

PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 24, The Rich Fool, Part I. Luke 12:13-21

1. The Text:

One of the multitude said to him,

“Rabbi, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me.”

But he said to him,

“Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?”

And He said to them,

GENERAL PRINCIPAL

“Take heed, and beware of every kind of insatiable desire.

For a person does not consist in the surpluses of his possessions.”

1. And he told this p, saying,

“There was a certain rich man

GOOD GIVEN

Whose land brought forth plenty.

2. And he discussed with himself saying,

“What shall I do, for I have no place to store my crops?”

PROBLEM

3. And he said, “I will do this;” I will pull down my barns and build larger barns; and I will store all my grain and my goods.

PLAN (PRESENT)

4. And I will say to my soul, “Soul! You have ample goods laid up for many years,

PLAN (FUTURE)

Relax, eat, drink and enjoy yourself,”

5. But God said to him, ‘Fool!’ This night your soul is required of you, and what you have prepared, whose will these things be?

GOOD’S LEFT

So is he who treasures up for himself,

GENERAL PRINCIPAL

And is not gathering riches for God.

2. As in the case of the p of the Good Samaritan, we tend to take the dialogue of this p seriously and see where it leads us. Here too the p is long and the dialogue is short. Yet again the setting colors the thrust of the p as it now appears in the text. The rhetorical form of the passage will be examined and then the particulars of the text will be discussed in the light of that form. The literary form (see above) must be first examined.

3. The overall literary form is simple and clear. It begins with a single exchange between Jesus and an anonymous petitioner that takes the form of a demand and a response. There is one wisdom saying said before and one after the p. The p falls naturally into five stanzas. The first tells of goods given and the fifth closes the p with these same goods left behind. In the center of the p, the rich man makes three speeches. It is clear that the first and second speeches are intended to be separate, because the 2nd has the redundant words, "And he said." Also, one senses that time elapses between the enunciation of his problems and the rich man's intended solution. His second and third speeches are together, yet there is a shift of emphasis that divides the speech into two halves.
4. He begins with the present in which he will build his barns and store his crops. Then in the years to come he will enjoy the 'good life.' Looking then at these three statements, in the first, stanza 2, he outlines the problem. In the second, stanza 3, he decides on a solution. In the third stanza, stanza 4, he reflects on the future in light of that solution. In stanza 5 God speaks. The center is a crucial turning point, for the rich man in that speech decides what he will do to solve his problem.
5. We have this same feature in the p of the "Unjust Steward." (Luke 16:1-8) In that p there are 7 stanzas, but again in the center has a soliloquy in which the principal character suddenly decides on a solution to the problem set forth in the opening stanzas. (Bailey). The very climax in the 3rd stanza is related to the beginning and end of the p. In this case the inner relationship is slight and slightly unconscious, yet it is there. In the first stanza, goods are *given*. In the central stanza, they are stored and in the last stanza, they are *left*.
6. Furthermore, the beginning and end talk of God's gifts. In the 1st stanza, God gives plenty. In the 5th (as we will note later on) the man's soul is on loan from God. With this literary structure in mind, we will proceed to be an examination of the text.

THE INITIAL DIALOGUE:

7. "One of the multitude said to him, 'Rabbi, bid my brother to divide my inheritance with me.'" But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or divider over you." As we have seen in 10:25, the Greek word for "teacher," can be traced back to the Hebrew, "Rabbi." The Rabbi was expected to be knowledgeable regarding the law and ready to give a legal ruling. Jesus' understanding of his ministry does not include passing judgment on legal

cases. There was precedent for this. We are told that some sages, “withdrew” from public affairs and even thanked the Almighty for not knowing how to administer justice.” (Safari). Ibn Al Salibi offers the intriguing suggestion that the brother involved was already a disciple and was thus under Jesus’ authority. The greedy petitioner then wanted Jesus to tell the brother/disciple and was thus under Jesus authority. The greedy petitioner then wanted Jesus to tell brother/disciple to forsake everything by naturally giving it to the brother/petitioner (Ibn al Salibi). Such details are in harmony with the story, but are imaginative and unfounded.

