



The Hard Sayings of Jesus

Week 6

Judgment (continued)

Mercy Me: Matthew 18:21-35

Wealth: A Barrier to Bliss? Luke 16:19-31

John and James Carroll's book, *Preaching the Hard Sayings of Jesus*, inspired this class and provides its overall structure. The parable diagrams are taken from Craig Blomberg's book, *Interpreting the Parables*.



Judgment (continued)

❖ Last week

- The Unforgiveable Sin: Mark 3:20-30
- Missing Dinner: Luke 14:15-24; Matthew 22:1-14

❖ This week

- Mercy Me: Matthew 18:21-35
- Wealth: A Barrier to Bliss?: Luke 16:19-31

❖ Next week (Nov 3 & 4) – NO CLASS

❖ Two weeks (Nov 10 & 11) – *I Don't Understand!*

- Praising a Dishonest Manager: Luke 16:1-9
- Midnight Blues: Luke 11:1-13



Mercy Me: Matthew 18:21-35

❖ The setting

- This parable is part of Jesus' fourth long block of teaching in Matthew's gospel.
- Peter asks Jesus: "If another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"
- Jesus' reply is that Peter is forgiven without limit.
 - The translation is either "seventy times" or "seventy times seven times."
 - In either case, the meaning is the same.

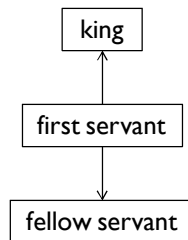
❖ A memorable quote

- "God's forgiveness is not for decoration but for use." Eduard Schweizer

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Story and structure – Matthew 18:21-35



Key piece of context:

The amount of money the king forgives the first servant would have conjured up visions of astounding wealth. It would take the average laborer 15-20 years to earn a single talent! The king forgives 10,000 talents. The ratio of the first servant's debt to that of his fellow servant's is 6000:1.

With whom in the story did the first hearers identify?

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Finding Meaning

- ❖ As in last week's second parable, the allegory here is sharp-edged. Looking at the three main characters:
 - ❖ The king is the giver of grace, forgiving the enormous debt of the first servant. It isn't hard to picture God as this king.
 - ❖ The first servant, whose enormous debt has been forgiven, turns out to be hard and unforgiving himself. A flood of grace has fallen on him, but not even a trickle flows onward to the fellow servant. A heart at least four sizes too small!
 - ❖ The fellow servant, who has been refused any grace, is left right worse off – lost and overwhelmed and in prison.
- ❖ Looking at the parable in three sections:
 - ❖ The first episode illustrates the boundless grace of God.
 - ❖ The second episode shows the absurdity of refusing to extend grace to others when we have been given so much.
 - ❖ The third episode (the punishment of the first servant) starkly shows the consequences of spurning God and God's grace.
- ❖ If you expect to be in the business of receiving forgiveness, you better be in the business of forgiving as well!

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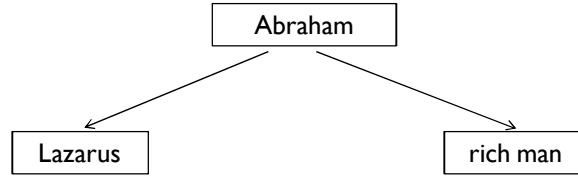
Wealth: A Barrier to Bliss?: Luke 16:19-31

- ❖ The setting
 - Go back to 16:1. Jesus is teaching about being good stewards of God's gifts when the Pharisees, "lovers of money," begin to ridicule him. This parable, about wealth – that is, about a lover of money – is part of Jesus' response to the Pharisees.
- ❖ It is helpful to know that this parable was well-known in other settings. Some of the details would differ, but the basic story was a very old one. There were about seven different versions of it in the writings of the rabbis.
 - Because the Bible says so little about our so-called "after-life," i.e, the time between our death and the great resurrection, people often turn to this parable for guidance. But it is NOT about the after-life, it is about the dangers of wealth. We need to keep two things in mind:
 - When it comes to the parables, we need to restrict our allegorizing of them. We can't infer that we'll all be met by Abraham! "Abraham's bosom" was a standard name for the place of the righteous after death.
 - Jesus is using a well-known "folk story" to make his point. Jesus is not the creator of the story, though he may have added the part about being unable to get a message back to the brothers.

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Story and structure – from Luke 16:19-31



Two things make this parable unique:

- It has named characters. The name Lazarus means “God helps.”
- The narrative goes from this life into the “after-life.”

With whom in the story did the first hearers identify?

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Finding Meaning

- ❖ Craig Blomberg finds three meanings in this parable, with the emphasis on the last two:
 - “Like Lazarus, those whom God helps will be borne after their death into God’s presence.”
 - “Like the rich man, the unrepentant will experience irreversible punishment.”
 - “Through Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, God reveals himself and his will so that none who neglect it can legitimately protest their subsequent fate.”
- ❖ **But** there is a problem with this analysis. Blomberg doesn’t say anything about the most obvious point: the dangers of wealth. This is what drives the contrast between the rich man and Lazarus. It is as if Blomberg falls into the same trap (emphasis on the after-life) that he warns about. Looking at the context – Jesus is teaching about the responsibilities of stewardship and the dangers of wealth – will help keep us from the same mistake.

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