

A Lenten Journey Through the Parables

6. Parables About the Use of Wealth

Sunday, April 1, 2012
10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor
Presenter: David Monyak

St. John in the Wilderness

References

- **The Parables of Jesus**, by David Wenham. IVP Academic, 1989. ISBN 978-04308-12864
- **The Parables. Understanding the Stories Jesus Told**, by Simon J Kistemaker. Baker Books, 1980. ISBN-13: 978-0801063916
- **A Journey Through the Parables**, by Rev. John Jay Hughes. Audio CD Course. Now You Know Media. **Stories Jesus Told. Modern Meditations on the Parables**, by Rev. John Jay Hughes, Liguori, 1991. ISBN 0-7648-0413-8
- **Stories with Intent. A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus**, by Klyne Snodgrass, 2008, Eerdmans Publishing Co., ISBN-13: 978-0-8028-4241-1
- *Audio excerpts from: **The Listener's NIV MP3 Audio Bible**, narrated by Max McLean*

Today

Grouping as per *Stories with Intent*

■ Parables About the Use of Wealth

- **The Rich Fool** (Luke 12:16-21)
- **The Shrewd Manager** = The Unjust Steward = The Dishonest Manager (Luke 16:1-9)
- **The Rich Man and Lazarus** = Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

Praise and glory to you, Jesus Christ our
Saviour,
for you do not call the righteous
but us sinners to repentance.
You draw us away from the easy road
that would lead to our destruction.
You call us instead to seek God's
kingdom,
to strive for what is right,
and to lay up our treasure in heaven.

- New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 532

Parables About the Use of Wealth

**Parables About the Use
of Wealth:**

**The Rich Fool
(Luke 12:16-21)**

The Rich Fool

Gospel Context

- In the beginning of Luke 12 we are told a crowd of many thousands had gathered, “so that they were trampling on one another.”
- Jesus has begun preaching, when (Luke 12:13-15):
 - ‘Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”’
 - Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”
 - 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.”
 - And he told them this parable:’ (NIV)

The Rich Fool

Luke 12:16-21



*Voice of Max
McLean*

“The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’”

“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. 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.””

“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?’”

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

The Rich Fool

Background

- The picture here is of a landowner for whom everything in his business has gone right – so much so that he has no room in his stores and warehouses to put all his grain.
- He is faced with the happy prospect of what to do with his surplus.
- A modern equivalent might be an industrialist who captures the market with a winning product and has made a mint for himself. What should he do with his surplus?

The Rich Fool

Interpretation

- The interpretation is pretty straightforward.
- The landowner is thinking only of himself:
 - *I* will tear down *my* barns ...
 - ... there *I* will store all *my* grain and *my* goods ...
- He focuses on the vision of himself enjoying his goods for many years:
 - 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.””

The Rich Fool

Interpretation

- He has forgotten the reality that James and Timothy remind us in their letters:
 - James 4:13-14: “Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”
 - 1 Timothy 6:7 “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it”.

The Rich Fool

Interpretation

- The parable illustrates the *deceitfulness* of riches: their tendency:
 - to give people an illusory sense of security
 - to fill people's thoughts and horizons,
 - to stifle any interest in the kingdom of God
- It does not imply that material things are wrong in themselves, but only when they become the focus and goal of life.
- It is a critique of all kinds of *greed* because (as Paul says in Ephesians 5:5) greed is *idolatry*.

**Parables About the Use
of Wealth:**

**The Shrewd Manager
(Luke 16:1-9)**

The Shrewd Manager

Luke 16:1-9



*Voice of Max
McLean*

Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’

“The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg -- I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’

“So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

“‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied.

“The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.’

“Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’

“‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied.

“He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’

“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.” (NIV)

The Shrewd Manager

Background – Managers / Stewards

- It was common practice for a rich person to choose a person he trusted and had full confidence in as his “manager” or “steward.”
- A manager or steward:
 - controlled his master’s assets.
 - lived, along with his family, as a member of his master’s household
 - represented his master in all transactions.
 - had full authority to deal with debtors as he saw fit:
 - Debtor had to abide by the stipulations laid down by the manager.
 - Debtors were responsible to the manager *alone*.