8. Yet more can be subsidized. This petitioner is not asking for arbitration, but rather ordering the judge to carry out his wishes. He has already decided what he wants and he tries to use Jesus. To say, “Rabbi, my brother and I are quarrelling over our inheritance; will you mediate?” is one thing. To order Jesus to implement his plan is something else. It is little wonder that Jesus’ response has a tinge of gruffness in it as we will observe.
9. The specific background is well known. The father dies and leaves the inheritance as a unit to his sons. Psalm 133:1 reflects how pleasant it is when sons manage harmoniously to cooperate in such situations. Daube observes that to “dwell together” is a technical term in the O.T. It is an assumed standard. Thus when Abraham finds it necessary to break with his kinsman Lot, “it is regarded as a sad necessity which calls for justification,” (Duabe, see Gen. 13:5-7). In the NT the same assumptions are operative. Luke 16:9 presents the dilemma of a servant where the father dies and they suddenly have two masters.
10. In our text, 1 brother wants to help in pressuring the other into finalizing a division between them. The Rabbis stated that if one her wanted a division of the inheritance it should be granted. (Roman law required consensus on the part of both parties; Duabe). Thus the petitioner seems to be saying, “Everybody knows the opinion of the rabbis. I am right, my brother is most naturally understood to be property.” Indeed, we are here dealing with the ME most sensitive problem, both then and now, namely a cry for justice over the division of land.
11. The question of justice for those who cry out seeking it an important concern of many biblical writers from Amos onward. Luke himself has more material from the tradition on the question of justice for the poor and downtrodden than any other evangelist. Early in Luke Mary expresses joy at the exaltation of those of low degree, Luke 1:52. A number of p help

the poor; “The Great Banquet, Lazarus, and the Rich Man”, see Luke 4:17ff, and many other references. Here, the topic of justice is met in a unique way. Thus it is important to examine carefully the ‘cry for justice’ that is voiced here.

12. This particular cry can be characterized as a “naked cry” for justice. A demanding voice says, “Give me your rights.” We are left to assume that this petitioner is unwilling to consider his problem from any other perspective other than his own. Lesslie Newbigin states the problem eloquently;

“If we acknowledge the God of the Bible, we are committed to struggle for justice. Jesus means giving each their due. Our problem (as seen in The light of the Gospel) is that each of us overestimates what is due to him as compared with what is due to his neighbor.....If I do not acknowledge a justice which judges the justice for what I fight, I am an agent, not of justice, but of lawless tyranny. (Newbigin). Newbigin precisely describes the petition of the petitioner. He has decided what are *his* rights. He only wants assistance in pressuring his bother into granting those rights.

13. The naked cry for justice is voiced in Shakespeare’s tragedy, “*Romeo and Juliet*,” Tybalt kills Mercutio, Romeo then kills Tybalt, who is a relative to Capulets (Juliet’s family). With the bodies of the 2 dead men in full view, the cowed gathers and with them, the prince. Lady Capulet speaks for her family and angrily demands the death of Romeo as the murderer of Tybalt. She says, “I beg justice, which thou, prince must give!” (act 3, scene 1). Each family is only demanding rights! At the end of the play the same people are again gathered in the presence of the prince, only now there are two other dead bodies on the stage, those of Romeo and Juliet. The prince says, “*Where be these enemies? Capulet, Montague! See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate, That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love! And I, for winking at your discords, too, Have lost a brace of kinsman; All are punish’d.*” (Act 5, scene 3).

14. To grant each party their own understanding of their “rights,” can lead to tragedy. A new perspective is needed. In Shakespeare’s play, even the priest makes no attempt to offer a new perspective to the families or pronounce a word of judgment on their hates. Indeed, it takes a special brand of courage to tell antagonists that their naked cry for justice is not enough, that they must begin with a new understanding of themselves.