Lesson 10, March 30

NO MIDDLE ROAD

Luke 16:1-31

Introduction

One of the marks of a mature people is their ability to learn from even those with which they disagree. For example, an adult should be able to read a biography of Thomas Jefferson, admiring and emulating his devotion to liberty and clarity while rejecting his Deism and enslaving practices. Children and immature people, on the other hand, cannot separate good and bad elements from a person's character. If they disagree with someone, they will write them off as a villain, but if they agree with them, they will hold them up as a hero.

Can you think of a book, movie, or person from which you have learned even though you disagree somewhat? _____

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> *Since chapter 14, Jesus has been teaching God's perspective on the Kingdom of God around a Sabbath Day dinner table. First, He taught the religious leaders that those welcomed in the Kingdom might not be who they expect. Then He turned to the multitudes and taught that His true disciples are those that forsake everything they have for the Kingdom. Then when they criticized Him for accepting sinners, Jesus addressed the religious leaders again, teaching that it is right to rejoice when sinners repent!*

In **Luke 16**, the Sabbath Meal at the Pharisee's house takes an interesting turn. Though He is in a public place, Jesus takes time to teach His disciples an important lesson. Of course, the Pharisees overhear and take exception to Jesus' words—which is exactly what Jesus intends. He then goes on to paint a stark picture of reality: **there's no middle road to the Kingdom of God.**

Learn from the World (Luke 16:1-13)

1. In Jesus' story to His disciples, the rich man's steward or manager is accused of *wasting the rich man's goods* (Luke 16:1)

> *Two ideas came to the Jewish mind whenever a "rich man" is mentioned. First, Jews of the time often believed that wealth was a sign of God's blessing (compare with Luke 18:24-26). But second, they also understood that many rich people got their wealth through dishonesty (compare with Luke 19:1-10). In all, this meant that many Jews saw rich people as good enough to be blessed by God, even if they were unjust at times.*

2. Why do you think the rich man asks for an account instead of just firing him right away? _____

> *I'm inclined to think that the rich man wants to give his steward a test. He doesn't care so much whether his steward is fair with his money as much as whether he is wasting it. Wastefulness is unacceptable but shrewdness is commendable in the rich man's eyes.*

3. What plan does the steward concoct in case he loses his job, since he refuses to do manual labor or rely on charity? (Luke 16:3-7) _____

> *Since he still has control of the rich man's property, he makes plans to help himself with it. He does not pocket the money—that would only solve his problem short-term. Instead, he uses the money to buy friends with his master's debtors.*

> *As a side note, the steward stands in contrast to the prodigal son. The son takes the money that was given him and wastes it on a short burst of extravagant living. The steward takes the money that he was entrusted with and (illegally) invests it in his future.*

4. In what unexpected way does the rich man respond to the account of the steward's scheme? (Luke 16:8) _____

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5. Jesus tells His disciples—the children of light—to take a tip from the unjust steward's shrewdness: use your wealth to become friends with the One who can receive you into *everlasting habitations (an eternal home in heaven)* (Luke 16:8-9)

> *Lest we think that Jesus is condoning the steward's illegal Ponzi scheme, Jesus tells his disciples that the steward and the rich man are children of this world. No child of the world is a child of light—the two are opposites. Nevertheless, the disciples could still learn a type of "wisdom" from the unjust steward.*

6. What type of stewards must we be if we are to expect God to entrust us with true, spiritual responsibility? (Luke 16:10-12) _____

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> *Mammon is a Greek transliteration that means wealth.*

> *Here's the point of the parable of the unjust steward. Though many use their wealth for unrighteousness, we Christians have an opportunity to be faithful with the resources He's given to us. He wants us to take creative "risks" that will reap heavenly rewards, like showing mercy to the outcasts (Luke 14:12-24), forsaking our comfortable lives (Luke 14:26-35), and celebrating whenever someone repents (Luke 15).*

7. In the end, you only have two choices: either you will serve God with the wealth He's given you or you will serve *the very mammon that He gave you to serve Him* (Luke 16:13)

