

Parables from Luke 12

The parables concern the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13.10-11) and can be categorised as follows:

- Parables concerning the (then present) **offer** of the kingdom and its **rejection**.
- Parables concerning the **setting up** and **entrance into** the (future) kingdom including Satan's opposition.
- Parables concerning the **subjects** of the kingdom and their **way of life** (or responsibility).

The two parables in Luke 12 concern the subjects of the kingdom and their manner of life.

Number	Name	Matthew	Mark	Luke	Unique?
17	A Certain Rich Man			12.13-21	✓
18	The Faithful Servants			12.35-40	✓

The Context (Luke 12.1-12)

Whenever studying a parable it is essential to understand the structure of the passage and context in which it was spoken.

Passage	Subject	Cross References
Luke 12.1-12	Teaching the Disciples (Part 1)	Matthew 10.16-33
Luke 12.13-21	Interruption Parable of <i>A Certain Rich Man</i>	Unique
Luke 12.22-40	Teaching the Disciples (Part 2) Parable of <i>The Faithful Servants</i>	Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 6.25-34 Matthew 24.42-44
Luke 12.41-53	Interruption Parable of <i>The Faithful Stewards</i>	Matthew 24.45-51
Luke 12.54-59	Teaching the Crowd (Part 3)	Matthew 16.1-4
Luke 13.1-9	Interruption Parable of <i>The Fruitless Fig Tree</i>	Unique. See and compare Matthew 24.32-33, Mark 12.1-12, Luke 20.9-19

It is most interesting to note the way in which these events come together. The 'repetition' of certain teaching in Matthew maybe because the Lord taught the same things more than once. It may also be that Luke has selected various parts of the Lord's ministry from different times to emphasise a theme, i.e. the way in which true disciples should live in contrast to the hypocritical lives of the Pharisees.

The Lord Jesus had been in the house of a Pharisee (Luke 11.37) and condemned the whole sect in a threefold 'woe' **twice** (Luke 11.42-44, 46-52). At this the Pharisees became most antagonistic (Luke 11.53-54) seeking to catch Him in His words. In the meanwhile a large crowd had gathered, but the Lord Jesus spoke primarily to His disciples (Luke 12.1). He spoke to **warn** (vv.1-3), **guide** (vv.4-5) and **comfort** (vv.6-12).

The **warning** concerned the 'leaven' of the Pharisees which is 'hypocrisy' (v.1). The sect of the Pharisees (which commenced in c.160BC) arose in order to maintain the separation of the nation of Israel from the wicked nations around. At the time of the Lord Jesus they were highly influential men, but had lost their moral and spiritual power. Why? The contaminating and corrupting influence of hypocrisy! Hypocrisy is 'wearing a mask' or 'masquerading as something you are not'. The Pharisees did not practice what they preached or professed to believe. As such they would face the judgment of God which would fully reveal their hypocritical actions and words (vv.2-3, cf. Luke 8.17, 2 Corinthians 5.10). Our Christian witness and testimony can be destroyed by hypocrisy. Do we wear masks in public Christian circles? Would we be happy for our words and actions in private to be viewed in public?

There was murderous intent amongst the Pharisees (Luke 11.54) towards the Lord Jesus and they would be sure to take the same attitude towards His followers, i.e. the disciples. As such the Lord Jesus **guided** them to exercise the fear of God, not men (vv.4-5). At best the Pharisees could only put them to death ('kill the body', v.4), but at this point their power ceased. However, God has the power to affect life *before* death **and** life *after* death! He is the only One who has authority to cast into Hell (*Gehenna*, v.5). As Christians we should realise that godly living leads to persecution (2 Timothy 3.12). We may well be called to die for Him. However, let us 'banish the false principle of fearing men and preserve the true principle of fearing God'. This is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111.10).

