

Parables in Luke's Gospel

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Luke the Historian (Luke 1:1-4) Day Share 02/01/2020

Luke 1: 1-4

Now many have undertaken to compile an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, like the accounts passed on to us by those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning. So it seemed good to me as well, because I have followed all things carefully from the beginning, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know for certain the things you were taught. (Luke 1:1-4 NET)

You cannot rely on every history book. I remember reading the writings of a monk by the name of Matthew Paris who lived in St Albans in the 13th Century. He was one of the mediaeval historians but he was not very reliable. He had some very deep-seated prejudices which affected the accuracy of his writings. He tended to exaggerate and even to make up stories in his writings. So, he could not have said truthfully, '*so that you may know for certain the things you were taught.*' Luke was able to say truthfully that what you are reading is reliable.

A much later writer of history was Sir Walter Scott. He lived in the 19th Century. He wrote many historical novels such as Rob Roy and Ivanhoe. They were described as romantic - they make life in the past seem exciting and glorious. They are not serious historical studies. They make good reading but they cannot be relied upon as serious historical evidence.

Contrast these two "historians" with Dr Luke, the writer of the third gospel. He is wanting to assure the man to whom he dedicates his gospel that what he has written is truthful and reliable. This is not fake news.

The first four verses of Luke's Gospel gives us a great insight into the writing of part of the Bible.

This is perhaps the beginning of written accounts as distinct from oral recollections. It is possible that Mark's Gospel was already written when Luke begins his history. It would have been unthinkable if there had not been any written accounts of the events in the Gospels. Through the years the oral history would have been corrupted and much of the detail would have been lost. Praise the Lord for men like Luke who put his findings down in paper.

He is admitting that he is not an eyewitness to all the events which he is going to recount in his Gospel. He tells us that there have been many who have taken care to pass on the accurate details of the events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. He describes them as "eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning." He is most certainly referring to the disciples and others who knew Jesus very well and were present at various stages in his short life. He says that he "followed all things carefully from the beginning." His honesty is refreshing - he does not claim to have been an eyewitness but this does not make his history any less reliable. Professional historians in the 21st century do exactly what Luke is doing here in this gospel. They rely on those who were present at the time and they conduct a thorough analysis of the evidence. He is making it clear that he is not relying on gossip or misinformation in his

account.

He is writing an orderly account. It is not a collection of rambled and incoherent information. He investigated all things carefully but he selected those data which he considered necessary for the completion of his narrative. This is the work of a true historian. It is not necessarily chronological but it is carefully researched and thematic. Of course, Luke was guided by the Holy Spirit who features prominently in this Gospel. Notice the words Luke uses in verse 1 of chapter 1 - the things that have been fulfilled among us. Luke is clearly stating that there is divine purpose in all the events he is describing. This is not just an ordinary history book - it is a work of the Holy Spirit and it has a spiritual purpose.

He says that he has followed all things carefully from the beginning. He does not imitate Mark's Gospel - which begins with Jesus fully grown and active in service. Luke traces his account back to Bethlehem. He is writing to someone called Theophilus and he is able to reassure him that this account can be trusted. He speaks with certainty and conviction - so that you may know for certain the things you were taught. I tried to put together a family history of the Neilly family but even though Janie and I conducted thorough research and travelled to Northern Ireland several times there are some parts of the history where there was some speculation and conjecture. Not so with Luke's Gospel - it is completely reliable and accurate.

This is a reminder that the Bible is no ordinary book- it is God's inspired word for today.

Luke's Gospel - Key Themes Day Share 04/01/2020

This list is adapted from the ESV Study Bible. Following on from the first study where we considered Luke as a historian and we noticed that Luke deliberately selects material to suit his purpose in writing his gospel. Here are some themes which Luke develops in his Gospel.

1. God's sovereign rule over history. The promises God made through the prophets are already being fulfilled. Our God is in control of the history of mankind.
 2. The kingdom of God has really arrived and was clearly evident while Jesus was on earth. Nevertheless, the church still prays for the kingdom of God to come in full in the future.
 3. The coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus and his followers. The Spirit is present in the Gospel of Luke, from the births of John the Baptist and Jesus to the end. The Spirit is present at Jesus' dedication in the temple, his baptism, temptation, early ministry, and first sermon. The Holy Spirit is central to the message of John the Baptist, and Jesus at his ascension promises the Spirit's future coming in power.
 4. The great reversal taking place in the world, in which the first are becoming last and the last are becoming first, the proud are being brought low and the humble are being exalted. Luke places great emphasis on God's love for the poor, tax collectors, outcasts, sinners, women, Samaritans, and Gentiles. In keeping with this concern, many of the episodes that appear only in Luke's Gospel feature the welcome of an outcast (the Christmas shepherds, the Prodigal Son, the persistent widow, Zacchaeus, etc.). We are going to see this theme clearly demonstrated in the future blogs where we study some of the parables that are only found in Luke's Gospel.
 5. Believers are to live a life of prayer and be careful with the material possessions we have been given by God. In Luke's narrative, prayer occurs at every major point in Jesus' life: at his baptism; at his selection of the Twelve; at Peter's confession; at Jesus' transfiguration; in his teaching the Lord's Prayer; before Peter's denial; etc.
 6. The danger of riches is constantly emphasised in Luke, for the love of riches chokes out the seed of the gospel and keeps it from becoming fruitful. This danger is so great that Jesus often warns his readers not to set their hearts upon riches and to give generously to the poor. The woes pronounced upon haughty rich people stand in sharp contrast to the blessings pronounced upon the humble poor.
- [ESV Study Bible: Introduction to Luke: Key Themes]

Some homework ! Sorry if this sounds too much like a school teacher.

