grievousness of their sin. Obviously He would find it as bad as the cry indicated, and that meant judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah--a warning to America because we are following the same path which led to the destruction of those two cities because of their sin. But the part that I want you to notice was that which encouraged Abraham to pray that judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah might be averted. Follow in your Bibles as I read Abraham's questions beginning with verse 23 and going down through verse 25. (Read.)

Then you remember how Abraham's faith seems to have increased as he

went from the possibility that there might be fifty righteous people in the city down to even ten righteous people. Notice how Abraham was recognizing that the people of God in that city would be “salt.” I don’t see any connection with our text and the fact that Lot’s wife later became “a pillar of salt,” but there may be a connection if we are thinking about a case where the salt had lost its saltiness.

The point that we need to see is that Abraham recognized how important it was for any city to have citizens who are righteous in the sight of God. Perhaps this is one of the main explanations why judgment, devastating judgment, has not fallen upon our own country. Whatever else you might say about the church in America, the fact remains that the Lord has many of us who truly know Him, and as “salt” we exercise a preserving influence in our country.

But I think that there is another idea that we cannot overlook when thinking of the Lord’s people as “salt.” The Lord spoke of salt that had lost its “savour,” or *flavor*--what I have called, *flavorless salt!* I don’t think that the Lord would have spoken about *flavor* if He had not been thinking about how salt is used to enhance the taste, the enjoyment of food. Salt is that ingredient which makes you look back on how enjoyable a meal was, and at the same time it makes you look forward to the next time you can have such a meal. If your doctor takes you off of salt, then you have only the memory of how “good” food used to taste to you. But let’s just look at it from the “good” side tonight.

But the Lord raised the question, “If the salt has lost its flavor, what are you going to use to season your food.” We live in a day when there are salt substitutes, but I think that there is an almost unanimous decision among people that there is really no substitute for salt that can really take its place. Maybe there were substitutes in our Lord’s day, as well. I don’t know. But He was certainly indicating that there is no real substitute that can measure up to the real thing.

So we can see why He said that “salt is good.” It has preserving qualities, and it increases the flavor of food. But then the Lord suggested a real problem. It was this:

II. SALT THAT HAS LOST ITS FLAVOR (Luke 14:34b).

I have heard that salt can never lose all of its flavor, that it can only lose the strength of “saltiness” that it once had. Well, that may be the case. If

so, then the Lord was suggesting a condition among people that you would never really find with actual salt. People who are “the salt of the earth” can become what would never fully happen to real salt. If this is the case, then it makes what our Lord was speaking about even more tragic. In Matthew’s account the Lord did not say that His people were only one of many sources of salt; He said that they were “the salt of the earth”--the only salt. If something happens to them, there is nothing that can replace them. Human philosophy and human psychology can’t replace the people of God. Politics tries to solve personal problems, but its record is nil.

So, since it is the people of God who are “the salt of the earth,” for them to lose the ability to preserve and that quality of flavor to be exercised in the world, how will the needs of the world be met? This speaks of a time when, although there are still Christians around, and churches still holding services, yet the power and blessing which once exercised such a tremendous influence upon the world, is gone! Where will the people of the world find that has been taken away from them? They won’t be able to find a substitute because there is none.

Now let me say that the Lord is not going to let that kind of a condition develop in the world. Things can get very bad in the church and in the lives of the Lord’s people, and right now they are bad! But the Lord in His grace will always preserve a testimony. However, as I sought to bring out in considering the two parables which led up to this parable on “salt,” verse 25 of Luke 14 tells us that at this time in the Lord’s ministry, “great multitudes” were with Him. People had been attracted by His miracles. Many had been attracted by His teaching. But the big question was, were they ready to be and to do what was required to live for the Lord, and to serve Him? To be “salt” in this world requires a whole-hearted commitment to the Lord. He must be the pre-eminent one in our lives. The Lord’s people need to love Him first, and to love Him with all of the heart, the soul, the strength, and the mind!

