

PDF version of the lesson notes.

I. Pointless 19th Century Mormon Trivia?

- Once again it is time for totally pointless 19th century Mormon trivia. This part of the lesson also explains why I am so fun at parties.
- In 1920, James E. Talmage prepared the first new edition of the Book of Mormon since 1879. Elder Talmage removed some footnotes written by Orson Pratt who was responsible for the 1879 edition (the edition with the versification that we use today). *What "super cool" speculative footnotes were removed?*
- The 1879 edition includes footnotes where Orson Pratt opined about the geographic location of Book of Mormon places. For example, On page 155 (of a copy of the Book of Mormon printed in 1908) footnote *g* reads, "The land Nephi is supposed to have been near Ecuador, South America" and footnote *h* reads, "The land Zarahemla is supposed to have been north of the head waters of the Magdalena, its northern boundary being a few days' journey south of the isthmus."

II. The Parable of Importunate Widow

- Read Luke 18:1–8:

(1) And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; (2) Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: (3) And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. (4) And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; (5) Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. (6) And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. (7) And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? (8) I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

- Note, women usually did not appear before judges in public court. They would have been represented by male family members.[1] Thus, this woman is not only a widow but probably has no male family members such as a living son. She is alone.
- *What do you think of this parable? Are you surprised by the form of the argument: from lesser to greater (Do we use reasoning like that very much anymore?)? Does the parable*

make sense? Specifically, how is the second sentence of verse 8 connected with the rest of the parable?

A. Background and Context

- The first verse clearly identifies the purpose of teaching of the parable: "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." *Why is the purpose or teaching of the parable so clearly identified at the beginning? Can you think of another example where the purpose of the parable is identified at the beginning?*
- *Is it important that Luke (the narrator) is actually the one that states the purpose of the parable? Does that help us understand why there is an explanation of the purpose or teaching of the parable by Jesus in verse 7 and 8?*
- *What is the backdrop or setting for the telling of this parable? Who is Jesus talking to? What question or questions was he responding to?*
- It is worth remembering that the chapter divisions are an artificial construct. It looks like to me that the telling of parable is a continuation of the literary unit that starts in verse 20 of chapter 17. Notice, the question and the audience:

(20) And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: 21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. [KJV]

(20) Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; (21) nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." [NRSV, also notice footnote C in the LDS edition of the Bible for this verse]

Thus, the parable of the Importunate Widow is a continuation of the conversation that started with a question from the Pharisees about the coming of the Kingdom of God. However, I don't think the Pharisees are part of the conversation anymore. Jesus is now delivering a private discourse to the disciples and this parable is part of that discourse. Let's read Luke 17:22–25:

(22) And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. (23) And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them. (24) For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. (25) But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.

- *Given the background and the context of the discourse, how does this parable fit with the rest of the discourse? What specific concerns do you think Jesus is trying to answer? Does this context help you understand the parable better?*
- *Let me try to focus in a little bit. Given the background and the context of the discourse, what does, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?", mean? Does the second sentence of verse 8 make sense and how is it connected to the parable and the larger discourse?*

B. Odds and Ends

- *In verse 1, what does the phrase, "not to faint", mean? Does it suggest that this parable is about more than continual praying? Does the parable itself suggest that it is not just about praying a lot or consistently?*
- *The judge is described as not fearing God and as having no regard to man? What does it mean to have "no regard to man?" Does the text give us some clues about what it means? How might the lack of fearing God and lack of regard for people be linked?*
- *Modern translations will often translate the phrase as "no respect for anyone." The underlying Greek Word is *entreprou* and it means to "make ashamed." "In its passive form here it means that this judge is not a man who can be made to feel ashamed. That is, he is shameless, he has no sensitivity to how his actions are perceived in the community or what the import of them might be." [2] *Why is God compared to a person like this? Why such an extreme contrast? Is it related to the concept the parables often have hyperbolic or exaggerated elements?**
- *Scholars tend to view the King James translation of the verse 7 as poor. Thus, the NRSV (a modern translation) reads as follows:*

(7) And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?

How does that affect your understanding of the verse and the purpose of the parable?

C. Luke 11: Friends, Family and Prayer

- *When I read this parable I am reminded of Luke 11. In verse 1 of chapter 11, the disciples request the following: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." The Savior responds first by reciting the Lord's prayer and after reciting the Lord's prayer he tells two parables to the disciples about prayer.*
- *Read Luke 11:5–13:*

(5) And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; (6)

For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? (7) And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. (8) I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. (9) And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. (10) For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. 11 If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? (12) Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? (13) If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

- These parables are worth discussing in their own right, but I want to keep the focus on the parable of Importunate Widow.
- *How are these parables similar to the parable of Importunate Widow? How are the parables different? Are these differences important? Do you think the differences are due to the different setting and context of the parable of the Importunate Widow?*

III. Healing a Blind Man in Jericho

- Read Luke 18:35–43:

(35) And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: (36) And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. (37) And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. 38 And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. (39) And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. (40) And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, (41) Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. (42) And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. (43) And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

- Jesus, in the four verses (31–34) preceding this story privately spoke to the disciples:

(31) Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. (32) For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on:

(33) And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. (34) And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

- *Do you think that these two stories are linked? What motifs apply to both? How do these links affect your understanding of the purpose of the story?*
- *Are the disciples actions similar in both stories in some sense?*
- *Chapter 18 also contains the story of the rich man that would not give up all his wealth. Do you think that is an important backdrop to this story?*
- *Are you surprised that the blind man glorified and praised God after being healed and not Jesus? Does this tell us something about the blind man and Jesus?*

IV. Zacchaeus

- Read Luke 19:1–10:

(1) And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. (2) And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. (3) And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. (4) And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. (5) And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. (6) And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. (7) And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. (8) And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. (9) And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. (10) For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

- Note, the name, Zacchaeus, means *clean*.^[3] Zacchaeus, is a chief tax collector and wealthy.
- *How is this story linked with the themes and motifs of chapter 18? How is it related to the story of rich man that would not give up all his wealth?*
- *Could this story be viewed as explanation of the following (Luke 18:25–27)?*

(25) For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (26) And they that heard it said,

Who then can be saved? (27) And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

- *How is this story related to the healing of the blind man?*
- *How does it repeat or continue themes that we see throughout the gospel of Luke?*
- *It certainly continues the motif of table fellowship and the debate over separating clean from unclean. Notice, the murmuring? Did the disciple murmur too? Is this important?*
- *Usually, Jesus responds to the charges when improper table fellowship is brought up. Here, Zaccheus responds. Is that an important detail?*
- *There does seem to be controversy over the translation of the tense of verbs used by Zacchaeus. Some scholars believe that Zacchaeus is really making a declaration of intent and not necessarily describing his current behavior.[4] What possibility do you think is the mostly likely given the other details of the story and how tax-collectors are talked about in the gospel of Luke?*
- *Why do you think Jesus links salvation coming to Zaccheus' house with being a son of Abraham? Is this particularly important given the backdrop of table fellowship and answering the charges of eating with the unclean?*

Endnotes

1. Malina, Bruce J., and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, 2003, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Fortress Press, 298.
2. Malina, Bruce J., and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, 2003, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Fortress Press, 298.
3. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 711.
4. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 947.