Choose one or more of the above 6 themes and read for yourself passages which illustrate the themes. Some of these passages are more difficult than others to understand. The first two themes are a bit more challenging so you might prefer to start with theme 3 (references to the Holy Spirit) or theme 5 (references to prayer). This is an open-ended task and you can do as little or as much as you can find time to do. I find it very helpful to read the Bible in a structured fashion.

Here are some examples of verses which illustrate each theme. The lists are not exhaustive - you may easily find other examples I have missed.

Theme 1 - God is in control over history. Fulfilling Old Testament prophecies written many years before [See Luke 1: 16-17; Luke 1:32-33; Luke 1:54-55; Luke 2:25-26; Luke 2:29-32; Luke 2: 34-35; Luke 2:38; Luke 3:4-6; Luke 3:15-17; Luke 4: 17-21; Luke 13:33-35; Luke 22:22; There are probably other passages that I have not found. Feel free to make the list longer.

Theme 2 The kingdom of God

[See Luke 1:32-33; Luke 4:43; Luke 6:20; Luke 7:28 Luke 8:1; Luke 8:10; Luke 9:2; Luke 9:11; Luke 9:27; Luke 9:60- 62 Luke 10:9; Luke 10:11; Luke 11:20; Luke 13:18; Luke 13:20; Luke 13:28 - 29; Luke 14:15; Luke 16:16; Luke 17:20- 21; Luke 18:16-17; Luke 18:24 - 25; Luke 19:11; Luke 22:16; Luke 22:18; Luke 23:51. This is a difficult theme and I am not going to be tackling it in the near future.

Theme 3 The Holy Spirit

[Luke 1:15-17; Luke 1:35; Luke 1:41; Luke 1:67; Luke 2:25-32; Luke 3:16,22; Luke 4:1; Luke 4:14; Luke 10:21; Luke 11:13; Luke 12:10-12. In some of the planned blogs for 2020, we are hoping to look at the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is a very important subject in the Bible.

Theme 4 - The Great Reversal

[Luke 1:48; Luke 1:52-53; Luke 4:24-27; Luke 4:30 -32] This theme will be covered in some of the blogs in the next week or so.

Theme 5 Prayer

[Luke 5:16; Luke 6:12; Luke 6:28; Luke 9:28; Luke 10:2; Luke 11:1; Luke 11:2; Luke 18:1; Luke 18:10; Luke 22:40; Luke 22:46]

Theme 6 Danger of Riches

[Luke 1:52-53; Luke 2:7; Luke 3:1-14; Luke 4:18; Luke 6:20; Luke 6:24-25; Luke 7:25; Luke 9:25; Luke 9:58; Luke 12:13-21; Luke 12:22-34; Luke 14:33; Luke 16:11-13; Luke 16:14-15; Luke 16:19-31; Luke 18:22-26; Luke 19:2-3,8; Luke 20:24-25; Luke 21:1-4; Luke 22:5-6.]

Spot the Bald Patch Day Share 08/01/2020

I seem to be good at observing the receding hairline and the skin shining through the hair - especially in much younger men. Is it maybe a misguided feeling of satisfaction that someone else is experiencing hair-loss! It is totally unreasonable for me to make any comment about baldness. My grandchildren are eager to remind me that papa has no hair. So it is a bit much for me to make any observations about other people's minor hair loss!

Jesus criticised the Pharisees for doing something very similar to this.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

Luke 6:41-42 NIV

<https://bible.com/bible/111/luk.6.41-42.NIV>

I think there is irony - even humour - in the Lord's analogy. They were trying to take out a speck of

sawdust from their brother's eye but did not notice the plank that was in their own. To go back to my bald skull, I have grown so accustomed to being bald that it has become part of me. It's only when a helpful barber holds up a mirror that I am reminded of this ugly looking scalp.

We get very comfortable with our sins - they are made to feel at home. But we are very quick to judge other people. This was one of the sins of the group known as the Pharisees.

The Pharisees feature quite prominently in Luke's Gospel so I thought I would provide a wee introduction to who they were.

The name Pharisee probably was a nickname given to them by their enemies and means 'separated ones.' They were formed in the 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. The Jewish religion was being attacked and there was a group formed - called the Hasidim - to preserve their worship. They separated themselves from other Jewish groups and tended to despise other Jews as being less righteous than themselves. At first, they were probably genuine and sincere but by the time of Jesus they had seriously declined into a group which Jesus condemned vigorously.

Jesus condemned them for their hypocrisy - they were good at seeing faults in others and tended to ignore their own sins.

They were into keeping the law of Moses and even added a whole list of restrictions which were not in Moses law. This became burdensome and was impossible to keep but they prided themselves in the way that they observed all these 'do's and don'ts'. They were proud of how good-living they were - and, of course, that is a big sin in itself.

They looked down their noses on other nations round about them believing that the Jews were special and other nations were nothing. They even despised the common people among the Jews - they would keep themselves completely separate from them and have nothing to do with them.

They were into washing in a big way. No bad thing - you might say. You might even hope that I take a shower or a bath regularly! This was more than that. If they had been in the market place, they might have accidentally come into contact with a Gentile - a person who was not a Jew. So this meant a big washing event - a whole bath to remove any form of uncleanness from the defilement of contact with a Gentile. They had a whole ritual around eating - every bowl and utensil had to be washed laboriously and ceremonially. I know hygiene is a good thing - but this went much further than that.

I hope this brief introduction is helpful to us to understand some of the parables relating to Pharisees.

I want to make the point that every Christian is at risk of becoming a Pharisee. If we ever think we are a bit better than someone who is a non-Christian, we are a bit like them. If we begin to look down our noses at other Christians because they do not attend church very often, we are in danger of turning into a Pharisee. If we are looking at sins other people have committed and forgetting to look in a mirror to see our own selves and confess them to God, we are on the road to becoming a Pharisee.