Now let me say a word about:

III. THE VALUE OF FLAVORLESS SALT (Luke 14:35a).

What does our text say? “It is neither fit for the land,” meaning that it would not make good fertilizer. Compost can produce good crops, but that is not the case with salt which has lost its power. And the same is true with regard to “the dunghill.” What is a “dunghill”? It is not a very

nice thing to talk about, but it is *a pile of manure!* That which has been “good” has become “good for nothing” and can only serve one purpose: “to be cast out, and to be trodden under the foot of men” (Matt. 5:13).

Perhaps the primary application of this statement must be directed toward those who make a false profession of faith, but afterwards when troubles arise because of the Word, they fall away and become worse than they were before. The Lord in His Word addresses this kind of a problem. Judas was certainly an example. And so was Paul’s one-time companion and fellow-worker, Demas.

But even with those of us who know the Lord, a similar situation can arise. And what effect does it have upon the world when a child of God falls away, if even for only a little while. It can bring feelings of great contempt from the hearts of people in the world. Do you remember what Nathan the prophet said to King David when he confronted the king with the sin that he had committed with Bathsheba? Listen to what Nathan said. The words are recorded in 2 Sam. 12:14:

Howbeit, **because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme**, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

Oh, how careful we all need to be about the lives we live in the world. I was the pastor of a church in another city in which one of the men in the church told me that the men he worked with through the week wouldn’t believe him if he told them that he attended church! Why? Because he talked like they did, told dirty stories like they did, and so on. I am not sure that he was a Christian, but when I talked to him he was really starting to think.

What a warning this is to all of us! Now notice:

IV. THE LORD’S APPEAL (Luke 14:35b).

“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” The Gospels and the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, tell us that the Lord often said this to people when He was speaking to them, or, as in the cases in Rev. 2 and 3, when He sent letters to them. I read one of them to you this morning at the close of our service: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

You know, it is possible to read your Bible, and yet not see a thing that

you need to see. It is possible to come to Sunday School and church, but not hear a thing that you need to hear. What a difference it can make if, as our Lord suggested, you only hear with one ear! Do you ever pray that the Lord will give you eyes to see, and ears to hear, and a heart to understand what it is that the Lord wants you to see and hear and understand? We all need to pray that prayer daily, and perhaps even more than once a day. Many of us are memorizing verses that have to do with that great subject, perhaps the greatest of all subjects, *The Attributes of God*. But do we realize that if the Lord doesn't open our understanding and cause us really to hear what we are saying, and to see the meaning of these verses that we are reading and committing to memory, that we can complete this memory period with no greater understanding of God than when we began?

Concl: I can think of four big reasons why we need to be salt that is "good." Let me mention them to you.

First, because that is the only way we can really live to glorify God.

Second, because that is the only way we can be a blessing to each other.

Third, because in being salt, good salt, we are being instruments that can be useful in bringing others to the Savior.

Fourth, because of what it will mean to us. Loving the Lord as we should, and putting His will first in our lives, is the secret (if it can be called that) of a life full of joy and peace and precious fellowship with God.

May God tonight give us ears to hear these very important words from the lips and heart of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST COIN

Luke 15:1-10

Intro: This chapter could well be called *the parable chapter* because all it contains is three parables--the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. And yet it may not be exactly correct to speak of *three* parables because Luke tells us in verse 3 that the Lord "spake this parable unto them." By this He seemed to be indicating that the three parables were to be considered as *one*. However, it could be one parable without having all of them say the same thing. They might be one in the sense that together they give us a complete story.

I think that these parables illustrate the danger that some expositors have not avoided in that they try to make the parables say more than they were designed to say. It is very clear that the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin have to do with the salvation of sinners. I say that because of what we read in verse 7, and again in verse 10. But we do not have a verse like these in the parable of the prodigal son. So that may be an indication that the parable of the prodigal son had a different message from the first two parables. And yet it was needed to complete all of the truth that the Lord was giving to the publicans and sinners who were gathered around Him. They obviously want to hear Him in contrast with the Pharisees and scribes who were there to denounce the Lord because He, as they said, "receiveth sinners and eateth with them." It is clear that if any of those publicans and sinners had turned to the Lord, there would have been no rejoicing in the hearts of the Pharisees and scribes who were looking on and listening to what the Lord was saying.

