

Jesus' Parables, Discipleship, and the Cost of Following Jesus

SCOTT HOEZEE

Depending on how you count, Jesus told roughly thirty-six parables in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Eleven of those parables are found only in Luke, and believe it or not, that includes some of the best-known parables of them all. Only Luke gives us the parable of the Good Samaritan, the parable of the Prodigal Son, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Well, today on *Groundwork*, we will look at some of these parables and how they reflect the major themes of Luke that we have been looking at in this series. So, stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now the sixth and final episode in this series on the Gospel of Luke. Across the previous five programs, we have touched on a few things that Luke stresses a little bit more than the other three gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John. We have seen the theme of economic justice, the theme of how Jesus brings the ultimate year of Jubilee, the theme of prayer, the theme of the victory of God, and how in Jesus' salvation, those who are far off are brought near; and as you said in the previous program, Darrell, Luke is the great gospel of inclusivity.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, Luke's idea is to make sure that everyone: women, centurions, Romans, Samaritans, and those with leprosy and skin diseases, an issue of blood for twelve years...eighteen years...a woman cannot stand up straight for eighteen years. He is making sure that everyone that everyone thinks is outside or them the least of them or on the margins, is brought into the center and included in this love and this victory and this power included in God's family; and Luke is intentional about that. He is not only intentional in the Gospel of Luke, he is intentional in the book of Acts as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and not surprisingly, most of the big themes in Luke come out in the parables that Jesus tells, as Luke records them for us. So, we have already seen how in Luke 16 the theme of economic justice came out with the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In fact, we noted that Lazarus, the poor man, the only character in any one of Jesus' parables who got a name, which seems to be Luke's and Jesus' way of saying, you know, the poor are not some anonymous, faceless category. Poor people are real people with real beating hearts, real stories, and real names; but as we begin this final episode of the series, Darrell, we are going to right at Luke 10 and look at that...probably the most famous parable in the world...the parable of the Good Samaritan.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, if you Google Good Samaritan, you will see a lot of different ministries and organizations and institutions named Good Samaritan. People are really enthralled by what this represents in the heart of a person; and that

the story brings out to show people the behavior and the attitude that we are supposed to have; and so, we want to actually look at the story itself to see the inspiration for why these organizations have named themselves this way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; hospitals, medical centers, food banks, clothing ministries, outreach centers for the poor and homeless, senior living facilities, hospices; they are all good Samaritans. Of course, in the parable itself, Darrell, *good Samaritan*...it is not in there.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We call this the parable of the Good Samaritan, but *good Samaritan* is not actually in the parable; but wrapped up inside this parable are, again, so many things that Luke's whole gospel focuses on; so, let's listen to that parable.

DARRELL DELANEY

Starting in verse 25 of Luke 10, it says: On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" ²⁷He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" ²⁸"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." ²⁹But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³²So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' ³⁶"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" ³⁷The expert of the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Darrell, as Luke presents it, this parable didn't come out of the blue, it is part of an answer that Jesus gives to a question. A law expert asked Jesus, how can he inherit eternal life? It is kind of like the question that rich young ruler once asked: What must I do to be saved? It is really the wrong question. We cannot do anything to be saved...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But with both of these men, Jesus kind of plays along. You know, there is an old joke that rabbis always answer a question with another question, right? I mean, somebody once asked a rabbi: Why do rabbis always answer a question with another question? The rabbi said: Why shouldn't a rabbi answer a question with another question? So, Jesus answers this question with another question: What is in the law? How do you read it? And the lawyer reels off the great commandment on loving God and loving neighbor, and Jesus says: Well, there you go. That's it.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, but after that, though, we get that curious line that says: He wanted to justify himself; and he says: Who is my neighbor? So, he is trying to find where is the line? Where are the concentric circles? Are they the people next to me....are they my best friends...the ones who look like me...the ones who have my same last name...who is my neighbor? So that I can do that bare minimum and still be called righteous and still follow the law to a tee? I think he is trying to find a loophole, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; he wanted Jesus to say: Okay, okay; a neighbor is restricted to someone who looks just like you and lives really close to you...maybe next door. Anybody outside that circle does not count as your neighbor, so don't worry about loving those folks. He wanted a restricted definition so he could have an out—an escape hatch. That is not exactly the answer Jesus gives, however. Instead, he tells this parable, the bottom line of which is that a neighbor is anybody you happen to meet anytime, anyplace, anywhere. It is interesting, when Jesus begins the parable, in most translations Jesus says: A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. In the Greek it is *anthropos**, and I think, Darrell, the best translation of that is *some guy*...some guy...just somebody. This could be anybody, is Jesus' point.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, because Jesus generalizes who the somebody is, the guy should have gotten the point then; but Jesus uses a Samaritan in this situation; and you can tell that there is still an issue between Jews and Samaritans because when Jesus asks: Who of the three...which of these...? He couldn't even say *Samaritan* out of his own mouth...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That's right.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know the one. The one who had mercy; you know who I'm talking about. He couldn't even say it; and Jesus is zinging him with the understanding of that, because even the person you least expect can show God's love and show God's mercy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what is interesting, too, is that once this certain guy...this somebody...gets beat up and stripped...he is laying in the ditch. By looking at him, you could not tell a thing about him: Is he rich? Is he poor? Is he a good guy; a lousy guy? Is he a foreigner? Is he like me? He was so beat up and naked, you could not tell. Is he married, single, a father, you know. It didn't matter, he is a fellow image-bearer of God; and so, this Samaritan takes care of him; he goes *way* beyond and above the call of duty in taking care of him. It reminds us of something we saw in this series that when the grace of God is presented in Luke, it is always lavish; it is over the top; it is prodigal. This is what the Samaritan does; but then interestingly, Darrell, Jesus turns the tables on the lawyer in the end. You would think that the point is: Oh, the guy in the ditch was your neighbor; but no. What Jesus says is: Who acted as a neighbor *to* the man in the ditch? Jesus didn't want this lawyer to identify with the victim in the ditch and say: Well, gee; if that were me, I would want somebody to help me. No; Jesus wants to say: It is your job when you run into that, that you are the neighbor. Wow! What a challenging, embracing thing.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is really interesting that theologians and early commentators concluded that in the end only Jesus is the *real* Good Samaritan. None of us can be that good and that perfect. But thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit, he can give us the ability to cross boundaries and go across different, actually, restrictions of our social networks and everything to give us the ability to do that.

