

This week we have four short sayings of Jesus. I think Luke included them because he thought each is related to the parables surrounding them. Last week we looked at the story of the financial manager who was fired. Jesus was making a point that we should be eager to use our opportunities to share the Good News even if it takes finances to do so. He ended by reminding us that we can't serve both God and money (Luke 16:13ⁱ). That is the lead-in to today's verses.

¹⁴ *The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.* Luke 16:14 Here we have the one place in Scripture that reveals the Pharisees were lovers of money. We know from archeology that the priests were wealthy, but here we have a firsthand account that the Pharisees were too. That is why they could afford all the tithes and time necessary to try to keep all the laws of Moses.

Jesus had implied that their love of money meant they were not serving God. The previous parable was about not letting money usurp God's place in our lives. It should have brought conviction to the hearts of the Pharisees, for they knew they loved money. When we are convicted of sin, we either repent of that sin and turn from it, or we make excuses to justify our sin. When we don't like the message, we often choose to malign the messenger. And so, they ridiculed Jesus to justify their love of money.

If we don't like the political view of someone, do we slander them as a person? How often we witness this in the news today! But do we do the same? If people point out a fault in our lives, do we look for a fault in theirs? If a neighbor is demanding that we follow HOA rules to the letter, do we inspect his or her property for violations? It's an inbred habit that started at the fall of man. Eve says, "It was the serpent's fault! He deceived me." Adam says, "It was Eve's fault, she gave it to me; and really it was your fault God because you gave her to me" (Genesis 3:12,13ⁱⁱ). All these justifications end up pointing back to God as if He were somehow responsible for our choices to rebel against Him and His goodness. Man is skilled at justifying sinful actions.

I like the way the KJV states Job 9:20. *"If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: If I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse."* When someone is quick to justify their actions, it often means they are trying to cover up something. Self-justification can either come from pride that believes we always make the right choice no matter what others say, or it can come from our uneasiness that someone has uncovered our secret sins. There are times when we just want others to know the facts, but a person with a good reputation rarely needs to resort to that.

When we return the attack on a false accuser, we sink to their level. The honest caring person who observes the attack will look at the details and character of the persons involved. Your friends don't need to know the facts, and your enemies don't care about the facts. There is usually no need to explain what is really going on unless asked by someone who really wanted or needed to know.

An untrue accusation on your character, especially by those you love, can be a very painful experience. David often addressed that in the psalms (Psalm 35:19,20ⁱⁱⁱ). But over time we should realize that everyone will forget what was said, or they didn't care about it in the first place. So why should we bother with it unless it would help someone else. Besides, if not for Jesus, we'd all be worse than what they said about us!

We have to remember that the persons who oppose us are made in the image of God. **It is more important for us to let the love of God flow through us to them than it is to justify ourselves or expose their sin.** Remember that Jesus taught us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44^{iv})! That can only be done when we are walking in the Spirit and letting God have His way in our hearts (Ezekiel 36:27^v). And if an accusation is true, we should welcome the correction (Proverbs 27:6^{vi}).

Jesus' response was an attempt to help them see the truth. ^{15a} *And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.* Luke 16:15a We can justify almost any action (Exodus 32:24^{vii}). The fallen church leaders of the last few decades all had justifications in their mind for either sexual misconduct or theft of church funds. But God is never convinced. The more we put ourselves out in public as a representative of being faithful to God, the more is required of us.

God sees right through our excuses. They don't convince Him of anything. At the same time, this expression is encouraging to us when we stumble or make mistakes when our heart's intent was to be obedient to God. Sometimes we do what we believed God was leading us to do, but find we were mistaken. Thankfully God sees the heart.

^{15b} *For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.* Luke 16:15b What a pithy truth! Memorize that one. Mankind exalts wealth, ego, fame, recognition, pleasure seeking, and many other things that are an abomination in the eyes of God. Many of the things are not bad or evil unless we exalt them to be the priority of our lives. Jesus was telling the Pharisees and all who have ears to hear that their love of money had taken God's place in their hearts. That is idolatry.

