

Reading Luke in Lent



Gospel of Luke 18:9-43

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

⁹ Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:

¹⁰ ‘Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.”

¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.’

Let the Children Come to Me

¹⁵ Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

¹⁶ But Jesus called them to him, saying, ‘Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’

The Rich Ruler

¹⁸ And a ruler asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’

¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments:

²⁰ “Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother.”’

²¹ And he said, ‘All these I have kept from my youth.’

²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, ‘One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’

²³ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.

²⁴ Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, ‘How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’

25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle
than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.’
26 Those who heard it said,
‘Then who can be saved?’
27 But he said,
‘What is impossible with man is possible with God.’
28 And Peter said,
‘See, we have left our homes and followed you.’
29 And 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,
30 who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.’

Jesus Foretells His Death a Third Time

31 And taking the twelve, he said to them,
‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem,
and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.
32 For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated
and spit upon.
33 And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.’
34 But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them,
and they did not grasp what was said.

Jesus Heals a Blind Beggar

35 As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.
36 And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant.
37 They told him,
‘Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.’
38 And he cried out,
‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’
39 And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent.
But he cried out all the more,
‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’
40 And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near,
he asked him,
41 ‘What do you want me to do for you?’
He said,
‘Lord, let me recover my sight.’
42 And Jesus said to him,
‘Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.’
43 And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God.
And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.’

Reflection

There are those who recognise Jesus for who he is and then there are also those who mistake him. In this passage the disciples, including Peter and the twelve get things wrong whereas a blind man and children respond to Jesus's presence. In the middle is the rich ruler who recognises Jesus but finds his teaching difficult to put into practice.

The opening parable is one of contrasts. The Pharisees hardly prays at all — he thanks God from himself; the tax collector in both words and posture shows himself to be repentant and to need God's mercy. This is a lesson in humility which the disciples do not learn as try to turn away children - the least and the smallest.

Once again Jesus tells his disciples about why they are going to Jerusalem and what will happen there. It is only after the resurrection that they will understand when he opens their minds to understand the Scriptures (24:45).

What the disciples do not understand a blind man sees. He recognises Jesus as 'Son of David' that is as a king who is approaching Jerusalem.

Luke continues to lay down images and ideas which will be picked up in a subsequent passage. In this section we have seen a repentant tax-collector and heard how difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. The next section will pick these ideas up.

- Have there been times in your life when only afterwards you understand the 'signs' that God has given you?

Prayer

O God,
who alone can probe the depths of the heart,
you hear the prayer of the humble
and justify the repentant sinner.

As we stand before you,
grant us the gift of humility,
that we may see our own sins clearly
and refrain from judging our neighbour.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen.