

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Luke 16:19-31

Intro: We saw concerning the parables that we had in Luke 15 that they were spoken to the Pharisees and the scribes. The parable which we had last Sunday at the beginning of Luke 16, was spoken to our Lord's disciples. At the conclusion of that parable, the Pharisees, who were listening, "derided" our Lord and His teaching. In Luke 16:15 Luke said that then the Lord turned to speak to the Pharisees again, and so we can assume that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus was spoken as a warning to them, the Pharisees. The Pharisees were not known as being like the prodigal of Luke 15 who "wasted his substance in riotous living." Instead, as Trench commented in his book, *Notes on the Parables of our Lord*, p. 449, "Their manner of life was sparing and austere; many of them were rigid ascetics." And yet, at the same time, they were covetous. They loved money, and really had their interests focused upon this life. They were not known for their compassion, but rather for their severity. Anyone who did not submit to their authority, was cast out of the synagogue-- a fate which every devout Jew feared because it was the equivalent to being the loss of salvation.

As the story in the parable unfolds, we realize that the rich man was not a man of faith, but Lazarus was! Being taken to Abraham's bosom after he died indicates that he was a son of Abraham, one of the elect (like Zacchaeus), and therefore an heir of salvation. And this indicates the difference between the two men. The rich man was not lost because he was rich, nor was Lazarus saved because he was poor. But we certainly see that a man is not saved by his riches, nor is a poor man lost because he has no money. The issue is faith. What the men were in their hearts before God, is what determined their eternal destiny. When thinking of the rich man we need to go back to the parable of that "certain rich man" we learned about in Luke 12:16-21 to see that the snare that the rich face is the inclination to live for this life instead of making preparation for the life to come. But, as I said then, riches often blind us even more to the basic need we have for salvation, and cause us to ignore the future life because we are enjoying ourselves so much in this life. That is not true of all rich men, but it stands as a basic truth that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. What a tragedy it would be to live thinking that you have everything, and then to die and find out that you not only have nothing, but that you are destined for an eternity of suffering because of your sin. And this really is the message of the parable. And so let us turn now to consider the parable.

The parable has to do with:

I. THE TWO MEN (Luke 16:19-21).

A. One was a rich man (v. 19).

The rich man is described in terms of his clothing and the way he lived. And we are told how completely happy and satisfied he was with his lot. He wore the clothing of kings. He could buy the finest imported linen. And our Lord said that he “fared sumptuously every day.” “Fared” means that he was extremely happy with his circumstances, and “sumptuously” means that he spared no expense in order to have what he wanted to have and to eat what he wanted to eat and to do what he wanted to do, or go where he wanted to go. I don’t know if this was the “Israeli dream,” but it certainly is “the American dream.” Our casinos and lotteries prove that, as well as the way rich men cut corners to get more money so they can do more and have more. This rich man had it all. There is no indication that he had any physical problems.

But a significant point is that the Lord did not give us his name. Perhaps this was so it could have more of a general effect upon the Pharisees who were listening to Him.

B. The second man was poor (vv. 20-21).

His name was Lazarus. His name is Jewish, and it means *he whom God helps*.

The first thing that we are told about him is that someone, or “someones,” took him and laid him at the gate of the rich man. The second thing we are told is that he was “full of sores”--probably due to the lack of proper nourishment. Evidently he could not walk, and was suffering from sores all over his body.

His object in being laid at the rich man’s gate was not that he might get a full meal from the rich man, but that he might eat some of the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. This was the food of the dogs. It probably means here the garbage that was thrown out. He was desperately in need of food, and from this standpoint the meaning of his name seems to have meant little or nothing. And yet we know that even in his poverty God was caring for him. But the only mercy that he experienced was from the dogs who licked his sores.

Now very possibly the Lord took these two extreme cases to attract the attention of the hearers, and to cause each one to determine where in the social scale he lived, and how he lived where he lived.

But after some time the inevitable happened:

II. THERE WERE TWO DEATHS (Luke 16:22-23).

The book of Hebrews tells us that “it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). The Word of God does not tell us that we can escape death unless it happens that the Lord comes while we are still living. It does not tell us that when death comes, then our existence comes to an end. It said that there is death, and then judgment. After death men have to deal with God. They may have ignored Him all of their lives, but they will not be able to ignore Him then. And woe to the person who has made no preparation to meet God, or has made the wrong preparation.

A. The beggar died first (v. 22a).

We could have guessed that it would be that way. The rich man had good health, and plenty to eat. But Lazarus had a diseased body, and was hungry most of the time.

But we are told that angels attended him at his death, and they carried him “into Abraham’s bosom”--an expression which speaks of his welcome by Abraham, and his complete acceptance. He was an heir of the salvation that God promised long before to Abraham, the father of the faithful. What a transformation Lazarus experienced--from extreme want physically and materially, to all of the abundance of glory. And there is no need to say anything more about the Lazarus’ condition because he was then where his every need was being met, and where his joy was complete.

B. Then the rich man died (vv. 22b-23a).

Suddenly his situation was changed, too. Not like Lazarus who went from bad things to the best, but from the best that earth could provide to a place of eternal torment. We are told that after he had closed his eyes on earth, he opened his eyes in Hades, “being in torments.” It seems that the basic idea in the word “torments” is that of having hit bottom. His pain was torture to him. He was in inexpressible agony. He had never anticipated that life could be so terrible, or that he could be so completely miserable.

Then next and last things that we are told about the rich man has to do with:

III. THE RICH MAN'S TWO REQUESTS--BOTH OF WHICH WERE DENIED (Luke 19:23b-31).

A. His first request, and its denial (vv. 23b-26).

He saw Lazarus "afar off"--very far off! The rich man recognized him immediately. And now the rich man finds himself begging that the poor man from earth would come with just a drop of water to take away some of the torment that he was experiencing. Things may not change here on earth, but they will undergo a tremendous change in eternity.

Abraham knew the rich man, and he reminded him of how well things had gone for him on earth where he had centered all of his attention. Lazarus, on the other hand, had experienced "evil things, but now he is comforted."

But the thing that made it impossible to grant the rich man's request was that great, unmoveable gulf that was between the place where Lazarus was and the place where the rich man was, and no one could pass over the gulf. Lazarus could not come to the rich man, nor could the rich man go to Lazarus.

So the answer was "no." And it may have been the first time that the rich man had ever had a request turned down. His position on earth enabled him to get anything he wanted, but it was different here.

B. The rich man's second request (vv. 27-31).

Isn't it interesting that now the rich man was concerned about his five brothers? Before he died we heard nothing about his family. It is only at this point that we find that he had five brothers. How do you suppose he treated them when he was on earth? He hadn't been concerned about his own soul, and so it is very doubtful if he had been concerned at all about his brothers--while they were alive on earth, or that he had given any thought to their eternal welfare. But he didn't want his brothers to come to that place.

I think this is very interesting, and the Lord gives us some insight about how people are going to feel about their families, and possibly their friends, after death, if they are in that place of torment.

But who did the rich man want to send back to his brothers? *Lazarus!* While on earth we have no indication that the rich man had anything to say to Lazarus, nor that he wanted to hear anything that Lazarus might have had to say to him. *And Lazarus could have told him plenty!*

But again the answer was “no.” It might have seemed cruel not to grant such a request. But Abraham knew that they were not left without a very wonderful means of finding the answer to their need. Where was it? It was in “Moses and the prophets.” Abraham said, “Let them hear them.” But when the rich man argued that if somebody arose from the dead, they would listen and repent, Abraham responded by saying to the rich man, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

I think we must assume that the rich man was a Jew like Lazarus was. And as a Jew he had been exposed many times to “Moses and the prophets.” He had heard the Scriptures read every time he went to the synagogue. He had heard them with his ears, but he had not heard them with his heart. Their message had never gotten through to him. His life had been like the person who had the seed of the Word sown among thorns where he had been so concerned about keeping what he had, and getting more, that the Word had been choked out, and he was forever lost, and in torment!

Concl: Isn't this an amazing testimony that our Lord gave to the power of the Word of God? God had already given them what the rich man wanted them to have, but they did not realize that the Scriptures, the OT Scriptures, gave them the message of eternal life.

When I read this thirty-first verse of Luke 16, I think of Nicodemus and what the Lord said to him. The Lord began to speak to him about the new birth. And when he quizzed the Lord about what He meant, you will remember that the Lord said to him, “Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?” (John 3:10). You see, the way of salvation was all there in the OT, but it had not gotten through to Nicodemus until that day when the Lord spoke to him.

When the Holy Spirit told Philip to go to the Ethiopian eunuch and to get into his chariot with him, he found the eunuch reading the prophecy of Isaiah. And what did Philip ask him? He said, “Understandest thou what thou reade?” And the eunuch responded, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” And Philip got into his chariot with him, “and preach-

ed unto him Jesus.” What was the result? That Ethiopian eunuch went on home with the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. All of this is in Acts, chapter 8.

This parable that we have considered seems to indicate that people without Christ are going to be haunted throughout eternity with what they remember and people that they remember. How different it could have been if the rich man had taken Lazarus into his house to feed him, and had listened to him then as Lazarus told him about his Lord!

But you know what the sad thing about this parable is? There is no indication that any of the Pharisees who heard the parable really got what the Lord was saying, and so we can only assume that most of them, possibly all of them, came to their dying day only to experience what the rich man in the parable was experiencing. May the Lord lead us to people to whom He has given ears to hear the glorious message of salvation, or, if we can't reach many, may He give them ears to hear what the Scriptures say about man's need, and God's provision to meet that need.

DISCIPLES, BEWARE!

Luke 17:1-10

Intro: The parable in this passage begins with verse 7 and goes through verse 10. But, in order to get the full message of the parable, it is necessary to include the first six verses of the chapter.