Parable of Good Samaritan (1) Day Share 10/01/2020

Read Luke 10:29-37

This is a very well-known parable. It is known by people who never or rarely read their Bibles. In today's blog, I want to focus on the setting in which we find the parable. What prompted Jesus to tell this parable to illustrate a truth he was conveying to his audience.

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and

with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." 29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" [Luke 10:25-29 ESV]

This lawyer was trying to trick Jesus with this question which he asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life? It is interesting that Jesus took him back to his own area of expertise - this man was an expert in the law of Moses and so he was able to quote easily the relevant section of the law. He explained the demands of the Old Testament law on the individual - how many of us could say truthfully that we have always loved God with all our heart and with all our mind and with all our strength? Equally, how many of us could say that we have loved all our neighbours as much as we love ourselves? Jesus made it clear that if he was hoping to be justified in God's sight and fulfil the law of God, he would need to carry out this commandment to the full. "Do this and you will live." This shows up the utter impossibility of pleasing God by keeping the commandments. This man might have had real doubts about his ability to keep the law and his conscience was beginning to trouble him. So he thinks he will get his own back on this unknown teacher by asking a question which he thought would catch out the Son of God.

It may be that in this unknown man's thinking he was hoping to limit the extent of who would be included as our neighbours. The Jews did not have any interest in anyone who was not a Jew. They might have found it challenging to love every Jew. The lawyer was of a different social class from the ordinary Jew and he would have despised them. He would certainly not have considered any non-Jew as his neighbour.

Samaritans were a mixed race who were despised by the Jews. The name was originally given to inhabitants of the city of Samaria and then extended to all those who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel which was captured by the Assyrians. Over the years there was inter-marriage and the Israelites inter-married with the Assyrians and absorbed much of their culture and religion. A bitter hatred developed between the Samaritans and those people of Judah who returned from exile in Persia. The Samaritans had their own temple and their own counterfeit religion and followed the first five books of the Bible. There was intense hatred between Jews and Samaritans by the time of the life of Jesus.

This brief history helps us to explain the parable which Jesus told.

Parable of Good Samaritan (2) Day Share 12/01/2020

Read Luke 10:30-37

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." [Luke 10:30-37 ESV]

I want to start this blog by quoting one old commentary which I have found helpful.

The lawyer asked Jesus the merely academic question: "Who is my neighbour?" The Saviour, by means of a parable, gives an answer to the practical question: "Whose neighbour am I?" This could be stated differently: "Do I behave myself as a neighbour to those who have need of my love and help?" [Norval Geldenhuys: Commentary on the Gospel of Luke]

The Lord Jesus is placing a radical interpretation on the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself. The Jewish religious leaders at that time taught that this commandment only applied to Jews -

Gentiles (that is everyone who is not a Jew) and perhaps especially Samaritans were not to be included in the scope of the commandment. Jesus is contradicting that - he is saying that there are no limits to our love - we should not be selective and we should not be restrictive. This is challenging. The parable ends with a command - Go and do likewise. How often we are like the priest and the Levite - we do not want to get involved with people who are in trouble - we prefer to pass by on the other side.

It is very interesting that the two religious men in the parable are the 'bad guys' as it were. They are shown up by the outsider whose religion is suspect. It is the Samaritan who cares for the man who has been severely wounded. The priest was not willing to help nor was the second passer-by who is described as a Levite (i.e. he belonged to the tribe from which all the priests were chosen).

You can imagine how this parable was received by the lawyer and by the others who were present. The Samaritan is the good guy - the one who behaved correctly. He is the one who acted towards his neighbour in the way that God commanded. The Samaritan did not withhold his kindness because the victim was a Jew. He showed no prejudice.

As Christians we should take our example from this man from a despised race and with a dodgy religious pedigree. We should act as a neighbour to all in our community - not just the middle class respectable people. We should not erect any racial or social or religious or intellectual barriers. Easy to say: more difficult to implement.

Parable of Rich Fool Day Share 14/1/2020

Read Luke 12:16-21

And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' 18 And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." [Luke 12:16-21 ESV]

It is helpful to read the earlier verses of chapter 12 to see what prompted the Lord Jesus to tell this parable. Jesus had been addressing a huge crowd of people and he was dealing with some very important matters. For example, he was speaking about persecution and he was telling them not to fear those who were going to murder them for their faith because he made it clear that God was always looking after his own people. He spoke about sparrows being so worthless that five sparrows were sold for two farthings - elsewhere the sparrows were valued at 2 for a farthing but here a bonus one was thrown into the bargain for nothing. And yet, not one of them is forgotten by God. He then emphasises that God values his people - you are of more value than many sparrows. But there was one man in the crowd who was not listening - his mind was too full of other matters which he considered to be more important than the talk Jesus was giving. This man was concerned about the fact that he was not getting his share of his inheritance. He eventually suggested that Jesus should sort this matter out. "Tell my brother to give me my share of what my father has left us when he died." Jesus was very blunt in his reply to the man - he made it clear that this was not something which he was willing to do - it was not why he came. You might argue that this man had a genuine grievance. He had a right to his share of the money or possessions his father had left him. But Jesus went on to speak about the sin of covetousness. Is it not true that both men were materialistic - they were very interested in obtaining wealth and possessions and they valued them more highly than they should have done. The man who asked the question wrongly thought that coming into the money he had been left would fix his future and his life. Jesus warns his listeners to be on their guard against covetousness - this is loving money and looking enviously at other people because of their possessions.

