

Ears to Hear

Getting to the Point of the Parables

6. Split-Level Living

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16v 19-31

“Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.”

– Matthew 13v 34

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

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Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:

It is estimated that in the synoptic Gospels, (Matthew, Mark and Luke) around one third of Jesus' words are found in His parables. If then, we are really interested in understanding Jesus; how He thought and taught, then we would do well to look at these penetrative illustrations more closely.

Yet it is sad to so often hear parables talked about in such a bland and predictable way. Western Christians have not only sought to instantly spiritualise the parables, but to sanitise them also. This is both tragic and ironic. The parables carry force, humour and an uncomfortably subversive message within their short, but devastating storylines.

In order for us not only to understand the parables, but also to hear the heart of Christ's teaching, we must return to Biblical times; unravel our well-worn, but often misinformed opinions and take our place not only within the culture but also the crowds of Jesus' day. Only then can we hope to hear His valiant voice and feel the force of the parables. The aim of this series is just that.

Scripture's message is a timeless one, yet its voice is all but lost if we simply jump to our own cultural conclusions and force the parables to fit our own situation. Only a rigorous, prayerful approach can yield the rich rewards contained within the parables: We must ask what was going on in Israel at the time of Christ, socially, spiritually and economically? The answers to these and other questions help us to contextualise the rather lurid backdrops that Jesus paints as He makes His parabolic points. Why Jesus spoke in such memorable ways is intriguing and of great importance to us all. There are lessons to learn and lives to be touched for the cause of Christ and the parables point the way He would have us go.

This series finds its title from the words of Christ Himself: If we truly have "ears to hear," we will approach these studies with humility, diligence and an expectancy that the parables of Jesus might leap of the sacred page and into our hearts, not simply so we get the point, but rather that we might also go on to live in the light of the lessons they so vividly teach us.

Do you have ears to hear? Then get into the point of the parables!

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear..." - Luke 8v 8

Spilt-Level Living : The Parable of the Rich man and Lazarus

Everybody has a view on life after death and often those views are strongly held: Where, if anywhere, do we go? Do all go? Who decides? Also, what will we do once we get there? Such views can lead to heated discussions, disagreements and divisions as people polarize around their varying viewpoints. Whatever our view on this question, the answer will, to some extent, influence the way we choose to live.

Opinions about what should happen beyond the grave are influenced by the way we view life in this world: Logic suggests that those who strive to do the right thing in life now, will naturally be rewarded in the next. Likewise, those who live wicked lives here will no doubt reap their rewards after death. But what is “the right thing” and in whose eyes? This parable of Jesus in Luke 16 challenges such natural notions, again exposing the limits of law and redefining the scope of God’s grace.

The Bible is strangely quiet on the details of the life to come. Apart from establishing that it is a certain reality, the finer points are yet to be revealed beyond symbolic language. In Luke 16, Jesus has already been addressing the problem of money. In and of itself, money is not wrong, but when the love of money becomes an idol, sinfulness soon creeps in. “You cannot serve God and money.” (v13) The choice is stark, and, as Luke notes, “The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.” (14) To them, money was not only a sign of success and power, but also of divine blessing now as an indicator of your eternal prospects: In other words, the life that pleased God should prompt reward financially. As with the other parables, Jesus sought to subvert such wrong teaching, by revealing something quite startling to those who followed after finance. Jesus’ parable of the Rich man and Lazarus had something to say about riches in this life and rewards in the life to come.

Each week – Getting to the Point of the Parables:

A simple way of studying parables could include these 3 questions:

Look at the Picture in the Parable: What is Jesus describing?

Listen to the Punch line of the Parable: What is Jesus saying?

Learn from the Purpose of the Parable: What is Jesus expecting?

Read: Luke 16v 19-31

Key words: *Rich, beggar, luxury, longing, comfort, torment, chasm, repent*

- **Two Fortunes: *Success and Suffering* – 16v1-2**
Two men, one named, the other anonymous, enjoy and endure their lives. Although living in proximity, what Jesus describes is worlds apart.
- **Two Futures: *Paradise and Punishment* -16v3-5**
Death, the great leveller, ushers these men into a new scene, again of complete opposites, but now the men's eternal fortunes are reversed.
- **Two Failures: *Recognition and Repentance* – 16v 27-31**
In a dramatic climax to the tale, Abraham's indictment on the rich man's brothers serves as a warning to any whose hearts are hard.

Ears to Hear?

- ***Backing up your Beliefs:***
How would you explain and defend your views on life after death to a non-Christian friend? Try and avoid rhetoric in explaining your answer!

To what extent does your view on these things affect the way you seek to live your life now, especially in your witness to unsaved friends?
- ***The Point of the Parable:***
What is the main point of the parable? Explain it in your own words.

How much of this parable can we take as an actual definition of the afterlife and how much is simply illustrative in Jesus' story?

How should we interpret verse 25? Is this a general principle?
- ***Hell under fire:***
Why do you think there are varying views on defining hell, but relatively few disagreements on Heaven?

Do you struggle with the idea of "torment"?

What are the main objections that people have about hell?

What are the biblical counter arguments to these objections?

What do you think is the balanced position to take on this subject?