The three accounts are very characteristic of experiences which we all have had. Perhaps you feel like I do when I say that I hate to lose anything! Often what I have lost is not very important, but I hate to lose it anyway— and I can identify with the lady who lost the coin, and then searched all through her house until she found the coin. I think that Lucille and I could write a book about the things which we have lost or misplaced during our marriage, and what we have done and the time it has taken to look for things. Most of the time we have found them, but sometimes we haven't. I am sure that the Lord knew that people would understand these stories, and the relief, the joy, it was whenever they found what was lost.

So personally I think that those who try to draw comparisons between sheep and coins, or between sheep and coins and sons, are really missing

the point of what the Lord was teaching. In the same way, when we try to make a big point out of the fact that the shepherd owned the sheep, and that the woman possessed the lost coin, and then try to fit this into salvation, we may be putting ourselves into a position where we are supporting a doctrine that the Word of God really does not teach: that it is possible for us to lose our salvation once we have it.

Neither do I think that election really fits into these parables except that we know that those who are saved are elected by God to salvation. No, the first two parables are intended to portray the joy that there is in heaven when even one sinner repents and turns to the Lord.

One exposition I read of these parables tried to make a point out of the fact that the sheep was animate, and the coin was inanimate. I don't believe that kind of an explanation can lead us anywhere except to be confused and to lose sight of what the Lord was saying. Let us remember that a study of the parables indicates that they were designed by the Lord in His infinite wisdom to emphasize usually one point, not to tell everything that might be included about any doctrine under consideration.

We need to remember in this particular case that we have two distinct groups which were listening to the Lord. The publicans and sinners were there, not to talk, but "to hear him," to hear the Lord. The Pharisees and scribes were there, not to listen and learn, but to murmur. There were there to criticize the Lord, and to criticize the publicans and sinners for listening to Him. And from what we know about the Pharisees and scribes, they were not a group known for their concern for the spiritual needs of their people. They should have been because, as the Lord said on another occasion, they say "in Moses' seat" (Matt. 23:2). Their main concern was to keep all of the people under their control, and getting as much out of them as they could. So the words which the Lord spoke to the publicans and sinners were words which they would never have heard from the Pharisees and scribes.

But let us turn now to:

I. THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP (Luke 15:3-7).

I can image that a man who had a hundred sheep in those days was exceptional. But still a hundred sheep would be very valuable to a shepherd. However, if one were to go astray, as our Lord said, "what man of you" would not go after that sheep. You would do what the shepherd in the

parable did--leave the ninety-nine, and go after the one that was lost. But sheep were not always found. A wild animal might kill it before the shepherd could find it. Or it might fall off of a cliff, and be killed. Or it could have wandered so far away that it could never be found. But this lost sheep was found! It was safe. It was not injured. So what did the shepherd do? Did he punish the sheep? No, what good would that have done? Instead, he was so happy to find the sheep that he carried it all of the way back to the others, gathered his friends and neighbors to come and celebrate with him because he had found his lost sheep.

Some expositors say that the man was so concerned about the one sheep that he *abandoned* the ninety-nine in the wilderness (or desert) to find the one that was lost. Now I am not a shepherd, but that sounds foolish to me. I think we can be sure that any shepherd in that position would leave his sheep with other shepherds, and then go after the one. If not, he could have lost all one hundred if he had left them alone.

But that is not the point. The point is, if you had been a shepherd who lost one of his sheep, and then went in search of it, and found it, how would you feel? You would have felt just like this shepherd. You would not have been content to celebrate by yourself; you would have wanted everybody you knew to celebrate with you.

You know, I am of the opinion that the publicans and sinners to whom the Lord was speaking had never had anyone rejoice over them. If anyone had ever rejoiced over them, it would have been a long time ago. But here the Lord was telling them that if only "one sinner" repents, there is more joy "in heaven" over that one than over all of the others who need no repentance, or don't think that they need to repent of anything.

Earlier in Luke's Gospel he told us about Levi, a publican, who left his work, and began to follow the Lord. He prepared a great feast for many of his fellow-publicans. This made the scribes and Pharisees angry, and they asked, "Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" (Luke 5:30). Before the disciples could answer, the Lord answered, and this is what He said:

31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:31-32).