Life is not measured by how much you own. [Luke 12:15 NLT] Jesus teaching is radical and unpopular. In today's society, people are very much judged by the amount of money they earn and how much wealth

they have accumulated. We admire people who can afford a luxurious and expensive car or even a luxury yacht. They are way up there in people's estimation. Jesus is saying - we have got it all wrong. This parable is about our attitude to wealth. Even if we are not well off, is getting rich our number one priority in life? If God has blessed us materially, do we appreciate that all our possessions are gifts from God and we should view them as such. Life is not about acquiring more and more wealth.

The rich farmer in the parable would have been regarded as successful and he would have been admired and respected and maybe envied. But he had forgotten all about God - he was making his farm his god. He was neglecting his spiritual life. He believed that life was about getting rich and having enough to enjoy life to the full. "Eat, drink and be merry," he told himself. He was beginning to imagine that he was going to live for ever. He was proud of his possessions and regarded them as his own - not to be shared. He spoke of 'my crops,' 'my barns,' 'my grain,' and 'my goods.' They were his possessions and he was going to enjoy them. He had not made preparations for meeting God because he was so busy acquiring wealth. The parable ends with a solemn word from the Saviour:

"You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for." [Luke 12:20 NLT]

A few years ago, Janie and I looked into my family history. There was a generation who were born at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century. Although their parents were not Christians, the whole family of 4 boys and three girls all became Christians and they served the Lord quietly and humbly in their own local churches. They did not have much of this world's wealth but their priority was not to become rich - but to love God and to serve Jesus in their church and community. In my teens, I visited one of my father's uncles who lived with his wife in a tenement house in Barrhead. I still remember being impressed by this Godly couple. Since then, the Neilly family have become more successful in the world's system and have gained qualifications and have been successful in business. Have we lost the simplicity and contentment of a past generation?

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. [1 Timothy 6:6-8 ESV]

I find this parable very challenging. Luke focuses much on the sin of covetousness and materialism - our attitude to money and wealth and possessions. It is not the possession of wealth which is the sin - it is our attitude to wealth and how much of a priority we give to obtaining wealth and material possessions which is so relevant to our spiritual condition.

Here is a quotation from an old commentary.

The Lord is not condemning the possession of worldly goods as such. He is disapproving of the covetous and carnal attitude with regard to earthly wealth. He is condemning trusting in worldly things instead of in God. He is advocating that we regard our possessions gratefully as God's gifts and that we use them in His service and according to His will to the glory of His name. [Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: Norval Geldenhuys]

Parable of Barren Fig Tree Day Share 16/01/2020

Read Luke 13: 6-9

And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' 8 And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. 9 Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

[Luke 13:6-9 ESV]

It was and still is the custom in Palestine to plant fig trees and other trees in a vineyard. Jesus here tells

a parable about a fig tree which was planted in a vineyard - but which had throughout the probationary period of three years remained without fruit. The owner wants to but it down because -

- it takes up room
- it exhausts the soil in which it grows.

The vinedresser, however, pleads that the tree should be spared for another year. It should be specially cared for and if it still does not bear any fruit it must then be cut down.

This might seem a strange parable. What is it all about?

The parable refers to God's chosen people, Israel. God gave them full opportunity to bear fruit. They remain unfruitful as can be seen from their rejection of Him, the promised Christ. But God will give them a last chance. If they still continue in unbelief and sin, they will be for ever cut down from their privileged and protected position as the chosen people of God.

Some lessons from this parable. God expects fruit from our lives. He has blessed us with many spiritual blessings but he expects fruit from us. God is disappointed when he does not see evidence of divine life in our daily lives. He is expecting to see Christ-like features and fruit of the Holy Spirit in us.

The fig tree had been given certain privileges. It was not usual to plant fig trees in vineyards. They would receive plenty of care and attention in the vineyard along with the vines. They would have good soil which was dug frequently and watered and given feeding and manure. Figs were often planted by the side of the road where they would grow wild. See Matthew 21:19. On this occasion Jesus found a fig tree growing by the road side but again there was only leaves and no figs. Jesus said to the tree, "Never again will there be fruit from you," and the tree withered immediately.

In the context of the parable, Jesus is referring to the nation of Israel, God's chosen people who had rejected him. He is expecting repentance from them or they will face God's judgement. Notice that God had given plenty of time for them to display fruit - in the short parable it states that they were given three years. The vinedresser acts as intermediary to request another chance for the fig tree. This might refer to the work of Jesus as our Advocate with the Father. [See 1 John 2: 1 - this was studied in the blog for 18/11/19.]

If we have been saved, there should be evidence of fruit in terms of godly conduct and character in us. If we are not really a child of God, we are still exposed to God's judgement. This is a very solemn message - and it is not intended to undermine our trust in Jesus. Rather I am dealing with a challenging parable but it is a reminder that we cannot of ourselves produce fruit for God. It is his Spirit in our lives which manifests itself in Christian conduct and growth.

Parable of Wedding Feast Day Share 18/01/2020

Read Luke 14:7-11

"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." [Luke 15:8-10 ESV]

This brief parable is the second in the trilogy of parables in Luke's Gospel Chapter 15 all dealing with the theme of God's dealing with those who are lost. All three parables were prompted by the behaviour of the Pharisees when they saw how Jesus related to those despised groups referred to as tax collectors and sinners. They criticised Jesus because he had a reputation for having meals with such people. The Pharisees despised these people and kept themselves apart from them. Jesus attitude was completely different - he knew they were 'lost' but that meant that they needed to be found. He preached to them to win them to repentance from their sins.

Let's look at this parable and see what lessons there are for us in it.