But there is so much more that we want to explore in the Gospel of Luke. So, stay with us.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and the sixth episode of our six-part series on Luke. We thought we would touch on a number of parables that are unique to Luke. We looked at the poor and economic justice, which brought us to the parable of the Rich Fool, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. We had a whole program on prayer in Luke, and that brought us to the parable of the Persistent Widow; the Friend at Midnight; but now, we get to Luke 18 to hear, again, one of the best-known parables of Jesus that you find only in Luke, and it is here in Chapter 18.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, picking it up at verse 9, it says: To some who were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, Darrell, Luke tends to do something with a few of Jesus’ parables that Mark and Matthew generally didn’t do; namely, Luke tips the reader off ahead of time what the parable is going to be about. So, ahead of the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge, Luke tells us right up front: This is about always praying and never giving up. Now here in Luke 18, Luke tells us right up front that the target for this parable was those who were confident in their own righteousness to the point that they spent most of their time looking down their noses at the less pious losers all around them. So, Jesus tells a story with a Pharisee and a tax collector; this story is about a bad guy and a good guy; bad guy is Pharisee; tax collector, good guy; and of course, that is the exact opposite of how Jesus’ original listeners would have heard it. Pharisee: good guy; Pharisee: Pious guy; Pharisee: Role model. Tax collectors: they were traitors. They cooperated with the Roman occupying forces. The Romans gave these tax collectors kind of a wide berth. If the tax collectors took more money than they were supposed to and lined their own pockets, the Romans let it go. In the very next chapter, in Luke 19, we are going to meet one of these guys. He has a name called Zacchaeus, right? So, for the listeners of Jesus’ day, Pharisee: good guy; tax collector: bad guy.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, for them to understand that because this person is a keeper of the law, they are an expert; they are the ones who help us understand how we are supposed to live; then they get shed into this positive light; but then, tax collectors are also given a negative light, and rightfully so, based on the way they interacted with their own people. So, the twist in this story is when Jesus says that the Pharisee was not going home justified, but the tax collector is. That would have really shocked everybody who heard it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And even more so, because, you know, when we hear the Pharisee’s prayer: I thank God I am not like other losers like this guy...right? We think: Oh, that is terrible. What a terrible... But you know what, Darrell? In Jesus’ day, that was actually a standard prayer the Jewish people did. They would thank God for their special status. They would thank God that they are not like other people; that they are not like Gentiles; that they were not like a woman, sometimes. I am sorry; that is what they would say. So, when the people who first heard this parable, heard the Pharisee begin to say: I thank God that I am not like other people, that sounded as familiar to them as if we heard somebody say: Now I lay me down to sleep. That was a standard prayer. So, they were not going to be that scandalized by that particular prayer; whereas, the tax collector, he just cries out for mercy, and I am sure most people thought: Well, yes; you need mercy, pal; good luck getting it, though.