The Lord did not mean that there are some people who do not need to repent. This was a kind of tongue-in-cheek remark to rebuke the Pharisees

and Scribes who felt that they were above the publicans and sinners.

It doesn't take a lot of sinners to repent before it is noticed in heaven. There is joy in the very presence of the Lord when only one sinner repents --whether he be a sinner or a publican! This might draw forth the rage of the Pharisees and scribes, but the Lord wanted the publicans and sinners to know that those in heaven rejoice over a single sinner who repents and turns to the Lord *whoever he might be!*

There are quite a few people I pray for who, as far as I know, do not know the Lord. And as I have prayed for them, I have sometimes been moved to tears with just the thought of what it would mean to me if they were saved. And if they ever are saved, or even one of them is saved, I know that I would join those in heaven who are rejoicing there as I will rejoice on earth that another sinner has been saved.

But we must go on to the second parable:

II. THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN (Luke 15:8-10).

This is a parable about a woman--and I am inclined to think that this woman was a widow. At least no husband is mentioned as helping her. She only had ten coins, and she lost one of them. She had lost ten percent of her money. At least part of the time she was looking she was using a candle which indicates that her search went on into the night. She just had to find that coin.

And she did! It is not always the case that we find the money that we lose, but this woman did. What did she do? Did she just put it away, and go on about her other business? No! She, too, called her friends and neighbors with this word:

Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost (Luke 15:9b).

The kind of joy that is described in these first two parables, is the kind of joy that you cannot keep to yourself. You want everybody else to rejoice with you. The lost coin had been found.

You know, I have a wife who likes to work with money. She keeps our books, and every month balances our checking account so that it agrees with the bank statement. I have seen her spend a lot of time looking for three cents. This past month I wrote a check for \$49, but recorded it as \$46. That meant that Lucille was off three dollars in her accounting. And

she looked and looked, and finally said to me, “I think that I am going to have to give up.” Then she added, “This is the first time I have not been able to make things balance out.” Well, she went to bed that night, and the next morning as soon as she could, she was back with those check records. And she found the mistake I had made in my book! Did she get mad at me? Not at all! (And that was good for me.) She was overjoyed. I think if we had already had this parable she probably would have called all of you over to rejoice with her that she had found the three dollars that she could not account for.

That is how the lady in our parable felt. Can’t you imagine how she took her house apart looking for that coin? And the longer she looked, the greater was her fear that she never would find it. But then she found it, and her heart was overflowing with joy.

Now the Lord said to those publicans and sinners, with the Pharisees and scribes listening, the words that we have in verse 10. (Read.) The Lord said that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” He did not say that the angels were rejoicing, although I am sure that they were. But there was joy expressed by those who were with the angels. Doesn’t this mean, the Lord? And doesn’t this mean the saints? It is not that the Lord doesn’t know who is going to be saved, but the joy of those in heaven is like the joy of the woman in this parable who found her one coin which she had lost. The joy in heaven is over *one* sinner that repents.

Concl: This is what happened when Levi was saved. This is what happened when Zacchaeus was saved. This is what happened when the thief on the cross was saved. This is what happened when Saul of Tarsus was saved, the man who later called himself *the chief of sinners*.

We rejoice when we hear that thousands were saved on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. But those in heaven rejoice when just one sinner, whoever he or she may be, repents and turns to the Lord.

I wonder if there is not one more lesson in these parable that we have been inclined to overlook. I wonder if the Lord in telling these stories was not indicating that you and I ought to be seeking the lost--like a shepherd who looks for his lost sheep, and like a woman looks for her lost coin. It seems that the longer we look, the longer we pray, the greater is our joy when finally, by the grace of God, the lost is found.

I know that the Lord has chosen those who are to be saved, but that does not minimize our responsibility to seek the lost. Some of the Church's greatest evangelist, and greatest missionaries, have been those who firmly believed in the sovereignty of God and in His ability to reach those whom He intends to save. But they also believed that just as our Lord came to seek and to save that which was lost, so we are to do the same. Then we will learn that one of the greatest joys of all is in seeing someone we have sought, and faithfully prayed for, has come to Christ.

