

“The challenge of the hour”

**Parables: Truth hidden in plain sight. Earthly story with a heavenly meaning.**

The first thing Jesus does when he begins His ministry is to proclaim “Now is the day of Salvation” *“The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel.”*

Jesus proclaims that His Kingdom is a **reign** not just a **realm**. He was establishing the authority inherent within a King to rule. All the gospels tell us this Kingdom is not just a **future home** but a **present reality**.

The Pharisees, Sadducees and religious leaders couldn't understand Jesus showing mercy to “Sinners”. Goes back to those Messianic expectations... 1. Messiah would not associate with sinners

2. Messiah would vindicate the righteousness of the Jews

Jesus did not meet their expectations Again they were wrong expectations so Jesus corrects their misinformed ideas of the Messiah.

3 times Jesus talked about the joy that comes when something which has been lost is found. A lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost Son. *Do come in, trespassers will be forgiven.*

So, these parables teach us first, that God wants the sinner.

God not only loves to show mercy to sinners but God actually **goes out to seek the sinner**, or, that *He is actually waiting and watching for the sinner to come home.*

God loves to show “mercy to sinners”.

Jesus not only faced difficulty with opposition from the religious leaders, but with the growing doubt of his own disciples over his messianic mission. The disciples needed “Great Assurance.” To encourage his disciples, he told them parables of contrast to illustrate the great ends are implicit with small beginnings.

So, the critics were breaking ground. And many ceased to follow Jesus even His own disciples were doubting the validity of His messianic mission.

➡ Into their doubt and confusion Jesus speaks parables of contrast... The Kingdom of God is like a bit of leaven which gives rise to a loaf; it is like a mustard seed which develops into a large shrub. God always finishes what He starts. Step back and see the great contrast between what you were at the beginning and what you will be at the end. *“Remember me not as you see, but as I am!*

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*Because the end was not far off, Jesus sought to warn the religious leaders and the people of Israel of God's impending judgment. He used parables to trigger their awareness that they were, "In Sight of Disaster." Like a rich fool unprepared for death, or a citizen unprepared for a burglar, so the religious leaders are unprepared for the advent of the Kingdom of God. God has entrusted to them supervision, and now the time of accounting has come, but they stand like children in the marketplace playing silly games while judgment is at hand. They are like a doorkeeper who has fallen asleep during the watch and therefore is completely oblivious to the important events transpiring around them. When God's judgment comes, hearing the word will not suffice – one must hear and do – the house must be built on the rock and not on the sand.*

*The Religious leaders were persisting in their resistance with a wait and see attitude. Why are you waiting; for truly if you wait too long you will be shut out of the Kingdom of God.*

*This intensified the antagonism of the Pharisees and chief rulers toward him, Jesus attempted to show them that the call into the wedding and the banquet celebration would not be open forever, wait too long and "It May Be Too Late." They should not be like five foolish maidens who took no oil and found the door locked to the wedding celebration, We must be prepared and Faith cannot be borrowed. You cannot be like guests who were invited and made excuses at first but later changed their mind and found it was too late for the door was then closed.*

summation by Douglas Sean O'donnell, God is a king. He is sovereign ruler. God has a son. God is gracious and generous. He invites people to a wedding feast. God is patient. He sends out word again and again. Why seek rebels twice? Why seek them even once? God is so patient. But God is also holy and just, and he will mete out justice to those who reject his joyful (party-like) rule.



In order for love to be real one has to be able to choose!

But if the sons of the Kingdom (Matthew 8:12), the theologians and the snobs ignore God's call, the despised and the confessed sinners will take their place. The others will receive nothing but a "too late" from behind the closed doors of God's glorious banquet hall.

For all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, "it might have been ... IF ONLY!" **PRAY**

The time was short – the hour was packed with challenge. “The Challenge of the Hour” the question of what the Kingdom of God demanded should not be left in the dark. The guest must have a wedding garment. Like poor Lazarus, the challenge was to stake one’s future on the word of the prophets. It was not enough that the house be cleaned and swept but left empty, good things must be put in their place or else the demons return seven-fold. It was not enough that the Pharisees and other religious zealots hate evil, they must also do good.

### The Challenge of the Hour

Once again Jesus is speaking to his critics ... they are persistent in their resistance by saying Jesus is unclear in stating what the Kingdom demands to be saved.