The Lord seems to have alternated His teaching between His disciples, on the one hand, and the Pharisees, or Pharisees and scribes on the other. Here in the first part of Luke 17 the Lord was speaking to the disciples, and in the process He issued a warning which is recorded for us in the first part of verse 3: "Take heed to yourselves." It immediately suggests to us that for any of us our greatest problem in serving the Lord is not:

- 1) the nature of our work (and so it cannot be in those whom we serve), nor
- 2) those with whom we serve (this seems to be what the Lord had in mind when speaking of "thy brother"), nor
- 3) even the Lord Whom we serve (and this brings us to the parable), but *our greatest problem is ourselves*. This is hard for us to believe because we are so prone to want to blame others for shortcomings that we have. The Lord has not promised that our work will be free of trouble, troubles that are man-made, but He here was showing His disciples how to handle the problems which we have to face. We can't change the fact that "offences will come," but we are, by God's grace, able to control our reaction to the problems, to the people who cause them, and to make sure that we do not make bad matters worse by causing offences ourselves.

The nature of our work is obviously offensive to the natural man. Perhaps it is because of the message of the preceding parable that this subject of offences was brought up by the Lord. It was offensive to the rich man to tell him that his brothers had Moses and the prophets, and that his brothers should "hear them." It was also offensive to tell the rich man that if his brothers would not hear Moses and the prophets, neither would they hear someone even if he were raised from the dead. Abraham was an offence to the rich man with both of those statements. And we cannot avoid such offences. Even the Lord causes offences like that. But what the Lord had in mind were the ways in which we can be personally offensive by our behavior; offences not because of our message, but because of the way in which we react to situations in carrying on our ministries. An offence is a stumbling block. It is something that we do, or attitudes which we have, which cause people to stumble over us so that the message we proclaim is obscured.

The Apostle Paul had much to say about stumbling blocks. Cf. Rom. 4:13:

Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

And what he told others, he applied also to himself. Cf. Acts 24:16:

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

And then we have Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church:

32 Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:

33 Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:32-33).

Here the Apostle was speaking of refraining from things, such as what we eat, which can be a stumbling block to people we are trying to reach with the Gospel.

So let us look at our text. The first point we come to is:

I. THE INEVITABILITY OF OFFENCES (Luke 17:1-2).

Try as we will, there will be offences in the work of the Lord. But we must be sure that we are not the cause, especially where "one of these little ones" is concerned. I don't remember reading anything about the Pharisees that would lead us to believe that they had a special concern for children. *But the Lord did!* Even the disciples were inclined to tell the children to go away. But do you remember what the Lord said to them? Mark tells us this in Mark 10:13-14:

13 And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them.

14 But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

To show the seriousness of causing an offence to others, especially to children, the Lord said that "it were better for him" who caused the offence "that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea." How could our Lord have stated the seriousness of such an offence in stronger words? The disciples had come very close to causing such an offence. And we all need to take this to heart. The context shows that we need to be as careful with believers as with unbelievers.

At this point the Lord introduced

II. THE WARNING (Luke 17:3a).

— “Take heed unto yourselves.” Our first concern must be that we are not causing the offense. This means that we must turn our thoughts on ourselves to make sure that we are not the cause of the offense. It means that we must apply this instruction to ourselves.

It is so easy for us to read our Bibles thinking of someone else, rather than ourselves. It is easy to listen to a message, or to be reading a Christian book, and to want to apply what we are hearing or reading to someone else. And that “someone else” may need what we are reading or hearing. But the point is that *we* are hearing what is being said, or we are reading it, and so the application needs to be made by us to ourselves. If we did this faithfully, many offences would never get started. So let us make a practice of this starting tonight if we have not been doing this before.

Now one of the first places that we are tested, and perhaps tested most frequently, has to do with:

III. A BROTHER WHO OFFENDS US (Luke 17:3b-4).

— There is nothing wrong with talking to a brother, or sister, if such a situation arises. But before we do this we need to make sure that the offence which we feel has not been caused by something that we have done. It is easy to be offended with someone when we have contributed to the offence. In such cases, we need to quit doing what we are doing, or apologize (the Biblical word is “repent”) for what we have done.

But we need to forgive the brother or sister who repents to us even if he or she trespasses seven times a day, and repents each time.

— Now if this should happen to us, that a person commits the same offence seven times a day, we immediately feel that their repentance was not sincere. And it may not be! But that is not our problem. That problem belongs to the person who has been so offensive to us. Our problem is our reaction to a situation like this. If we fail to forgive, if we harbor the offence in our hearts, and are ready to remind this person (and possibly others) of the offence that has taken place, then we have not truly forgiven the other person. Remember that when God forgives, He forgets. That is hard for us to do, perhaps in some situations, impossible. But that is

where we need to see the help and blessing of the Lord because the important thing is for Him to be please.

And so this cause “the apostles” to offer a prayer:

IV. THE PRAYER REQUEST (Luke 17:5).

Now these were the men who were chosen to lead the work of the Lord after He went back to heaven. They realized that this was a hard thing to do, actually impossible--if it is to be done from the heart (and with God nothing else matters). And so they said, “Lord, increase our faith.” Some of the greatest prayers of Scripture, are the shortest. And this was a short one. It is a prayer that ought to follow our reading of the Word every day because we continually are told in Scripture that we need to do things which are absolutely contrary to human nature, and completely beyond our capacity even as the children of God. But this is one reason we are told to do the things that we find in the Word of God.

The request suggests (and rightly so), that the secret of all obedience is a stronger faith. The Lord seems frequently to be asking us to do things that are not only foolish, but ridiculous. To forgive a person seven times in one day for doing the same thing against us, would seem to make fools out of us. But that is where we have to trust the Lord. That is where we need to keep our eyes upon Him. We want to please Him, and the only way we can be sure that we are pleasing the Lord is by doing what He tells us to do in the Word. So if you have a situation that is an offence to you, perhaps the Lord is waiting for you to pray this prayer.

The Lord was not long in giving an answer.

V. THE LORD’S ANSWER (Luke 17:6).

The answer came in the form of teaching, coupled with a promise. The apostles were thinking in terms of what a great faith it would take to do what the Lord wanted them to do; the Lord wanted them to think, not of the size of their faith, but of the quality of their faith--”faith as a grain of mustard seed.”

You will remember that in one of our Lord’s parables, He spoke of a “mustard seed.” Listen to what He said. I am reading Matt. 13:31-32:

31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and

sowed in his field:

32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Think of faith as being illustrated by that which the Lord called “the least of all seeds.” When we are faced with problems caused by some brother or sister, that is where the character of our faith is tested. But as we look to the Lord to strengthen our faith, that is where our faith grows. Faith causes us to look to the Lord as our Helper. Faith causes us to believe that what God commands, He enables us to do--even if it means forgiving a brother or sister seven times a day for doing the same thing!

Thayer describes a “sycamine tree” as a tree which looks like a mulberry tree, but it has fruit like a fig. This tree evidently had a strong system of roots. There is no record that any apostle tried to do this. It would have to be a situation which could bring glory to God. The Lord was not saying that they should “try” this. He was simply saying that if a problem were so great that it was like a sycamine tree, it would be no problem for the Lord to do whatever was necessary to see the problem resolved. If you had to forgive a person seven times a day, it would be easy to think that the difficulty was beyond solution.

So trusting God brings us into the realm where we are trusting His power to meet the most difficult of needs.

But then we come to the parable, and again the Lord was focusing attention on the apostles. This has commonly been called *the parable of the unprofitable servants*. But it seems to me that a better name would be *the parable of servants who need to know that they are unprofitable servants*. But I will use the usual name.

V. THE PARABLE OF THE UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS (Luke 17:7-10).

The story in the parable is easy to understand. The word that the Lord used for “servant” is the Greek word δοῦλος. This is a bondservant. He belongs to his master. He is to do his master’s will and to take care of his master’s needs before he attends to his own. This is the word which the apostles used when describing themselves as servants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the application which the Lord made was perfect in pointing out the problem which most of us have.

A servant works all day long. He is tired and dirty and hungry when he comes in at the end of the day. But his work is not yet completed. Before he can eat, he has to provide food for his master. His master does not feed him, but he is to feed his master. And the ordinary master would not even thank his servant for doing his duty. "I trow not" means, *I think not*. That would never happen.

So in verse 10 the Lord gave the application. The reason we can be so offended when we are doing the will of God is because we have forgotten not only that we are the Lord's bondservants, committed to do His will, but that we are "unprofitable" bondservants. This not only means that we are not the servants that we ought to be, but it means that we are dispensable! We never give the Lord the service which He so richly deserves, but we forget that the Lord's work was going on before we came along, and it will continue after we are gone. What is important is not that things go our way, but that things are done first and foremost for the Lord, and in a way that is pleasing to Him. In ourselves we are useless, good for nothing. We only become useful in the Lord's service when we are what we should be, and when we do His work the way He wants it to be done.

Concl: I doubt if the disciples, the apostles, ever received a more important lesson in what it means to be a servant of the Lord, and how the Lord's work must be done. And it can't be improved upon even for today. It is not here in our Bibles just to tell us how our Lord was preparing His apostles for their lives of service. But it is here because we need the same teaching.

All of this adds up to one thing, doesn't it? *Humility*. We cause problems because of our pride, and we refuse to settle problems because of our pride. When we see how unprofitable we are in ourselves, how worthless and useless we are without the Lord, then we will humble ourselves before Him, seeking the strengthening of our faith, and amazed every time the Lord is pleased to give His blessing to us.

Let me close by reading what Paul wrote to the Philippians about how they should serve the Lord, and how they needed to follow the example of the One Who exercised more humility than any person ever has because the Lord's work made it necessary for Him to come from the highest glory to descend to the greatest depths--death! And not just an ordinary death, but a death He died for sinners, a death which marked His perfect obedience to God. Listen as I read the first eighteen verses of Philippians, chapter 2.

