

Property is Incendiary

November 4, 2012 ~ “Christian Materialism #5” ~ Mat 20.1-16

Tooth Fairy Visits ~ Property Exchanges

- ✧ Excited to receive quarter for my tooth ~ brother traded it for 3 arrow heads
- ✧ Same brother talked me out of my mini-bike ~ made go-kart (which was his)
- ✧ Loss of property is painful ~ Brian Regan: loss of balloon to loss of wallet

Definition of Incendiary

- ✧ Primary definition is “something that causes fire” ~ “incendiary device”
- ✧ But our definition is “tending to create strife, violence; inflammatory”

Property is at the Center of Many Disputes

- ✧ People are killed every day over property ~ (*theft, lingering disputes*)
 - ◇ 9 million property crimes in 2010 ~ 16k hr / 4.5 per second
- ✧ All of us have been victims of property theft
 - ◇ My best friend at 12 admitted later he’d stolen from my coin collection
- ✧ III: Crystal Cathedral ~ Robert Schuller / bankrupt 2010 / 20 family ~ \$2M year

Parables Challenge Us

- ✧ Parables can shock the twisted worldview of unbelievers . . .
- ✧ As a young first-time Bible reader ~ I was offended by this parable
 - ◇ “**Why didn’t the landowner pay those that worked all day more?**”
 - ◇ My warped conscience told me this was wrong ~ those people deserved it
 - ◇ If you never found this parable odd – you grew up with better worldview

Understanding Parables

- ✧ Parables can too easily be misunderstood / misapplied
- ✧ Two things to remember in understanding them
 1. You must recognize that there is a primary lesson
 2. You must not assume all story details support the primary lesson
 - i.e., Some view Jesus as the foreman in this parable . . .
- ✧ You can draw secondary lessons ~ I will ~ But first the primary

Xition: “What is the primary meaning of this parable”

Primary Meaning of This Parable

- ✧ Jesus had just talked with the rich young ruler
 - ◇ **Read Mt 19.16-24** ~ He'd gone away sad . . .
- ✧ The disciples were astounded by what Jesus said . . .
 - ◇ **Read Mt 19.25-27** ~ "If the rich can't get in who can?"
 - ◇ The disciples (**v25**) and then Peter (**v27**) asked questions
- ✧ Jesus answers Peter first in **v28** then the disciples in **v29**
 - ◇ Yet He also says "first / last" in **v30** that He repeats in **Mt 20.16**
- ✧ "So which question does the parable expand upon?"
 1. Peter's question in **Mt 19.27** –or–
 2. Rich young ruler's question in **Mt 19.16** & disciples in **Mt 19.25**
 - ◇ Both had been answered by Jesus in **Mt 19.28-29**
- ✧ Primary lesson is that God rewards whom, and how, He chooses
 1. Laborer cannot be working for salvation ~ easily refuted elsewhere
 2. Same wage cannot reflect same reward ~ rewards differ elsewhere
- ✧ Notice Mother Zebedee comes to Jesus in **Mt 20.20** seeking honors for sons
 - ◇ They'd heard that they would rule over 12 tribes ~ they wanted more

Landowner pays wages – (Mt 20)

- ✧ **v9** ~ "those hired the eleventh hour received a denarius"
 - ◇ Amazing! They received 12 times a normal pay . . .
- ✧ **v10** "But when the first came, they supposed they would receive more"
 - ◇ but "they likewise received each a denarius"
- ✧ **v11** "And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner"
 - ◇ He hired them ~ He gave them work ~ He's paid them \$ ~ but . . .
 - ◇ **v12** "you made them equal to us"

Jesus Heightens the Perceived Slight

- ✧ Landowner waits to pay those that worked 12 hours
 - ◇ He could easily have avoided this unpleasantness by paying them first
 - ◇ But Jesus wanted to reveal their covetous hearts
- ✧ God is the landowner . . .
- ✧ Landowner's response is interesting . . .

Xition: "What the Landowner (God) said . . ."

v13a ~ “Friend . . .”

- ✧ It is wise to soften a difficult conversation with kindness
 - ◇ What is better than to refer to them as a “Friend” ~ if sincere . . .
- ✧ We should remain calm ~ even if others aren’t . . .
 - ◇ III: “If” by Rudyard Kipling ~ “If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you . . . Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it, and – what is more – you’ll be a man my son.”
 - ◇ “Was Kipling a Christian?” ~ Self-described “God-fearing Christian atheist”

v13b ~ “I am doing you no wrong . . .”