### The Unjust Steward – Luke 16

**16** He also said to His disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. <sup>2</sup> So he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’ <sup>3</sup> “Then the steward said within himself, ‘What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup> I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.’ <sup>5</sup> “So he called every one of his master’s debtors to *him*, and said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ <sup>6</sup> And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ So he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ <sup>7</sup> Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ So he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ <sup>8</sup> So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. <sup>9</sup> “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. <sup>10</sup> He who *is* faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much. <sup>11</sup> Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own? <sup>13</sup> “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

The shock, much discussed from early times, that has always been caused by a parable that seems to present a criminal as a model, ought to disappear when we consider the parable in its original form (vv. 1-8) and disregard the expansions (vv. 9-13). As in the parable of the burglar, Jesus is probably dealing with an actual case that had been indignantly reported to him. He deliberately chose it as an example, as he could be sure that it would secure the redoubled attention of any hearers who did not know of the incident. They would expect him to end the story with an expression of strong disapproval, but instead of that, to their complete surprise, he praises the swindler. Are you indignant? Apply the lesson to yourselves. You are in the same position as that steward who saw disaster, his life in ruins; but the crisis that threatens you – in fact, you are already involved in it – is incomparably more terrible. That man was ‘prudent’ (v. 8a): that is, he realized that the situation was critical. He did not let things drift; he acted at the last minute before the threatening disaster overtook him, fraudulently and unscrupulously, no doubt – Jesus does not excuse his action, but we are not concerned with that here – but boldly, resolutely, and prudently, and gave himself a fresh start. **For you, too, the challenge of the hour demands prudence; everything is at stake!** If you worked as hard at your Christianity as the world works to be rotten, this would be a different place.

**In the face of this challenge of the hour evasion is impossible... that is the message of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)**

To understand that parable in detail and as a whole, we have to recognize that the first part derives from well-known folk-material concerned with the reversal of fortune in the after-life.

<sup>19</sup>“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, <sup>21</sup> desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. Verse 21: ‘He desiring to be fed’ (i.e. he would have liked to be fed, but he was not). ‘with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. rather means, according to the Aramaic, ‘with what was thrown on the ground by those who sat at the rich man’s table.’ We are not to think of crumbs, but of pieces of bread

which the guests dipped in the dish, wiped their hands with, and then threw under the table.

*According to the ideas about retribution that were current in contemporary Judaism, his miserable condition indicates that he is a sinner who is being punished by God; and therefore, the audience cannot have expected what followed. Verse 22 indicates that Lazarus occupies the highest place in the assembly of the righteous.*

<sup>22</sup> So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. <sup>24</sup> "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. *Where has Jesus ever suggested that wealth in itself merits hell, and that poverty in itself is rewarded by paradise? V. 25 really means that lack of reverence for God and unkindness are punished, and that reverence and humility are rewarded; this is clearly shown by a comparison with the folk-material that Jesus used.*

<sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us. **The 'gulf' expresses the irrevocability of God's judgment; thus Jesus knows no doctrine or purgatory.**

<sup>27</sup> "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' <sup>30</sup> And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup> But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

The first point is concerned with the reversal of fortune in the life to come (vv. 19-23), the second (vv.24-31) with the refusal of the rich man's request that Abraham should send Lazarus to him and to his five brothers.

That means that Jesus does not want to comment on a social problem, or intend to give teaching about life after death – he tells the parable to warn people like the rich man and his brothers of the impending fate. Lazarus is therefore only a secondary figure, introduced by way of contrast; the parable is about the six brothers, and it should not be called the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, but the parable of the Six Brothers.

The challenge of the hour is to wake up NOW while you can. You cannot continue to live life in selfish luxury deaf to God's word... and not know that eternal separation is waiting for you...

**Identity remains; memory remains; recognition remains**

**Return of the Unclean Spirit – Matthew 12:43-45 STAND**

<sup>43</sup> “When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. <sup>44</sup> Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds *it* empty, swept, and put in order. <sup>45</sup> Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.”

They said that the atmosphere was so full of them that a pin could not be inserted into it without striking against one.

The Jews believed that these evil spirits originated from one of two sources. They might be the spirits of wicked people who had died but were still carrying on their malicious work. More commonly they were connected with the strange old story in Genesis 6:4 where we are told that the sons of God came to earth and begat children of the daughters of men. These children were supposed to be the unclean spirits who haunted the air. It is to such spirits Paul refers when he speaks of “principalities and powers.”

All illness was ascribed to these spirits. The Egyptians believed there were 36 parts in the human body and all of them might be presided over by a good or an evil spirit.; and if an evil spirit was in charge of illness must follow. It was particularly easy to see in madness and epilepsy the work of evil spirits which occupied the bodies or minds of men. There were certain special directions in which these spirits were given their chance. They were supposed to lurk when a man was eating and to get into his body along with the food. It was held to be especially true that they lurked in crumbs of food which had been left lying about. They were believed to lurk near unwashed hands and, if a man ate with unwashed hands, he was giving



them a special chance to enter into him. They were believed to lurk in water drunk in a strange place or given by a stranger. They lonely places were their favorite abode. There was only one way to dispose of them and that was to drown them in deep water. We may remember how the healing of the Gadarene demoniac was proved to be complete because the swine into whom the evil spirits entered plunged into the sea.

Here again Jesus is telling something which would be very vivid to His listening audience because empty houses were supposed to be the abode of demons and no one would enter a house which had long stood empty if he could possibly avoid it. Always about what man saw... not what God saw. The outside, performance...

