

Be Prudent (Luke 16:14-31)

We are studying the gospel of Luke. Today, we will look at the latter half of cp 16.

V.13, Jesus told his disciples, "You cannot serve both God and money." The Pharisees, who loved money, heard this and sneered at Jesus. Jesus gave them a short teaching and told them the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. This is the outline.

The first half and the latter half of cp 16 make contrast to each other. The first half talks about a dishonest, shrewd manager, and the latter half talks about the Pharisees who look pious before man, but actually are foolish.

The theme of this chapter is to be prudent. We are encouraged to be thoughtful and faithful as disciples who live in the last days. In the latter half, we can learn about "foolishness" we need to avoid.

1. Examine your heart

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¹⁵ He [Jesus] said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

First foolishness. The Pharisees thought how they look is very important. For them looking righteous is very important. But they didn't examine their heart before God.

Who are Pharisees?

"The Pharisees separated themselves from anything non-Jewish and carefully followed both the Old Testament laws and the oral traditions handed down through the centuries." "They were admired by common people for their apparent piety." ¹

In John cp. 9, there is an incident that shows clearly how Jewish people in those days connect the law with the state of people. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2) They thought the man

¹ *Life Application Study Bible*, Tyndale House Publishers, 1996, (p.1404-1405)

was born blind because of sin. How did they get the idea?

Let's look at some verses in Deuteronomy. By the way, the Jewish people have called Deuteronomy *Mishner Hattorah*, "Repetition of the Law."²

Duet 28:

¹⁵ However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

²⁰ The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him.

²⁸ The Lord will afflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of mind.

⁴⁷ Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity,⁴⁸ therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.

Based on these verses, they considered blindness, sickness or poverty could come upon a person, as a result of the person's deserting God or doing evil. Then, what does it say about "a wealthy person" on the other hand?

Duet 7:12-13

¹² If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your forefathers.

¹³ He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land-your grain, new wine and oil-the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land that he swore to your forefathers to give you.

Depending on how you read it, this can be interpreted that the reason why a person is wealthy is because he is following God's laws. And it seems the Pharisees had that understanding.

The Pharisees sneered at Jesus, when he said to his disciples, "You cannot serve both God and money." For they thought a person cannot be poor while serving God and following His laws. What Jesus said seemed a ridiculous

² *Children's Ministry Resource Bible*, Thomas Nelson, 1993, (p.219)

idea to them.

By being wealthy, they look as if they were following God's laws in the eyes of men. It is a fine way of living on this earth. But searching deep in their heart, we find that they love money. God knows their heart, and He saw their hypocrisy.

Being rich or living comfortable life is not wrong in itself. But if riches and comfort make us not able to see ourselves before God in eternal perspective, then that is a problem. This truth is expressed in the parable of a rich man and Lazarus. The rich man received good things in his lifetime. But after death, he was in agony in flames in hell. And no one can change it now.

What does the Bible say about the rich in those days?

James 5:1-5

¹ Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. ² Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴ Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ⁵ You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.

This exploitation by the rich against the poor didn't start in the time of the New Testament. It was already there in the time of the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 22:13, 17

¹³ "Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor.

¹⁷ "But your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion."

The hearts of the Pharisees are exactly like that.

Matt 23:25

²⁵ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

Those who look righteous, successful and victorious in the eyes of men are not necessarily righteous before God. If we just think about our life on this earth and how we look to others, the richer the better, and the more praise we get from others, the more we are successful. But, when we become aware of how God sees us in his eternal perspective, we will have to make a choice whether to serve God or money.

As we learned in the first half of cp 16, wealth is entrusted to us by God. We live and use faithfully what God entrusted to us, in order that the kingdom of God is realized on this earth, and God's righteousness is recovered in our society.

A prudent person will examine his heart.

2. Accept what the Bible says

16

¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

The 2nd foolishness. Although you study the Bible, if you don't accept what it points out, that is foolishness.

How can we know that Jesus is the Christ God promised? We can know that from the Old Testament. If we study the Old Testament carefully, we know that Jesus is Christ. (cf. Acts 18:28)

John 5:39-40

³⁹ You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

To study the Bible seeking to know about eternity, kingdom of God, salvation, righteousness and truth. That is wonderful. However, if we don't

accept what the Bible points out, for what purpose are we studying the Bible?

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1;17) The kingdom of God has come through Jesus. (Luke 11:20) Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. (John 14:6) People who realize this are forcing their way into the kingdom of God. Yet the Pharisees who are studying the Bible diligently are not trying to enter. Moreover, they are preventing those who try to enter from entering. (Matt 23:13) There is nothing more foolish than this.

When Jesus started to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God publicly, he went into a synagogue at Nazareth. And he stood up to read the Scripture. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written.

Luke 4:18-19

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

It is not that he happened to open this place. He found this place and read. (v.17) And he said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (v.21)

Let's look at what this word means. To whom is the good news preached? It is preached to the poor. To whom was Jesus sent, so that he could proclaim the year of the Lord's favor? He was sent to the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed.

"In those days, if you were labeled by the Pharisees as a sinner, that means you would be cut off from the Jewish community. It was believed that a sinner was deserted by God's blessings and cursed by God, and has no hope of being saved." ³

However, they have heard the message, "The good news is yours! God has given you grace. Today, now, this promise of God is fulfilled in your hearing"

Think about it. Until then, they thought they had no chance to be saved and be allowed into the kingdom of God. They gave it up. But now, they realized they could actually enter. Then, there is no one who won't try to enter. Right?