1. The extent of the loss.
2. The energy expended in finding the lost coin
3. The rejoicing when it was found.

1. The Extent of the Loss

This woman had 10 silver coins or drachmas each of which was worth about 1 day's wages for a labourer. So it was a considerable loss and was a higher percentage than in the previous parable where there was only a 1% loss (one sheep out of 100). She was clearly distressed at this loss and made every effort to find the lost coin. Some scholars suggest that these ten coins were the woman's dowry, which she would wear round her neck or on her headdress. Those who were looking on might not have considered that this lost coin was worth all the effort. But the owner of the coin obviously valued it. It was the price. In the same way, God values each one of his creatures. He is the one who is searching for the lost - not the reverse.

2. The Energy Expended in Finding the Lost Coin

She lights a lamp to aid her in her search. She sweeps the house and she seeks diligently - until she finds it. She does not give up easily. The ancient scholars always interpreted this to mean the activity of the Holy Spirit in bringing the lost ones to Jesus. Notice that there are two obstacles preventing this coin from being found and both have to be removed. First, there is darkness which would speak of sin and this prevents us from seeking the light of God's Word and presence. Our sinful nature prefers the darkness. Secondly, there is dirt and dust - the coin could not be found because it was hidden in dust and dirt on the floor. Our sins keep us lost and away from God unless they are dealt with.

3. The Rejoicing When it is Found

The frugal housewife was clearly elated when she was reunited with her lost coin. Similarly, there is rejoicing in the courts of heaven when just one lost soul is found and returns to God. This is the main message I take out of this parable - the Pharisees and the religious leaders maybe were not interested in seeing lost souls won for the Saviour but heaven was ecstatic when this happened. It is comforting to appreciate that our conversion - though it perhaps made us unpopular with friends and relatives - was a cause of major celebration in heaven.

Parable of Prodigal Son Day Share 24/01/2020

Read Luke 15: 11-32

This is a very well-known Bible passage. It is a story of grace and forgiveness on the part of the Father towards a son who did not deserve any favours. He had left the family home and had indulged himself in every vice in a distant location and had wasted his inheritance. Only when he was penniless and at rock bottom did he begin to give a thought to returning to his home. He has prepared his speech ready for meeting with his estranged father and was prepared to take the lowest position in the household - he had reckoned that it was better to be a hired slave in the household than to look after pigs in the far country. At least, he would be able to go to bed with food in his stomach.

It is the attitude of the Father which is amazing.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. [Luke 15: 20-24 ESV]

He is celebrating the return of his wayward son with lavish generosity and kindness - best robe, ring on his hand, shoes on his feet and killing the fattened calf. This is a beautiful picture of God's grace towards undeserving sinners such as me. It is celebrating what God can do with the sinner who turns from his sin and comes back to him - what a change he brings about - he was dead but he is alive again; he was lost,

but he is now found.

This is not the end of the parable - there is another son who has not been aware of the return of his wee brother. He had had plenty of time to build up a head of resentment and bitterness against him for leaving him to do all the hard work while this young waster was enjoying himself abroad. When he hears the music and the dancing, he finds out from a servant that this is a party being held in honour of this ne'er-do-well of a brother and he is furious and indignant. He cannot believe the injustice. You could say he has some justification for his anger - the older son has been so good in comparison to this younger troublemaker. But the lesson is this - God's grace extends to the worst of humanity and we cannot question his grace.

The older brother's attitude is so sad and so spiteful. And yet it is so prevalent in our day just as it was in the first century. People today argue that God rewards our goodness and our morality. We deserve to be treated well by God - we have earned it. We are not like other people - we are better than them. We go to church - we are good-living - we pay our taxes - we give to charity - we even pray - surely God will see that and reward us for all our goodness. That was how the Pharisees thought - and it is so easy to think like that. It is also so easy to begin to judge other people - thinking that we are better than them.

My son-in-law was helping me to cut the extremely long grass in the shared garden in the tenement block where he and my daughter had a flat. Downstairs there was a party going on in the middle of the day and lots of alcohol was being consumed. They thought it was a good laugh that we were trying to cut this grass - they had the window wide open and every now and then an empty vodka bottle would be thrown out of the window into the grass. I remember that my first reaction was one of resentment - they should be helping us - this is a shared drying green and they have left the place in a terrible mess. Then I got a message from the Lord - it was as if I heard the Lord saying - "You would have been in that flat and in that condition, if you had not been saved as a boy." I remember that Peter and I tried to pray for grace as we continued with our thankless task. [This happened a long time ago!]

Every day that I live I have to challenge any form of the attitude of the Pharisees from taking root in my thoughts. If I ever think that I am better than anyone else, I am being a Pharisee and they were the enemies of my Lord. We should seek to develop the heart of the Father.

Here is a quote from a poem by Scotland's poet, Robert Burns

Address to the Unco Guid

*O ye, wha are sae guid yoursel',
Sae pious and sae holy,
Ye've naught to do but mark and tell
Your neebour's fauts and folly!
Then gently scan your brother Man,
Still gentler sister Woman;
Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang,
To step aside is human:
One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving Why they do it;
And just as lamely can you mark,
How far perhaps they rue it*

Unless you are familiar with a language that is no longer spoken - the Scots language, you will find Burns a bit hard to understand. Here is my interpretation.

