

Luke

Lesson #11

Parables, Part 1

(12: 1 – 14: 35)

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Review

In Lesson #10 we entered the 2nd Phase of Jesus' public ministry, as he and his disciples headed south toward Jerusalem and the cross. En route, Jesus sent ahead 72 disciples, an "advance team" for his 100-mile journey. Fascination with Jesus—and opposition to him—continued to increase, and the crowds following him continued to grow.

Along the way Jesus reproached Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum for their unbelief, while at the same time, Luke pointedly included stories of Jesus elevating marginalized people: the good Samaritan over the priests and Levites, Mary over Martha; and those who opposed him said it is *"by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he drives out demons,"* while others demanded a sign validating his words and actions.

Preview

Continuing on the journey to Jerusalem, Jesus entralls the crowds with his teaching, responding to questions people ask him, commenting on current events and warning the crowds of conflict to come. His teaching takes many forms, but the *parable* is the form most identified with Jesus. It was not unique to him—many teachers used it—but he was especially adept at it.

The word “parable” is a compound of two Greek words: παρά (para = “along side,” as in paramedic or paralegal) and βολή (bolé = the verb “to throw”). A “parable” is a short story or illustration thrown alongside an old truth to illuminate that truth in a striking and memorable fashion. The synoptic gospels include 39 parables: 27 of them are in Luke; 5 of those appear in Lesson #11.



As we enter Lesson #11 we read:

“Meanwhile, so many people were crowding together that they were trampling one another underfoot. He began to speak . . .”

(12: 1)

As Jesus and his disciples continue their journey to Jerusalem the crowds accompanying him grow ever-larger, and as they walk together, with Jesus leading them, Jesus engages them in a free-wheeling conversation on a variety of topics, some triggering questions from the crowd or his disciples, and others leading by association to new topics. Luke orchestrates this free-wheeling conversation masterfully, mirroring the dynamics of a large, enthusiastic crowd, led by a piper.

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For convenience, we might view this section in 7 movements:

- 1. A lesson on the fear of persecution (12: 1-12)**
- 2. A lesson on detachment and radical simplicity (12: 13-34)**
- 3. A lesson on the responsibilities of discipleship (12: 35 – 13: 9)**
- 4. A lesson on Jesus' opponents (13: 10-21)**
- 5. A lesson on those who will be saved (13: 22-35)**
- 6. A lesson on the marginalized (14: 1-24)**
- 7. A lesson on the price of discipleship (14: 25-35)**

We should be careful not to insist on rigid boundaries for these movements, however, lest we detract from the free-wheeling, give-and-take nature of Jesus' spontaneous engagement with the crowd, a spontaneity that Luke has so carefully created.

1. A lesson on the fear of persecution (12: 1-12)

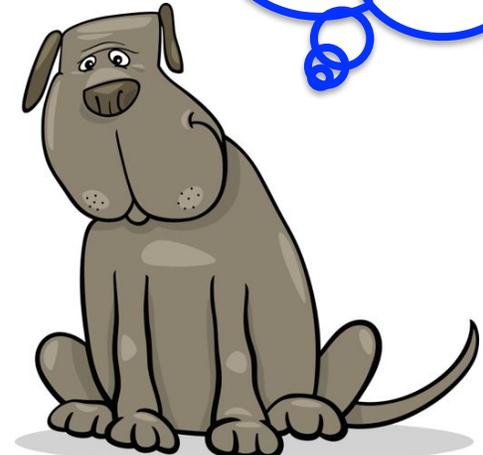
“Meanwhile, so many people were crowding together that they were trampling one another underfoot. He began to speak, first to his disciples, ‘Beware of the leaven—that is, the hypocrisy—of the Pharisees.’”

(12: 1)

- “He began to speak, first to his disciples . . .” sets Jesus’ spontaneous conversation into motion. He speaks directly to his disciples, and overhearing, others in the rapidly-growing crowd join in.
- “Leaven” is ALWAYS a negative image in Scripture, a symbol of sin; in this case, hypocrisy.



Opening this movement by Jesus targeting the Pharisees is a really nice transitional device, since the previous section ended with Jesus' rejection by the Scribes and Pharisees, and his denunciation of them.



That is so like you to notice such a thing!