AN UNRIGHTEOUS JUDGE AND A RIGHTEOUS GOD

Luke 18:1-8

Intro: (Read the text.)

Perhaps, as you read this parable, you are reminded of the parable we had back in the eleventh chapter of Luke, beginning with verse 5. The Lord's purpose in both was to encourage *importunate prayer*. In the first parable the man who went to his friend's house had to overcome the reluctance of that friend to get the bread that he needed. And the same is true in this parable which we are considering now: the unjust judge was reluctant to help the widow who was being severely troubled by one whom she called, "mine adversary." And both the friend who at first refused to give bread, and the judge who feared neither God nor did he regard man, granted the requests which we so persistently presented to them.

The amazing thing about both parables is that the reluctant friends and the unrighteous judge in each parable represent the Lord. Why is this the case? Well, it is probably because this is the idea that many of us may have of God. And it is the result of much of the experience that we have in prayer. We pray, but we have more unanswered prayers than we do answered prayers. Luke, in Luke 18:1, tells us the problem: We know more about *fainting* than we do about *praying always*. And so this parable, and the one in Luke 11 are designed to teach us a very important lesson in prayer. The parable was given by our Lord to teach us that:

**I. "MEN OUGHT ALWAYS TO PRAY, AND NOT TO FAITH"
(Luke 18:1).**

The word "ought" indicates that we are debtors to pray. Charles Simeon, who was a faithful man of prayer and who saw great blessings from God during his ministry, said that our debt is threefold:

A. Primarily it is a debt we owe to God Himself.

God never intended for us to live like most of us live. How rare is the child of God who realizes how completely dependent he is upon the Lord. And the Lord has made us that way. The Psalmist expressed the need which we all have when he wrote Psa. 27:13-14:

13 I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

14 Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall

strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

Think of how barren and unhappy our lives would be if we did not have the blessing of the Lord to count on. He blesses us richly even though we fail to pray as we should. But to be always praying, living in an attitude of prayer and utter dependence upon God, what wonderful added blessings we would experience if only we were to pray more. James said, "Ye have not because ye ask not" (Jas. 4:2), and then he added in verse 3, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your own lusts," or *selfish desires*.

We owe it to God to pray because He created us, and He preserves us, and especially because He has redeemed us. Not to pray is to be disobedient to the Lord when He tells us so many times and in so many ways that we don't have any greater first need than the need to pray. But instead, we are all experts in fainting.

B. We have an obligation to pray for others.

But we have an obligation to pray for others, and it is a God-given obligation. We need to pray for our family members. We need to pray for our fellow believers in the church. We have an obligation to pray for those who minister the Word in other place, even in other countries. And it is probably true that we have unsaved friends for whom no one else is praying. And this should cause us to be more faithful in prayer.

C. We have an obligation to pray for ourselves.

But we also have an obligation to pray for ourselves. None of us can make progress spiritually without praying for ourselves. And this includes those times when we worship the Lord. We need to seek His strength and His blessing. We need His guidance. We need His protection. And this was the burden of the widow in our parable who sought the help of the unrighteous judge.

What does it mean *to faint*? It means *to become discouraged, to lose heart, to despair*. But in contrast with our inclinations and our experience, we have this statement of Scripture which is a statement of the will of God that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint"! The Lord knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. He knows our unbelief, and all of the excuses that we make when it comes to prayer. And it clearly was His purpose to correct our ideas about prayer, and to lead us into a much closer fellowship with Himself in prayer. "Pray without ceasing," said Paul to

the Thessalonian church. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit," he told the Ephesian believers. "Continuing instant in prayer was his instruction to the church at Rome. But we are always inclined to feel that we can't spend all of our time in prayer. So what did the Lord mean when He has given us all of this teaching concerning prayer? He wouldn't tell us to do anything that is beyond our reach if we are trusting in Him for the wisdom and strength to do what He wants us to do.

Obviously we all need regular times of prayer when we pray alone. Then we ought to have family prayer. Our children should be able to learn how to pray by listening to us pray. And then there are times when special needs arise, and we go to the Lord seeking His help. But the exhortations of Scripture, such as we have in the first verse of our text tonight, is not that we should always be on our knees in prayer, but that we should be living in an attitude of prayer. It should never be difficult for us to pray. We should never be involved in anything which makes it difficult for us to pray, or where prayer becomes a final resort instead of our first resort. To pray is to be living in fellowship with God, and the more we pray, the closer will be our fellowship with Him. Praying is not easy. It is probably the most physically taxing work that we have to do. The Devil opposes us. Our flesh faints under it. That is why, if we are to be faithful in prayer, we have to seek our strength from the Lord, and keep the eyes of our hearts upon Him. Luke 11:1 probably gives us the request which we all need to begin with, and then continue with the same request as long as we live: "Lord, teach us to pray."

One way to keep from fainting is by continually feeding our souls on the Word of God. How important it is for us to be learning more and more about God Himself, if we are to be faithful in prayer! And the promises of God are given to us in Scripture to encourage faith and prayer. And then we have many records of answered prayer in Scripture. Some church groups have their prayer books. Remember that the best prayer book that was ever written in your Bible. Read it, and then turn it back to God in prayer.

But now let us turn our attention to the parable at the beginning of Luke 18.

II. THE PARABLE OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS JUDGE (Luke 18:2-5).

The first thing that we are given is:

A. A description of the judge (v. 2).

I am sure that this is not the kind of a judge that we would want to have any dealings with. He didn't fear God; he had no regard for man. He was not concerned about doing what was right in God's sight. He was quite evidently a very proud man who always had to make things go his way. He was not a servant of the people; he made people do what he wanted. He resented any intrusion upon his time when he had other things to do. He did not know that God had given him the position that he had. Aren't the powers that be "ordained of God"? Neither did he know that his position was ordained as "the minister of God...for good"? Read Romans 13:1-7. So he was really disqualified on both points. But in this wicked world you often find that this is the case.

Let us look, secondly, at:

B. The widow (v. 3).

She had no husband to help her, and so she came to the judge, seeking the help that she needed. We don't know exactly what the problem was, but we know that she had an enemy who was trying to take advantage of her. She had something which he wanted, and so this widow came to get the judge to stop her adversary, her enemy, from whatever he was doing, or trying to do, to her. Her plea was very simple, but very urgent. This was her prayer: "Avenge me of my adversary." She was only asking the judge to do what was right. She wanted protection for herself, and punishment for her adversary--or at least for restraints, permanent restraints, to be put upon her enemy.

The text indicates that this widow had come more than once. Verse 5 speaks of her "continual coming." This illustrates what it means to be praying always.

The third thing in the parable is:

C. The reaction of the judge (vv. 4-5).

At first he made it clear that he could not be bothered. He was acting true to his character--not caring what God might want him to do, nor was he concerned about helping this woman who obviously was a helpless victim. For the Lord to say that this judge had no "regard" for this woman means that he had no concern for her as a person.

But finally he realized that she was not going to take “no” for an answer. And so, just to keep her from making life miserable to him, and by her coming would *wear him out*--which is an alternate translation for the word “weary,” he decided to do what normally you would never expect that judge to do. He avenged her. She got her answer, and it must have amazed her family and friends that she got such a response from such a judge. Her persistence paid off.

That is really all that there is to the parable, but then the Lord, the Master-Teacher, made:

III. THE APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE (Luke 18:6-8).

Now the point in this parable is this. The Lord wanted those who were listening to Him to weight carefully the words of the unrighteous judge. He was obviously a sinner, a very selfish man, more concerned about pleasing himself than he was about pleasing anyone else.

This widow was a stranger to him--at least at the first. And she was a woman. Today he probably wouldn't have been able to get away with what he did then. But probably the picture that the Lord painted of this judge was true to life. And he finally gave her what she wanted, not because he had changed, but because he knew that she would keep coming back and ultimately would wear him out. So he gave her what she wanted.

Now all of us know that the Lord is not like that. He is absolutely righteous in all that He does, and in all that He is. He had the greatest concern while He was here on earth for the will of His Father, and He showed the greatest compassion for people--often to the point of tears.

More than that, we are not strangers to Him. Here is a comforting fact about our salvation. He chose us. We are His elect. I didn't plan to bring this doctrine in to both of my messages today; the doctrine of election was there in both texts. So when we come to God, He knows us by name, and He loves us. He has always loved us with an everlasting love. We can't fully understand that.

But more than that: He has asked us to come. I should state it even stronger than that: He has commanded us to come. He knows that we have not just one need, but many of them. And every need we have is a need which we cannot meet. Will He avenge us?

At this point there is a similarity between the unrighteous judge and our righteous God. Sometimes we have to "cry day and night unto him." He often *bears long with us. But then suddenly the answer is given. Suddenly prayer is answered when it seemed to us that it would never be.*

God has promised to answer our prayers when we pray according to His will. Cf. 1 John 5:14-15. He hears us when we pray. Often His purpose in delaying the answer is that He wants to keep us coming, and it seems that we are so constituted that we have to have some need in order for us to continue coming. The question is not *will* the Lord answer our prayers, *but when?*

But what did the Lord mean by the question He asked at the end of verse 8?

I believe He meant that in spite of the fact that He is a good God, a righteous God, a God Who has chosen His own and Who has promised to hear and answer their prayers, when He comes, will He find any who are really praying, any who really believe His promises, any who have made prayer such a vital part of their lives that they could be called *men of prayer*, or *women of prayer*, or *young people who pray*, or *children who pray*? True faith is essential to true praying.

Concl: How would you answer that question? If the Lord were to return tonight, and He very well could, would you be ashamed before Him, would I be ashamed before Him, as the Apostle John suggested is a possibility, because we have not trusted the Lord as we should, and have not prayed as we should? Do we pray "always"? Do we want to learn to pray "always"? We often use the excuse that we are too busy to pray. How much better it would be to have the attitude of Martin Luther who used to say, "I am so busy that I must pray."