Address to the Unco Guid [This means those who consider themselves to be very righteous and good people]

O ye, wha are sae guid yoursel', [He is addressing those who think that they are good in themselves]

Sae pious and sae holy, [They are so pious -letting everyone know that they are good-living and holy]
Ye've naught to do but mark and tell [They have nothing else to occupy their attention - they live idle lives - so they have time to observe the lives of others and criticise]
Your neebour's fauts and folly! [Neighbour's faults and foolish deeds]
Then gently scan your brother Man, [Be a bit more gentle when you look out on your brothers in the village and the lives they are living]
Still gentler sister Woman; [Women should be even more careful and less inclined to gossip]
Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang, [Even though they may sin deliberately and in full knowledge of what they were doing]
To step aside is human: [Burns is making light of sin - it is part of our human nature and is to be expected. We obviously disagree with Burns on this point.]
One point must still be greatly dark, [This is something which is hard to find out]
The moving Why they do it; [What motivates them to do wrong?]
And just as lamely can you mark, [And you would find it just as hard to work out]
How far perhaps they rue it [How much they deeply regret what they have done - e.g. the hangover the next day or the consequences of an unwanted pregnancy]

Parable of Dishonest Manager Day Share 26/01/2020

Read Luke 16: 1-9

He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. [Luke 16: 1-9 ESV]

This is a difficult parable to understand. It is not well-known and this is not surprising.

The story which Jesus told has two main characters - there is the rich man who owns the estate or the business venture but he has entrusted the running of his business to a manager (some translations have 'steward' but that sounds too much like Keswick Convention!). This manager has not been doing his job well and he has been 'wasting his master's possessions' - sounds a bit like the prodigal son in the previous parable. The rich owner has a meeting with his manager and asks him to hand over the accounts to him.

The manager is worried about the prospect of losing his job and does not know how he will be able to make a living - he does not want to have to do any manual labour and he cannot stoop to begging (there were no state benefits). He decides on a course of action which seems unscrupulous. He sends for the debtors who owed money to the master and he has an arrangement with them to settle for a lower debt. The manager is writing off debts owed to his master - so that these people will be kind to him when he is no longer deriving an income from managing his master's estate. Good thinking! He is one smart guy - he is using his master's money to settle his future security.

And yet, Jesus commends this manager. This has been criticised by those who are looking for faults in the Bible. Jesus appears to be commending an unscrupulous manager for defrauding his master. Surely not!

I want you to notice that the rich owner actually commended his manager for what he had done. This suggests to me that there was a problem with debtors not being able to pay their debts. So the owner reckoned that it was better to recover a percentage of the debt than nothing at all. Jesus is teaching some lessons to us but they are spiritual lessons. He is not commending any form of fraud. He goes on to warn us about the dangers associated with money or as Mammon as it is referred to.

Also, we need to look at the lesson Jesus drew from the story. Jesus is using an illustration from the world of commerce to teach his disciples lessons. People from the world behave in a certain way to achieve their selfish aims. There are lessons for Christians.

This manager was making friends by his treatment of others - he had selfish motives but the point Jesus was making is that even a dishonest man like this realised that he could not alienate people - he depended on the goodwill of others. I believe that Jesus is pointing to the Pharisees and the religious leaders of the day and condemning the way they treated other people. They made enemies of others. Jesus went on to talk about how we treat people on this earth and how this relates to our meeting these same people in heaven. Will they welcome us because they remember the kindness they received from us? This may be strange because we always emphasise rightly that we can never reach heaven depending on good works. This is not contradicting salvation by grace but is looking at it from a different perspective.

Also, he points out about how we treat our possessions which God has entrusted to us? If we cannot act responsibly with material things, how can God trust us with higher things relating to his kingdom? God is testing us with our possessions - do we use them to benefit others? Do we make capital of them in our service for the Saviour? Do we use them selfishly and wastefully forgetting that all that we have materially as well as spiritually we owe entirely to God?

If you want to dig a bit deeper, follow the link to the text from a commentary on Luke's Gospel by Norval Geldenhuys, I have provided an extract from the old commentary I have been using. This follows this Day Share.

There is also another article on this same parable

<https://www.bible-knowledge.com/unjust-steward/>

Going Deeper - Parable of Dishonest Manager (Geldenhuys)

The parable is as follows:

A certain steward (manager) did what the prodigal son had done with the possessions his father had given him - he wasted his master's goods. When the rich owner was informed of this, he commanded his steward to give an account of his stewardship - i.e. he had to give an exact statement of the actual condition of the property which he had been entrusted to manage.

The object of this command was to expose clearly the extent of the wastefulness and disorder into which the steward had brought the business, so that it would be possible for his successor to take up his work. The owner apparently did not suspect the steward of conscious dishonesty. He thought he had merely been irresponsible and extravagant in his management. So he did not have him arrested immediately and punished for deceit and fraud. He only informed him that he could no longer be his steward.

The steward (manager) had been spoiled by a life of plenty and ease. He saw no chance of making a living from strenuous and humiliating work. He had, however, enough cunning and adroitness to devise a plan to look after his own interests in an easy manner. Note, he was being completely underhand and unscrupulous.

He sent for those persons who had formerly, when he was steward, raised loans or bought goods on credit in the business of his master. He spoke to them one by one separately, let them destroy their written acknowledgements of debt and draw up and sign new ones in which the amounts owed by them

were considerably reduced. He, therefore, robbed his master deliberately and disgracefully. But he gained the favour of the debtors because he had reduced their load of debt.

The owner came to know how the dishonest steward (manager) had set about providing for his own future by treating the debtors in such a way that they would receive him into their homes and maintain him after his dismissal. Because the shrewd steward had spoken to the debtors one by one and separately and had destroyed the old acknowledgement of debt, the master did not have the necessary evidence or witnesses to enable him to take legal action against him.

All he could do, therefore, was to acknowledge that he had acted very cleverly. He did not praise his unjust and fraudulent act as such, but the "worldly wisdom" with which he had acted towards the debtors.

The Saviour did not continue the parable to tell us what happened next. The purpose of the parable was to call attention to the "wise" and diplomatic manner in which worldlings generally act towards their fellow-men in order to achieve their own selfish aims. - see the end of verse 8.