Imagine being told that what you live for is an abomination to God. Well, if we live for the things man exalts, He just did say that to us, for the words of Jesus are timeless! **Jesus cuts through all the rhetorical justifications and finger pointing and tells us, "God knows your heart!"** We can make elaborate explanations for our sins, and we might fool everyone, even ourselves, but God knows the heart behind our actions (Proverbs 21:2^{viii}). It is often the desire for people to think well of us. We want to be exalted in others' eyes as someone special, valued, and respected. Jesus gave us this saying that slices through the cloud of worldly thinking and makes reality crystal clear. *"What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God!"* My words of explanation to justify my sins are an attempt for people to think well of me. I want to be exalted in their eyes. Christians should only want people to exalt Jesus (Psalm 34:3^{ix}).

It's natural to want people to think well of us, and there are circumstances that make it difficult not to sin. But instead of justifying ourselves, we should examine our hearts. See what it is that allowed us to make the wrong choice. Confess it and repent. Set our hearts, by the grace of God, to never go that way again. It is a paradigm shift in the reason behind our behavior. Not to us but to God be the glory (Psalm 115:1^x).

Now we shift to an important point made in only one other Gospel (Matthew 11:12,13^{xi}). ¹⁶ *"The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.* Luke 16:16 This is a watershed verse. Jesus explained this momentous turning point in the history of mankind. From Adam to John the Baptist, the Law and the prophets were the guide for mankind. From the law that forbade eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the prophecies of Enoch and on through the laws delivered to Moses and the words of the prophets ending with those of John the Baptist, man was shown how broken we are

(Romans 7:7^{xii}). The message continued through the story of Israel, the impossibility of keeping God's laws, and the prophets' condemnation of mankind's sinful behavior.

However, all of it also pointed to the coming of the Messiah (Galatians 3:24,25^{xiii}). There are what Scripture calls types and shadows of the coming Messiah as well as hundreds of prophecies about His coming (Romans 5:14^{xiv}; Hebrews 10:1^{xv}). An example of a foreshadow would be Isaac who carried the wood for his sacrifice up Mount Moriah as Abraham obeyed God and was ready to sacrifice him there trusting that God would raise Isaac from death (Hebrews 11:17-19^{xvi}). Jesus carried the wood of the cross up the same mountain and was sacrificed according to the will of God and did rise from death according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:4^{xvii}). There are dozens of these foreshadows.

An example of a type is Joshua who led God's people across the Jordan into the land God promised. Jesus, whose name is the same as Joshua (Yehoshua or Yeshua), leads us across the Jordan, symbolic of death, and into the promised land of heaven. Jesus interpreted the Law, and all the prophets, and the Psalms (shorthand for the writings), in other words the entire Old Testament, to all be speaking of Him (Luke 24:47^{xviii}).

But now the universal kingdom of God is proclaimed. That is the message that the Savior has come, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29^{xix}). He was the only man who could ever keep the Law (Hebrews 4:15^{xx}). He did it, and He is willing to take our sins and give us His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xxi}). He fulfilled the Law and the words of the prophets concerning His first coming.

This verse tells us that John the Baptist was the last person to hold the office of prophet. There is prophecy today, but the office of prophet, which was to speak the words of God that should be recorded as Scripture or be stoned if the prophecy did not come to pass (Deuteronomy 18:20-22^{xxii}), ended with John. Now there is the gift of prophecy and others are to judge if the prophecy is according to the Spirit and the written Word of God (1 Corinthians 14:29^{xxiii}). Jesus' coming was the hinge of history. I know some would like to separate history into periods they call dispensations, but there is only before Christ and after Christ. There are only those who looked ahead to Him coming and we who look back to what He accomplished on our behalf. Salvation has always been by faith.

Now, we hear the words of the New Covenant and by His life in us we deny our carnal desires and step into Christ by grace through faith. ESV gives an alternate translation to "everyone forces his way into it" - "Everyone is forcefully urged into it." That speaks of our declaration of eternal life being found in Jesus alone and the alternative is to face the wrath of God for our sins. The Spirit of God forcefully urges people to make the right choice for the sake of their eternal destiny. Sometimes we are His instruments to urge people into the kingdom.