The Shrewd Manager

Background – Managers / Stewards

- The position of a manager was quite lucrative.
- However, if a manager got dismissed, it would be complete and utter ruin:
 - He had no house, no possession of his own.
 - Other managerial positions were rare, but even if one was available, the fact he had been dismissed as a manager would put him on a “black list.”

The Shrewd Manager

Background – Interest and Usury

- It was illegal for a Jew to charge his Jewish fellowman interest on money, food, or anything else that could earn interest:
 - Followed multiple biblical injunctions: for example Exodus 22:25: “If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest”
 - Others: Leviticus 25:36; Deuteronomy 15:8 and 23:19.

The Shrewd Manager

Background – Interest and Usury

- So how does a wealthy man of the world get around this “unrealistic” injunction?
- You let your manager handle all the transactions, so that if there are accusations of usury, your manager – not you the master – is brought to trial.

The Shrewd Manager

Background – Interest and Usury

- How might a manager protect himself?
- The manager and a borrower would draw up a statement in which the debt and interest were listed in one total figure:
 - Illegal usury: “I will pay Reuben 10 *kor* of wheat on the first day of Nisan and if I do not, then I will pay 4 *kor* of wheat annually in addition.”
 - Legal: “I owe Reuben 14 *kor* of wheat.” (Not documenting the fact that borrower had given Reuben only 10 *kor* of wheat, and would pay the balance in interest.)
- This practice was condoned by the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, and was recognized by magistrates as a “necessary evil.”

The Shrewd Manager

Background – Interest and Usury

- Interest rates could be quite high.
- Interest rate for borrowed wheat went as high as 20 percent, with an additional 5 percent for insurance against price fluctuations and depreciation of the product's value.
- Interest rate for olive oil was 80 percent plus 20 percent insurance cost, totaling 100 percent – for the risk in lending olive oil was great:
 - Olive crops were unpredictable and the value of olive oil, because of the size and quality of the olives, varied from year to year.
 - Cheap oils extracted from other sources could be added to olive oil, and methods to determine purity were poor.

The Shrewd Manager

Interpretation

- This parable has been troublesome for many commentators.
- What the manager has done is pretty clear:
 - He and his family are facing a crises of impending personal financial catastrophe and ruin.
 - He uses the power he still has over the assets entrusted to him to quickly create a lot of new friends – friends he can turn to when he becomes destitute.
- *Problem:* The manager has created his new friends by (apparently) swindling his master of a good deal of money.

The Shrewd Manager

Interpretation

- Despite this (apparent) glaring swindle:
 - There is *no* condemnation of the manager's "robbery."
 - Instead, the rich master *commends* the manager's "shrewdness."
- One way commentators have tried to get out of this problem is to assert that the manager was not "dishonest" (to use Jesus' words!), but really a good guy:
 - The money, they suggest, that the manager wrote off the various debtors bills was actually the (illegal and biblically enjoined) interest.
 - So the manager was to be commended because:
 - He had "cleaned" up the unethical transactions by removing the illegal interest, righting many wrongs!
 - In the process, he made a lot of grateful friends for himself – and for his rich master!

The Shrewd Manager

Interpretation

- However it is not really necessary to try to make the manager “honest” for the parable to work:
 - The rich master may have publically commended his manager while privately he seethed in anger:
 - He legally could not reverse the changed transactions.
 - If he publically rebuked his manager, he risked loosing the good will of his debtors, the only positive thing he would get out of the whole affair.
 - Jesus in other parables did not hesitate to use dishonest or unjust characters to make a point.

The Shrewd Manager

Interpretation

- This parable is:
 - *not* a commendation of dishonest stewardship,
 - but rather a *commendation of shrewd forethought and preparation for a future crisis.*
- The shrewd, dishonest, unjust manager is a worldly man, *not* a “son of light,” *not* someone whose moral example should be followed;
- but he and his ilk can still teach something to the people of God.

The Shrewd Manager

Interpretation

- The shrewd, dishonest, unjust manager faced the crises of his life, personal catastrophe and ruin, and used the treasure entrusted him to *shrewdly* prepare for it.
- Each of us also face a crises – our impending death – and the parable calls us to use the treasure entrusted to us in this life to *shrewdly* prepare for our death and the life beyond.