We don't come to an unrighteous judge. We come to a righteous God Who is also our heavenly Father. Let us please Him by coming continually to the throne of grace to be with Him, and so that there we may find mercy and grace to help us in all of our needs. What He asks us to do, He enables us to do. Let us ask God to make us a people who pray continually, and who, by His grace, refuse to faint.

TWO MEN AND THEIR PRAYERS

Luke 18:9-14

Intro: Our Lord gave the purpose of this parable, and so we would have to say that it mainly had to do with the Pharisee. He is the “certain,” or typical of the “certain,” to whom the Lord was referring. He made two mistakes:

- 1) He was trusting in himself that he was righteous, and
 - 2) He “despised” the publican because the publican was not like he was.
- And yet in verse 14 we find that the publican was justified, but the Pharisee was not! However, in order to appreciate this story which the Lord told it is important for us to learn something about:

I. THE TWO MEN (Luke 18:10).**A. The Pharisee.**

He is mentioned first. In some respects, the Pharisees were orthodox. They believed in the immortality of the soul, in the resurrection of the body, and in a final judgment with its rewards or punishments. On the other hand they subscribed to many traditions which had been added to the Law of Moses, but they taught that these traditions also came from Moses, but were handed down orally from generation to generation. And so they accepted and sought to enforce the traditions even more than the written Law. They also maintained a Messianic hope when many in the nation in the time of our Lord were ready to give in to Rome in order to get greater political influence for themselves.

But all of these things, as good as some of them were, were offset by the character of the Pharisees themselves. We have a true and detailed description of them in the words of our Lord in Matthew 23. They laid heavy burdens on the people, but considered themselves exempt from their own teaching. The Lord said, “They say, and do not” (Matt. 23:3). They were extremely proud. They wanted the chief places at feasts. They wanted to be called “Rabbi” or “Father” or “Master.” The Lord said that they kept people from entering into the kingdom of heaven, i.e., from being saved, and when they would win converts to their ideas, they would “make him twofold more the child of hell” than they were. See Matt. 23:15.

They linked almsgiving with righteousness, and so they believed in righteousness by works. The Lord said over and over again that they were

“hypocrites.” They pretended to be very religious, but practically they were only putting on an act. And this is where we find the Pharisee that the Lord told about in his parable. His pride was very apparent even when he went to the temple to engage in his prayers. They were not the only group of religious leaders in Israel at the time of our Lord, but they were a very strong group.

For more information on them, and the history of their cult, consult a good Bible encyclopedia or dictionary. I have gotten much of the above from the International Bible Encyclopedia.

B. The publican.

The people of Israel in our Lord’s day were heavily taxed by the Roman government. Not all of it was in the hands of publicans, but much of it was. The article in ISBE gives this helpful information:

It is to be noted first of all (a fact that is often overlooked by the student) that in the imperial era the direct taxes were not farmed out, but collected by regular imperial officers in the regular routine of official duty. The customs or tolls levied upon exports and imposts, and upon goods in the hands of merchants passing through the country, were sold to the highest bidders, who were called publicans.

(from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (C) 1996 by Biblesoft).

The article continues as follows:

Sufficient cause for the unpopularity of publicans in New Testament times is not far seek. Hatred of paying duties seems to be ingrained in human nature. Customs officials are always unpopular. The method is necessarily inquisitorial. The man who opens one’s boxes and bundles to appraise the value of what one has, is at best a tolerated evil. In Judaea, under the Roman system, all circumstances combined to make the publican the object of bitter hatred. He represented and exercised in immediate contact, at a sore spot with individuals, the hatred power of Rome. The tax itself was looked upon as an inherent religious wrong, as well as civil imposition, and by many the payment of it was considered a sinful act of disloyalty to God. The tax-gatherer, if a Jew, was a renegade in the eyes of his patriotic fellows. He paid a fixed sum for the taxes, and received for himself what he could over and above that amount. The ancient and widespread curse of

arbitrariness was in the system. The tariff rates were vague and indefinite (see Schurer, History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, I, ii, 67 f). The collector was thus always under the suspicion of being an extortioner and probably was in most instances. The name was apt to realize itself. The unusual combination in a publican of petty tyrant, renegade and extortioner, made by circumstances almost inevitable, was not conducive to popularity. In the score of instances in the New Testament where publicans are mentioned, their common status, their place in the thought and action of Jesus, their new hope in the gospel are clearly set forth. The instances in which our Lord speaks of them are especially illuminating:

(from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database
Copyright (C) 1996 by Biblesoft)

And the parable before us in Luke 18 is an example of how the Lord viewed the publicans. He never justified their greed, nor the way in which they took advantage of their fellow-Jews, but He knew what was in the hearts of many, and such men as Zacchaeus and Matthew, His disciple, who seems to have carried his title with him ever afterwards: "the publican." Much has been written about the publicans, but they certainly were a despised group, and the Pharisees had much fuel for the scathing denunciations that they brought against them.

So we have in the Pharisees, men who were religious, but, for the most part, hypocrites. They were proud, just as greedy as the publicans were, and very tyrannical toward the people who were under them. The publicans were considered traitors to the nation Israel, and they were classed with prostitutes and sinners of the Gentiles. We cannot conceive of two groups that were farther apart than the Pharisees and the publicans.

However, we see in the Scriptures that there were Pharisees who were among the elect, and their were also publicans. So we never know where the Word of God is going to take effect, nor how God works in any heart to make them receptive to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The second point in the parable has to do with:

II. THE PRAYERS OF THESE TWO MEN (Luke 18:11-13).

A. The prayer of the Pharisee (vv. 11-12).

It is interesting to note that our Lord in speaking of the Pharisee's prayer said that he "stood and prayed thus with himself." He addressed God, but everything he had to say was about what *he* did! We see no consciousness of sin. In fact, he was there to tell God that he was not a sinner. But the basis of his conviction was not the character of God, but the character of the publican. His thanksgiving was a farce because he was taking the credit for himself that he was not doing anything wrong, but was doing what was right.

And yet a study of the Pharisees in Scripture shows that he was not telling the truth. They did extort money even from widows. They fasted, not to please God, but to appear righteous before men. And in the story found in John 8 where the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman taken in the act of committing adultery to the Lord, the Lord sent them all away when He said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:7).

The Pharisee in this parable was sure that he was all right because he didn't do the wrong things, but did do the right things. These are cited as examples of how deserving he felt he was of the blessing of God.

We have in Luke 5 an account where the Pharisees were critical of our Lord because he ate with publicans at the home of Levi. Let me read this to you to show why the Pharisee in our parable was only talking to himself when supposedly he was praying. This is the account:

27 And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me.

28 And he left all, rose up, and followed him.

29 And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.

30 But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

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 5:27-32).

But now let us look at:

B. The publican's prayer (v. 13).

Be sure to notice that the Pharisee was aware of the publican's presence in the temple, but nothing was said by our Lord to indicate that the publican was conscious that the Pharisee was there.

Notice also that the prayer of the publican was very short in comparison with the prayer of the Pharisee. But it is apparent that the Lord heard and answered the prayer of the publican, but that He paid no attention to the prayer of the Pharisee. This ought to remind us of the parable in which the man sought his lost sheep. And he called his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him because he had found his sheep which was lost. And then the Lord said this:

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (Luke 15:7).

It was not that the Pharisee did not need to repent, but he did not feel that he needed to repent. After all, if he had sinned in the past, his present good works were sufficient to make God forget about his past sins. At least, this was his theology.

Now let us notice what our Lord said about the publican.

He stood afar off. He did not feel worthy to be in the temple, nor to approach God. His humiliation is seen in the fact that he could not look into the face of God. He beat upon his breast to show how he regretted his sin, as well as the agony of heart he was experiencing at the thought that he deserved judgment, and not salvation.

Herbert Lockyer, in his book, *All the Parables of the Bible*, quoted this verse:

Two went to pray; O! rather say,
One went to brag: th'other to pray.
One stands up close, and treads on high
Where th'other dares not send his eye.
One nearer to God's altar trod,
The other to the altar's God.

What did the publican say? He knew that he was a sinner, and that he could not undo before God what he had done. He knew that he deserved the wrath of God. And he could only do one thing: Pray that God would have mercy upon him.

I have called your attention before to what this publican actually said. It was not, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” but “*God be merciful to me the sinner.*” He said nothing about the Pharisee. If he knew that the Pharisee was there, he would only consider the Pharisee to be better than he was. But his simple, brief prayer meant that he was saying to God in those few words, “When the Bible speaks of sinners, it is talking about me. And when the Bible speaks of the mercy and grace and love of God, it is my only hope of acceptance with a holy God.”

Charles Simeon said this about the publican:

He did not attempt to extenuate his guilt, or promise amendment as a reparation for his offences. He renounced all self-righteous methods of recommending himself to God, and cast himself entirely upon the Divine mercy (Vol. 13, p. 33).

Now we come to

III. THE VERDICT (Luke 18:13).

It is God Who determines who will be declared righteous before Him, and who will not. The Pharisee with all of his “good works” and all of his self-righteousness, went down to his house a sinner under the judgment of God. The publican, on the other hand, because he sought God’s forgiveness through His mercy, went home justified.

Concl: Therefore, we should not waste our time talking to God about all of the good that we have done because we can never do enough good to save ourselves, nor can we even do enough good to atone for the bad that we have done in the past. God’s mercy has been expressed to us in the coming of His Son into the world to die on the Cross for “sinners.” And it is only by the work of Christ on the Cross that any of us, Pharisee or publican or whoever we might be, can find forgiveness and justification. As long as we seek to exalt ourselves with all that the good that we think we have done, the greater will be our abasement. But when we humble ourselves, admitting that we deserve only the wrath of God but seeking His mercy through Christ, then God lifts us out of our sin, makes us new creatures, and declares us fully acceptable because we are not trusting in our character, nor our good works, but in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross.