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1. A lesson on the fear of persecution (12: 1-12)

“There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed on the housetops. I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but after that can do no more. I shall show you whom to fear. Be afraid of the one who after killing has the power to cast into Gehenna; yes, I tell you, be afraid of that one. Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins? Yet not one of them has escaped the notice of God. Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows . . .

1. A lesson on the fear of persecution (12: 1-12)

“I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.

“Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When they take you before synagogues and before rulers and authorities, do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you are to say. For the holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say.”



Look at this opening movement carefully:

- The “hypocrisy” of the Pharisees is an example *by contrast* for Jesus’ disciples. Recall that the Greek word translated “hypocrite” is ὑποκριτής (hoop-ok-ree-TACE), meaning “actor,” one who wears a mask, pretending to be someone he is not. Jesus’ disciples should not do so, for the truth will come out in the end. Once again, for Jesus’ disciples, radical simplicity rules the day: let your “yes” mean “yes,” and your “no” mean “no.”
- Stand up to the Scribes and Pharisees—even if it means your death, for the death of your body means nothing (we are all going to die one day, anyhow); your *eternal* life means everything, however.
- But you are not to worry. Two sparrows are sold for a penny, and you are worth far more than they are; indeed, God has counted every hair on your head!

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Yikes! Dr. C. gives God a new math problem every morning!!!



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- **God will watch over you, so when persecution comes—as it surely will—don’t be afraid: speak the truth and stand up for Christ, and if you do, he will stand up for you in the presence of the angels and of God.**
- **When Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit in Luke’s Gospel, we must keep in mind that Luke/Acts is a single work in two parts. In Luke, Jesus is the main character; in Acts (after Jesus’ ascension in chapter 1), the Holy Spirit is the main character, the one driving the action.**
- **Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is deliberately refusing to accept the testimony of the Holy Spirit regarding the reality of sin, the holiness of God and the inevitable judgment that must follow. Without accepting this fundamental reality, one cannot be “saved,” not because God won’t or can’t save you, but because you won’t allow yourself to be saved.**

No, thanks.



Cure for sin →





Finally, *“When they take you before synagogues and before rulers and authorities, do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you are to say”* (12: 11) . . . the Holy Spirit will give you the words you need.

Don't let fear of the unknown or doubt about your rhetorical skill stand in the way of your discipleship.



1. A lesson on the fear of persecution (12: 1-12)
2. **A lesson on detachment and radical simplicity (12: 13-34)**
3. A lesson on the responsibilities of discipleship (12: 35 – 13: 9)
4. A lesson on Jesus' opponents (13: 10-21)
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7. A lesson on the price of discipleship (14: 25-35)

2. A lesson on detachment and radical simplicity (12: 13-34)

“Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.’ He replied to him, ‘Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?’ Then he said to the crowd, ‘Take care to guard against all greed, for through one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions.’

“Then he told them a parable . . .



Recall that the word “parable” is a compound of two Greek words: παρά (para = “along side,” as in paramedic or paralegal) and βολή (bolé = the verb “to throw”).

“A parable is a succinct, didactic story thrown alongside a common, ordinary truth to illuminate that truth in a striking and memorable fashion. Parables are meant to illuminate, not to hide or obscure.”



Jesus did not invent the parable as a pedagogic device; rather, parables are a type of *mashalim*, a form of comparison used in the Old Testament, such as Nathan's story of the ewe-lamb in 2 Samuel 12: 1-7 and the story told by the woman of Tekoa in 2 Samuel 14: 1-13. Indeed, Greek rhetoricians used the term to describe a brief fictional narrative used for comparison, much like an extended metaphor.

Although Jesus did not invent the parable, he was a master at using it. Jesus' parables are clever and memorable, often delighting his audience with surprise and insight.

