

Book	Psalms – Study 19
Topic	The Two Debtors
Reference	Matt 13:1-9; 18-23
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Speaker	Dr. Peter Ng

Luke 7:36-40 (ESV) One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. 37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." 41 "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." 44 Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." 48 And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49 Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" 50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

So here we have a situation of a dinner where Jesus is invited by a pharisee, Simon. Pharisees are rich people who are very spiritual as it were, following the law and they are the upper class of society. They were only about 7000 of them in the whole Israel at that time. A lot of them occupied political positions. If we look in the book of John, we have Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin of 70 people, like a parliament. The pharisees always hated Jesus anyway. They are always against Jesus but this pharisee, Simon, at least open-minded enough to invite Jesus to his house which is very-very unusual, although he didn't treat him very nicely. So the whole parable is about the contrast between Simon and the woman. She is a sinner from the city, which is basically euphemism for prostitute. He is the pharisee. So we are talking about one end of society to the other end of society, which is really far away. These are the contrasts.

Pharisee	Prostitute
Rich and educated.	Poor and uneducated that's why she has to sell her body.
He is moral.	She is immoral.
He is detached and intellectual, always asking Jesus questions.	This woman is completely opposite. She just comes in and pour herself to Jesus.
He comes with head knowledge and only address Jesus in his intellect.	She comes with her whole being. She comes with her tears. She wipes with her tears Jesus's dirty feet.
Attitude of questioning Jesus. He invited Jesus at home to compare notes, compare theory, doctrine of predestination versus free will. He wants to discuss all sorts of theological issues.	She just came and throwing self at Jesus's feet.
He omitted the usual welcome, no water. So Jesus comes with smelly feet.	Washed feet with tears, spent a fortune on the perfume.
He treated Jesus like any other guest.	She gave Jesus special treatment.
He had no commitment to Jesus.	This woman displayed vulnerability and commitment.
Parable debt 50 denarii.	Parable debt 500 denarii.

The spiritual lessons are, which one are you. Both of them listened to Jesus, one is untransformed and has no faith, another is transformed. One of them, Simon, went home lost. She went home saved. He was condemned. She was praised. So the issue here for this lady is the issue of commitment and vulnerability. Putting your weight on something to the point of being vulnerable. Commitment often involves vulnerability. No vulnerability means no commitment. Some of us are committed to Christ only when it suits us. When you want to put all the eggs in one basket, cannot, because I want to put one leg in the world and one leg in Christ. While it suits me, I will follow Jesus. When the choice is between Jesus and the world, I will hedge my bets. This parable tells us, you can't do that. This parable tells you, commitment and vulnerability comes together. If you are not vulnerable, you are not committed. All commitment comes with some vulnerability. You can't come in a situation where you know everything, you have all the faith.

So when you are talking about committing to Jesus Christ, it is not something that you can commit, you absolutely do everything 100% then you commit. There is always some element of doubt, because it is false faith and Rollo May says,

The relationship between commitment and doubt is by no means an antagonistic one. Commitment is healthiest when it is not without doubt but in spite of doubt.

Helen Keller was a blind lady. She was instrumental in developing the brail language. She wrote,

"Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing. "

So the pharisee has an intellectual relationship with God. He says his prayers, believes intellectually. She has a personal relationship with God. She actually prays. She worships out of her heart, experiences His love, lays down everything at His feet, and becomes vulnerable at His feet. For the pharisee, Jesus is one of the many guests. Jesus to her is the only guest. Jesus is the only person that is totally valuable to her. The pharisee probably uses God to get things. For her Jesus is everything. The pharisee is spiritually bankrupt as does the woman. He doesn't understand depth of his sin nor the beauty of grace. She understood the depth of her sin. He is spiritually independent. She is spiritually dependent. So the difference is religious versus faith.

Religion	Faith
Sin is only failure- rule keeping only.	She sees sin as rebellion against the love of God. That's why when she comes to Jesus Christ, she is totally-totally sad.
He just thinks is there were some mistakes.	She feels the cost of forgiveness.
Unrepentant Critical spirit -No joy.	Joy, more repentant more joy.