*Look at me... look at me... example! Sabbath issue keeps coming up...*

John 5 man healed in the pool of Bethesda **38 years**, pain, sorrow, smell, hopelessness, and BAM all gone. **Aren't you happy for me?** We are not interested in your story buddy, All we know is your breaking the law and you are in big trouble!

The mosaic instruction to observe the Sabbath was simple: "You shall not do any work". **Over the years though, a great barrier reef of interpretations so encrusted the command that it's original purpose was lost.** The rabbis established a system of **39** categories of work, which, if violated, carried the penalty of death. Each category was further divided into subcategories... Reaping for example was one of the main categories... Lesser subcategories were created that lost the intent of the Sabbath. **Picking a grain of wheat or pulling a follicle of hair.**

The regulations became so strict that it was forbidden for a woman to even look in a mirror on the Sabbath for fear she might see a gray hair and be **tempted to pluck it**, thereby violating the prohibition against reaping.

**False teeth...** fall out pick up **WORK**

Could not carry a **handkerchief** on Sabbath but could wear one. Upstairs put on walk down stairs and take off. **NOT WORK**

**Debated wooden leg...** if house caught on fire could he carry it out? **WORK**

**You could Spit...** careful if foot rubbed ground cultivating the soil. **WORK**

**Traveling...** tie a rope on your house and go up to 1000 yards.

Sundown Friday... till sundown Saturday... No cooking was allowed, not even the starting of a fire. No dishes were washed. No floors were swept. No work of any kind was done.

*The heart of this devotion to God is shown by modern day Orthodox Jews. In early 1992, tenants let three apartments in an Orthodox*

neighborhood in Israel burn to the ground while they asked a rabbi whether a telephone call to the fire department on the Sabbath violated Jewish law. *Observant Jews are forbidden to use the phone on the Sabbath*, because doing so would break an electrical current, which is considered a form of work. In the half-hour it took the rabbi to decide "yes," the fire spread to two neighboring apartments.

**Not just "thou shalt not" but after thou shalt not, no "thou shalt."**

Pascal said, "Man is great insofar as he is wretched." Another man said, "When we see our spiritual wretchedness, we are candidates for spiritual greatness."

The righteousness of the Pharisees was only an outward performance...

**THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH** *The Pharisees were putting on a three ring circus...* The Game of Giving - The Performance of Prayer - The Farce of Fasting,

Matthew 6 verse 1 **The Game of Giving** "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. *Seen by men... man pleasers not God pleasers. Every circus has its clowns,* and the Pharisees were the clowns of Judaism. When a Pharisee entered the temple to drop an offering into the collection boxes, a brass band would strike up a jazzy tune to draw attention to him. **Men who do works so they will be seen by men receive the applause of men. Those who do works for God's glory receive God's smile. The reward for the latter is overwhelming – and always will be.**

**Next on the circus floor... The Performance of Prayer verse 5**

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Opportunities for their street corner performances came 3 times a day. **The third hour, the sixth hour, and the ninth hour. In other words, at 9:00am, at noon, and at 3 in the afternoon,** *Wherever a devout man was on the street, he stopped, faced the temple, and prayed. It was a perfect opportunity to let everybody see your stuff.* You could time your afternoon stroll so that when the trumpet sounded, you were on a very



**PROMINENT CORNER** where you could lift your hands and pray for all to hear. – just as the Pharisees did in Luke 18:11-12, “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 I possess.” It was all a show... the circus clowns were performing for man... **the volume and inflection and eloquence and length was designed to impress people.** Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. “Paid in full”

<sup>6</sup> But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

**Jesus was not condemning public prayer. He was condemning the desire to be seen praying publicly. Fasting... painting your face white... LOOK at ME!**

Again Matthew 12 <sup>43</sup> “When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. <sup>44</sup> Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds *it* empty, swept, and put in order. <sup>45</sup> Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.”

**Jesus was thinking of the Pharisees. All their religion was built on the commandments which start, “Thou shalt not ....” It was a religion of *not* doing things. It tried to empty men of all evil things but it did not tell them what the good things were. It is never enough to say, “Thou shalt not ...” and to stop there. Let us take a simple analogy. Suppose a man enters into possession of a garden which has run wild. He digs it, takes out the weeds and cleanses the whole place. But if he leaves it like that the weeds will come back and cover the soil again. He cannot leave it empty; he must go on to plant flowers; and in the end, he must plant so many flowers that there no room for weeds.**

It is never enough to try to erect a good life on, “thou shalt not ....” We must not merely hate evil; we must love goodness.

This is particularly true of thoughts. Often we think the wrong things. If we say to ourselves, “I will not think about this,” the only effect is to fix our thoughts upon it. The real way of escape is to think of other things, to plunge into other activities, to gain other interests. We cannot simply drive out badness; we must eject what is

bad by the power of what is good. There is only one final way to do that. Paul said two great things. “For me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21); and “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). What he meant was that his love for Jesus had driven the lesser things out. When we find ourselves giving such love and loyalty to Jesus that he comes first we shall find that evil things have lost their power.

It’s an inside job! God works from the inside out not from the outside in!