

Rich Man Poor Man - the Lesson to Everyone **A Series on Tax Collectors and Sinners: Part 4**

In this series of parables that Jesus presents as a literary unit, Jewish religious authorities have been listening to His parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Prodigal Son and the Shrewd Manager as He sits with tax collectors and other social outcasts. But Jewish religious authorities only see a poor itinerant man talking about money, and failing to understand the meaning of Jesus' parables (similarly in Matt 13:10-17), scoff at Him (Luke 16:14). Before Jesus presents the last parable in this narrative unit, the Parable of the Rich Man and Poor Man, He addresses the scoffing Jewish religious authorities:

And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15)

Jesus makes His first point that Jewish religious authorities are motivated to show themselves as righteous to be justified of their position before men; but, they fail to show themselves righteous before God to be justified by Him. Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus explains how Jewish religious authorities do this:

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. (Matt 23:1-7)

The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail. (Luke 16:16-17)

As He notes, up until John the Baptist, the Old Testament was proclaimed by the prophets. Now that John the Baptist started to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God, Jesus makes His second point that Jewish religious authorities are trying to force themselves into the new gospel; in denying the Messiah, they seek to prevent the Pentateuch from being fulfilled and fail, which they attempted to do throughout the gospels.

John the Baptist confronts Jewish religious authorities for distorting God's word of the Old Testament and warns against co-opting the message of the gospel (Matt 3:4-10).

Proclaiming John the Baptist as the greatest of all prophets (Matt 11:7-14; Luke 7:26-28), Jesus quotes a part of Malachi's prophesy associating him as the forerunner to the Messiah, the One who will judge and purify His people, and names him the "Elijah who was to come" (Matt 11:14; Mark 9:12-13).

As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You,
Who will prepare Your way before You.'

Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. **From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.** And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (Matt 11:7-15)

Rich Man Poor Man - the Lesson to Everyone
A Series on Tax Collectors and Sinners: Part 4 (page 2)

Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery. (Luke 16:18)

Jesus' third and last point to Jewish religious authorities is to substantiate how they distort God's direct word by using divorce as an example. It is only the Pentateuch where God communes with Moses who records His words; thereafter, the Holy Spirit superintends the writing of the Bible. This last point can be easily understood by examining a discussion Jesus had with Jewish religious authorities more specifically about divorce elsewhere:

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" And He answered and said, "**Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'**? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matt 19:3-9)

Jesus' third point was a conclusion of His condemnation of the scoffing Jewish religious authorities. Their leadership and behavior were evidence of their hard hearts and failure to know God. Elsewhere they were recognized as an "adulterous generation" which was consistent with their views of a flimsy marriage covenant and infidelity to the Mosaic Covenant.

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "**An evil and adulterous generation** craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matt 12:33-40)

And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this **adulterous and sinful generation**, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:34-38)

Against this backdrop of scoffing Jewish religious authorities who were "lovers of money", Jesus begins the last parable. The Parable of the Rich Man and Poor Man. It is a parable that is about heaven and hell and is directed towards everyone listening.

"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. ... (continued)

Rich Man Poor Man - the Lesson to Everyone
A Series on Tax Collectors and Sinners: Part 4 (page 3)

(continued) ... Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:19-31)

The parable is principally about the perceptions of the rich man and the real existence of heaven and hell. As he faces the stark reality of his eternal afterlife, he comes to several realizations.

1. One's wealth and outward appearance says nothing about one's faith in God.
2. After death, there is no second chance at salvation and mercy.
3. There is no testimony more powerful than the word of God.
4. Faith is a matter of listening and obeying God's word (Ex 19:4-6).

Present among the social outcasts of Jewish society, Jesus narrates a series of parables as a single literary unit to address the attitudes of everyone listening in hopes of invoking a self-awareness of their prejudices and misunderstanding of faith, the agapē love of God the Father, and the task of building the kingdom of God.