³ Tetsurou Honda, *God who is on the side of those who were humbled, the sequel*, Sin-yo-sya, 1992, (P.94)

The good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

In the parable, the rich man calls Abraham “father”. That is, he knew that he was one among God’s chosen people. I guess he studied the Bible and the law. I think he knew the Covenant of God’s blessing in which God’s people will be blessed by God, and will be a blessing for all peoples. However, he didn’t learn from Abraham’s faith. He didn’t try to live according to the covenant of blessing given to him.

"In faith there is movement and development. Each day something is new. To be Christian, faith has to be new – that is, alive and growing. It cannot be static, finished settled. When Scripture, prayer, worship, ministry become routine, they are dead."⁴

Let’s ask ourselves honestly. What about our understanding about the Bible? Is it just a head- knowledge? Or is it alive through experience? Is our relationship with Jesus deepening compared with last year? Am I growing as his disciple? Am I seeking to be transformed? If so, am I doing my part to be transformed?

God's own nature is described this way. "As the Father who loves us before we loved him, the gift of love given to us in Christ, and the sharing of love that is initiated by the Holy Spirit, which makes love real to us."⁵

If, while we believe the Bible, we have no relationship with this loving God, there is something wrong. If, while we study the Bible, our relationship with this loving God doesn’t deepen, and we don’t grow as Christ’s disciples, and transformed into his likeness, there is something wrong. While we know that God is love through the Bible, and know that God loves us, yet if we don’t spend time with him, there is something wrong.

A prudent person will accept what the Bible says.

3. Fix your error

The third foolishness. Even though the Bible points out your error, if you don’t fix it, that is foolishness.

⁴ Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Multnomah Books, 1990, (p.167)

⁵ James M. Houston, *The Heart's Desire*, Regent College Publishing, 1996, (pp.249-250)

"(Just as) man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." (Heb 9:27) We know that one day we will face judgment before God, but if we don't prepare ourselves for that, we are foolish.

17-18

¹⁷ It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law. ¹⁸ "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

"The law without grace destroys us. (p.26) No matter how hard they tried to perform, they would always come up short. (p.24)"⁶

Moses commanded that a man should give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away. But "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard." (Matt 19:7-8) It doesn't mean that God's standard has changed.

"Truth without grace is judgment. It sends you straight to hell, literally and experientially. (p.24) On the other hand, Grace without truth can be named License. (p.28)" Whatever you do is permitted, accepted. Everything is okay. "Grace without truth leads to less than successful living. (p.28) They kept doing the same bad things over and over, and they never seemed to know where they were going. (p.20)"⁷

"Failure comes through the law, and redemption through Jesus. (p.30)

Grace is the unmerited favor of God toward people. Grace is something we have not earned and do not deserve. (p.21) Truth is what is real; it describes how things really are. (p.23)

Grace and truth together reverse the effects of the fall, which were separation from God and others. Grace and truth together invite us out of isolation and into relationship. (p.31)"⁸

The law is not nullified by the good news of Jesus, the forgiveness of Jesus and the grace of Jesus. "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John1:17)

⁶ Henry Cloud, *Changes That Heal*, Zondervan, 1990

⁷ Henry Cloud

⁸ Henry Cloud

Jesus gave this parable. There was a rich man. He lived in luxury every day. After he died, he was thrown into Hades, and tormented in the flames. He wished he could cool his tongue with a drop of water. But there is no one who can give him even water. And, he came to himself and said, "I have five brothers. All of them live in luxury every day, while I am tormented in this flame. I will ask father to send a messenger to them so that they will not also come to this place of torment. They have never heard about it."

Father answered, "I have been speaking all my thoughts. If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not listen even if someone rises from the dead."

We have heard a similar story, right? Yes, the structure of this story is almost the same as that of "the parable of the lost son". Both stories were primarily spoken to the Pharisees.

Why did Jesus give this parable? He wanted them to know about the torment of hell. He wanted them to wake up so that they wouldn't go to that place of torment. He wanted them to notice they were heading toward a wrong direction.

Once we know about the torment of hell, we want to come out of it at any cost. And we want to enter the kingdom of God. We think we should never come to a place like this.

A prudent person will fix his error.

God has kept telling His thoughts through the Law and the Prophets. He revealed Himself through Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah and so on. And He has been showing the promise of salvation. And John the Baptist pointed out that Jesus is God's promised salvation. And now, through Jesus, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached and the coming of the kingdom of God is testified by mighty works.

And everyone is forcing his way into the kingdom of God. If we truly understand what the kingdom of God is, and realize that we can enter it, every one of us will force our way into it. Yes, everyone is hoping for the coming of the kingdom of God.

Are we seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Are we

really hoping that the kingdom of God is build and established in our society? In order for it to be realized, what is our mission entrusted by God? Are we living for that mission?

We must be aware that "we only have a limited amount of time left to accomplish that which is really important – and that awareness illumines for us what really matters, what really counts."

We need to stop our work, leave from daily routine, and take some time for "serious reflection on the nature and quality of our faith in the gospel of grace, our hope in the new and not yet, and our love for God and people."

Probably it is good start to ask for ourselves that "Do I really accept the message that God is head over heels in love with me?"⁹

⁹ Brennan Manning, (p.165)