Who do you stand with tonight--with the Pharisee, or with the publican? That is the crucial question for all of us to answer. The Pharisee needed

the same mercy from God that the publican did, but the difference was that the publican knew it, but the Pharisee did not. The Apostle Paul said that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15), and then he, a former Pharisee, took his stand with the publican when he added, “Of whom I am chief.”

If any of you cannot say tonight that Jesus Christ is your Savior, then take your stand with the publican tonight, and plead with God for His mercy. Our Savior has promised that no one who comes to Christ will be turned away.

A LETTER TO A VERY DEAR FRIEND

3 John

Intro: There are three men who are mentioned by name in this epistle:

Gaius in verse 1, Diotrephes in verse 9, and Demetrius in verse 12. Gaius is the man to whom the Apostle John addressed this epistle, and he is mentioned very favorably. Diotrephes is mentioned very unfavorably. He is sometimes referred to as a “church boss”—a man who had to have his way in everything. Demetrius, like Gaius, is mentioned very favorably, and highly commended by the Apostle John.

We really have no idea who these men were. They appear here on the pages of church history, but we do not know where they lived. There are four Gaiuses mentioned in the NT (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14). But since the Apostle John was writing toward the end of the first century, it is very unlikely if any of these men were even living in the early days of the church. It is possible, but not very likely.

So the Holy Spirit, Who led the Apostle John in the writing of this epistle, quite evidently did not want us to have any further details about these men than those which are given to us right here. In this way the epistle would have a greater message for men in the church down through the years from those days until now. We can be sure that what pleased the Apostle John, and the Lord, in those days, is pleasing to Him today. And so we do well if we follow in the footsteps of Gaius and Demetrius, but we are in trouble with the Lord if we are like Diotrephes.

A. T. Robertson, a noted Greek scholar who wrote a commentary on the NT either in the latter part of the nineteenth century or in the early part of this century, reported a humorous incident connected with Diotrephes. He wrote an article about Diotrephes, the church boss, for their denominational paper. He mentioned no contemporary names in his article, but after it was published “twenty-five deacons stopped the paper to show their personal resentment against being personally attacked in the paper” (Vol. VI, p. 263). So there evidently were at least that many men in that day who had to admit that they were like Diotrephes. Well, let us notice what the Apostle John had to say about each one of them.

The epistle can easily be outlined:

- 1) The Apostle’s salutation (v. 1).
- 2) The Apostle’s commendation of Gaius (vv. 2-8).
- 3) The Apostle’s condemnation of Diotrephes (vv. 9-11).

4) The Apostle's commendation of Demetrius (v. 12).

5) The Apostle's conclusion (vv.13-14).

We saw that 2 John was written to a lady, a godly lady, who had godly children. This epistle was written to a godly man who obviously was very dear to the Apostle John. In fact, it would seem from verse 4 that Gaius may have been the Apostle John's spiritual son, and the same may have been true of Demetrius--that the Apostle John had been used by God in the salvation of both of these men. Four times in this brief epistle the Apostle John addressed Gaius as "beloved." See verses 1, 2, 5, 11. There is no reason for translating the word in verse 1 as "wellbeloved," except that the translators may have been trying to reveal how very dear Gaius was to the Apostle John. But basically the same word is used the four times it appears in this epistle. And they all express how dear Gaius was to the Apostle.

But now let us look at the epistle. First we have:

I. THE APOSTLE'S SALUTATION (3 John 1).

Think of the beloved Apostle John, the one who years ago had outrun the Apostle Peter as they hurried to the tomb, and then who waited for Peter to be the first to enter the tomb, now writing to his *beloved Gaius*, not vaunting the fact that he was the last remaining *Apostle*, but identifying himself as an older brother and as a pastor. He takes his pen in hand to write to one of his sons in the faith, a man we only know by name: *Gaius*.

Actually twice in this first verse, he expressed his deep and abiding love for Gaius, who it would appear was his son in the faith: "The wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth." What tenderness do we detect flowing out of the heart of John, through his pen, and on to the page upon which he was writing. It would be difficult to find a more gracious and loving greeting than that which we have heard. And the fact that this is no mere human affection which the Apostle was expressing, we see that his love for Gaius was "in the truth." Not only did he genuinely love Gaius, but it was a love rooted and grounded in the truth of God's Word.

But he quickly moves on to his first commendation.

II. THE APOSTLE'S COMMENDATION OF GAIUS (3 John 2-8).

A. Gaius commended for his walk with the Lord (vv. 2-4).

I want you to see that the Apostle John's commendation of Gaius was twofold. First he commended Gaius for the way he was living, and secondly because of the way he was serving the Lord. And notice that the commendation followed that order. It is often the case that we place so much emphasis on serving the Lord that we neglect the nurturing of our own souls. Gaius did not make that mistake, and the Apostle John was very happy about that.

The expression of his love for Gaius continues with the word, "Beloved." "Wish" is a translation of the familiar Greek word for prayer. So this was not just a wish, but a prayer! We who are believers in the Lord Jesus can do far more than just wish people good health, or a good day; we can carry our request to our God and heavenly Father from whom all of our blessings come. The Apostle John recognized that Gaius' soul was prospering; his prayer was that his physical health would keep pace with his spiritual health.

We live in a day when people are deeply concerned with physical health. Athletic clubs are bursting with members. Joggers are out early and late. And I have no objection to that. It is good for us to keep exercising. But how many do you think there are who spent hours working on their physical health, but who don't take even a minute to deal with their spiritual health. They never read the Bible. They never go to church. They are concentrating on that which is only temporal, but doing nothing about that which is eternal. Gaius was not like that. It may have been that he was recovering from some illness, but whatever the situation was in his life, his spiritual health seems to have been better than his physical health. And it was the Apostle John's prayer that his physical health would catch up with his spiritual health. Many people want to prosper financially even though they can't take any of it with them when they die, but do not give a thought to a prospering soul. They may not even know that they have a soul.

What is a prospering soul? Well, it is a soul that is saved, and that is growing in grace. It is a person who is pursuing a holy life, and who diligently seeks to avoid sin. It is a soul in fellowship with God, a person who is living for eternity, and not just for this life.

Verse 3 tells us that even thinking about Gaius made the Apostle John rejoice. Notice the emphasis again upon the truth. It was "the truth...in" Gaius which enabled him to walk in the truth. His life showed that he was a man who spent time with the Word of God. He was not just a hearer of

the Word, but he was a doer! His life was being transformed by what he found in God's Word. And in verse 4 the Apostle declared that there wasn't anything that could have made him happier. (Read verse 4.) This shows that the Apostle John really had a pastor's heart. It showed where he was that his joy was centered on the spiritual life of his son in the faith.

But he did not ignore the service that Gaius was involved in.

B. Gaius commended for the way he was serving the Lord (vv. 5-8).

The emphasis here seems to be upon what Gaius did to aid in the spread of the Gospel. "Brethren, and...strangers" seems to refer to those whom Gaius knew, and other which he did not know. He knew that the latter were believers, but he had not known them previously. They were itinerant missionaries, with letters of recommendation from churches who were supporting them. They had come to the church where Gaius was, and could always count on his encouragement and support. And it seemed that Gaius encouraged the church to stand behind these servants of the Lord. And the Apostle John was commending Gaius for what he was doing.

"After a godly sort" actually means, *worthily of God*. That is, the Apostle was indicating that when a true servant of the Lord comes, he is to be treated as you would treat God if He were to come to your home. When the three men appeared at Abraham's tent in Genesis 18, he treated them "after a godly sort," only to learn later that he was entertaining the Lord and two angels. In the preceding letter you will remember that the Apostle John told that "elect lady" *not* to entertain anyone who came and did not bring the doctrine of Christ with them. Here he commended Gaius because he did entertain true servants of the Lord, encouraged the church to do the same, and then treated them as he would have treated the Lord--which he was actually doing because the Lord is always with His people and He goes forth with those who serve Him.

One thing that especially endeared these servants of the Lord to whom the Apostle John was referring was the fact that they refused to accept help from "Gentiles," that is, from people who did not know the Lord. And they refused any help from unbelievers "for his name's sake." This means that their purpose in going forth was to make their Lord known. His Name represents Who He is. And it would have given people the wrong idea about the Lord if His servants had accepted help from the world. And it would have made it harder for them to understand the grace of God.

This is a line that has been almost completely ignored in our day. Churches are often too glad to get help from any source, whether Christian or not, and this only gives the people we are trying to reach the wrong idea about our Lord. He is not dependent upon people. He is no beggar that He has to appeal to the world for the support of His work. The servants of the Lord to whom the Apostle John was referring, didn't take even a little; they "took nothing." George Mueller, who started all of those orphanages years ago in Bristol, England, not only would return gifts sent by unbelievers, but if he suspected that a gift was given with the wrong motive, he would send it back.

And so the Apostle John said what we read in verse 8. (Read.)

This means that we need to check up on people whom we are going to support to make sure that they really know the Lord, that their message is true to the Word of God, and that they are really trusting the Lord to support them in their work.

There is a great deal that we can learn from a little epistle like this that will help us to do the Lord's work more effectively. What we seem to have forgotten in our day is that the Lord's work must be done in the Lord's way if we are to have the blessing of the Lord upon what we do. If we do the Lord's work in our way, it will only get corrupted more and more. And that is what has happened so often today. But let us move on.

