

Luke 6:39-7:10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 6 verse 39 to chapter 7 verse 10. When you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye, you hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit, for figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of the evil treasure produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like. He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock, and when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.

[1 : 3 8] After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.

When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.

And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

Therefore I did not presume to come to you, but say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, Go, and he goes.

And to another, Come, and he comes. And to my servant, Do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.

[2 : 4 3] And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well. The end of Luke chapter 6 continues Luke's version of the material that we find in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew.

There are a number of seemingly disparate sayings on the surface of things, which don't obviously seem to fit with the opening description of a parable, as it isn't what we would usually associate with that term.

However, that term can be used more broadly, and it can include under it proverbial sayings. Part of our challenge will be to recognise the connection between these statements. In these verses, Jesus seems to be concerned to distinguish between different kinds of people.

In verses 39 to 40, Jesus highlights the importance of discerning the difference between teachers. In Matthew chapter 15 verse 14, Jesus is saying here about the blind leading the blind, is used in reference to the scribes and the Pharisees in the context of the controversy concerning ritual hand-washing.

People who follow blind guides will come to ruin. Also, blindness in this sort of sense is contagious. If you follow someone who is spiritually blind, that blindness will affect you.

[3 : 50] We must pay attention to the character of our teachers. Our teachers' characters will tend to be reproduced in us. You can think about Jesus' teaching about the leaven of the scribes and the Pharisees.

The way sourdough works is similar to the way that teaching works. Something of your teachers is placed within you and is a principle of growth and development for you. And if you are not very careful in the teachers that you listen to, you will take on some very negative characteristics.

From this, Jesus moves to the subject of hypocrisy in teaching. People who seek to correct the faults of others have to be very sure that they have dealt with the problems in themselves. If we do not deal with the log in our own eye, if we do not teach ourselves first, then we have no business teaching others.

We are in a position of hypocrisy where we have not internalized the lessons that we claim to apply to others. Jesus' teaching about teaching here as elsewhere is very shrewd.

He recognizes the way in which teachers will often use their teaching as a way of getting power for themselves, as a way of actually avoiding addressing their own problems. Indeed, teaching others can be a means of deflecting attention from the issues within ourselves.

[5 : 00] We must put our own house in order first. How do you know if someone is a good teacher? You test them by the fruit that they produce. This can be seen in their actions. It can be seen in their more general character.

It can be seen in the sort of people that they create around them. If you want to know if the teaching of a church is good, pay attention to the people who have been there for several years. See what character it has produced in them.

In discerning whether someone is going to be a good leader of people, look at their relationships. Look at their families. Look at the people who have come under the realm of that influence. Are they thriving? Are they growing?

Are they people who are maturing into good character? Or are they people who are stagnating? Or perhaps growing in forms of wickedness? Are they marked by an unhealthy fear towards that teacher or authority figure?

Or are they marked by joy in relationship to them? Are they liberated by that teacher? Or are they held in bondage by that teacher? When you're a student, you are not an expert. But there are ways, even if you are not an expert, to discern whether someone is a good teacher.

[6 : 03] And this is the primary way. Pay attention to their fruit. What do they produce around them? Do they have a track record of good judgment? Do they have a good reputation with their surrounding society?

Are they at peace with people? Or are they constantly causing conflict? Are they producing maturity in the people under their teaching? What about themselves? Are they living righteous lives?

Are their families in good order? Do their actions testify to their righteous character? Where these things are lacking, we should be wary. We may not know exactly where they are going wrong, but we have a good indication that somewhere, they are going wrong.

Out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks. If you can discern the fruit of people, you have an indication of their character. And if you have an indication of their character, you have an indication of the source from which their teaching is coming.

If that source is a good one, they are people to listen to. If that source is a bad one, keep your distance. The importance of testing teachers is found throughout scripture. We can see this in the testing of false prophets in Deuteronomy.

[7 : 07] You see false prophets by the failure of their prophecies, or by the fact that they lead people away from God. Deuteronomy chapter 13 describes this in detail. Also chapter 18 verses 21 to 22.

Test your teachers.

Test their teaching. Test their manner of life. Consider the longer term effects of their teaching in their lives, and in the lives of people around them. In the lives of the people who listen to them.

Having discussed the character of teachers, Jesus moves to the character of disciples. There are many who might give lip service to him. Lord, Lord. Now these are not words that we've really heard to this point in the gospel.