The Parables of Jesus

<u>Parable</u>	<u>Matthew</u>	<u>Mark</u>	<u>Luke</u>
1. Lamp under a bowl	5:14-15	4:21-22	8:16; 11:33
2. Wise and foolish builders	7:24-27		6:47-49
3. New cloth on an old coat	9:16	2:21	5:36
4. New wine in old wine skins	9:17	2:33	5:37-38
5. Sower and the soils	13:3-8, 18-23	4:3-8, 14-20	8:5-8, 11-15
6. Weeds	13:24-30, 36-43		
7. Mustard seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
8. Yeast	13:33		13:20-21
9. Hidden treasure	13:44		
10. Valuable pearl	13:45-46		
11. Net	13:47-50		
12. Owner of a house	13:52		
13. Lost sheep	18:12-14		15:4-7
14. Unmerciful servant	18:23-34		
15. Workers in a vineyard	20:1-16		
16. Two sons	21:28-32		
17. Tenants	21:33-34	12:1-11	20:9-18
18. Wedding banquet	22:2-14		
19. Fig tree	24:32-35	13:28-29	21:29-31
20. Faithful and wise servant	24:45-51		12:42-48
21. Ten virgins	25:1-13		
22. Talents	25:14-30		19:12-27
23. Sheep and goats	25:31-46		
24. Growing seed		4:26-29	
25. Watchful servants		13:35-37	12:35-40
26. Money lender			7:41-43
27. Good Samaritan			10:30-37
28. Friend in need			11:5-8
29. Rich fool			12:16-21
30. Unfruitful fig tree			13:6-9
31. Lowest seat at the feast			14:7-14
32. Great banquet			14:16-24
33. Cost of discipleship			14:28-33
34. Lost coin			15:8-10
35. Lost son			15:11-32
36. Shrewd manager			16:1-8; 19-31
37. Master and his servant			17:7-10
38. Persistent widow			18:2-8
39. Pharisee and tax collector			18:10-14
Total Parables	23	9	27



Rembrandt. *The Parable of the Rich Fool* (oil on oak), 1627.
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

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2. A lesson on detachment and radical simplicity (12: 13-34)

“He said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Notice the ravens: they do not sow or reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than birds! Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your life-span? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you anxious about the rest? Notice how the flowers grow. They do not toil or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass in the field that grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?’

2. A lesson on detachment and radical simplicity (12: 13-34)

“As for you, do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not worry anymore. All the nations of the world seek for these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these other things will be given you besides. Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”



I think I understand now. As Jesus stressed earlier, to be his disciple requires a life of detachment and radical simplicity, not one of being caught up in passions, politics and possessions.

That would be a much better way to live, for sure!



1. A lesson on the fear of persecution (12: 1-12)
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Virtually everyone in the 1st generation of the Church fully expected Christ to return and usher in the Kingdom of God—in their lifetime! After all, he did say: *“Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God”* (9: 27).

Consequently, Jesus turns the discussion from a life of detachment and radical simplicity to what a disciple should do while waiting for the Lord’s return—in theological terms, his parousia [παρουσία], his 2nd coming.



3. A lesson on the responsibilities of discipleship (12: 35 - 13: 9)

“Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master’s return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them. And should he come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.

3. A lesson on the responsibilities of discipleship (12: 35 - 13: 9)

“Then Peter said, ‘Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?’ And the Lord replied, ‘Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his servants to distribute [the] food allowance at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property. But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, to eat and drink and get drunk, then that servant’s master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him most severely and assign him a place with the unfaithful. That servant who knew his master’s will but did not make preparations . . .

3. A lesson on the responsibilities of discipleship (12: 35 - 13: 9)

“nor act in accord with his will shall be beaten severely; and the servant who was ignorant of his master’s will but acted in a way deserving of a severe beating shall be beaten only lightly. Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.”

(12: 35-48)



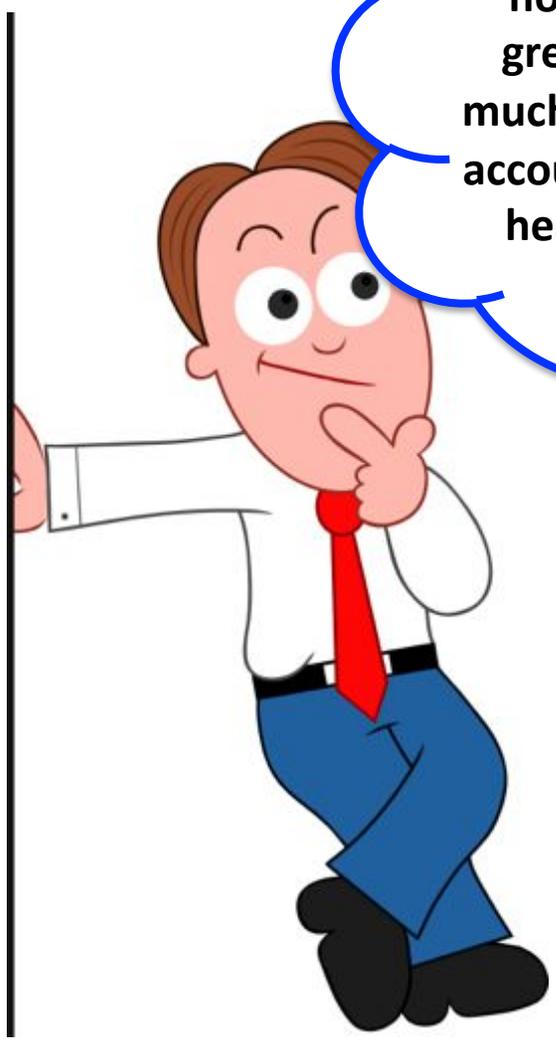
After the parable of the vigilant and faithful servant (12: 35-40), Peter asks, *“Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?”* (12: 41).