I trust that all of our hearts have been stirred by these parables, and that we will be more diligent in the coming days in seeking those we know, to bring them to Christ.

THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15:11-32

Intro: Last Sunday we considered the first two parables in this fifteenth chapter of Luke, which has been called *the parable chapter* in Luke because it contains nothing but three parables. And they all seem to be related because they called in verse 3, “this parable.” The first two were designed to express the joy that there is even in heaven over just one sinner who repents and is saved. The first tells of a shepherd who lost one out of ninety-nine sheep, and who left the ninety-nine in search of the one. Obviously the one sheep was very precious to him. The second parable tells of a woman who lost one of her ten coins. She searched and searched in her house until she found it. And the joy she experienced was similar to that experienced by those who are in the presence of angels in heaven over one sinner who repents. So, in each case, the purpose of the parable is to show how precious even one sinner is, and the joy that is expressed in heaven when that one sinner repents, and is saved.

The last parable is the longest parable, and it is different in many respects. A man has two sons. One leaves home to waste his life in sin. In this case the father did not go in search of his son, but he waited for his son to return. However, the joy was the same, but there is nothing said about joy in heaven over the son who had returned home. Instead, we see the *unhappiness* of the older brother when the father made a feast to celebrate when his younger son had returned. And the parable closes on that note.

Expositors have differed about this parable as to whether or not it speaks of the salvation of a sinner, or of a child of God who has gotten away from the Lord, and then has come back. It seems to me that the latter case is probably the right one--that of a child who has gone away from his father, and then returns. The circumstances are so different from the first two that it seems that the meaning must be different. The three together give us a picture of the compassion and love of God which has been comforting to sinners and saints alike.

Let us note the details of the parable.

I. THE DEPARTURE AND DECLENSION OF THE YOUNGER SON (Luke 15:11-13).

(Read.) I suppose that sometimes in our culture an inheritance is dispensed before the parents die, but that is not usual. But apparently such a

request was not uncommon in our Lord's day. And notice the word "them" in verse 12. It seems that the older brother got his inheritance when the younger brother got his. The big difference was how the younger brother used his inheritance. After a few days, he gathered all of his belongings together, left for "a far country" (to get as far away from home as he could), and "there wasted his substance in riotous living." This kind of living has been described in other translations as "loose" or "wild." How the older brother described it when the younger brother came home is probably the most helpful. See verse 30. This younger son had employed prostitutes and engaged in the kind of life that usually accompanies that kind of behavior, such as drinking, profanity, and the like.

But then a change began to take place. Part of the change was the result of what he did, and part of it was the providential doing of God.

II. THE UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT HE HAD DONE (Luke 15:14-16).

The part that the younger son was responsible for was that his money was used up. Everything was going out, but nothing was coming in. The part that God was responsible for was the famine. And so the two situations together put this younger son in a situation that he never had anticipated. Sin is that way. It promises far more than it can deliver. And the person who goes down that road takes the path which the book of Proverbs says in more than one place, can lead to death. And so often it does.

We don't know from the parable how long the son had been away, nor how long he suffered without money and without food, but finally he went and got a job with a farmer in that country. His job was to feed pigs. I think that we can correctly assume that this young man was a Jew. To feed swine would have been a lower position than he could have ever imagined he would have because of the way the Jews, from Scripture, were made to feel about pigs. But when it says in verse 16 that "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat," it means that he coveted the food that he gave the pigs, but he was forbidden to eat what he gave to the pigs.

The picture is one of complete helplessness and total humiliation. This meant that he was down at the bottom. He had gotten so far down that he could not go any farther. The Lord has to do this with us when we are so determined to do what we want to do that nothing else will bring us to our senses. But it is a mercy from God when it can be said that "he came to

himself” (v. 17). A man by the name of Vincent wrote several volumes many years ago which he called, *Word Studies*. In it he defined this expression that the prodigal *came to himself* as meaning that he had been insane to live this kind of a life and that it represented “the beginning of repentance as the return to sound consciousness” (quoted by Lockyer, p. 286).