In contrast with this sort of clever conduct, those who are members of the children of light too often act unwisely and undiplomatically towards others. Instead of behaving in such a way that they bind others to themselves, their behaviour and attitudes cause other people to be repulsed. The Pharisees with their attitude of self-righteousness and self-exultation repel the tax-collectors and sinners instead of attracting them and making them willing to listen to their teaching.

The Lord calls the dishonest steward (manager) "unjust." He unconditionally consistently condemned, both in word and deed, every suggestion of fraud. There was, therefore, no danger that His hearers would interpret His words as though He was recommending dishonest methods. It is, therefore, totally unjustifiable to launch attacks (as some critics have done) against the ethical standards of the Lord and against the New Testament on the basis of this parable.

In the parable there was a reference to material possessions (not merely to money). As a result the Saviour adds these words (verse 9) as an express command in connection with the right use of material things (summarised under the metaphor of "the mammon of unrighteousness"). He call worldly possessions the mammon of unrighteousness, because injustice is so often involved in the accumulation and use of earthly possessions.

But the Lord nowhere teaches that material possessions as such are sinful and unclean. It is man's sinful attitude and conduct in connection with worldly goods (money in particular) that make these things a curse. In general in the world earthly possessions are rightly designated as the "mammon of unrighteousness", it must be quite different in the case of His followers.

Christians should be free from the low, selfish and covetous motives that dominated the unjust steward (manager) of the parable. They should use the worldly goods which God has entrusted to them in a way that will bring blessing to others. They should be free from avarice and inspired by real unselfish love - they will wholeheartedly share their possessions with those who need them.

In this way they will gain for themselves an imperishable treasure in heaven. In the "hereafter" those who were helped by them in life when they used their possessions in a generous way will, as it were, welcome them and testify in their favour. This future welcoming of the faithful in eternal dwellings contrasts sharply with the unjust steward who would be welcomed in the homes of his fellow-sinners - but only for a short time.

Because a man's character does not depend on the quantity of goods entrusted to him but on the real disposition of his heart. Whenever he is unfaithful or unjust in the small things of life, this proves that he is essentially false and therefore also unfaithful in the great things of life.

If one is unfaithful in the acquisition and use of worldly goods (which are "the least" things and of the smallest intrinsic value), how can he be entrusted to a responsible task in connection with the eternal

and "true riches" (the things of highest value). Someone who is unfaithful and false in ordinary life (may pose as extremely pious) but he will be also false and unfaithful spiritually. No spiritual gifts and blessings can be entrusted to him.

Everything one possesses on earth (talents, privileges, money etc.) belongs primarily to the Creator, who lends it so liberally in order that it may be a blessing to man himself and to his fellow men. It should be used to the honour of God. If one is unfaithful in connection with these "borrowed goods", how can he expect to receive God's eternal riches?

In order to be able to serve God truly, one must be free from dependence associated with avarice and attachment to material possessions. Worldly people may labour under the delusion that they are free and independent. However, everyone who makes the enjoyment and accumulation of earthly goods the main object of his life is under its power and is serving Mammon.

Do we use our worldly possessions in such a manner that there will be persons in eternity who will be glad to receive us? Or will there be those who will point accusing fingers at us because we neglected or injured them through our unfaithful conduct in connection with the earthly goods entrusted to us

[From Norval Geldenhuys: Commentary on the Gospel of Luke - adapted]

Parable of Rich Man and Lazarus Day Share 28/01/2020

The Context

Just after recounting the parable of the dishonest manager, Jesus made a very strong statement about the dangers associated with money.

No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. [Luke 16:13 ESV]

The Pharisees did not like this too much because they really loved money. So when they heard what Jesus had said, they made fun of him. Here is how Jesus responded to the Pharisees (from a modern translation)

You are always making yourselves look good, but God sees what is in your heart. The things that most people think are important are worthless as far as God is concerned. [Luke 16:15 CEV]

Read Luke 16: 19-31

This is another parable about our attitude to wealth and material possessions. Dives or the rich man lived a life of indulgence but found himself in hell after he died. He had consistently ignored the welfare of a poor neighbour. There is a graphic contrast in their two lifestyles on this earth. The situation is reversed in the after-life - this is a popular theme in Luke's Gospel. There is a great reversal - the high and mighty is brought down low and the poor and despised is raised higher. The poor man is in Abraham's bosom after he dies. The rich man is tormented in hell. He is so distressed that he longs for someone to come and alleviate his sufferings.

Chapter 16:15b states a very important principle which sums up the theme of the great reversal which takes place in the kingdom of God.

For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. [Luke 16:15b ESV] or *the things which most people think are important are worthless as far as God is concerned.* [Luke 16: 15b CEV]

Just spend an evening watching the TV and you will see that money features prominently. There are endless quiz shows where people are competing to gain a big cash prize. There are so many shows which highlights affluence and wealth - Escape to the Country, for example. There are adverts for expensive

products and a celebrity lifestyle and adverts for various lotteries where people dream of becoming millionaires.

So the parable about the rich man and Lazarus is challenging to us today and is contrary to our cultural values in the UK in 2020. During his life on earth, the rich man had a lifestyle which would have been envied by many people. He would have enjoyed the respect and admiration of his countrymen. He wore expensive clothes and ate the best food. There was a beggar at his gate who had to be brought there to beg and he would have been happy with the scraps which fell from the rich man's table. His body is covered in sores and he has to rely on dogs to lick his wounds. It is clearly implied that his plight was ignored by the rich man whose priority was self-indulgence and ostentation. The great reversal takes place after death - the starving beggar who had no status or comfort is in a place of honour - the Jewish people thought that heaven would be a banquet that God would give for them. Abraham would be the most important person there, and the guest of honour would sit next to him (that is what is meant by Abraham's bosom). The rich man is meanwhile in hades - the place where the dead wait for the final judgement. This rich man is in deep distress and torment and wants to send someone back from the dead to warn others not to follow him to this place.