Jesus answers that the parable applies to everyone, but as we learned in our study of Leviticus, there are degrees of privilege, with accompanying degrees of responsibility and accountability.

Jesus then goes on to answer Peter with another parable, a rather dire warning to his inner circle. To be an Apostle—one who was an eyewitness to Jesus’ entire public ministry, from his baptism through his death, burial, resurrection and ascension—is an enormous privilege, but with that privilege comes enormous responsibility and accountability, far above that of everyone else.

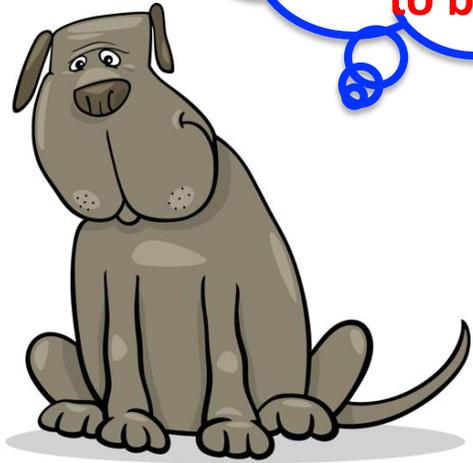


Jan Luyken. *The Parable of the Faithful Steward* (etching for the Bowyer Bible). C. 1795.



The same holds true for Bible students. To study Scripture verse-by-verse, 2 hours each week for 7 or 8 years is a great privilege, but it carries with it a much higher degree of responsibility and accountability than for those who simply hear a few readings and a 12-minute homily at Mass on Sunday!

Yikes! This class is a pretty dangerous place to be!



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Jesus' discussion on detachment and radical simplicity, followed by the responsibilities of being a disciple, lead him—by association—to consider his own mission and responsibilities, and the timetable he envisions.

3. A lesson on the responsibilities of discipleship (12: 35 – 13: 9)

“I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in law.”

(12: 49-53)



Jesus' message demands a response: acceptance or rejection; there is no middle ground. As the Kingdom of God takes hold in the world, it is like a refining and purifying fire, a source of conflict and dissension even within families.

And then he said to the crowds . . .

3. A lesson on the responsibilities of discipleship (12: 35 - 13: 9)

“When you see a cloud rising in the west you say immediately that it is going to rain—and so it does; and when you notice that the wind is blowing from the south you say that it is going to be hot—and so it is. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

(12: 54-56)



It was abundantly clear at the time of Jesus' public ministry in the early 30s that history was careening toward a catastrophe.

Indeed, when the Emperor Tiberius died in A.D. 37, he was followed by Caligula (A.D. 37-41, assassinated); Claudius (A.D. 41-54, poisoned by his wife, Agrippina); and Nero (A.D. 54-68, assassinated).

Nero launched the first state-sponsored persecution against the Church in Rome (A.D. 64-68), in which both Peter and Paul were martyred, and he triggered the "Great Jewish Revolt" (A.D. 66-72), in which 1.2 million Jews died.

Nero's persecution and the "Great Jewish Revolt" supply the soil from which the book of Revelation emerges.

These were tumultuous times, indeed, and anyone who opened his eyes could see it coming.