¹⁷ But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void. Luke 16:17 After saying the Law and Prophets were until John, people may have assumed they could throw it out. It is not as if the New Covenant we have in Christ does away with the Law and the prophets. In this case, the Law (*nomos*) refers to all of Scripture, which is what we refer to as the Old Testament. ESV uses the words "to become void." The Greek is literally "to fall." In other words, every inspired Word of God in both our Old and New Testament will be fulfilled, has eternal meaning, and cannot fall away. If Christ fulfills it all, it will forever testify of God's faithfulness. We still need those declarations that man is fallen and that it was always God's plan to send

us a Savior (Revelation 13:8^{xxiv}). He loved us from the beginning. From Adam on, faith in God and what He would do for us was the way of Salvation. Salvation is now and has always been a recognition that we are sinners and trusting God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. It has always been repentance and reliance on God to make a way (Psalm 51:17^{xxv}; 32:1^{xxvi}; Romans 4:3^{xxvii}). That is why Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life!” John 14:6^{xxviii}

Jesus fulfilled many of the promises, but there are still many to come. Just as the prophecies and types and shadows pointed to His first coming, they also point to what He will do in the Second Coming. The first were fulfilled in so many amazing details, and we can be sure the Second Coming will fulfill the rest. He will transform our lowly bodies and make them like His glorious body (Philippians 3:21^{xxix}). He will receive us into our heavenly homes. We will be with Him forever, and He will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 7:17^{xxx}). Sorrow and sighing will flee away (Isaiah 35:10^{xxxi}). We will enter the joy of the Lord.

Now the topic changes again, and this time with a connection to the first topic.
¹⁸ *“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.* Luke 16:18 It almost seems out of place in this chapter that deals so much with the love of money. The parable that follows is that of the rich man and Lazarus. The connection is idolatry and selfishness. Just as money can be thought of as a way of bringing personal satisfaction, so divorce can be rooted in the same passion. Idolatry says this thing will bring me satisfaction, and the foremost thing is money. But perhaps number two on a list of idols would be a perfect spouse.

In Jesus’ time there was a debate going on about the grounds for divorce. Some were so lenient that even a burnt breakfast was sufficient reason. Rabbi Akiba (2nd century) permitted divorce if a man found a woman prettier than his wife (Gittin 9:10). The Law allowed it, but Jesus said it did so because men’s hearts are hard (Deuteronomy 24:1ff; Mark 10:5^{xxxii}). Jesus dealt with the issue of divorce in a similar manner to what He did with the issue of the love of money. He called it adultery. The mouths of every Pharisee and half the crowd must have dropped open with a gasp. In another passage, the disciples said that if that was the case then no one should get married (Matthew 19:10^{xxxiii}). In other words, divorce was as prevalent then as it is now, and they thought Jesus’ judgment was too demanding.

In other passages, Jesus made exceptions in the case of an unfaithful spouse (Matthew 5:31,32^{xxxiv}; 19:7-9^{xxxv}) and some interpret Malachi’s expression of a man clothing himself in violence as another legitimate reason for divorce (Malachi 2:16^{xxxvi}). Paul wrote that desertion by an unbelieving spouse is an acceptable reason (1 Corinthians 7:15^{xxxvii}). Like all sins, if you are in Christ, the penalty for the sin of adultery is paid by Jesus’ blood. But neither should we take it lightly and justify ourselves as we were warned in the previous verses.

This was also a perfect illustration of how the law has its fulfillment in Christ. We are the bride of Christ. The New Covenant is our marriage vow. His blood shed for us was the bride-price. To receive Him as Savior is to commit our lives to love Him alone, above all else, and to be faithful to Him. But if we put another love in our life above Him, we are unfaithful to our vows and make some dream of an ideal spouse our idol. We divorce ourselves from Him. We have replaced Him with an idol. So, the Old Covenant

command that you should not commit adultery, finds a New Covenant application in our marriage with Jesus as the bridegroom. Not one dot of the Law shall fall to the ground.

Before we start purging from our midst those who have remarried, remember that Jesus also said if we look at a woman to lust after her we have committed adultery (Matthew 5:28^{xxxviii}). We come back to the fact that the Law condemns us all, but the Law also points to our Savior who bore all our sins on Calvary (Isaiah 53:5,6^{xxxix}). The verdict for all of us is guilty, but the grace of God sent Jesus to bear our sins and pay the penalty we deserve.

