

Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order (#7 - 8) ~ Scripture

Parable #7 — Luke 12:15-21 — The Rich Fool

¹⁵ Then he said to them, “Watch out!* Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

¹⁶ And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

¹⁸ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

²⁰ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

²¹ “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

* Early translations say, “Take heed.” Most later translations say “Beware.”

Parable #8 — Luke 12:35-40 — Watchfulness

³⁵ “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. ³⁷ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. ³⁸ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. ³⁹ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Parables in Chronological Order (#7 - 8) ~ Discussion Questions

Parable #7 — Luke 12:15-21 — The Rich Fool

1. In Verse 15, Jesus said, “Beware.” Is that a strong warning or simply a caution?
2. How does greed show up in a person’s life? Do you see this in your life?
3. Is it wrong or a bad thing to be rich? If not, what’s the big problem?
4. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon spoke of two items in this story. How does Ecclesiastes 5:15 fit in? Later, in Ecclesiastes 8:15, Solomon says, “So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.” Is the Bible giving us conflicting advice?
5. Does this parable say you should not plan for retirement or that you should not save money or valuables? In one sentence, what does being “rich toward God” actually mean?
6. With what parts of the parable can you identify? What parts of the parable make you uncomfortable? (12:16-20)
7. Why is it difficult for us to accept the fact that our life and things are temporary? What step can you take this week to become less dependent upon your possessions?

Parable #8 — Luke 12:35-40 — Watchfulness

1. What is it like to wait for someone without knowing when he or she is coming? (Think hours, days, weeks, months.)
2. How were the servants to be while waiting for their master? (12:35-36) How long did Jesus say the servants should be willing to wait for their master? (12:38) How does this translate to you today?
3. What happened to the servants who were watching properly? (12:37)
4. For what are we to be watchful? What does watchfulness involve? Why is watchfulness not a passive activity? What are the *three* main messages of this parable?
5. What responsibilities or duties might God demand of you? What can you do for God in your area of responsibility?

Parables in Chronological Order (#7 - 8) ~ Leader's Guide

Parable #7 — Luke 12:15-21 — The Rich Fool

1. In Verse 15, Jesus said, "Beware." Is that a strong warning or simply a caution?

Older Bible translations have "take heed" and the NIV and Holman have "watch out" which seem more like a caution. But "beware" is probably the best translation of the original Greek and it is an intensive term. Because it is inherently emphatic, it is rarely followed by an exclamation mark. We would not expect to see a sign, "Beware of wet paint," or "Beware, new grass planted," because the word is too strong for the occasion. But it is more likely to be used on a sign like, "Beware – Vicious Dog," or "Beware – Bridge Out." Thus, when Jesus used the word "beware," he was indicating great danger. Other places we find the word used is:

Matthew 7:15 – Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves.

Luke 12:1 – Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

2. How does greed show up in a person's life? Do you see this in your life?

Jesus' strong warning here is about greed. He says, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." He is explaining that the essential, fundamental evil and error of covetousness, that is being eagerly desirous of wealth or possessions, is that covetousness makes one think that the life is comprised and composed of the things you possess. And don't we often feel that way? If we have material goods, we are "better off" or even just plain "better" than those who do not have them.

This is what the Lord was attacking when he asked the rhetorical question in the sermon on the mount, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25) Your life's value, your soul's worth, is not measured by what you own. "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and to lose his soul?" (Mark. 8:36) Jesus would never have asked those questions if the covetousness' theme were true—that is that your life is measured by what you possess. It is not what *you* own, it is what owns you that really matters.

After posing the warning about greed in straight-forward language, Jesus goes on to tell a parable about it. Often, he only tells the parable, but in this case he's waving a red danger flag first.

3. Is it wrong or a bad thing to be rich? If not, what's the big problem?

Absolutely not. Abraham, Jacob, Solomon and Job were not simply rich; they were "very rich." The rich man in this parable is not criticized or condemned because he was wealthy. Wealth itself does not damn. Conversely, poverty does not save. Wealth is not a vice. Poverty is not a virtue. It may be hard to believe, but many people with no money will go to hell over the riches they so strongly desire. At least that what Paul writes to

Timothy, “But people who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into ruin and destruction.” (1 Tim. 6:9). So it is not riches but the “trust” in riches that dooms men (Mark 10:23-35).