So the challenge for us in this parable, how do we view our selves. How do we apply this? It doesn't necessary apply to non-Christians. Some of us can become like Simon, even though you are a Christian. After you are a Christian for many years, attend Gamma for 15 years and you feel, wow! your head knowledge is very good and so therefore the number of sins that you have very small. When you think your sins are very small then your gratitude becomes very small. Whether you owe 50 denarii or 500 denarii, if you are bankrupt you are still bankrupt as it were. So the challenge, real religion, real faith involves the picture of this woman; vulnerable, totally committed, Jesus is the most important person in the world in her life. That's the story of the parables.

THE PARABLE OF THE BEGGAR

So we have got two beggars. One has a name, one got no name. Usually rich man got names and poor man no name. Here it is totally different. The rich man got no name, but the poor man got a name, Lazarus, which means 'God is my help'.

Why is the name important?

All our names have some meaning. Names are given usually to represent who you are. So why does Jesus doesn't give the name of the rich fellow but gives the name to the poor fellow. At the end of your life, your entire life is summed up in tombstone. The rich man is only known as the rich man, his money defines his life. He is only known because of his richness and it tells you God's estimation. A name defines a person.

The parable is telling us, what defines your life. What are we going to put on your tombstone? Hopefully, none of you will have your tombstone saying, rich man, because it will be a disaster, because that's the only thing that defines you. Now the rich man lives an ungodly life, why, because it defined by only one thing, the quest for riches. That's all that defines him, everyday you wake up, the only thing you are waiting for is another payday. The poor man enjoys the pleasure of life but is not driven by it. They enjoy life, they look at other aspects of life but they are not driven by it at all. So the riches drive the rich to do unethical things. Poverty drives the poor man towards God. So actually there is some benefit in being poor. You are in a situation where you don't depend on your riches.

Then it talks about hell. Only in Gospels Jesus and NT writers speak about hell. Teaching of Jesus concerning Gehenna, darkness, and damnation were in the context of His proclamation and exposition of the kingdom of God, salvation, and eternal life;

Luke 16:22-24 (ESV) The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 And he called out, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'

The rich man is not having a good time. This is quite subtle already. He is really hot. He is actually in torment. Then there is a separation between them. Which means there is an exclusion from the presence of God with consciousness and torment. Jesus in this parable is telling you, when life ends and if you are on the wrong side of the fence, you will be excluded from presence of God with consciousness and torment.

Luke 16:25 (ESV) But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

So hell is a place for justice. People receive is not only what they deserve but that they have in effect already chosen – namely, to be forever without God and therefore without any of the good that He gives. The rich man has chosen his riches,

the poor man chose God. So, when you die you get what you choose. So, the poor man chooses God, when he dies, he gets God. The rich man chooses to run away from God and when he dies he runs away from God. The trouble is that when you run away from God, the further it is the less water you have.

2 Thessalonians 1: 9 They will suffer the punishment of **eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord** and from the glory of his might,

So hell is a place where there is unending destruction, away from the presence of God which is not with him anymore because of the choice that you chose. C.S. Lewis writes,

"What are you asking God to do?" . . . To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what he does...In the end, there are only two kinds of people—those who say to God "thy will be done" and those to whom God says in the end "thy will be done."

Luke 16:26 (ESV) And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

So there is consciousness, there is eternal immortality but there is a separation. There is no exit from hell.

Luke 16:29-31 (ESV) But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Which is exactly true. So God's word provides more than sufficient warning for humanity. When we talk about this parable, it introduces us to a very terrible concept called hell. Bertrand Russell writes, why I am not a Christian. He writes, *Hell is the one profound defect in Christ's character that he sends people to hell.*

People try to get around this idea, how can a loving God send people to be tormented for ever and ever and ever and the Catholics come up with this idea of purgatory. So after you die, there still may be a chance, you go to a place in between heaven and in between hell and there you will sit and roast for a bit until you are nice and brown and then after sometime you can go to heaven and it would help if your relatives, if other saints were to pray for you and the more they pray for you the less brown you are, the more likely you get out very quickly, but that's the idea of purgatory because they can't accept this idea that a loving God would actually send people to suffer forever. Then there is this idea of conditional immortality or annihilationism where the chief proponents are British, John Wenham who wrote commentary on Genesis and famous John Staudt. They say that God is so loving and so kind, it is inconceivable that he would punish people for ever and ever and

ever. So therefore he says, God will punish them and after a while they will disappear. They will be totally annihilated.

