



## Week 6 – True Obedience

### Day 1 – Wise and Foolish Builders (Matthew 7:24-27 and Luke 6:46-49)

*Matthew 7:24-27* “Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn’t fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn’t put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed.”

*Luke 6:46-49* “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and don’t do what I say? I’ll show what it’s like when someone comes to me, hears my words, and puts them into practice. It’s like a person building a house by digging deep and laying the foundation on bedrock. When the flood came, the rising water smashed against that house, but the water couldn’t shake the house because it was well built. But those who don’t put into practice what they hear are like a person who built a house without a foundation. The floodwater smashed against it and it collapsed instantly. It was completely destroyed.”

#### Understanding the Passage:

Jesus’ warning to us in this passage is a timeless one, each of us must choose the foundation upon which we will build our lives. What will our bedrock be as we pursue joy, happiness, security, or purpose in our lives? Jesus tells us that if we want to live our lives in a way that has eternal stability we must not only hear about his teachings, but put them into practice. This is emphasized in Luke’s version of the parable when Jesus points out that simply calling me Lord will not translate to true obedience.

It is not enough to attend church or read scripture and listen to the words that Jesus taught; we must heed and follow them in order to benefit from their wisdom. I would liken it to following a health and wellness program that lays out practical steps for living a healthier life. You can read all the materials and watch all the videos, but if you don’t actually change how you are living then you shouldn’t expect any real change to your health. We are made righteous through our faith in Jesus, but in order to live well we must not only believe but follow him.

Everyone chooses something as their foundation for their lives. People who might be tempted to choose things such as wealth or accomplishments or comfort as the bedrock of how they will pursue their life’s purpose are in danger of being caught unprepared for life’s ups and downs. Jesus says that if you don’t follow me first, then those other pursuits will fail you when the floods come. If your identity or self-worth is solely dependent on your wealth or influence, then you will surely begin to see cracks in your foundation as those fleeting things pass away.

#### Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What jumps out to you in this parable? What do you find interesting about it?
2. Where have you been tempted to build your house? How might God be calling you to adjust your foundation?
3. This image of flooding and loss has some real relevance to us recently as Houstonians; how does this deepen our understanding of the parable?

## **Day 2 – Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-31)**

"What do you think? A man had two sons. Now he came to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 'No, I don't want to,' he replied. But later he changed his mind and went. "The father said the same thing to the other son, who replied, 'Yes, sir.' But he didn't go. "Which one of these two did his father's will?" They said, "The first one."

Jesus said to them, "I assure you that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering God's kingdom ahead of you."

### **Understanding the Passage:**

Just before our parable for today, Jesus has been approached by the chief priests and elders of the church who are calling into question Jesus' authority to teach and perform healings. As the representing power, they weren't too pleased to see Jesus subverting their authority by garnering a large following or watching Jesus throw people out of the temple. When they ask Jesus by whose authority he is doing these things, Jesus answers with a question of his own. Jesus asked them, "Where did John the Baptist get his authority to baptize?" Because of the dodgy position answering the question would put them in one way or the other, they elect to give no answer.

Today's parable makes the leaders regret their decision to challenge Jesus' authority. Here Jesus defines true obedience with those who genuinely respond to God's call and follow through with the work that God has for them. John the Baptist called everyone to repent, and it was the prostitutes and the tax collectors that responded and were baptized while the "religious leaders" stood by and watched.

This parable reminds the reader that simply looking the part does not transfer to right relationship with God. In fact, it is often a temptation of the traditionally religious to turn their religion into the thing they worship rather than the creator that religion points to. In this parable the first son represents those who first rejected God and lived outside of his will for their lives (prostitutes and tax collectors), but have since answered the call and repented. The second son represents those religious leaders who approached Jesus challenging his authority in the first place (and it was likely obvious to them upon hearing Jesus' parable). They first said yes to God's call but never did any of the work that God called them to do in the field.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. What jumps out to you in this parable? What do you find interesting about it?
2. Where do you find your place in the parable, are you more like the first son or the second son?
3. What might God be calling you to glean from this reading today?

## **Day 3 – Pharisee and Publican (Luke 18:9-14)**

Jesus told this parable to certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust: "Two people went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself with these words, 'God, I thank you that I'm not like everyone else—crooks, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of everything I receive.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn't even lift his eyes to look toward heaven. Rather, he struck his chest and said, 'God, show mercy to me, a sinner.' I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up."

### **Understanding the Passage:**

If we are not careful, we may find ourselves falling into the same trap as the people to whom Jesus was telling the parable. They were being warned not to think too highly of their own righteousness when looking down at others around them. Jesus' parables are at their best when they reveal a truth to the reader just before turning that truth on its head and showing the reader how they can be guilty of that same truth. This is a similar trap that the prophet Nathan caught King David in when he first told a story to reveal his guilt, and then promptly told him that he was indeed the man in question.