It is this trust, this belief in material substance, that condemned the rich man. Five times he used the personal pronoun “my.” He referred to “my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, myself.” That is not evil, either, for there is a sense in which things do belong to us; we “own” them (Acts 5:4; Matthew 20:15). However, in this case it was the absorbing, consuming thought of his life, and that is wrong. Even building the barns was not wrong—he actually acted wisely in building larger barns for his surplus lest it rot or be eaten by scavenger animals. *But*, he acted foolishly in allowing his goods to secure, as he thought they did, his soul. [For Verse 12:19, early translations say “And I will say to my soul...” whereas later translations make hits “I will say to myself...” In this case, I think the earlier literal translation is probably better.]

The man imagined “many years” of ease and security, many years in which he could take it easy; eat, drink, and be merry. How does the rest of that phrase go? “For tomorrow we die,” but the rich man did not consider death. He stopped with “merry.” He forgot, “for tomorrow we die.” But in this case, even if he had said it, he would have been in error. It was not, “tomorrow,” but “this very night your life (or your soul) will be demanded of you.”

4. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon spoke of two items in this story. How does Ecclesiastes 5:15 fit in? Later, in Ecclesiastes 8:15, Solomon says, “So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.” Is the Bible giving us conflicting advice?

Eccl 5:15 – “We all come to the end of our lives as naked and empty-handed as on the day we were born. We can’t take our riches with us.” [NLT] So neither the devil nor this world can give you one single item that will not be snatched and taken from you the moment you die. We all go into bankruptcy at death. We leave it all. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon then wondered whether his riches might not go to a fool who would throw it all away (Eccl. 2:18-19). Even earlier, David said this same thing in Psalm 39:6 – “Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom; in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be.” And again in Psalm 49:10 – “...even wise men die; the stupid and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others.”

But the rich man did not foresee this eventuality. He was oblivious to eternity. David said it in Psalm 49:6-9 and Jesus said it here. Your wealth will not do you one jot of good when you die—the only thing that counts is being “rich toward God.”

The big difference between this parable and what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 8:15 “...eat, drink, and be merry...” is that he is saying it gratefully in thanks that “God has given him wealth and possessions and enables him to enjoy them” (Eccl 5:19). A few verses later, he adds that one should “be joyful that God favors what you do” (Eccl 9:7). He is not saying it arrogantly or pridefully as the rich man in the parable is.

5. Does this parable say you should not plan for retirement or that you should not save

money or valuables? In one sentence, what does being “rich toward God” actually mean?

Absolutely not; saving money and planning ahead are good things. The Bible in many places stresses using ones money and gifts wisely. Other parables actually advise us to increase our wealth, to be good caretakers of what God has entrusted to us, to help the poor and those less fortunate (often spoken of as widows and orphans). This is how we show we are “rich toward God.” This is the antidote to covetousness. It is the man who has his priorities in order who sees to the wealth and prosperity of his soul. Paul says it again to Timothy, “Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment.” (1 Tim. 6:17, NLT).

Looking ahead in Luke, don’t ever forget who the real beggar turned out to be in the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Isn’t it ironic that the rich man in this parable will also be the impoverished beggar in spiritual rags in the day of judgment?

Thanks to Truth Magazine.com for many of the comments on Questions 1-5 above.

In one sentence, what does being “rich toward God” actually mean? Does it mean to (a) seek first the kingdom of God, (b) give most of your money to the church and the poor, (c) use your abilities and resources to further God’s kingdom, (d) invest in church lotteries, (e) something else?

6. With what parts of the parable can you identify? What parts of the parable make you uncomfortable? (12:16-20)

7. Why is it difficult for us to accept the fact that our life and things are temporary? What step can you take this week to become less dependent upon your possessions?