It is always the case that when we do what this younger son did, that we get to the place where we can't think clearly, and we go farther and farther away, and deeper and deeper into sin. We all need to remember that we can learn far more about sin and its consequences from our Bibles than we can from our own experience. This young man had every reason to be thankful for the grace of God in his life because what he experienced in coming to himself was not natural, and does not always happen. It shows the providence of God in his life.

And so let us consider:

III. THE PRODIGAL'S CHANGE (Luke 15:17-19).

Will you notice that the change came about while he was still away. His father would not have had any idea of what was going on in his son's heart, but God was at work!

First he began to contrast his situation with that of the people who worked for his father. See v. 17. (Explain.)

Next he decided what he would do. See verses 18 and 19. He also decided what he would say. And he would go to his father, not as a son, but to become one of his father's servants. And most of all he would acknowledge that he had sinned against God first, but then also against his father.

Many expositors have recognized that just before this young man left home he had said to his father, “Give me...” As he prepared to go back to his father, he planned to say, “Make me...” We need to read these verses over and over again in order to take in what God had done in the heart of this young man.

IV. THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN AND THE RECEPTION HE RECEIVED (Luke 15:20-32).

A. By his father (Luke 15:20-24).

Did you notice that his father was looking for him? He did not go in search of his son, but there probably was not a day that his son had been gone that the father had not gone out on the road, looking down the way that he had gone, to see if he were coming back.

I have used this story many times in talking to people who have come to me in their concern over a son or a daughter. Wait until the Lord brings them back, and then they will stay.

But this is also a picture of the heart of God the Father. This young man had his speech all prepared, but he never did get to give it all. His father was so overjoyed because his son who had to him been dead, was alive again, and who had been lost was found.

And then the father called to his servants to get prepared for the biggest feast and the greatest time of rejoicing that any of them had ever experienced.

But the story was different with the older son.

B. The reception given by the older brother (Luke 15:25-32).

Forgiveness is a hard thing for any of us to understand. The older son was very obviously jealous. And it is clear that he was very self-righteous. It is a good thing that he had never done what his younger brother had done, but it is sad that he did not share his father's joy in the fact that his brother had returned.

But who dealt with him? It wasn't his brother who had returned. It was his father. His father tried to get him to see why he was so happy about the younger brother, but the parable ends without any indication as to what actually happened to the attitude of the younger brother.

How careful we need to be about our own hearts. If we haven't done some of the things which others have done which have gotten them into trouble, it is only by the grace of God that we haven't. The older brother had some problems that needed to be cleared up just like the problems of his younger brother.

Concl: There are many lessons for us in this parable, and the lessons apply to believers and unbelievers alike. Remember the Word teaches us more about the dangers and consequences of sin that we can

ever learn by experiencing those results. While we are sinning our hearts are blinded to the true nature of what we are doing, and we are always inclined to overlook the consequences.

THE WISDOM OF THE UNJUST STEWARD

Luke 16:1-14

Intro: Parables are usually looked upon as simple ways to teach great truths--and that is what they usually are. But we come to a parable in the story of the unjust steward which caused Archbishop Trench to say, "No one, who has seriously considered, will underrate the difficulties of this parable" (*Notes on the Parables of our Lord*, p. 424). The difficulties have led to many different interpretations, and at other times has caused some to give up "in despair" (*Ibid.*). But it is a part of Scripture, and came from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and so we know an interpretation is not impossible. The Holy Spirit is as well acquainted with these verses as He is with any other part of Scripture. But beyond that we must remember that "all Scripture is" not only "given by inspiration of God," but that it is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect..." (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). So if we turn away from this passage, we will be neglecting a section of the Word of God which, like all others, is designed for our growth and preparation for serving the Lord effectively. Therefore, we admit as we usually do with Scripture, that it is so high we cannot attain unto it, yet it is attainable with the Holy Spirit as our Teacher. So let us approach these difficulties with our confidence in the Holy Spirit, and not in our own wisdom. The Holy Spirit often uses others to help us in our understanding of the Word, but in the final analysis, *He is our Teacher!* It is good to come to difficult passages because then we are reminded of how dependent we are upon the Holy Spirit.