DARRELL DELANEY

Unfortunately, we all need mercy, right? So, you know, when you said that the Pharisee's prayer: I am glad I am not like this sinner, even this tax collector; just imagine if you grew up your whole life and you read scripture that told you that God said: You are my people; you are my chosen possession; you are mine and I love you; you are special; you are set apart for my purposes. If you grow up hearing that your whole life, then you can see why the Pharisee would talk the way he talked in that situation; but the tax collector is actually radically acute, and actually aware of his own sin, and begins to confess that, and I think that the contrite heart of that is the reason why his prayer was heard.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; Jesus pulls the rug out from underneath people in the end. *The Pharisee* does not go home justified. Jesus says the tax collector is made righteous. Humility, not pride, Jesus is saying, is the path that leads to the heart of God.

Later in the New Testament, we are going to read a lot from the Apostle Paul how we are saved by grace *alone*. Interestingly, you don't read the words *grace alone* anywhere in the four gospels. In fact, the word *grace* only occurs four times in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Only once in the synoptic gospels, in Luke, and then not even saving grace. It is at the end of Luke 2, after Jesus had been lost at the temple; he is twelve years old. We are told he grew in knowledge and grace; and then three times in John 1 in the prologue, Jesus was full of grace and truth. So, we don't find grace in the gospels, but everything that Paul built on about grace alone, were built on everything else Jesus said. Grace is all over the gospels, even if the word isn't there.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love what you said about humility, too, Scott. It is really important for us to understand that Paul made this clear, too. Being a Pharisee in Philippians 3, he said: I will put no confidence in the flesh. I've got reasons to brag; I've been through all of that school; I've been through all of that, but I am telling you, I am putting no confidence in what I can do. And the Pharisee in this parable is actually giving God a litany of things he has done: I fast twice a week; I give all this stuff; and he is trying to make sure that he establishes that as why he is righteous. That is a problem; in God's presence, that is a problem.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He doesn't need grace; and you know, Darrell, unfortunately, sometimes we have a hard time remembering this, too. It is not just other people who need grace. I need grace; you need grace; we all need grace; we all need to remember that it is not other people who get saved by grace alone, it is us; and that should be a generator of joy. We have seen that in Luke's gospel, too. When people get saved, it is always followed by rejoicing and joy. We saw that earlier in this series. We need to remember that that grace is just as much for us as for anybody else. The late writer, Robert Farrar Capon, once said: What if the tax collector comes to church every single week and says that same prayer? Do you think he is ever going to exhaust God's grace? Of course not. God's grace tank is never going to run dry; not for you, not for me.

But in just a moment, we are going to wrap up this whole series on Luke, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, as we bring our series on the Gospel of Luke to a close, one theme rises to the surface that ties together all the other themes, and I think that is the call to discipleship.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and so, let's talk about discipleship, Scott. Discipleship is the process where you become one who loves and follows Jesus, becomes more like him in your attitude and actions that seek to make other disciple-makers do the same. So, Luke wants to make sure that people understand that God is calling everyone to follow him, but he also wants to make it a sober and not an idealistic or romanticized following, because it will cost something. I mean, if you really follow Jesus, it is going to cost you everything, and that is a good thing, because it is worth it to follow Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and we have seen in this series and we have seen even in the parables that we looked at earlier in this episode, it cost Jesus a lot. He healed somebody on a Sabbath and got dinged for it. You are not supposed to work on the Sabbath; shame on you. He told parables where the bad people were the heroes. So, Jesus came in for a lot of criticism too; and as Jesus said elsewhere, you know: the disciple is not greater than the master. If the master got persecuted, you are going to get persecuted. This is serious business; and that comes out a lot in Luke.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it does; and so, let's talk about when he calls his first disciples in Chapter 5, where you get the story of Simon Peter and James and John, and they are fishing. They had been fishing all night and they caught nothing; but then Jesus tells Peter: I need you to cast your nets on the other side; put down into deep water; let down your nets for a catch; and they hauled in so many fish, they cannot even...their nets begin to break...they cannot even get it all. It is a moment of the biggest payoff in the fishing business that they have ever had, and it is also a revelation for Peter, because he says: Oh, wait; if he can see this fish, he probably can see into my soul. So, he says: Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man; and Jesus says: Don't be afraid. From now on, you are going to fish for people. So, they pull their boats up on the shore; they left everything and followed him. That is the biggest payoff they had, Scott. They left it there to follow Jesus because it was more important.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is always interesting to me that in the gospels the disciples are always actually depicted as really lousy fisher people. So, I mean, I think Jesus actually saved them from more than one thing? They were never good at it. They never could catch a thing. But they left everything. This comes a little bit later in the same chapter, 5. Jesus calls Levi...perhaps Matthew...a tax collector. Jesus calls Levi, and again, he gets up from his tax collecting booth, he leaves it all behind and just follows Jesus, right? So, it is really quite amazing that you get this theme over and over and over that they abandon everything. They gave it all up; they left, you know, their father...James and John left Zebedee, their father, behind. That is part of what we call the cost of discipleship.