Parable #8 — Luke 12:35-40 — Watchfulness

1. What is it like to wait for someone without knowing when he or she is coming? (Think hours, days, weeks, months.)

Have you even been late meeting someone for lunch? Have you ever forgotten about an appointment or forgotten to call someone after you said you’d get back to him? Of course you have. How do you think the other person felt? How do you feel when this happens to you? What if you expect to hear about a job application in a week and don’t hear anything after 2 weeks? What if your taxes are being audited and you expect to hear something in 2 months and 4 months go by without hearing anything? What if you son is traveling around Australia and he says he’ll call “when he has a chance” and after 6 months you’re still waiting to hear from him?

2. How were the servants to be while waiting for their master? (12:35-36) How long did Jesus say the servants should be willing to wait for their master? (12:38) How does this translate to you today?

The servants were to be dressed. Early translations say, “loins girded” meaning the loose outer garments gathered up for work or travel, not let loose for sleeping. Lamps were to be burning. In these two images, Jesus says, “be prepared” and “be awake” even if many dull hours have passed and you’re very tired.

How long to wait? Jesus didn’t really say, but implied the master might not come home until quite late, “the third watch.” Night was divided into four watches by the Romans: (1) 6:00 - 9:00 pm, (2) 9:00 pm - midnight, (3) midnight - 3:00 am, (4) 3:00 - 6:00 am. The Jews had only three watches during the night: (1) sunset - 10:0 pm, (2) 10:00 pm - 2:00 am, (3) 2:00 am - sunrise.. The parable probably referred to the last two of the Jewish watches. The wedding banquet would have begun in the first watch right after sunset.

Today, are you waiting for the second coming? Are you prepared if it were to happen tonight? Are you ready? Most of us are not. Most of us would like just a little more time to prepare. Most of us say I need more time to read my Bible. I’m so darned busy with everything else, but maybe I’ll have more time next week. Or next year. Or never.

3. What happened to the servants who were watching properly? (12:37)

In Verse 37 Jesus says, “It will be good for those servants [that is, believers] whose master finds them watching when he comes.” Then, having said that, he deviates totally from Middle Eastern culture. He says, “...I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.”

Notice in actual life back then the master would come home to his house, knock on the door, and find his servants ready. They open the door, escort him in, hang up his coat; they show him to his favorite chair and they give him a hot drink. They say, “Do you want a bath?” They’ve already warmed the water because there were no hot showers in those days. Basically, they greet him with an attitude of “we are ready to serve you.”

But, in the parable, we read the very opposite. In Verse 37 when it says “he will dress himself to serve, the “he” does not refer to the servants. It is a singular word and it refers to the master. So here we have the master girding himself up and saying, “I want you servants to recline at my table and I will serve you.” That is a huge difference between a Middle Eastern lord or master, who would absolutely never do that. So in the story who does the master represent? The Lord Jesus Christ. The wedding banquet that the master went to would seem to be a symbol for the enthronement of Jesus in heaven and it points to his return for the final judgement for which he wants every believer, every one of you to be prepared.

4. For what are we to be watchful? What does watchfulness involve? Why is watchfulness not a passive activity? What are the *three* main messages of this parable?

We must be watchful and ready for Jesus’ return at any moment. Jesus return is certain but the time is not known. In Matthew 24:36, it says, “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” A specific outline of the future would actually be a hindrance, not a help, to faith. Certain signs have been given, but not for the purpose of making detailed predictions.

Watchfulness is not passive or easy. As Luke warns in 21:34 – “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.”

The three messages:

1) The disciples—and all believers—must be ready for a return of Jesus at any moment. As verse 40 says, “the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

2) You must allow for a delay that must neither reduce your expectancy nor impede your preparedness (vs 38). You must not let this delay discourage you so you fall into a trap or get overwhelmed by the drudgeries and anxieties of life.

3) You must faithfully manage the resources that have been entrusted to you by God. Don't forget, you are stewards—caretakers—not owners. As the last parable emphasized, you can't take it with you.

5. What responsibilities or duties might God demand of you? What can you do for God in your area of responsibility?

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