

WEEK 4

# The stories Jesus told

PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

## ENCOUNTER

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Read Amos 5:10-12, 18-24, 8:4-12. The prophet Amos preached that people were using religion to try to hide their sins from God, and that wasn't working. God was upset that the people were gaining affluence while ignoring the human costs in getting there. Can you think of any examples of this going on today? Are there ways each of us might be guilty of doing that? How? Recognizing that we might be stepping on others in order to gain in stature, what can we do to reverse that in our own lives? Are we ever hopeful that our "religious-ness" might mask our own sins?

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- Read Luke 12:13-21. Jesus said, "...life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." What did the rich man overlook in his thinking? How can we bring "others" into the equation of our life? Should our standard of living be based solely on how much we make and have, or should something else be considered?

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- Read Luke 12:22-34. Here's the tough question: Do we Christians really believe that God will ultimately provide all that we need, or is our faith too weak to accept this basic precept of Christ's teaching? Would we endanger ourselves and our family by accepting this teaching, or would our lives be enhanced by believing? Is Christ telling us to ignore our needs and our resources? If not, what is he saying? On another level, what does worry do for us? Does the expression "worried sick" have any truth to it? Should we plan and provide for the future? Within what limits?

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- Read Luke 12:35-44. Do you ever wonder whether, as Jesus sees you, you are ready for eternity? If you were to coach a newer Christian, what advice would you offer on how to become prepared to meet your master? What are the easiest parts of becoming ready? What are the hardest parts? How do we "feed" other servants of God? If God is our master, what is your specific job? Some people say that they are ready to leave this life and meet God. Are they being morbid? How do we "watch" for Christ's return?

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- Read Matthew 25:1-13. How would you interpret this parable's message? What might the oil in the lamps represent? Could it represent the value of service to God? Why couldn't the oil be borrowed? Why would it take time to gain more oil? Once again, preparedness is a key point in the parable. Why wouldn't the bridegroom announce, in advance, the exact hour of his arrival? If you knew that Christ was returning at 8:45 am, next Monday, do you think you would alter your plans between now and then? Would your preparations be as selfless?

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- Read Matthew 25:31-46. Weren't the goats saying in this parable that if they had known it was Jesus, they would have helped, but they thought the needy weren't worth helping? Would you consider anyone in prison as unworthy of helping? What if that person was your brother? Are street people unworthy of help? What if that person was a sister, hooked on drugs? Are poor people worthless? What if that poor person was your elderly mother? What if we were able to change our entire perspective and see all in need as members of our own family?

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## EMBRACE

Discuss what life should consist of, especially in the mind of God. The rich man with an abundance of grain saw that as the pinnacle of his life. Was he totally wrong or partially wrong? Are our possessions meaningless? Should we feel any satisfaction in our successes?

## ENGAGE

This week list the ways you offer your time, talents and treasures to the needs of others. Pray over this list. Ask God to help you find at least one new way to help others. Next week, share with the group what you experienced in making this extra effort.

### SUGGESTED PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, you taught and taught—yet, too often your hearers failed to get the point, and did not obey. Too often we are like them. Warm our hearts and help us to see everyone, especially those in need, as our brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers in the human family. Soften our hearts that we might reach out and help in your name. Amen.*

## DAILY READINGS

### MONDAY - AMOS 5:10-12, 18-24, 8:4-12

- Pastor Lloyd John Ogilvie wrote, “There is no more seemingly effective way to hide from God than in religion ... the piping of pious songs and psalms didn’t impress God while the people ... ground the poor into the mire and loaded the overburdened with misery ... What God wanted was inner righteousness, expressed in justice, righteousness in action.” How can you determine honestly whether your religious activities serve more to a) hide from God or b) submit your whole life to God? What can you do to “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”?

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- Amos 8:11 used a vivid image to show how unsatisfying living only for our own material satisfaction is: “I will send hunger and thirst on the land; neither a hunger for bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the Lord’s words.” How can you, in good times or bad, nurture in yourself a hunger for feeding your soul on the Lord’s words?

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*Prayer: Lord God, in this globalized world, it’s sometimes hard to know whether I’m hurting or helping others. May your priorities become mine as I keep “hearing the Lord’s words.” Amen*

### TUESDAY - LUKE 12:13-21

In this parable, Jesus said the wealthy man had chosen too short a time horizon. (“Time horizon” means “Estimated length of time for a plan, program, or project to complete, an endeavor to succeed, an investment to yield returns, an obligation to become due, a right to mature, etc.”) All his plans, all his vision, were focused on this earth, this life—and he operated as though this life was all there is.

- Scholar William Barclay said this rich farmer made two fundamental errors. First, “he never saw beyond this world.” For a Christian, our mortality is no longer something to be feared—but it is a reality to be taken seriously. In what ways are you planning and living for the time when this world’s material possessions will no longer matter?

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- The farmer’s second error, Barclay said, was that “he never saw beyond himself.” He cited Methodism’s founder John Wesley as a contrast: “At Oxford he had an income of £30 a year. He lived on £28 and gave £2 away. When his income went up to £60, £90 and £120 a year, he still lived on £28 and gave the rest away.” In what practical ways can you “see beyond yourself” when you evaluate your “standard of living”?