III. THE APOSTLE'S CONDEMNATION OF DIOTREPHESES (3 John 9-11).

The situation regarding DiotrepheSES could not have been more different from that of Gaius. Here was a trouble maker, a man who had to have his own way. He knew nothing about the truth--although he would claim that he did. And he certainly did not understand the ways of the Lord. He wanted to have "the preeminence." In the light of what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, that Christ according to God's will was to have the preeminence, this means that DiotrepheSES was taking the Lord's place. *He wouldn't even accept the Apostle John!*

The Apostle John intended to deal with him face to face when he came. He would remind DiotrepheSES about what he had done, and what he had said. And he would deal with him about his rejection of brethren who should have been accepted, and how he threw people out of the church who did not like what he did! A man like DiotrepheSES will not stop at any-

thing nor anyone, even an apostle, to do what he wants to do.

Note the expression, “prating against us with malicious words.” This means that he brought false charges against the Apostle John. The word “malicious” links such false charges to the Devil himself. It was like they did with the Lord. When they couldn’t produce true charges, they made up false charges.

If you want an illustration of a little leaven leavening the whole church, this is it! And that is the reason that the Apostle John intended to do something about it before Diotrephes was able to do any more damage.

And then the Apostle John gave Gaius the truth to go by. (Read v. 11.) “That which is evil” is that which is not true, which is designed to damage a person’s character, to get people to think that which is not true. That which is “good” is that which is true and helpful and supported by the Word of God. “Evil” is that which is contrary to Scripture. A person who does what is right according to Scripture “is of God.” Diotrephes was proving that he did not know the Lord, he had “not seen God.” We need to beware of men who claim to have special insights into the Word of God, but whose behavior is without that which is good and holy in God’s sight. Remember the warning which the Apostle Paul gave to the Ephesian elders:

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:28-31).

Things are either white or black in the eyes of the Lord, never gray. And they need to be that way with us, too.

But now we have some relief as we look at Demetrius.

IV. THE APOSTLE’S COMMENDATION OF DEMETRIUS (3 John 12).

You know, it makes a great deal of difference as to how the right people

feel about you. We all need to remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when He said in Luke 6:26, “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.” But the Scriptures also would warn us when no one can speak well of us. When the world speaks well of us, we need to examine our hearts to find out what is wrong. Our Lord was never in danger of being Citizen #1 in Israel. But look at the commendation which Demetrius had:

A. He had a “good report of all men,” that is, of all believers.

B. He had a good report “of the truth itself.”

What a commendation this was! Place Demetrius along side of the Word, and you find divine approval, the approval of God Himself. There can be no greater commendation than this! It ought to be your objective and mine too, to have God’s approval.

C. He had the approval of the Apostle John.

The Apostle said, “We also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.”

Wouldn’t you like to have known Gaius and Demetrius? And aren’t you glad that you didn’t know Diotrephes—although you may have known someone just like him. But in most churches, unfortunately, you will find both kinds. Just as the Apostle John stood Gaius on one side of Diotrephes, and Demetrius on the other side, so it is to be hoped that wherever there is a Diotrephes, such an ungodly man will be hemmed in by two godly men the caliber of Gaius and Demetrius. And where there is a Diotrephes, he needs to be called to account as the Apostle John intended to do, that his work might be stopped and so the work of the Lord can go ahead under the blessing of the Lord. Church discipline needs to be exercised whenever there is an attack upon the truth of God or upon the practice of the truth.

This brings us to:

V. THE APOSTLE’S CONCLUSION (3 John 13-14).

Both 2 John and 3 John conclude in the same way. (Read 2 John 12-13 and 3 John 13-14.) What do these conclusions teach us? They teach us that it is good to write, and sometimes circumstances prohibit us from

doing anything else. We write when the need is urgent--and that was the case with both of these epistles. But it is better to speak face to face. In neither case was the Apostle John sure that he could visit either the elect lady or Gaius. But he was hoping and praying that the Lord would make that possible. Would it be just for a visit? No, it was for fellowship with them in the Word of God. Regardless of how much we know about the Word, or think that we know about it, there is always more to learn, and it is always helpful for all of us to be reminded of truth that we have known so that we may continue to make progress toward the goal that is before all of us, that of becoming like our Lord Jesus Christ.

Concl: We all need to know the Word, and to walk according to the Word, and to work as we are taught in Scripture to do the work of the Lord. There are always those who want something different from what we have in the Word, or something more than we have in the Word. But we must never depart from the Word. And we must never let others turn us from the Word. To turn from the Word is to turn from God, and to turn from the Word is to turn from Christ, and to turn from the Word is to turn from the Holy Spirit. God's Word is "truth." Those who would seek to make us deviate in any way from the Word of God, are not are friends, but they are our enemies. Thank God for the relatively unknown Gaiuses and Demetriuses, as well as the well known like the Apostle John, who have remained true to the Lord and His Word in the past. To God's glory we owe them much. May the Lord make us faithful and keep us faithful in our day and until our Lord comes.

A NOBLEMAN AND HIS SERVANTS

Luke 19:11-27

Intro: This parable is not to be confused with the parable of the talents which is recorded for us in Matt. 25:14-30--although there are expositors who say that they are the same. I think that a careful reading of the two parables will show that they are *not* the same. There are many similarities, and the emphasis is surely the same, but the purpose of the parables, the audience, and the way in which the goods of the masters were distributed to their servants, are all different. And, although it might be a minor point, while a “talent” as in Matthew 25, and a “pound” in Luke 19, are different, this also is an indication that the parables are different. David Brown, in the JFB commentary, said that the pound is about one-sixtieth of a talent. With these differences we will consider the parable in Luke as different from the parable in Matthew 25.

Let us begin by noticing:

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLE (Luke 19:11).

One mistaken idea that many of the followers of our Lord had, including His apostles, was that the Lord at that time was going to set up His kingdom and begin His reign upon the earth. That is why they were so confused when the Lord would speak of His suffering and His death, even though He would add that He would be raised from the dead. Even the Apostle Peter strongly rebuked the Lord when He would speak in this way. See Matt. 16:21-23 as an illustration.

The effect of such an attitude would be that it would keep the followers of our Lord from doing what they needed to do, as well as from understanding what they needed to understand. And so the Lord used this parable to teach them that there was work to be done, but also to show the solemn and irreversible effect of rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spurgeon, in his message on this parable, pointed out that this parable had a historical basis which he learned from the Jewish historian, Josephus. It seems that when the Herod died who had wanted to kill the baby Jesus, his son Archelaus became king in his place. But he could not reign as king under Caesar until appointed by Caesar. When he went to Rome for that purpose, many of the Jews in Judaea objected. They were tired of the Herods and their cruelty, and would gladly have been made a part of the Roman Empire under Caesar himself to avoid another Herod. This may

have been in the Lord's mind as He told this parable.

II. THE DETAILS OF THE PARABLE (Luke 19:12-25).

— The nobleman was a man of high rank, but he evidently had been called by the King to be appointed to an even higher rank: to receive a kingdom of his own.

In order that he might not lose any profit during the time that he was away, and also to provide his servants with a test that could lead to greater responsibilities on their part, he called ten of his servants and gave each of them one pound. It was so-called because of its weight as well as its value. This does not mean it weighed what we call a "pound," but it had to do with weights in those days, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to compare it with our money today. It was not a great amount, but enough to serve the master's purpose.

— The master told his servants, "Occupy till I come" (v. 13). This meant that they were to carry on with their master's business until the master returned. It would be a test of their wisdom and ability to see how much they could earn, not for themselves, but for their master, before he returned from receiving his kingdom.

He gave each servant the same amount. They all had the same opportunity to serve their master. Then the master went away.

After the master had gone, his citizens, who hated him, sent word to the one who would appoint the nobleman to a kingdom, that they did not want him to rule over them. So we have the story centering in the servants, and the attitude which was held by the citizens over whom the nobleman would reign if he got his royal appointment.

Later he returned as a king. He called his servants to himself, and asked them to account for the money which he had given to them. See.

The first servant gained ten pounds (v. 16).

The master praised him, and gave him authority over ten cities.

— The second servant gained five pounds (v. 18).

The master praised him, and gave him authority over five cities.

The third servant had a different story to tell. He had kept safely what his master had given to him, but had not gained anything. He evidently felt more concerned about keeping what was given to him than he did about using it for the benefit of his master. The men were not told how they were to earn money, and the master told the man he called a “wicked servant” that he could have at least placed the pound in the bank, and the master would have at least received the interest on the money when he returned. Where the master went, and how long he was away, is not the point in the parable. The issue had to do with what the servants did for their master while he was away. Perhaps the fact that no dates were mentioned would have served to make the servants more diligent.

The master was quick in condemning the “wicked servant.” See vv. 22-24. So the third servant lost what he had, and his one talent was given to the one who had the ten talents to give to his master.

Then we come in the last two verses to:

III. THE APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE (Luke 19:26-27).

First,

A. Concerning the servants (v. 26).

And then,

B. Concerning the citizens (v. 27).

IV. THE EXPLANATION OF THE PARABLE.

The nobleman represented our Lord. The servants were the disciples. The citizens were the Jewish people, and their condemnation was in their rejection of the nobleman to be their king.

This parable pictures the return of our Lord to heaven until the time that He would come to reign upon the earth. When He returns there will be an accounting of how we have served Him during His absence. The application is for all of the Lord’s people from the time of our Lord’s ascension until His return to reign upon the earth. The Lord did not try to make any distinctions about His coming such as we have in other places in Scripture. Parables were not complicated with a lot of details. The point of the

parable is twofold: 1) for the servants; 2) for the citizens. As far as the nation Israel was concerned, their attitude as a nation was total rejection of Christ. When the Lord was being tried, Pilate said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" (John 19:14). But the Jews would have nothing to do with Him. They cried out for him to be crucified. And then they said, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). And Matthew tells us that when Pilate washed his hands of the whole matter, all of the people, not just the leaders, cried out, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. 27:25). And Israel has suffered down to the present day for that. But what is worse, just as the citizens in our parable were put to death by the newly appointed king, so there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when our Lord passes judgment on those who would have nothing to do with Him.