> *One teacher put it this way: a disciple should make his wealth serve him as he serves God. Otherwise, he will end up enslaved to his wealth. Figuratively, Dickens pictures Jacob Marley as wrapped the chains of his wealth. Practically, we see wealthy people spending their lives worrying that they will lose it by theft, stock market crashes, or inflation.*

Believe the Word (Luke 16:14-31)

1. Responding to the covetous, sneering Pharisees, Jesus says that though they've justified themselves before men, *God knoweth their hearts* and that God is disgusted with the things they value most (Luke 16:14-15)

2. What sorts of things makes someone great in the eyes of the world but repugnant in the eyes of God? _____

3. Why do you think the Pharisees objected to John the Baptist and Jesus' preaching that pressed every man to repent and take part in the Kingdom of God? (Luke 16:16) _____

4. How does Jesus' teaching on divorce prove that His Kingdom message doesn't make the law fail? (Luke 16:17-18) _____

> *Instead of coming to destroy the Law, Jesus teaches that His Kingdom message is the culmination of the Law — that it encourages citizens to live for not just the letter but the spirit of the law.*

5. In a parable that illustrates the sufficiency of the Law and prophets, how does Jesus describe the differences in life between the rich man and the beggar Lazarus? (Luke 16:19-21) _____

> *Purple clothing was extremely costly to produce, as was linen. To "fare sumptuously" is to feast excessively. This rich man eats so much food that just the crumbs would have been enough to sustain a beggar like Lazarus, if he had mercy and gave them away. Instead, he waits at the gate with the dogs. One preacher writes that the dogs "were scavengers who were not only competing with Lazarus for food, but likely saw Lazarus as food."*

6. Neither the beggar nor the rich man's station in life reflect spiritual reality, for when they die, Lazarus is carried to *Abraham's bosom* while the rich man lifts up his eyes in *hell* (Luke 16:22-23)

> *Remember that people in Jesus' culture would recline on the floor next to a low table for a meal instead of sitting in chairs. To lay in someone's bosom was to recline with your head toward their head, showing friendship and goodwill (like the disciple John with Jesus in John 13:23; see John 1:18). Lazarus is not only brought by angels to paradise; he is also in the prominent position of being close to Abraham, the "father of faith" (Romans 4:11).*

7. Why can't Abraham show the rich man the mercy he desires? (Luke 16:24-26) _____

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> *Abraham points out to the rich man that during his lifetime he'd given himself "thy good things" but Lazarus had only received evil things. Remember that evil means broken, diseased, or sinful. Certainly all the miseries of the world are the consequences of sin, but the rich man had mistakenly believed the lie that Lazarus' beggarly state was God's judgement on him. Now that things had changed, the rich man wanted for the very mercy that he wasn't willing to show to Lazarus.*

8. Since he couldn't be relieved from his torment, what does the rich man "pray" or beg Abraham to do? (Luke 16:27-28) _____

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9. What must the rich man's brothers do to be saved from the torments of hell? (Luke 16:29-30) *they must repent — which is the same message that John the Baptist and Jesus had been preaching*

10. The point of Jesus' parable is that even the Old Testament sufficiently revealed that all are sinners in need of repentance, and that those who don't hear the Old Testament wouldn't believe it even if *one rose from the dead*" (Luke 16:31)

Conclusion

Just because we can't have our cake and eat it too doesn't stop us from trying. In this chapter, Jesus reveals that disciples and unbelievers alike will try to find a middle road to the Kingdom of God. Disciples need to take a tip from shrewd businessmen — use your wealth to God's advantage not your own. And unbelievers need to take a tip from the self-righteous rich man — believe it when God's Word says you need to repent!

What's one way that Christians often use their money that you think Jesus would say is "unwise"? _____

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Can you list a few creative ways that Christians could use their money to please God? _____

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Jesus' words in **Luke 16** paint a stark picture of reality. Either you are a child of the light or you are a child of the world. Either you are a servant of God or of mammon. Either you believe the Law or you reject it. Either you'll be brought by angels to paradise or you'll lift up your eyes in hell. Dr. Luke is emphasizing that if Theophilus is a true disciple of Jesus, he should devote everything he has to serving God, not himself!

Can you think of anyone like the rich man's brothers who need you to remind them to take the Word of God seriously before it's too late? _____

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