The first thing that we should note about this parable is that it was addressed to our Lord's disciples.

I. THE PARABLE WAS ADDRESSED TO THE DISCIPLES (Luke 16:1).

Whether or not this means only *the twelve*, we cannot say for sure. We can be sure that it did include them, but perhaps it is best to say that there were other disciples there besides the apostles. At any rate, it was not designed for the publican and sinner, nor for the Pharisees and scribes, although verse 14 tells us that the Pharisees were there, listening, and because it was a rebuke to them, "they derided Him." This means that they sneered and scoffed at Him. Being unregenerate in heart, they rejected the teaching of the Lord.

However, the important thing to notice that this is a parable which was designed by our Lord to help His disciples--and to be of help to His people from that day to this. It is obviously a warning against being covetous which is a sin of greater proportions than most of us realize today. In one of our memory verses for this week we are taught that a person who can be described as "covetous," is an idolater (he worships money and things), and that he has no "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5). And the following verse tells us that a covetous man is one upon whom "the wrath of God" shall come.

Now we are all inclined to be covetous, and we need to be very careful about coveting, but the Apostle Paul was talking about a person who is so covetous that that word is descriptive of him as a person. The Pharisees were covetous men. There may have been exceptions here and there, but, for the most part, that title included most of them. And that is why we know that they were not saved. As the Apostle Paul wrote those words, he was probably reflecting upon the condition of his own heart before the Lord graciously saved him.

So this was a warning specifically for disciples.

The parable itself is given in verses 1-8. The application of the parable is in verses 9-13. And then, as we have seen, in verse 14 we have the reaction of the Pharisees.

II. THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD (Luke 16:1-8).

When we think of a steward we need to think of Eliezer who was Abraham's steward--a man who was so important that, when a man and his wife had no child, it was expected that the steward would be his master's heir. Or think of Joseph when he was in Potiphar's house. A master would turn over all that he had to his steward, and it was the steward's responsibility to see that the master's family and servants were all well cared for. And, of course, no man would give a servant that responsibility unless he had complete trust in him.

However, stewards were human, and they were not always trustworthy. That was the case with the steward in this parable. A charge, which the master considered to be absolutely reliable, had been brought against the steward of wasting his master's goods. And so the master was going to fire him. The thought in the parable seems to be that this steward had been taking from his master, and keeping much for himself. He was in an

excellent position to be able to do that because he apparently was only made to account for his doings when there was some indication that he was not being faithful.

We are not told about the account, only about the steward's reaction. He had to decide in a hurry what he was going to do. He couldn't think of doing ordinary labor, such as digging, and, by his own confession, he was too proud to beg and would have been ashamed to do that.

So we are told in verses 4-7 we are told what he decided to do, and what he did. We are not to be concerned with the rightness or wrongness of what he did, but just that he was continuing to look out for himself so that, when he was put out, there would be those who would receive him and who might give him the same kind of a job in appreciation for the way he had helped them. And it is thought that the arrangement that he made with each debtor was final. (Read vv. 4-7.)

In verse 8 we have the master's reaction. He thought that from the steward's side, he had acted wisely. And so the master "commended" him. This probably was not done to the steward's face, but it was how the master reacted in his heart. The steward was making the best of a bad situation.

One reason this parable has presented such a problem to interpreters is because it seems that the Lord was teaching and commending dishonesty. But that is not the case, and we all should know that the Lord would never do that. He was simply showing, as He said, "for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." He was using a reduction in the bills of the debtors to making a way for himself later. At the same time he may have caused the debtors to pay less when it may have been next to impossible for the master to collect all that his debtors owed him. So we can see why the master, while he was very angry with what his servant had done, had to see that there was wisdom in what he did even though he really had no right to do it without conferring with his master.

