
The Structure of the Luke 15:2-17:4 | Parables of Lostness

- These verses have a structure that calls for them to be considered as a whole:
 - Luke 15:2 – The Pharisees Murmured
 - Luke 15:3-32 – Speaking to the Pharisees
 - Luke 16:1-13 – Speaking to the Disciples
 - Luke 16:14- The Pharisees Derided
 - Luke 16:15-31 – Speaking to the Pharisees
 - Luke 17:1-4 – Speaking to the Disciples
- Bullinger (whose outline is above), taught that, “*The meaning of words is to be gathered from the scope of the passage; and not the scope from the words*” Furthermore, the “*scope is discovered by its structure.*” (How to Enjoy the Bible, Canons 1 and 2)
 - The *scope* is the *subject*.
 - “Private interpretation” ignores the scope of the words.
- Without recognizing the structure of this passage, the parables of Luke 15 have often been removed from their scope, and thus the subject of the parables was misunderstood.

Luke 16:1-13 | The Unjust Steward

- Verses 1-8 – the story itself
 - This story goes along with the previous parables, as insight and explanation into the purpose of those parables.
 - This is a *story* rather than a *parable*. As a story, it does not need to reveal mystery. It is actually designed to give application to the previous parables of Luke 15 (whether they be two or three parables).
 - The word **steward** in Greek is οἰκονόμος· [oikonomon] the one who has the **stewardship** of the house.
 - Stewardship is the translation of οἰκονομία (oikonomias).
 - Both words give insight into dispensationalism, which believes that there are οἰκονομίας [oikonomian] (dispensations or “stewardships”).
 - The **steward** is the one giving oversight to the *house law* (*oikos* = house, *nomos* = law).
 - When time came for the steward to **give an account** of his stewardship, the wicked steward began to be worried, knowing he was going to lose his position. He was too weak to dig and too proud to beg, so he **resolved what to do** so that he would have a place to go. His plan was to reduce the indebtedness of the debtors so that they would be in debt (morally) to him and **may receive me into their houses**.
 - The steward was commended by the master as wise, and (presumably) Jesus commented that **the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light**.
- Verses 9-13 –
 - The application of the previous story is directed *to* the disciples (v. 1) but *about* the Pharisees (chapter 15).
 - Verse 9 must be read carefully or it contradicts decency as well as the words of verses 10-12. In this case, the *golden rule of interpretation* comes in: “if the plain sense makes

common sense, seek no other sense.” However, the *plain sense* of these words *contradicts* the words that follow. Therefore, verse 9 must be taken as either sarcasm or as a question, either of which is allowed by the grammar.

- The Lord’s answer to the disciples comes in verses 10-13, and show that a *spiritual* steward is in charge of **true riches**.
- The clear implication is that the Lord was telling the disciples that they were not to be like the Pharisees, who themselves were unjust stewards.

Luke 16:14-17:4 | The Pharisees Derided

- Verse 16: 14 - This verse corresponds to Luke 15:2, in which the Pharisees **murmured**.
- Verses 16:15-18 -
 - In these verses Jesus introduces another story (that of the **rich man** and **Lazarus**). The story is pointed to the Pharisees directly (thus, **unto them**, v. 15).
 - Jesus says that the Pharisees **justify** themselves **before men; but God** knows their **hearts**.
 - Up until John the Baptist, **the law and the prophets** gave foreshadowed the **kingdom of God**, but **since that time the kingdom of God is preached** (note: not arrived, but proclaimed), and the law itself remained (v. 17).
 - Verse 18 shows one example of the charge that the Pharisees **esteemed among men** that which is **abomination in the sight of God** (v. 15), for the Pharisees had a total disregard for the divorce laws of the Torah and held rather to divorce for almost any infraction.
- Verses 16:19-31 –
 - The story (not parable) of the Rich Man and Lazarus is given not so much for the details of the afterlife as for the application that the **five brethren** (i.e.: the Pharisees) would repent **if one went unto them from the dead**.
 - Jesus made clear that they would not be persuaded **though one rose from the dead** (and later one named Lazarus would do just that, not to mention Jesus Himself.)
- Verses 17:1-4 –
 - These verses give the second address to the disciples (the first being 16:1-13).
 - The warning concerned stumbling blocks, and a woe unto him through whom they come.
 - It was, in context, the Pharisees which were the stumbling blocks.

Bringing It All Together

- Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem for His death – Luke 9:51, 13:22, 17:11, followed by 19 and following, from Jericho to Jerusalem.
- These parables were possibly (even likely) given in the vicinity of Mount Ephraim, which was the place of both the Old Testament activity and Northern Kingdom religious shenanigans.
- Implications of each story:
 - The lost sheep – Ezekiel 34:5-11
 - The lost coin – Judges 17 – A woman loses silver, then finds it, then her son hires a Levite and pays him. Note Judges 17:10. Points: The Pharisees are “for hire.”
 - The lost son – Two sons have an inheritance (thus not the church) – Hosea 11:12, one faithful, one unfaithful. Hosea 11-14 give the story of both sons.
 - The unjust steward – an echo of Joshua 24:15
 - The rich man – the Pharisees are a hopeless case.