- ✧ The friendly greeting is followed with a simple statement of truth
 - ◇ III: “If God gives grace to others that He denies to us, it is kindness to them, but no injustice to us.” ~ *Matthew Henry commentary*
- ✧ This is the truth ~ It cannot be disputed . . .
 - ◇ “But why can we still feel wronged?” ~ Two things . . .
 1. Because we are selfish ~ We want what is best for ourselves . . .
 2. And if we can’t have that ~ we resent those that do . . .

v13c ~ “Did you not agree with me . . .”

- ✧ The landowner brings up the wage now ~ But who did before?
 - ◇ “Had the laborers negotiated this specific wage?”
 - ◇ “Or had they accepted a specific wage offered by the landowner?”
 - Some commentators stress the laborers negotiated it . . . (Don’t know)
 - But they knew what they were working for ~ the rest didn’t
- ✧ The workers had agreed ~ but now they regret that agreement
 - ◇ They are victims ~ They’ve been deceived ~ They’re chumps . . .
 - ◇ The facts seems clear cut . . . but no . . . They are morally outraged . . .

v14 ~ “Take what is yours and go . . .”

- ✧ The landowner is teaching them a lesson
 - ◇ **Psalm 15.1.4** reads “LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? . . The one whose walk is blameless, who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind.”

Xition: “Let’s go on to the landowner’s rhetorical question . . .”

v15a ~ “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?”

- ✧ This is a retorical question ~ The landowner knows the answer . . .
 - ◇ “Yes . . . He does have the right to do what he wants with his stuff...”
 - ◇ The landowner’s right to do this is without question . . .
- ✧ **But not anymore** . . . Not in our present society . . .
 - ◇ Such commonly understood property rights are being lost
 - What we can do with our property is not entirely our decision
- ✧ !!!: Investors shorting stocks in 2008 were hated
 - ◇ It was thought, nobody should make money on declining stock values
 - ◇ Various bodies spoke of illegalizing the shorting of stocks
 - ◇ There are reasonable concerns in shorting stocks
 - But concerns then went way beyond reason . . . “popular to hate”
- ✧ !!!: Rushing relief to disaster victims
 - ◇ Entrepreneurs could do this much more effectively than FEMA
 - But they won’t ~ because they’re not allowed to make \$\$\$
 - ◇ Prior to hurricanes in FL water and plywood sales rocket
 - But stores “by law” cannot raise prices (accused of “price-gouging”)
 - So some people buy far more water & plywood than normal
 - Some may do so only for their own needs . . .
 - Others because they want to create a “black market”
 - ◇ And after the disaster, legitimate companies actions are scrutinized
 - If they move supplies in but charge high prices they’re criticized
 - If they don’t move supplies in they’re criticized
 - Even if they send truckloads of “free stuff” they’re forced to wait

v15b ~ “Is your eye evil because I’m good?”

- ✧ The landowner declares Himself good ~ But they regard Him as evil
 - ◇ They believe if all people aren’t “equally” benefitted then it’s evil
- ✧ But really they’re not concerned about everyone ~ only themselves

The Blessing of Property

- ✧ God blessed man with property
- ✧ But the fall has left many with a warped perspective on it

Xition: “This is why God addressed it so clearly in the 10th commandment”

Covetousness

- ✧ **Read Ex 20.17** ~ “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”
 - ◇ We believe this . . . But it is difficult to obey it at times . . .
 - And we attempt to rationalize exceptions to it . . .
 - ◇ Know too that the 10th commandment is a hedge around the 8th
- ✧ **Read Ex 20.15** ~ “You shall not steal.”
 - ◇ We live in a time of “**rampant rationalization**”
 - ◇ We have laws & rules ~ but they grow increasingly maleable

Let’s Remember Where our True Treasure Lies

- ✧ But let’s not overreact to this attack on our stuff . . .
- ✧ As much as we may appreciate – even love – our stuff . . .
 - ◇ We must remember our imperishable treasure is not on this earth
 - ◇ **Read Mt 6.19-21** ~ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless before
the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior, who alone is wise,
Be Glory and Majesty,
Dominion and Power,
Both now and forever.
Amen.