The Lord Jesus continues to **comfort** His disciples in the light of such persecution (cf. v.11). *Note. All but one of the twelve apostles were martyred.* The logic appears to be strange, i.e. don't fear men, fear God (v.5), but since you know God, 'fear not' (v.7)! For example, if God takes care of, and does not forget the one single sparrow with no commercial value (compare vv.6-7 with Matthew 10.29), then He certainly will take care of His people who carry forth the gospel. However, this care of Father (vv.6-7), Son (vv.8-9) and Spirit (v.13) is consequent upon one being a **true** disciple. A true disciple is one who, even in times of the greatest persecution, confesses (v.8) Christ rather than denies Him (v.9). To confess Christ is to 'say the same thing as' or 'agree' with Him. True disciples are not afraid to speak **of** Christ and **for** Christ in the most difficult of circumstances. Consequently, Christ shall speak of their worth before the angels (cf. Matthew 25.34-36). Note the confessions of the Lord Jesus (John 1.18, 1 Timothy 6.13) and other mighty men of God (Matthew 16.16, Acts 8.37, Galatians 2.20). Any so-called or professing disciple that 'denieth' or 'refuses' Christ (e.g. the Pharisees) shall also be refused entry into the kingdom of God (cf. Matthew 25.41-46). These verses have particular reference to the tribulation period when God's faithful remnant will experience great persecution (cf. Matthew 25.31-32). Are we living lives that 'confess' Christ? Do we say the same things He said and seek to follow in His footsteps?

A particular way in which the Pharisees demonstrated that they had 'denied' or 'refused' Christ was to attribute His miracles performed by the power of the Spirit of God to the power of Satan instead (Matthew 12.22-32). This sin is called blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (v.10) and cannot be forgiven. It is not a sin which can be committed by a believer, nor has it anything to do with backsliding.

Persecution would inevitably lead to court appearances (e.g. Stephen, Acts 6.8-7) where true disciples would be given special wisdom and ability by the Holy Spirit to speak for God (vv.11-12). This does not imply laziness in preparation, but rather a heart that is **already full** being used and directed by the Spirit of God. Are our hearts and minds full of the Word of God? If so, He is well able to bring to our minds and attention that which is fitting for every circumstance.

A Certain Rich Man (Luke 12.13-21)

It is against this background (vv.1-12) that the Lord Jesus is interrupted and asked to judge in a dispute over money between two brothers (v.13). Why is this parable introduced at this point? The Lord Jesus is going to illustrate that professing disciples (like the Pharisees) are not only **hypocritical** (v.1), but also **covetous** (v.15). It goes without saying that true disciples are a contrast to this.

We are to beware of covetousness, i.e. the desire to have **more**. The Lord Jesus teaches that a man's life does not 'consist' or is not made 'entire' and 'complete' by the number of 'things' (possessions) he has. We often think there are things we don't possess which would make our lives better if we had them. **This is not life!** Indeed this is the 'deceitfulness of riches' (Matthew 13.22, cf. 1 Timothy 6.9). It was as if the inheritance was saying, 'you need me!' **This is lies (deceitfulness) indeed!** True life consists in being rich in good works, ready to give to others and sympathising with those in distress. It is much better to 'use our possessions for God today, than let them fall into the hands of the devil tomorrow' (1 Timothy 6.18-19). Additionally, we should **learn** to be content with that which we have, not least our Great God and Saviour (Philippians 4.11, 1 Timothy 6.8, Hebrews 13.5). The Pharisees were particularly proud of their material possessions as it was seen as an outward sign of God's approval and delight in a person (Deuteronomy 28). The dishonest pursuit of material possessions therefore became the highest goal in life to give public evidence of God's approval on them.

The parable illustrates such a person. He was already rich before God blessed him with an abundant harvest (v.16), yet he had no thought for God or others less fortunate. In fact, this man's life was self-ruled and self-centred (note the use of 'I' and 'my', vv.17-19). Furthermore, he believed his soul would be satisfied with 'ease', food, drink and entertainment (v.19). These things were his treasure. **Now none but Christ can satisfy!!** He failed to use his possessions in a way that showed he treasured God more than riches (cf. 1 Corinthians 15.32).

Unfortunately the rich 'fool' didn't count on God (cf. Psalm 14.1). He failed to realise that God was sovereign over his life (cf. Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 4) and that very night his soul would be required (cf. v.5). He had invested his life in temporary things and laid up treasure on earth, but now it must be all left behind (v.20).

Note the key concluding verse: we are to be 'rich toward God' (v.21). **'He is a fool who fills his barn with self and not with God'**. We must put the things of God first and make Him our priority. We should count the Lord Jesus as greater riches than anything else on earth and whatever prosperity God gives us, we use it to show how much value we place on Him. *Luke 12.34: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* We spend our money on what we value, therefore, the movement of our money demonstrates the movement of our hearts. Does our money show that we value 'things' more than God, or God more than 'things'.