I have heard this chapter of the Bible being used to warn sinners to trust the Saviour but in its context it is first and foremost a warning against materialism and covetousness. After his death the rich man clearly illustrates the folly of living such a selfish and heartless life. He may have been well respected by others when he was alive but God does not admire such conduct. He is now begging for help while the poor beggar is enjoying blessings of God's presence. God did not estimate the rich man in the same way as others in his society.

It does not say that the poor man had come to trust in God but the Bible makes it clear that materialism and the love of money is a barrier to faith in God. There is strong historical evidence that the Christian church has thrived in times of poverty and in countries where there is deprivation.

This is a powerful lesson which we all should learn from this parable - are we so affected by the prevailing culture of seeking prosperity that we are ignoring God? Are we obsessed with gaining wealth and living in luxury and at the same time completely ignoring the plight of those who have been left behind in the rat race?

This should not be interpreted crudely as an attack on rich people. There are Christians who have been blessed materially and they have used their possessions and money for God's service and glory. There are also people who are poor and they have become so obsessed with becoming rich that they have ignored God.

I think we should not read more into the parable than Jesus intended. It is clearly another example of the great reversal in the kingdom of God when those who are highly esteemed are brought low and conversely those who are disregarded in this world are given a place of honour in God's kingdom.

Parable of Persistent Widow Day Share 30/01/2020

Read Luke 18: 1-8

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming." And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" [Luke 18:1-8 ESV]

Don't give up praying! Don't lose heart! We have absolutely no doubt about the meaning of this

parable - Luke tells us clearly why Jesus told this story about a persistent widow and a callous judge. Again, the story might seem a bit strange - but it is a great lesson we are being taught. This widow had a genuine grievance which was being ignored. She was not getting justice because the judge was so hard-hearted and had no respect for God or for anyone. The character of the judge is very important if we are to get the message. This unrighteous judge is the opposite of our God and Father. We have a Father who is caring and just and acts with utmost respect.

And yet, the unrighteous judge was eventually persuaded to give this poor woman's request - not because he wanted to or really cared. He could not stand her requests any longer - her persistence wore him down.

Will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?

Have you been praying for something for several weeks and have not had an answer? Maybe, you have been making the same prayer for months or even years? Maybe, you have made the same prayer for so long that you cannot remember how long? This parable is telling me - don't give up! Keep on praying! God wants you to continue in prayer - he wants us to continue to believe that he will answer prayer - he wants to see 'faith on earth'.

God's timescale is different from ours.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [2 Peter 3:8 ESV] So it may seem that we are having to wait for a long time, but not from God's perspective. The Israelites waited 400 years for God to deliver them from slavery in Egypt - but he did it, when the time was right.

There is much that could be written on the subject of prayer and this short blog does not do justice to a very important subject in the Christian life. Sometimes, God does not answer prayer the way we want him to - we have it in mind how we want him to solve the problem for us. But his ways and not our ways.

God will answer our prayer if we continue and persevere in our prayer. He wants us to trust him completely.

Parable of Pharisee and Tax Collector Day Share 01/02/2020

Read Luke 18:9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." [Luke 18: 9-14 ESV]

This is the last of Luke's parables which we are going to look at in the Day Share blogs. This parable was targeted at the Pharisees and one of their number features prominently in the parable. Jesus has two criticisms to make of this group of people. Firstly, they trusted in their own righteousness. They believed that they were right in God's sight because of their strict adherence to a set of rules. Secondly, they despised others because they were unable to follow their strict code of conduct.

Jesus was very critical of the attitude of the Pharisees. Sadly, there is a tendency in all of us to become Pharisees - especially in the two points highlighted above.

He told this parable to condemn the Pharisees. The two main characters are diametrically opposed to each other - they could not be more different. On the one hand, there is a self-righteous, respectable

Pharisee and there is a tax collector. Some translations read 'publican' for the other guy but that is not helpful. Neither does the word 'tax collector' really tell the whole story. We need to remember the context - Palestine was part of the Roman Empire so the Jews were being taxed to pay for the Roman soldiers whose presence in and around Palestine was resented. These tax collectors were Jewish traitors who were working for the enemy. Not only that but they were notoriously dishonest and greedy.

So most of Jesus listeners would not have expected the outcome of this parable whereby the tax-collector comes out as the good guy. He is declared 'justified' - which means that he is righteous in God's sight - not the self-righteous respectable Pharisee who had listed all the reasons why God should be pleased with him. He had done more than could be expected - he fasted twice a week (and he was obviously proud of that fact) and he gave a tenth of all his income and produce (so he could not be faulted on that score). But he had made it clear that he was better than other people and he produced a list of people who were not living the sort of good life he was living. The Pharisee wanted God to know that he was better than other people - especially the tax collector who was well down the list of God's favour in his opinion. God, I thank you that I am not greedy, dishonest and unfaithful in marriage like other people.

The tax collector stood at a distance - reluctant to come forward. He did not think he was good enough to look up towards heaven. He was so sorry for what he had done that he pounded on his chest and prayed, "God have pity on me! I am such a sinner."

The whole point about this parable is that it was the tax collector and not the Pharisee who was pleasing to God. This is another example of the great reversal which takes place in God's kingdom - the proud are brought low and the humble are honoured. Is there not a bit of a Pharisee in all of us? Do we not think we are better than other people? Do we not have a temptation to look down our noses at some people whom we think are not as good as us?

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