The Apostle Paul commented on this in his second epistle to the church of the Thessalonians. Listen to what he wrote to them:

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord
Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,
8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not
God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:
9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from
the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;
10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be
admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you
was believed) in that day (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

Nothing can possibly be worse than the judgment of those who "know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." How it behooves each one of us to make sure that we know the Lord, and that we have obeyed the Gospel injunction to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

But now let us think about applying the master's directive to his servants, which is our Lord's directive to us, "Occupy till I come." What does it mean?

I want to suggest that it means two things.

To "occupy" until the Lord comes means, first of all, that we need to be living for the Lord, living the way we are taught in the Word to live, not living like the people of the world, but living like the people of God. We need to manifest by God's grace that we are "new creatures." The testimony of our lips will not mean much unless it is supported by the testimony of our lives! We all know that the professing church today is doing

everything it can to be like the world. Church services have become more of an entertainment than a ministry. We are overlooking verses like Rom. 12:1-2 (quote) and 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1, which reads as follows:

14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

CHAPTER 7

1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

Our SS lesson this morning was very apropos. When there is fruit in our lives, based upon our relationship with our Lord, "the true vine," we are occupying as we await the coming of the Lord.

But there is also this other side of what it means to occupy. Our Lord has gone back to heaven. When He returns to the earth He will come to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. We are to be looking expectantly for Him every day that we live. With respect to the world, the Lord has given each of us a "pound," a gift which is to be used in taking the Gospel to every creature. Every servant of the Lord is a missionary. Some He calls to go to other lands to carry the Gospel message. Those of us who remain at home are to support those who go and who show themselves to be worthy servants of our Lord Jesus. And we are to pray for them. But that does not excuse us from being involved in getting the Gospel out. Let us not hide our "pound" in a napkin some place, but let us be faithful where we are in spreading the glorious message of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to make sure that we understand the Gospel so there will be no confusion in the message we give. And we need to ask the Lord daily to give us the boldness to speak for Him, just like the early Christians did. And we need to remember that the Lord sends His Word

out, often through us, to accomplish what He pleases. It is our task to give the message, to give it sincerely and fervently; it is up to the Lord as to what He does through His Word. If you feel that you can't do anything else, invite people to come to church with you. We all have a place. We all have a part that we can do. Let us be faithful to the Lord in spreading the message of the Gospel, and He will give us His blessing.

Concl: When Spurgeon preached on this text on Sunday morning, April 24, 1887, he had this to say about, "Occupy till I come":

I find that the original would suggest to any one carefully reading it that they were to regard their master as *already returning*. This should be our view of our Lord's Advent; He is even now on His way hither. No sooner had He risen from the grave than, practically, our Lord was coming back. Strange paradox! but His ascension into heaven was, in a certain sense, part of His coming back to us... He is coming now as fast as wisdom judges it to be right. I am sure our Saviour will not delay a moment beyond what is absolutely needful, for He loves the church which is His bride, and as he Bridegroom he will not delay the long-expected hour of their meeting, never to part again. *He* is ready, it is the bride that needs to make herself ready. Jesus desires to come; His heart is responsible to our cry when we say, "Come quickly!" He will come sooner than we think. We are bound to feel that He is at this moment on the road; and we are to live as if He might arrive at any moment.

We must trade on till our Lord has come. There must be no retiring from His business, even if we retire from our own; there must be no ceasing because we fancy that we have done enough. Our rest will be when He comes, but till then we must trade on (Vol. 33, pp. 249, 250).

May the Lord impress on all of our hearts how we need to live for Him each day, and how we need to be prepared always to give people a reason for the hope that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. How blessed we will be if we become instruments in the Lord's hands to point someone to Christ, and then to see them go to Him.

THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

Luke 20:9-19

Intro: The importance of this parable is seen in the fact that it is found in Matthew and Mark as well as Luke. It combines, from the standpoint of where our Lord stood in history, the past, the present, and the future. In Luke 20:19, at the end of the verse, Luke stated that the chief priest and scribes “perceived that He {our Lord} had spoken this parable against them.” And they were right! The Lord within the brief space of this parable had combined Israel’s past history, their present history which was then in the process of being written, along with a future prophecy as to what the nation’s response to God would mean to all who continued to oppose Him.

The owner of the vineyard is God. The husbandmen were the religious leaders of the nation. The owner, who in verse 13 is called, “the lord of the vineyard” [God} sent His “beloved Son,” our Lord Jesus Christ, and Him they killed. It must not have been easy for the Lord to tell this parable on what was virtually the eve of His own crucifixion. But He did. And then we see that our Lord predicted two judgments upon the husbandmen, and those who were like them.

The conflict that our Lord had with the Jewish leaders of His day was a question of *authority*. You can see this from the beginning of our Lord’s ministry, and especially in matters that had to do with the Sabbath. But there were other problems that the Jews had with our Lord because of His refusal to abide by their rules and regulations.

We see the Jews’ question addressed to the Lord in Luke 20:2. (Read.)

Authority means jurisdiction. The person with authority has the right to do what he has authority to do, and usually this includes power over others who are under his rule.

The situation that must have raised this question again (because this was not the first time the Lord faced this opposition) was what the Lord did in chapter 19. First we have what has been called His *triumphal entry* into Jerusalem. The Jews did not like that, and they told him so. See 19:39. But the thing that must have made them especially furious was after that when the Lord went into the temple (as we read in 19:45), cast out the money changers, and rebuked them with Isa. 56:7. This made them that much more opposed to the Lord, and suddenly there was a concerted effort

in the making to “destroy” the Lord. The Jews had wanted to do this before, but at this point it became more intense. They were very cautious, however, about taking the Lord prisoner because He was so highly popular with the people.

But one day as He was teaching and preaching the Gospel in the temple, the chief priests, scribes, and elders approached Him. They were the members of the Sanhedrin. They were the men who were “the supreme council and tribunal of the Jews” (Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, p. 881). They had not only religious authority, but civil authority, but also criminal authority over the Jewish people. These men came to the Lord while He was teaching and wanted to know who gave Him the authority to do what He had been doing. This included His teaching, but it also included what our Lord had done in casting out the money changers. I think we can safely assume that the money changers had not come back to work even days after all of this took place.

In their eyes, they, the Sanhedrin, were the sole authority for those things which the Lord had done. And so our Lord was infringing upon their authority--which ordinary Jews would rarely do. The Lord was obviously in trouble with them.

To answer them, He asked a question. See 20:3-4. He put them on what we would call *the horns of a dilemma*. There was no way they could answer our Lord’s question without getting themselves into trouble with someone. Luke tells us in 20:5-6 how they reasoned among themselves. Finally they said that they “could not tell.” The truth was that they *could* have, but they *would not*.

And so the Lord refused to tell them by what authority He had done what He had done, and why He was doing what He was doing: teaching and preaching.

I always marvel at the way the Lord faced the Jewish leaders of His day. They had authority to arrest Him (which they eventually did). Humanly speaking they could have put Him to death soon after He began His ministry. But something was restraining them. And that something was *Someone! It was God!* There must have been something about the very presence of our Lord which made them know that they could not do what they wanted to do. They could not touch Him until the time appointed by the Father. But it was at this time that the Lord told the parable which has been known as *the parable of the wicked husbandmen*.

I. THE PARABLE (Luke 20:9-16).

This “certain man” is called in verse 13, “the lord of the vineyard.” He owned the vineyard. But he leased it out to certain “husbandmen.” We would call them farmers, or vine dressers. Then the owner went away “into a far country for a long time.”

At the time of harvest he sent a servant to get his share of the crop. But the husbandmen beat him up, and sent him away. The owner of the vineyard exercised a great deal of patience, and so he sent a second servant. They beat him up, and treated him with contempt, apparently insulted him and making him feel that he had no right, no authority, to ask them for fruit. The husbandmen evidently felt safe because the owner of vineyard was nowhere around, but in a far country.

A third servant was sent. They treated him with even greater contempt and inflicted bodily harm on him.

It was then that the lord of the vineyard decided to sent his dear son, thinking that the husbandmen would show respect for him because of who he was. But instead of honoring him, the husbandmen looked upon this as an opportunity to take over the vineyard and to keep it for themselves.

So what did they do? They cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

The husbandmen did not realize it, but they had exhausted their lord’s patience. He came, killed the husbandmen, and leased the vineyard to others. At least some of the people seemed to get the point of what the Lord was saying, and so they said, “Let it not be!” They were horrified at the thought.

And this point the Lord took the people to the Scriptures as he had done with the moneychangers in the temple in Luke 19:46. Only this time our Lord quoted from Psa. 118:22. (Read verse 20:17.) And then the Lord followed His quotation with the statement which we have in Luke 20:18.

II. THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE.

I have already identified the “lord of the vineyard” as God, and his son as representing our Lord Jesus Christ. But who are the servants whom the lord of the vineyard sent to the vine dressers?

They have to be the prophets which the Lord sent throughout the history of Israel--a group of the Lord's servants who for the most part were rejected by the people.

Perhaps you remember how the Lord lamented over Jerusalem toward the end of His ministry. Luke gives it in chapter 19, verses 41-44. (Read.) In Matthew's account we have a more vivid statement of how Jerusalem had treated the prophets whom the Lord has sent to them. Let me read to you the words we find in Matt. 23:34-39:

34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Did the rejection of our Lord Jesus Christ put an end to the plan and purpose of God? Certainly not! No man, nor group of men, no nation, nor alliance of nations, could do that. The authority is in the hands of the Lord and in the hands of those servants to whom He delegates His authority. Let me remind you again of what the Apostle Peter told the Jews in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost after our Lord's resurrection and ascension. He said this:

22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it (Acts 2:22-24).