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*Prayer: Loving Lord, whatever kind of “crop” I bring in, keep me from being so fixated on building bigger barns that I lose sight of you, and this hurting world you love. Amen*

**WEDNESDAY - LUKE 12:22-34**

Luke said Jesus addressed these words to his disciples, not to the man who wanted a bigger share of an inheritance. They were not a highly affluent group. But they, too, needed to hear the message: “Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. There is more to life than food and more to the body than clothing.”

- In yesterday’s passage, we saw an affluent farmer’s challenge with hoarding his wealth and not being “rich toward God.” In today’s passage Jesus counseled people of lesser means not to be just as distracted by worry about their lack of wealth. Jesus said, “Don’t be afraid, because your Father delights in giving you the kingdom.” If you strain to make ends meet, or have other areas of lack in and refocus your outlook?

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- Scholar N. T. Wright said “This wasn’t just good advice on how to live a happy, carefree life. This was a challenge to the very center of [our] world.” The core question Jesus posed was, “Do you really trust that God is your great Father, who will love and care for you not just now, but through all eternity?” How is your mindset different when you deeply trust that he is than when you just kind of hope maybe it’s true?

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*Prayer: Lord Jesus, your servant Julian of Norwich said you taught her, “All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.” Help my heart to trust the truth of those words. Amen*

**THURSDAY - LUKE 12:35-44**

In the last parable in Luke 12, Jesus told a story of a household in which the servants went maturely about their business. They were always ready to do their master’s will, ready to serve him any time he arrived home. In a startling reversal, Jesus said the master would serve them “as honored guests” for their steady, consistent service to God’s kingdom day by day.

- Have you ever taken a trip far from home, and only upon arriving thought to yourself, “Did I bring the \_\_\_\_\_”? In this parable (as well as the one we’ll read tomorrow) Jesus said the time to prepare for eternity is now, not when eternity begins to dawn upon us. What is your sense of God’s calling to your heart? As you live out your love for God, what “job description” does God have for your life today? Are you steadily living into that calling?

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- In verse 41, Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?” Jesus didn’t answer directly, but seemed to say that the parable was for all who wish to be “faithful and wise managers”—so Peter should take it seriously. How can you ask about each Scripture you read, “Lord, what do you want me to hear in this passage”? In what ways are you being a faithful and wise manager of the gifts and talents God has given you?

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*Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the ways you have equipped me to serve. Make me a faithful and wise manager, valuing myself and who you made me to be. I offer myself to you to bless your world. Amen*

**FRIDAY - MATTHEW 25:1-13**

Middle Eastern weddings went on for days. Jesus' story pictured the bridegroom arriving at the main feast much later than expected (perhaps delayed celebrating with other friends). Five bridesmaids had extra oil, to keep their lamps lit in case of a delay. But five hadn't prepared, and missed the feast as they tried to borrow or buy oil at the last minute. As in the story of the household servants, Jesus' was saying that the point of life is to serve God steadily every day, not leaving preparation for the last minute.

- In this parable Jesus taught that some things cannot be done at the last minute. When exam day comes, it's too late to start studying for the exam. As you read this parable, did you identify more with the prepared or the unprepared bridesmaids? What steps can you take each day so that, like the prepared bridesmaids, you will be at the "wedding banquet of the Lamb" (see Revelation 19:1-9)?

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- The parable also said some things cannot be borrowed. Have you ever wished you could "borrow" the connection your pious grandmother or your preacher has with God? Doesn't work. God wants a love relationship with us, and we build those relationships by our own involvement with the other person. In what ways are you building your personal connection with God each day?

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*Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for inviting me to be a part of your "wedding feast." Help me to value that privilege highly, and to stay connected with you every day. Amen*

**SATURDAY - MATTHEW 25:31-46**

Scholar William Barclay told this story: Martin of Tours was a Roman soldier, and a Christian. One winter day, Martin met a beggar who was blue and shivering with cold. Martin took his worn and frayed soldier's coat, cut it in two, and gave half of it to the beggar. That night he had a dream. In it he saw the heavenly places and Jesus in the midst of all the angels. Jesus was wearing half of a Roman soldier's cloak. An angel asked, "Master, why are you wearing that battered old cloak?" And Jesus answered softly, "My servant Martin gave it to me."

- In this parable, note that both "the sheep" and "the goats" were surprised at what "the king" told them. The goats' question (verse 44) suggests a feeling that "if we'd known it was you, of course we'd have helped." In other words, the hungry, hurting, outcast people they did see weren't worth helping. What can help you learn to see the face of Jesus in the faces of the people you meet? When have you found the kind of freedom and joy that comes from blessing others because it's the "God thing" to do?

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*Prayer: Dear God, I'm sorry for the times I've turned away from you, not recognizing you in the unlovely, unlovable people I saw. Fill me with your love. By your grace I may bless you by blessing those I otherwise would not love. Amen.*

