

Luke 18 • Choosing What to Follow

Introduction

In this chapter are recorded two parables and three real-world encounters, all combining to show comparisons and contrasts to a common spiritual theme. This is actually a summary of teachings in Luke 16 which is a discourse on the management of this life's resources, and Luke 17 as a discourse on that relating to the next life's resources. Luke 18 is a kind of "guide", if you will, for this life in that it provides examples of people in relationship to things temporal versus eternal. As we proceed through the study, think of each person in relation to both the next and previous, as well as the corresponding conditions each one finds themselves in. And keep in mind that this is all narrowing down to His final week in Jerusalem coming in Luke 19. Ultimately, it is everyone's choice as to what they are going to follow.

¹Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, ²saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. ³There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' ⁴For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, ⁵yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'" ⁶And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; ⁷now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? ⁸I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

[Read v.1-8]

Q: What is probably the original, historical-cultural meaning for their time when it describes the judge as someone, "who did not fear God and did not respect man"?

A: This is most likely stating in the vernacular of the time that this is someone who was corrupt. Such officials most often obtained their position by bribery, treachery, intrigue or some combination thereof, therefore they acted in the same character once they obtained the position, expecting bribes and shenanigans in return.

Q: How do we know this for sure from the context of v.6?

A: Jesus calls him "the unrighteous judge", a term that can only be applied to someone both morally and spiritually corrupt.

Q: What is the widow asking for? Why is it important to pay close attention not only to what she IS asking for, what she is NOT?

A: This is not a parable about praying for our personal desires or material things—she is asking for "legal protection". (v.3)

Application: Are we praying for material or temporal things or for the greater spiritual issues? It is often said that the one prayer we are guaranteed will be answered is, "Thy will be done". The widow may be poor and in need of "things", but that highlights even more so that this is teaching about prayer for more important spiritual issues, not a formula for getting what we want.

Q: Is Jesus telling us that the only way to get through to the Father is by pestering Him until He is annoyed to the point of finally responding?

A: No, Jesus is contrasting the behavior of "the unrighteous judge" with that of The Righteous Judge.

Q: What, exactly, is that contrast?

A: The unrighteous earthly judge is "unwilling" (v.4) and only finally acts for himself so he does not have to deal with the problem any further (v.5); the heavenly Righteous Judge acts to bring about true justice quickly. (v.7-8)

Q: How do we know for sure what Jesus intended to be the right interpretation of this parable?

A: By His closing rhetorical question, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (v.8)

Point: *If we are aware that even an unrighteous judge can do the right thing from time to time, even if it is for the wrong reasons, then how much greater should our trust be in The Righteous Judge that all things are already in His care in spite of outward appearances?*

Overall Application: *In this example of a needy woman who would not go away, we are presented with an example that we follow Christ by persistence of faith because He takes care of everything that matters.*

⁹And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

[Read v.9-14]

Q: What is the chief difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector in how they publicly behaved?

A: Whereas the Pharisee talks **to** himself and **about** himself, the tax collector talks to God.

Q: How does this shape their overall behavior? Were both of them really praying?

A: Only the tax collector was actually praying; the Pharisee was actually boasting.

Q: What is the chief difference in each of their powers of observation?

A: The Pharisee could only see the faults and sins of others; the tax collector could only see his own.

Q: What is the powerful term used here to describe the ultimate spiritual goal?

A: “*Justified*”. (v.14) This is ironic since by definition someone who is a “*Pharisee*” is supposed to be devoted to the Law, yet “*justified*” carries the meaning of being legally declared righteous according to the Law. Here the “*lawless one*” is meeting the true requirements of the Law the so-called “*lawful one*” should but does not.

Overall Application: *In this example of a sinner who goes away justified, we are presented with an example that we follow Christ by persistence of humility.*

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

— 2 Corinthians 5:21

¹⁵And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. ¹⁶But Jesus called for them, saying, “Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁷Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.”

[Read v.15-17]

Q: Were the disciples actually rebuking little children?

A: No, they were actually directing their rebuke to those who were bringing them.

Q: What is Christ’s direction to both the disciples and those bringing the children?

A: “*Permit the children to come to Me*”. (v.16) In other words, he was directing that children old enough to recognize and come to Christ on their own were to be permitted; this is not a license for infant baptism or the like, they had to be old enough to actually have the “*faith of a child*” we so often attribute to this story.

Q: How is this actually a contrast with both the previous parables of the widow and the Pharisee?

A: It is an example of the kind of faith and humility which are necessary in both cases.

Overall Application: In the example of the children who are not turned away, we are presented with the ultimate example that we are to follow Christ in faith and humility by choice.

[Read v.18-27]

¹⁸A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. ²⁰You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'"

²¹And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."

²²When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." ²³But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. ²⁴And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"

²⁷But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."

Q: Why is this an ironic question coming from someone we call "the rich, young ruler"?

A: He is one of the few examples of someone who has everything in this life, and yet still comes to Christ to inquire about the next life.

Q: What is unique about the list of commandments Jesus quotes?

A: They all come from the "second tablet", those commandments we are told specifically embody the greater principle that we are to love our neighbor as our self; Jesus omits the four commandments of the "first tablet" which summarize the requirement to love God.

Q: From this list of "second tablet" commandments, how can we know for sure that Jesus knew exactly the specific spiritual problem of this individual?

A: Jesus quotes five of the six commandments of the "second tablet", omitting, "You shall not covet". Note that the man confirms, "these things I have kept", but is blind to what has been omitted and therefore needs further prodding.