We may rightly understand that the Pharisee is in the wrong here, but we had better be careful about our feelings toward the Pharisee lest we find ourselves turning right around and doing the same thing. As if we were saying “well, at least I am not like this Pharisee who is totally missing the point.” We all have a temptation to look around and compare ourselves with what other people are doing or not doing, but this parable equates true obedience with humility and lack of focus on those around you. Mind the plank in your own eye long before you worry about the speck in your neighbors.

#### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. What jumps out to you in this parable? What do you find interesting about it?
2. When was the last time you were tempted to compare your spirituality to others?
3. What is the balance between judging others and lovingly holding someone accountable? When might a situation call for a quiet humility?

#### **Day 4 – Lamp under a Bushel (Matthew 5:14-15, Mark 4:21-25 and Luke 11: 33-36)**

*Matthew 5:14-15* You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house.

*Mark 4:21-25* Jesus said to them, “Does anyone bring in a lamp in order to put it under a basket or a bed? Shouldn't it be placed on a lampstand? Everything hidden will be revealed, and everything secret will come out into the open. Whoever has ears to listen should pay attention!” He said to them, “Listen carefully! God will evaluate you with the same standard you use to evaluate others. Indeed, you will receive even more. Those who have will receive more, but as for those who don't have, even what they don't have will be taken away from them.”

*Luke 11:33-36* “People don't light a lamp and then put it in a closet or under a basket. Rather, they place the lamp on a lampstand so that those who enter the house can see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your whole body is full of darkness. Therefore, see to it that the light in you isn't darkness. If your whole body is full of light—with no part darkened—then it will be as full of light as when a lamp shines brightly on you.”

#### **Understanding the Passage:**

The primary function of light is not to be seen, but to allow other things to be seen by it. When we walk into a dark room and flip on the switch, it's not the light bulb we are hoping to see, it is the room illuminated by the light that we desire. In that same way the metaphor of a city on a hilltop or a light on a lampstand reveals to us the mission of the church as one who shines the truth of the gospel to the world. This hope that we have in Jesus is not something hidden for a select few to learn in secret, but for the whole world to witness. It is the job of the church to shine that light to the world.

Ever since I have been at St. Luke's, I have heard about how our mission is to be a beacon church to the city of Houston. This sentiment along with our mission statement of “a city transformed by the love of Jesus,” captures the truth of today's parable and attempts to keep that truth at the very heart of what we do at St. Luke's. It can be all too easy for a church to become too inward focused and forget about (or even actively avoid) the world around them.

Luke's version of the parable goes on to further warn the church of maintaining the light within the body. As bearers of the light it is important that we watch out for darkness within us so that we may shine the light brightly. A light built that no longer works has lost its primary usefulness in the same way that a church that has no real impact on the community around it.

#### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. What jumps out to you in this parable? What do you find interesting about it?
2. Take a moment to reflect how light affects darkness, what truth does that reveal about today's passage?
3. How might God be calling you to shine God's light specifically to those around you today?

## **Day 5 – Conclusion - Re-read your favorite parable.**

Jesus used parables as a way of teaching spiritual truths about God, the Kingdom of God, and about us in relationship to that Kingdom. Jesus often chose to tell stories when asked difficult theological or cultural questions in order to allow his hearers to understand a deeper truth that dwelt beyond their original questions. Parables are effective in this way because they have a way of showing us a truth about the world or about ourselves that we would have had a harder time accepting if simply presented with it. When Jesus taught, he would reveal a truth through the story and then turn that story on its head in a way that would be convicting or illuminating to the hearer.

Parables were also a way for Jesus to bridge the gap between the incomprehensible and the comprehensible. Our human understanding of eternal things is limited, so Jesus used culturally relatable things such as agriculture to make comparisons that his readers would more readily understand.

Finally, parables should also be challenging to those who read them. They should make us think about the characters and how the revealed or hidden truth might apply to us. Even though most of them are timeless in their application, none of them were told in a vacuum and so modern readers should pay attention to the context in which Jesus told each parable. Be careful not to over allegorize parables in order to find a secret hidden meaning. While some were intentionally confusing to certain groups who heard them, most have a simpler and more profound effect at face value. In the opening video, Dr. Pace said that he liked to look for the twist in order to ask himself “how this parable is teaching me.” The great thing about parables is that they often engage us, as the reader, in unexpected ways. We may find ourselves reading a story about ourselves when we thought we were reading a story about someone else. Pay attention to the ways a parable from Jesus might turn a mirror onto something reflected in your own life.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. What is your favorite parable? What do you find interesting about it?
2. What is your least favorite parable or one you find the most confusing? Why do you think that is?
3. How might God specifically be calling you to live today in light of the spiritual truths found in Jesus’ parables?

### **Video Questions:**

1. What stood out to you from the video? What did you find interesting or what questions did the video raise in you?
2. How would you articulate the theme of authentically following Jesus versus putting on a good show found in these parables?
3. Where have you been tempted to build your house? How might God be calling you to adjust your foundation?
4. In what ways do you think the city of Houston would notice if St. Luke’s was gone tomorrow? How does this relate to our call to be a light on a lampstand?
5. What have you learned from this Scripture + Shared series that has stayed with you? What might God be placing on your heart moving forward?