Now we come to:

III. THE LORD'S EXPLANATION AND APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE (Luke 16:9-13).

My Dad was a Christian, the head deacon of our church in Tacoma for

more than 30 years. He was a Bible teacher, but the job by which he supported his family was he was the treasurer of a steel casting company. So he was a business man, and handled money every day of his working years. When he knew that I was preparing for the ministry, he used to talk to me about becoming a pastor, and more than once he told me that there were three things that had ruined men in the ministry: one was immorality, a second was laziness, and the third was money. Later on he talked to me about popularity. It was the third problem that the Lord was speaking about to His disciples: the problem which money can be. This steward had been ruined by his love for money, by his desire for the things which money will buy, and possibly by the prestige which having a lot of money can bring. There are very few men who can handle it.

The children of this world, a term meaning people who do not know the Lord, often save money so that their final years can be years of ease and pleasure. They are not thinking of eternity. They just want to get as much out of life here as they possibly can. And you don't have to have a lot of money before you feel that way. Covetousness is a problem to almost everybody, but with some it becomes an obsession.

So the Lord said to His disciples, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness." Mammon is a word of Aramaic origin, and it speaks of *wealth, riches, treasure*, or just plain *money*. And it is called *the mammon of unrighteousness* because it has to do with this world. There is nothing sinful about money, but it presents temptations which can easily lead to sin. It is what is so important to "the children of this world." In contrast, you will remember that the Lord had this to say about money when He was giving the Sermon on the Mount:

19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt. 6:19-21).

And this is what this parable is about. But the Lord was indicating that the way we handle money, and the responsibility we show in being faithful, is one thing that prepares us to serve the Lord here, and to lay up treasure in heaven.

"When ye fail" is taken to mean, *when ye die*. Lit. it means *when you quit or leave* (understood) this life. In other words, our faithfulness "in that

C.F. 1 COR.
7:31.

which is least” will be an indication that we will be “faithful in that which is much.” The “least” has to do with this life; the “much” has to do with the life to come. On the other hand, to be unjust in that which is “least” means that we will be unjust in that which is “much.”

Our Lord was teaching that even the way we handle money here, is an indication of the ministry that we will have in heaven. I hope that none of us feels that we are just going to sit around when we get to heaven and let the angels sing to us! We are going to be serving the Lord there even more than we have here. We don’t know all of the details, but the Lord wanted His disciples to know that there is a definite connection between the way we live here, and the life that is yet to come when we get to glory.

Notice the Lord’s question in verses 11 and 12. “True riches” are in heaven. So the point that the Lord was making was that we need to aim at faithfulness here, even where money is concerned, because that prepares us for faithfulness in heaven where we will be handling “true riches.”

The Lord’s conclusion is in verse 13. (Read.) And the reaction of the Pharisees showed which side they were on.

Being honest in the handling of our responsibilities, especially with in this case with money, is not serving man, nor showing a love for money, but it is one very important way that we serve God. The steward in the parable loved money. He was actually serving himself. He was acting as though there were no life after death. And so he was serving money as his master, not his earthly master, and certainly not God.

IV. THE REACTION OF THE PHARISEES (Luke 16:14).

The Pharisees listened to it all, and, if they had been modern Americans, they would have said, “That is the craziest teaching I have ever heard.” Or maybe they would have made it even stronger. They sneered at the Lord. They scoffed at Him. And the word “derided” even means that *they turned up their noses at Him*.

One of the verses John reminded us of this morning as he was speaking of people in darkness was 1 Cor. 2:14. Luke 16:14 is another verse which illustrates that verse in 1 Corinthians. The Pharisees showed that they had no capacity for the Lord’s teaching, and so we can rightly apply 1 Cor. 2:14 to them:

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God:

for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Concl: Let me conclude with one final word. There was another man who was listening to the Lord that day, but didn't get the message. Do you know who he was? It was Judas Iscariot. What was his main problem? Listen to what the Apostle John wrote about him when the disciples were gathered with the Lord in the Upper Room. You will find these words in John 12:3-6:

3 Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

4 Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him,

5 Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

Judas loved money; he didn't love the Lord. And he is proof positive that you cannot serve God and mammon. The Apostle Paul said that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. We can never say that covetousness is not a dangerous sin since it cause a professing disciple to betray the Lord into the hands of His enemies.

May the Lord help us to see that all through our lives here on earth we are preparing and being prepared for heaven. Let us thank the Lord for the way He so graciously provides for us, but let our interest be in laying up treasure in heaven.