Men, I want to address this issue especially to us. It has caused so many broken homes and so much pain. We have a world-wide problem with pornography. It is idolatry of the human form. We recently finished our class on the Song of Songs. In it I repeated several times a suggestion I thought incredibly important for us. Your wife should be your definition of beauty. The world promises some airbrushed perfection that we imagine will treat us like a king. It's a lie! It is simply the idolatry of an idea that doesn't exist. It is self-seeking a pleasure that is unreal. The Bible says to enjoy the wife of your youth (Proverbs 5:18^{xl}). We should grow old together, learning to love each other and focus on what we value. The things that bother us about our spouses are far outweighed by the good things they bring to the relationship. Learn to love the differences. Forgive and forget. Learn to love unselfishly like God loves us (John 15:12^{xli}).

Paul tells us exactly what love is, the very love we should have for our spouse. ⁴ *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 This is the kind of love we have found in Jesus. Is that how you behave toward your spouse? If not, the problem is with you. Let God fix you first and see how things improve.

We've covered four big topics in a short thirty minutes. Don't justify your sins! Confess them and let God change you. The office of prophet ended with John the Baptist. Now the Spirit of God urges everyone into the kingdom of God. God's Word is forever, as it is fulfilled in Jesus. And finally, divorce and remarriage is adultery. Keep God first in your life and learn from Jesus how to love your spouse. Don't mar the picture marriage presents of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32^{xlii}). God's grace will help us if we are willing to seek that help.

Questions

- 1 When does wealth become an idol?
- 2 Why should we refrain from counterattacks?
- 3 Why should we resist justifying ourselves?
- 4 Why is what man exalts so different from godly things?
- 5 Who held the last office of prophet?
- 6 What happens since then?
- 7 What is the difference between office of a prophet and the gift of prophecy?
- 8 Why won't one dot of the Law be voided?
- 9 How can divorce be like idolatry?
- 10 What do we need to make marriages last?

ⁱ **Luke 16:13 (ESV)**

¹³ No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

ⁱⁱ **Genesis 3:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

ⁱⁱⁱ **Psalms 35:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Let not those rejoice over me who are wrongfully my foes, and let not those wink the eye who hate me without cause. ²⁰ For they do not speak peace, but against those who are quiet in the land they devise words of deceit.

^{iv} **Matthew 5:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

^v **Ezekiel 36:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

^{vi} **Proverbs 27:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

^{vii} **Exodus 32:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ So I said to them, ‘Let any who have gold take it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”

^{viii} **Proverbs 21:2 (ESV)**

² Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.

^{ix} **Psalms 34:3 (ESV)**

³ Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!

^x **Psalms 115:1 (ESV)**

¹ Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!

^{xi} **Matthew 11:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John,

^{xii} **Romans 7:7 (ESV)**

⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”

^{xiii} **Galatians 3:24-25 (ESV)**

²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

^{xiv} **Romans 5:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

^{xv} **Hebrews 10:1 (ESV)**

¹ For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

^{xvi} **Hebrews 11:17-19 (ESV)**

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son,

¹⁸ of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”

¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

^{xvii} **1 Corinthians 15:4 (ESV)**

⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

^{xviii} **Luke 24:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

^{xix} **John 1:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

^{xx} **Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

^{xxi} **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{xxii} **Deuteronomy 18:20-22 (ESV)**

²⁰ But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’ ²¹ And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?’ — ²² when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

^{xxiii} **1 Corinthians 14:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

^{xxiv} **Revelation 13:8 (ESV)**

⁸ and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

^{xxv} **Psalms 51:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

^{xxvi} **Psalms 32:1 (ESV)**

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

^{xxvii} **Romans 4:3 (ESV)**

³ For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

^{xxviii} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^{xxix} **Philippians 3:21 (ESV)**

²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

^{xxx} **Revelation 7:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

^{xxxi} **Isaiah 35:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

^{xxxii} **Mark 10:5 (ESV)**

⁵ And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.

^{xxxiii} **Matthew 19:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

^{xxxiv} **Matthew 5:31-32 (ESV)**

³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’

³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

^{xxxv} **Matthew 19:7-9 (ESV)**

⁷ They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?”

⁸ He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

⁹ And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

^{xxxvi} **Malachi 2:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”

^{xxxvii} **1 Corinthians 7:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.

xxxviii **Matthew 5:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

xxxix **Isaiah 53:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

xi **Proverbs 5:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth,

xli **John 15:12 (ESV)**

¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

xlii **Ephesians 5:32 (ESV)**

³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.