Who became the Lord's servants? First, the apostles. Then, NT prophets, evangelists (pioneer missionaries not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles), and then pastors and teachers, elders and deacons.

So the Lord used the rejection of our Lord by Israel in cooperation with the Roman Empire, to open the door for the Gospel to the nations of the earth.

Who has the authority?

See our Lord's words in Matt. 28:18-20:

- 18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power [the word is *authority*] is given unto me in heaven and in earth.
19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

We had this same word, authority, in our SS lesson this morning. Cf. John 17:2-3:

- 2 As thou hast given him power [authority] over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.
3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

I read the sermon which Alexander Maclaren preached on this parable, and in it he made a very interesting statement which explains why the scribes and Pharisees and Jewish elders were the way they were. This is Maclaren's statement:

The root of all rejection of Christ is the desire of self-will to reign supreme. Men resent being reminded that they are but tenants, and are determined to assert ownership (Vol. 6, p. 194).

Put a man in clerical robes. Give him the name Rabbi, or Reverend, or whatever title you want, if his heart has not been changed by the transforming power of God, he is still a rebel at heart and will not hesitate to exert his will against the will of God. And God holds him accountable for all of his rebellion against God. Man's will is free to act in accordance with his sinful nature, and that means that he is in total bondage to his sin.

But before I close, let me deal with the last words spoken by our Lord in this passage. I will call it:

III. OUR LORD'S FINAL WORDS OF WARNING (Luke 20:18).

The Lord Jesus is the Stone which the builders in Israel rejected. But by the authority of God, and to the glory of God, and by the sovereignty of God, He "is become the head of the corner." Many, like the members of the Sanhedrin, were falling upon Him, seeking to kill Him because they despised Him. They would be "broken." Some day when the Lord comes, as the Stone Whom the builders rejected, they will be ground to powder.

Our Lord may have been describing two attitudes of opposition. Those who actively oppose the Lord; others, who simply ignore Him and have no time for His message.

Concl: How did the chief priests and scribes react? They continued on in their desire to lay hands on the Lord, ignoring the Lord's warning that He would not be broken, but they would be. How thankful we should be that the Lord has given us ears to hear and hearts to believe. This is His greatest mercy, and to Him belongs all of the praise.

Let us not be like the majority of Jews in our Lord's day who had no place for Him, but would rather stay by their own authority than to submit to the "beloved Son" of God Who came to seek and to save those who are lost.

THE SPROUTING FIG TREE

Luke 21:29-38

Intro: This parable is very short. It occupies only two verses in our English translation: Luke 21:29-30. And apparently it was thought by one expositor on the Parables of our Lord, not to fully qualify as a parable in comparison with the others because he did not give a chapter to it in his commentary. Cf. Trench's *Notes on the Parables of our Lord*. However, Luke specifically called it "a parable" in Luke 21:29, so I am reluctant to pass it by.

I. THE CONTEXT OF THE PARABLE (Luke 21:5-38).

It is a part of a very large context beginning with verse 5 of Luke 21, and going on to the end of the chapter. Luke did not indicate that any particular group was listening to Him, but the tenor of the message indicates that He was speaking to believers. In Matthew's account of this passage, he said that the Lord was speaking to His disciples, and in Mark's account he limited the long explanation to just four of the apostles: Peter and James and John and Andrew" (Mark 13:3). So, while there may have been unbelieving Jews listening to what the Lord was saying, it seems clear that the message was intended for those who were His people.

The message that Lord gave at that time was very ominous. Those who spoke to Him, prompting this message, were admiring the Temple. But the Lord responded with the words which we find in verse 6. (Read.) Those who were listening responded immediately by asking when this destruction would take place, and what would be the "sign" that would announce such a destruction.

The Lord did not set a time, but when on to describe in great detail what would happen. And instead of dating it, He spoke of the details by which the time could be identified. There would be false Christs who would appear. The people of God would suffer great persecution. The nations would be at war with each other. There would be upheavals of all kinds in nature itself--earthquakes, signs in the sun, moon, and stars. Even the seas of the earth would be affected. And Jerusalem would be singled out for extinction. The Jews would not be able to resist their enemies, and so were to flee from the city rather than to stand their ground. This, of course, would be when the Temple would be destroyed.

Many expositors seek to limit this time for Jerusalem to the time when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., but, while that may have been a foreshadowing of the time the Lord was speaking about, yet that destruction did not include all that the Lord mentioned in His message. In Matthew this time is spoke of as “the great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21, 29), and Mark identified it as the tribulation also. See Mark 13:24. The closest that Luke gets to the same description is what we 25 and 26 of Luke 21.

As I understand this passage it does apply to the Great Tribulation which will take place on the earth just before the Lord comes to set up His kingdom on earth. Verse 27 seems to indicate this.

II. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THIS MESSAGE.

What does such a terrible message have to do with us? I personally don't believe that we are going through the Great Tribulation. But it is very clear from 2 Tim. 3 that “the last days” for the Church will be very difficult days. I will be dealing with that passage next Sunday, the Lord willing, as we get started in our new SS series of lessons, so I won't get into it now. But I just wanted to point out that the last days for the Church and the Tribulation period may not be very different. We all should know that the NT does not teach that things are going to get better and better for us before the Lord comes for us, but that they will get worse and worse. This is what we read in 2 Tim. 3. So this is a message which applies to all of us, regardless of what our views about the coming of the Lord may be. Either way, trouble, big trouble, is head! Things are already getting tougher for Christians, and the indications are that they are not going to get better.

Now, in the light of all of this, it is important for us to note:

III. OUR LORD'S EXHORTATION (Luke 21:28).

The Lord had already told them to “flee.” And he had warned them that it would be very bad for any family that had nursing children. And yet in verse 28 we have an exhortation from the mouth of our Lord which seems almost ridiculous. What is it? “Look up, and lift up your heads.”

This is an exhortation expressing hope, expressing joy, even expressing peace. When people are discouraged and hopeless you can tell by how they hang their heads, and the fact that they are looking down, not up! But

the Lord said, "Look up, and lift up your heads." He was indicating, you might have to flee from your homes, but "look up, and lift up your heads." Such an exhortation means that they were not to be fearful and distressed which they would be if they lost sight of the truth, and lost sight of the Lord. They were to "look up, and lift up" their "heads."

Now this shows two things:

- 1) That they were to maintain their faith in the coming of the Lord.
- 2) That the bad things that were going on were to be to them an indication that what was coming would more than compensate for the bad things that they were going through.

Isn't this what the Apostle Paul told the church at Rome beginning with verse 18 in chapter 8? (Read Rom. 8:18-28.)

And let me read to you what Paul said in 2 Cor. 4:16-5:1. (Read.)

When we get together and talk about conditions today with all of the homosexual activity, with abortions, with murders and all that goes with that, *don't we console ourselves with the promise of the Lord's return?* Don't we say that it just can't be too long before the Lord returns. You see, the Lord uses our trials to turn our eyes from looking down upon the earth to looking up into heaven, the direction from which our Lord will return.

Spurgeon said the following in the course of giving a message on the text that is before us tonight;

You ask, perhaps, "How shall we do that?" You cannot do it without your Lord. With God, all things are possible. In Christ, you can do all things; without Him, you can do nothing. If you live away from your Lord and Master, in those days of terror that are yet to come, your hearts will quail for fear, and you will be like other men. If you run with them, you will fear with them. If your strength is where their strength is, you shall be as weak as they; but if you have learned to look up, why, even in those stormy times you shall keep to the habit of looking up; and if you have learned to lift your heads above the world,, you shall keep to the habit of lifting up your heads. If your portion is in heaven, it shall not be shaken when the earth rocks and reels to its very foundations; if your treasure is in heaven, the your treasure shall not be lost (Vol. 42, pp. 604-605).

And isn't this what we read about in Psalm 46? See Psa. 46:1-3:

1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

And the Psalm concludes with these words in verses 8-11::

8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth.

9 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.

10 Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

11 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

God never asks us to do anything that He does not provide the necessary grace to do it. Our sufficiency is always in Him; it can never be in us, nor in anyone but the Lord.

But we still haven't gotten to our parable, but let us look at it now.

IV. THE PARABLE OF THE SPROUTING FIG TREE (Luke 21:29-30).

Now you can see how we are to interpret this parable. All of the signs given by the Lord in the preceding verses are like the sprouting of the fig tree, and all other trees. They carry a message: *Summer is on the way!* It is not here yet, but it is coming. The trees begin to sprout in the Spring, but the fruit comes in the summer. Matt. 24:32 and Mark 13:28 tell us the same thing.

Persecution and sufferings never spell disaster nor defeat for the child of God. If we look at them through the eyes of our Lord, they are the indicators that the summer of our Lord's presence and of His blessing are on the way.

Haven't we seen this to be true at various times in the history of God's people on earth? Do you remember that saying that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"? Let us never minimize the awful price that the people of God have had to paid for their faith, but with all that the

Devil and demons and men have done, the work of God continues and the elect continue to be drawn by the Lord. Hope never makes us ashamed. God cannot fail, and His Word will not fail. Our trials make us long for the coming of the Lord, but they are more than that. They are like the sprouting of the fig tree.

Concl: Lucille's Dad used to say, "Better days are coming!" We all need to say that. We can't be assured of that as far as our country is concerned, nor can we say that with reference to people who are without Christ. But it can always be said of all of the people of God. The fig trees are sprouting in the plan and purpose of God. And a summer of peace and joy of the blessing of God in the new heaven and new earth is ahead which will never pass away.

We don't know when the Lord will come, and it is not only foolish to set dates, but it is sinful to do so. But when the things take place which the Lord was describing in this chapter and in Matt. 24 and Mark 13, the generation living at that time will see the Word of God fulfilled. "Heaven and earth," our Lord said, "shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." In the final state there will be a new heaven and a new earth which will bring the summer of God's blessing because righteousness will prevail.