They seemingly express a great recognition of the authority of Christ, and submission to his rule. But yet, many people who have these words in their tongue do not live according to them.

[8 : 12] They declare him to be Lord, but they do not live according to his word. What foundation are we building upon? Our lives are like houses, and if we're not careful, we'll build them on something other than solid rock.

To hear Christ's word, and to obey it, is to have an integrity of life that will hold us firm in times of testing. And it's in the time of testing that the difference between wisdom and folly is revealed.

The foolish person is revealed in that moment of testing. As the storm comes in their life or their world, they collapse. However, the person who has true integrity, the person who hears and obeys, the person who declares Lord, Lord, and submits in their actions, that person will find security and strength.

As we see in the wisdom literature, time and crisis tend to be the things that divide between the wise and the foolish, between the righteous and the unrighteous, between those who have integrity of life and those who do not.

In those moments of crisis, or in the longer-term harvest that we reap over time, our character is seen. There are periods in our lives which will be mostly those of sowing. We'll be making decisions that have long-term effects, but we won't be reaping those effects just yet.

[9 : 24] There will be other periods in our life that are mostly times of reaping, times when we're experiencing the consequences of decisions that we have made long before. And for many people, these are the times of crisis.

Midlife crisis, for instance, comes when people reflect upon their decisions in marriage, their decisions in their friendships, in the vocations that they chose, all these other things, and they experience the consequences, and there's no easy way out of them.

They feel trapped in their folly, and they don't know what to do. And for many people, such times involve falling into new and greater folly. The wise, however, those who follow Christ's words, will be prepared for such periods of crisis.

They will have sown good seed, and they will reap a harvest of righteousness. Chapter 7 begins with a centurion sending messengers to Jesus, asking for the healing of his servant.

It is not unlikely that this centurion would have been the highest-ranking military officer in Jesus' base town of Capernaum. Jesus doesn't actually meet the centurion. Others approach Jesus on the behalf of the centurion, and they approach Jesus on the basis of an honour and patronage culture.

[10 : 32] They are beholden to this man. He's a good man. He has given them a great gift. He's helped to build their synagogue. And so they can speak on his behalf to Jesus, saying he's a worthy man. He merits your attention.

However, a surprise soon arises. Jesus goes with the original delegation of the Jews that have gone on behalf of the centurion. But, while on the way, a new delegation comes.

Some of the friends of the centurion. And they directly contradict the earlier delegation. The earlier delegation said, He is worthy to have you do this for him. But then the second delegation says, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

The centurion here has an insight into the nature of the kingdom. The kingdom does not operate like an honour or patronage culture. He cannot have a claim or entitlement to the blessing of Christ. Rather, he must appeal to Christ as one who has no claim.

Behind this story, we can probably hear echoes of the story of 2 Kings chapter 5. The story of Naaman the Syrian. The story of Naaman the Syrian and his healing by Elisha has already been alluded to in Luke chapter 4, where Jesus talks about the healings and the actions of Elijah and Elisha and their relationships to Gentiles.

[11 : 43] In both cases, we have a Gentile military leader. We have a servant. Again, it's a story of delegations being sent between parties, and the prophet never actually meets the person who is healed.

Recognising these parallels, however, also helps us to recognise the contrast. For Naaman, the lack of contact with the prophet and the smallness of the action that he is called to perform is a cause for protest.

In 2 Kings chapter 5 verses 10 to 13, And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.

But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are Natabana and Farpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?

Could I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you. Will you not do it?

[12 : 45] Has he actually said to you, Wash and be clean? By contrast with Naaman, the centurion believes in the power of Jesus' bare word from a distance, without any spectacle at all, so much that he is prepared to say, Don't come into my house.

The power of Christ's word, and the authority of Christ's word, and his power to heal from a distance, is also similar to Jesus' second sign in John's Gospel. It also serves as a sign of the future of the kingdom, of the bringing in of Gentiles.

This is a Gentile who has faith that puts people in Israel to shame. Jesus has not encountered such faith among his own people. And the way in which this story plays off the story of Naaman the Syrian, and the way it recalls the sermon in Nazareth in chapter 4, helps to alert the hearer or reader of Luke's Gospel, that something is afoot, that the kingdom is going to be blessing Gentiles.

A question to consider. The centurion, in his second delegation to Jesus, discusses the nature of authority, comparing his position as a leader of men, with Jesus' own position. What can we learn about the nature of authority from what the centurion says?