DARRELL DELANEY

What is interesting is that when Matthew—or Levi—the tax collector, goes with Jesus there is some controversy and the religious leaders have an issue. They say: Why does this guy eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus says: It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick; and I have not come to call the righteous but the sinners to repentance. So, what we see in these stories is that these people who were being called to Jesus are radically available to Jesus, and discipleship is not about adding another thing to your life. You have to actually re-prioritize your life if you are going to follow Jesus; and that is the cost. Luke is not going to sugarcoat that. It is through his entire gospel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, we get it again in Luke 9:57-62. Somebody comes up to Jesus and says: "I will follow you wherever you go." And you would expect Jesus to say: That's great; come on; let's go! Nope: what does Jesus say? "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Another wants to bury his father first, and Jesus says: Well, no, no; you cannot do that. You have to follow me right now. No

one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the service of the kingdom of God. So, wow! Jesus makes it really, really hard. He is saying it is kind of all or nothing.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and it challenges our priorities, our comforts, and our attachments. We have seen this in some of the parables and the stories in the earlier parts of this segment, and in the earlier parts of the book of Luke, where Jesus is actually challenging what we consider important, and making sure that we prioritize Jesus. So, we count the cost; we count it out of honesty and not out of anxiety, because the call is real, and Jesus calls us to something deep. Of course, Luke is making sure you know that right up front.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we read this in some of the other gospels, too, but in Luke 14 Jesus says: ²⁷Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

And in Jesus' day, Darrell, what did it mean to carry a cross? So, sometimes today we see people who literally, street evangelists, they carry...they are literally are shlepping a cross around. That is not really what Jesus meant. If you had the crossbar over your shoulders, it meant you were under the sentence of death. You had to die to yourself to follow Jesus; and this is a difficult message for us to hear. Jesus says the way is narrow, not broad; you have to give your whole heart; and yet, as we have seen in multiple stories in Luke, including the story of Zacchaeus, who comes down with joy out of that sycamore tree he had climbed, joy comes to those who truly commit to following Jesus, no matter what it costs.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, Scott; so, as we close this series, we just want to give you a brief recap of where we have been. We see that Luke is writing to his friend, most excellent Theophilus, and he sets out to write an orderly account of the gospel; and we talked about having the role of the Holy Spirit primary in Jesus' ministry and how that same Spirit empowers us today. We talked about Jesus' prophetic role and how he challenged injustice, especially those with wealth and status; and we reflected on Jesus' deep life of prayer and dependence on the Father.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have heard the joyful news of salvation for outsiders; of Jesus bringing in the ultimate year of Jubilee where everything that is wrong—everything that has gone wrong in our lives—gets reversed—gets reset. That is what happened in the year of Jubilee. Everything that went wrong gets reset; and we have seen again and again how those hands of Jesus in Luke constantly, constantly, constantly reaching out and touching particularly those who were on the outside; and Jesus brings them to the inside; and as we have seen now just in this last couple of minutes, all of that leads to that road of discipleship, where we follow Jesus, and only Jesus, and we don't fail to count the cost of what that means.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, if you are wondering today what it means to follow Jesus, why don't you start there? Start by reading these stories; count the cost in your own life; and you know, the same Jesus who called Peter, Levi, and Zacchaeus is calling us too; and when we really say yes...I mean, really say yes...we will find...just like they did...we will find that when we leave behind these things, it is nothing compared to what we gain. So, as we close this series in Luke, we are reminded that the story does not end with the final chapter. It continues with us, and that invitation is still open. And Jesus is near and his Spirit is at work and the kingdom of God is still breaking in. So, may we be the people who live this good news, thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Please join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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DARRELL DELANEY

[0:24:44 .0] *Groundwork* is a listener supported program produced by ReFrame Ministries. Visit reframeministries.org for more information.

*Correction: In the audio of this episode, host Scott Hoezee mispronounces the form of the Greek word in Luke 10:30. The root of the word is the same, but the correct form is *anthropos*.

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