The Shrewd Manager

Interpretation

- Jesus tells us (v. 9): “I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”
- *In other words:* use your worldly wealth in such a way that when you arrive at the “heavenly gates,” you will get a “friendly” reception.

**Parables About the Use
of Wealth:**

**The Rich Man and
Lazarus**

(Luke 16:19-31)

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31



*Voice of Max
McLean*

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but

now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

“‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’” (NIV)

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – The Disabled

- The diseased and disabled of the ancient world were a burden on others and were often left sitting or lying at the roadside and in public places, asking for charity from passers-by.
- There was no state “welfare.”

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – Food Scraps

- Food was eaten with the fingers, which were wiped afterward with pieces of flat bread that were cast aside to be eaten by the household dogs.
 - The persistent Gentile woman, beseeching Jesus to heal her little daughter, reminded him of this custom when she said: “Even the dogs under the table eat the family’s leavings” (Mark 7:28).

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – The Dogs

- The dogs that lick Lazarus' open sores are not pets, however, but stray dogs like those in the Third World.
- Such dogs were a plague in the ancient world:
 - They licked up the blood of Naboth, murdered by the wicked king Ahab because Naboth refused to exchange his ancestral property next to the king's palace for land that Ahab offered him elsewhere.
 - God sent the prophet Elijah to warn Ahab that his crime would not go unpunished: “In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, the dogs shall lick up your blood, too” (1 Kings 21:19).
- Both Lazarus's running sores and the dogs licking his sores would have rendered him *ritually impure*.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – Views on Wealth & Poverty

- Conventional morality of the day:
 - Wealth was a sign of God’s blessing (the hearers would have admired the rich man as an upright pillar of society)
 - Beggars were likely receiving their just deserts from God for sins they has committed.
 - This was the assumption of Job’s “comforters.”
 - This attitude was also implicit in the question Jesus’ disciples put to him about the man born blind: “Rabbi, was it his sin or that of his parents that caused him to be born blind?” (To which Jesus answers: “Neither. It was no sin, either of this man or of his parents” (John 9:2-3).

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – Meaning of “Lazarus”

- “Lazarus” is a shortened version of Eleazar, meaning “may God help” or “the one whom God helps.”
 - If Jesus’ hearing knew this, it would not permit them to think Lazarus is cursed because of his condition.
 - Lazarus is poor and miserable, but God is still on his side.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – Moses and the Prophets

- The Old Testament (= “Moses and the Prophets”) is full of instruction about caring for the poor and of warning about neglecting the poor. Examples:
 - Deuteronomy 15:7-8: “If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your poor brother. Rather be open-handed and freely lend him whatever he needs.”
 - Amos 2:7: a sustained warning of God's judgment on the rich who live in luxury and “trample on the heads of the poor.”
 - Isaiah 58:6-7: “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen . . . to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – Abraham and Hospitality

- Abraham was a model of the *hospitality* expected of the wealthy in the ancient world.
- At the mention of Abraham's name, Jesus' hearers would have immediately recalled the well-known story of the patriarch extending *hospitality* to three strangers who turn out to be messengers from God:
 - The three messengers, angels, tell Abraham that his aged and childless wife Sarah will bear a son in whom “all the nations of the earth are to find blessing” (Genesis 18:18).

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – “Heaven” and “Hell”

- In the Jewish thought of Jesus' time there were all sorts of ideas about the after-life and about the “geography” of “heaven” and “hell.”
- *Sheol* (Hebrew) = The netherworld, the abode of the dead. Translations:
 - Greek *hades*
 - Latin *infernium* or *infern*
 - English: *hell* (which is *very* misleading)
- Sheol in the early Old Testament:
 - Those in Sheol are in some state of rest and can be disturbed from that calm
 - Sheol was not so much a place of punishment as a place where people are detained until judgment day
- Sheol in the later Old Testament:
 - Sheol a place of punishment for the unrighteous (Psalm 31:17)
 - The righteous are there as well (Ezekial 32:21, 27), but God is capable of delivering the righteous from Sheol's icy grip.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – “Heaven” and “Hell”