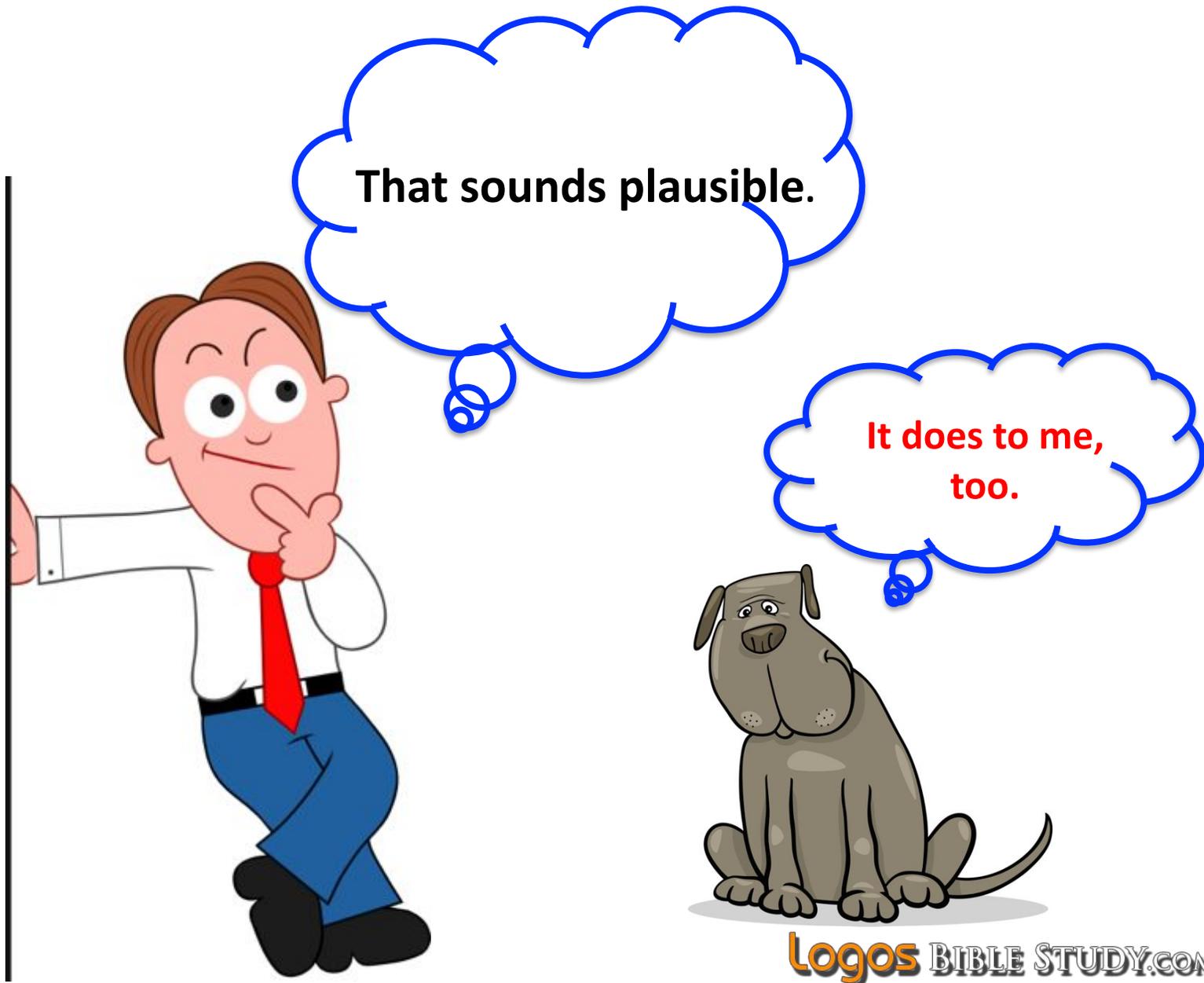
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And if, as we speculated in Lessons 5 & 7, both John the Baptist and Jesus were influenced by the decidedly apocalyptic vision of the Essenes, then Jesus' words may reflect his anticipation of the imminent climatic battle between the "Sons of Light" and the "Sons of Darkness," led by a great leader, a "son of David," who would usher in a new and righteous Kingdom, as the Essene's "War Scroll" so vividly portrays.



War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness [“War Scroll”], 1QM, 4Q491-496.
Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum, Jerusalem.



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**Again—by association—
Jesus moves the discussion
to what one should do in
the meantime, given what
he has just said.**

3. A lesson on the responsibilities of discipleship (12: 35 - 13: 9)

“Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? If you are to go with your opponent before a magistrate, make an effort to settle the matter on the way; otherwise your opponent will turn you over to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the constable, and the constable throw you into prison. I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.