Q: What is the nature of Jesus' solution for the young man's problem?

A: To liquidate the very thing he is coveting so as to fulfill the greater requirement of the "second tablet" to love his neighbor.

Q: How does this spiritual issue contrast with the previous examples in this chapter?

A: The Parable of the Widow is about faith, the Parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector is about humility, and this real-life event is about obedience—"...sell all...distribute it...come, follow Me". (v.22)

Q: Why would this "eye of a needle" teaching shock people of that time who heard it?

A: There are probably several reasons:

1. Since the Old Testament Law associated material wealth with spiritual obedience, it was automatically assumed that to be rich meant to be obedient to the Law and that being poor to always mean disobedience. There was a false "Faith-Prosperity Gospel" of the day, if you will.
2. A notion which was gaining ground and would be catapulted to the forefront of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple was that charity to the poor translated into deeds of righteousness, so they began to think that the richer someone was, the more righteousness they could obtain through works.
3. There is a popular teaching that when a walled city closed its main gates at night, there was always a much smaller side gate that could be used called "the eye of the needle" because it would require unloading the camel to get it and the contents through—in other words, a very cumbersome process. It is difficult to confirm that this is what Christ was absolutely referring to.
4. Other points?

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Q: Taken together in the context of all the examples leading up to and through this one, what is probably the greater meaning of, “The things that are impossible with people are possible with God”?

A: The “impossible” behavior required for faith, humility, obedience and fulfillment of the Law of love is not achievable on our own or by our own works, but only through God. It always falls short pursuing the things of this world, and can only experience success in pursuit of the kingdom of God.

Point: Notice that Christ never brings up any issue relating to the “first tablet”. We cannot begin to meet the scriptural requirements of loving God if we cannot first meet the “second tablet” requirements to love others.

Overall Application: In the example of the rich man who went away sad, we have the example that we are to follow Christ by observing the greater spirit of the Law in its requirement to love others.

²⁸Peter said, “Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You.”

²⁹And He said to them, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life.”

[Read v.28-30]

Q: How does Jesus specifically qualify the conditions here?

1. “...left...for the sake of the kingdom...” (v.29) The giver cannot be doing so for the things of the world but for the kingdom of God.
2. “...receive...eternal life.” (v.30) What is given “at this time and in the age to come” is also not of this world but the next.

Q: How might this compliment the previous teachings?

A: It is a specific application of the Parables of the Widow and Pharisee and Tax Collector in terms of, “What can we get?” and the encounter with the rich, young ruler in terms of, “What can we give?”

Q: What might be ironic about what Christ promised here when compared to the original desire of the young man who sparked this conversation?

A: The rich, young ruler originally asked, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (v.18), and here the full explanation is given as to how to obtain “eternal life”—follow Jesus “for the sake of the kingdom of God” (v.29)

Overall Application: In the example of the disciples who were following Jesus, we have an example that we are to follow Christ for the sake of the kingdom of God in this life that we may obtain eternal life.

³⁵As Jesus was approaching Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road begging. ³⁶Now hearing a crowd going by, he began to inquire what this was. ³⁷They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. ³⁸And he called out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ³⁹Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁰And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him; and when he came near, He questioned him, ⁴¹“What do you want Me to do for you?”

[Read v.35-43]

Q: How can we immediately tell that there is a significant spiritual difference between the crowd accompanying Jesus and the blind man?

A: The crowd calls Him “Jesus of Nazareth” (v.37), but the blind man calls Him “Jesus, the Son of David”, a term which in that time is regarded as extremely Messianic. The crowd calls Jesus by His earthly name, the blind man by His heavenly one.

Q: How does this then become an ironic situation regarding the blind man’s physical condition?

A: The “blind man” is not actually “blind” because he knows who Jesus truly is; it is the crowd who is actually “blind”.

And he said, "Lord, I want to regain my sight!"

⁴²And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well."
⁴³Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.

³¹Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. ³²For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, ³³and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." ³⁴But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.

Q: How do we know for sure that it was not just the man's sight that was restored? How do we know that there was spiritual healing as well?

A: The underlying phrase, "made you well", can also be literally translated, "saved you". It always carries with it a dual meaning in these types of situations.

Q: What kind of a test might we devise from this account to prove whether or not an authentic miracle of God has occurred?

A: It will result in changes of heart where God is concerned and bring praise to God; it will also result in people following Jesus from the heart going forward, not seeking more and more signs.

Overall Application: In the example of the man who went away with Jesus, we have an example that we are to follow Christ for His glory

[Read v.31-34]

Q: How might their perplexity at what will happen to Christ be a reflection of the repeated perplexity demonstrated through all these examples of what will happen to those who follow Christ?

A: The examples all have in common some kind of problem understanding what is important in this life and how it only fully develops in the next life.

Q: How is Christ using Himself as an example to teach this to them?

A: Jesus will give up everything in this life—even His own life, in order to gain everything in the next life.

Overall Application: To follow Jesus requires literally following in His footsteps in that as He gave up everything for the kingdom of God and eternal life—even to the point of suffering for it, so shall we.

Overall Application

- To what degree are you fulfilling the expectations of Christ's rhetorical question whether at His Return He will find you are in possession of biblical faith?
- Are you so focused on others' faults and sins that you have no insights into your own shortcomings?
- Is your obedience to **most** of God's Word a cover for your occasional disobedience to **some** of God's Word?
- How closely do some of the characteristics of those studied in this chapter reflect your own walk?
- How well do you understand what it means to "live like Christ"?