- Another word used was gehenna
 - Also translated into English as “hell.”
 - Adapted from the Hebrew *ge hinnom*, the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, which had been a place of child sacrifice (2 Kings 23:10) and later made a pit for burning garbage.
 - Some scholars say:
 - Sheol or Hades: one’s location during the intermediate state between death and final judgment
 - Gehenna: the place of punishment after the final judgment,
 - But general scholarly consensus is that this is very unclear.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – “Heaven” and “Hell”

- Jewish writings sometimes speculated that in the afterlife:
 - the righteous and the evil would see the bliss or punishment of each other, to demonstrate to each that justice has prevailed
 - Such writings however often acknowledged this would be a terrible reality if literally true, and envision a righteous person offering prayers for mercy to end the punishment.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – “Heaven” and “Hell”

■ Paradise:

- In Hellenistic times (= the three centuries from Alexander the Great to the triumph of Rome), “paradise” increasingly refers to both:
 - the garden of Eden
 - the place of reward for the faithful.
- In New Testament times, paradise could refer to a temporary dwelling place for the righteous dead prior to their resurrection.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – “Heaven” and “Hell”

- Heaven:
 - The dwelling place of God and the angels
 - In later Old Testament times heaven was considered the destiny of those in covenantal righteousness with God.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Background – Misc

- Purple Dye
 - Purple fabrics were highly prized in the ancient world
 - The source of the dye was one of several carnivorous snails that lived in the Mediterranean Sea
 - Twelve thousand shells would produce less than 2 grams (0.07 oz.) of dye.
- “Dives”
 - Traditional name for the rich man in the parable; from the Latin for “wealth.”
 - Parable sometimes called “The Parable of Dives and Lazarus”

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Interpretation

- There appear to be two major themes:
 - It is a terrible warning to the rich about the danger of neglecting the poor:
 - The judgment against the Rich Man seems to be based on:
 - the injustice of the juxtaposition of his wealth and Lazarus's poverty, and
 - his neglect to do anything about it
 - The parable clearly expresses a special identification of God with the poor.
 - It affirms “Moses and the prophets” as sufficient in expressing the will of God
 - It warns against the sort of “sign-seeking” that is really an excuse for disobedience (scripture is sufficient).

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Interpretation

- The parable was not intended as a literal “map” of the after-life (though it has often been misused in that way).
- But we must take seriously its implications that:
 - What we do in the present is important, and we will be judged for the way we live.
 - The consequences of judgment will be serious and irrevocable.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Application

- Warning (Rev. Hughes, p. 120):
 - “If we wish to be close to the Lord, we need to do also what the rich man in the parable failed to do. We need to see the needs of those around us. And like the despised outsider in the parable of the Good Samaritan, we need to minister to those needs in caring, costing ways. The Lord seldom demands heroism. Often a kind word, a friendly gesture, or an encouraging smile is enough. But unless we are open to the needs of those we encounter on life’s way, and are trying to meet those needs, we shall discover one day that we have lived far from God, no matter how many prayers we have said. And if we have lived far from God in this life, we shall live far from him in eternity. God’s judgment is not something imposed on us from outside. It is his ratification of the judgment we make in this life by the way we choose to live.”

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Application

- Good News (Rev. Hughes, p. 120):
 - “Clearly this is a parable of judgment. God’s judgment need not be fearful, however. In reality it is part of the good news. The judgment meted out in this parable to Lazarus — passive throughout and speaking never a word — assures us that the inarticulate, the weak, the poor, the marginalized and neglected, are especially dear to God. Lazarus, the man whom God helped, tells us that in the kingdom Jesus came to proclaim the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk and run without growing weary; those who hope in the Lord renew their strength and soar as on eagles’ wings; the toned deaf sing like Kiri Te Kanawa and Placido Domingo; the poor are made rich; the hungry feast at the banquet of eternal life; the sorrowful are filled with laughter and joy; and those who are ostracized and persecuted because of the Son of Man receive their unbelievably great reward. That, too, is the gospel proclaimed by this parable. That is the good news.”