3. A lesson on the responsibilities of discipleship (12: 35 - 13: 9)

“At that time some people who were present there told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of the sacrifices. He said to them in reply, ‘do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you all will perish as they did.’”

(12: 57 - 13: 5)



As a sidebar:

Neither the killing of *“the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices”* nor *“those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them”* are mentioned anywhere, other than in Luke’s Gospel.

However, Pilate did kill a number of Samaritans at a religious gathering on Mt. Gerizim (*Antiquities* 18, 4, 1 #86-87) and he killed many others when he appropriated money from the Temple treasury to build an aqueduct in Jerusalem (*Jewish War*), 2, 9, 4 #175-177).

The account reported in Luke certainly is consistent with what we know about Pilate.



“Don’t even think,” says Jesus, “that you will escape the coming upheaval because you are more righteous than others; no, all need to repent!”

And then Jesus concludes this 3rd movement with a parable—a final warning, a last chance.



Jan Luyken. *The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree* (etching for the Bowyer Bible). C. 1795.

3. A lesson on the responsibilities of discipleship (12: 35 - 13: 9)

“There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, he said to the gardener, ‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. [So] cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?’ He said to him in reply, ‘Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.

(13: 6-9)



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James Tissot. *Healing of the Crippled Woman on the Sabbath* (opaque watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper), c. 1886-1894. Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York.



Notice in this story:

- The woman “*was bent over, completely incapable of standing erect*” (13: 11). The Greek ἦν συγκύπτουσα is literally “*she was being bent double,*” a much more vivid image than simply “bent over.” Grammatically, it is a present active participle, suggesting that Satan binding her for eighteen years was not a single act that caused her condition eighteen years ago, but it has been an ongoing action across the entire eighteen years, right to the very moment Jesus unbinds her.
- Of course, Jesus heals her on the Sabbath, arousing the ire of the synagogue leaders.
- Two parables then follow the story, one of the mustard seed and the other of yeast, both meant to illustrate that “birds” and “yeast” (negative images throughout Scripture) would infiltrate the Kingdom of God.



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We then read, *“He passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem”* (13: 22).

The journey continues, and having broached the topic in the previous movement of the “hypocrites” who oppose him—again, by association—Jesus shifts to the topic of who will be saved, when someone asks him, *“Lord, will only a few people be saved?”* (13: 23).



Charlotte Reihlen. *Der Breite und der Schmale Weg*
[“The Broad and Narrow Way”], English version, lithograph, c. 1860.

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The movement then closes with Herod Antipas, Jesus' arch-enemy, seeking to kill him, and Jesus lamenting over the fate of Jerusalem.



James Tissot. *Herod* [detail] (opaque watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper), c. 1886-1894.
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York.



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In the 6th movement Jesus once again attends a dinner party, where he heals on the Sabbath, which—of course—invokes criticism by the Scribes and Pharisees, triggering Jesus to tell the parable of the Wedding Banquet (14: 7-14).

This, in turn, invokes the parable of the Great Feast (14: 15-24), the centerpiece of Jesus elevating the marginalized over those of the well-fed, hypocritical establishment.



**Eugene Burnand. *Invitation to the Feast* (oil on canvas), 1899.
Winterthur Museum of Art, Winterthur, Switzerland.**



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The 7th movement returns to the theme of the cost of discipleship, of taking up one's cross and following Jesus.

It is not enough simply to place our faith in Christ, to be "salt"; our lives must be radically transformed as a result, our faith expressing itself in a life of active love:

"Salt is good, but if salt itself loses its taste, with what can its flavor be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear."

(14: 34-35)

Questions for discussion and thought

1. **Jesus' clear message about discipleship is one of detachment and radical simplicity. What can you do in your own life to move closer to that goal?**
2. **What is "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?"**
3. **Jesus clearly gives priority to the marginalized over those who are secure, comfortable and well-established. What are the implications for us today of Jesus' priorities?**
4. **We are to await Jesus' return as faithful servants await the return of their master. If you are a "faithful servant," what is your job in the master's household?**
5. **A great many people who *think* they are serving God will, in the end, be rejected by him; conversely, many who appear to be doing little will join him at the banquet table. How can you ensure that you will be at the table?**

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