Then the last one that comes out recently is Rob Bell. He wrote a book called 'Love Wins'. That God is such a loving God that in the end although people will be in hell, He will give them another chance to come to heaven. Rob Bell is very famous now because of this statement. People are praising him.

*"Bell is at the forefront of a rethinking of Christianity in America."
The love and sovereignty of God cannot be thwarted*

So there are three ideas, purgatory, annihilationism and universalism. Purgatory, the Catholics don't have much proof for purgatory, because the only proof they have is 1-Peter where Jesus when he died, he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison. This verse is very vague, and Catholics interpret it as purgatory.

Matthew 12:32 (ESV) And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Which then implies that there may be forgiveness in the age of come. But it is a little bit tenuous because this is just a hyperbole, an expression. Aside from this, there is a chapter from Maccabees which is not recognized in the Bible where people make atonement for the dead that they might be freed from sin

Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin" (2 Macc. 12:43-45)

So that one doesn't have much biblical evidence at all. What is interesting is annihilationism, which is the love of God is so great that he wouldn't want people to suffer forever, why would they be tormented. The problem with that is that Justice will be compromised by annihilation as the wrath of God is actually a major attribute of God. You can't just say that God is only loving, God is also a just God and wrath is also part of his attribute. Hell magnifies for us the love of God, because you can't know the love of something unless you know they are the extreme end, which is actually the wrath of God. The other argument is the Grand vision of Christ control,

Ephesians 1:10 (ESV) as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

The vision of a segment of the universe in which there are people who are being punished does not detract from God's glory it reinforces His Holy nature and justice. Here we look at Isaiah, he shows a picture of the future

Isaiah 66:23-24 (ESV) From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the Lord. 24 "And they shall go out **and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me.** For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

This means at the end of time the saved can actually look across and see that people suffering and it actually magnifies the fact that they are actually in heaven because on the other side it is actually very-very bad. So there is a need for contrast. The other issue is the word 'aionios'. Now if we look at this word,

Matthew 25:45-46 (ESV) Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into **eternal punishment**, but the righteous into **eternal life**."

The word aionios does not necessarily mean for ever and ever. It can also be translated as characteristic of the age to come. So it doesn't mean that you get punish forever. That's their argument, which is not necessarily accepted by most people.

Man is not intrinsically immortal

1 Timothy 6:15-16 (ESV) the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 **who alone has immortality**, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen.

Only God has immortality. So if you are a Christian and you are in Christ, you become immortal and if you are not in Christ you may not necessarily be immortal. Actually the strongest verse is Matthew 10:28

Matthew 10:28 (ESV) And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can **destroy both soul and body in hell.**

Which means God can destroy you in hell, which means there could be annihilation. Possible, there is room for discussion there. So most theologians all over the world, conservative ones, don't believe in annihilation. I don't think it is a heresy. It is an area that is left open because we don't know what happens when you die other than the fact that you get judged, but it is an open question.

Now the case against annihilationism. If you look at all the Bible verses

Matthew 8:10-12 (ESV) Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. 11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the sons of the kingdom will be

thrown into the **outer darkness**. In that place there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**."

Matthew 22:13-14 (ESV) Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

Hell is described as a place of suffering that goes on and on and we already mentioned

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 (ESV) when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of **eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord** and from the glory of his might,

So this eternal destruction and being away from God cannot mean annihilation, because they are away from the presence of God and they are continuing being destroyed as it were.

Revelation 20:13-15 (ESV) And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Here it implies, you are thrown in there and the torment goes on forever and ever and ever, because it doesn't make sense for God to raise you from the dead and then destroy you completely straightaway, why bother for that.

Hell magnifies for us the love of God and give you perspective. Unless you understand the doctrine of hell you will not understand how God loves you. Hell is a place of destruction, disintegration, things are broken down.

We bear the image of God, which makes from different from animals. We love, we sacrifice, there is nobility, there are questions of justice, there is loyalty. There are so many things that make us different from animals. People going to hell are basically are the people losing that image of God. We are created to reflect, to love, to respond to God. So when you are on the way to hell, all your evidence on the fact that you are made in the image of God slowly gets eroded away. You are created to reflect God, to worship God, to respond to God, to be in a relationship with God. When we are not functioning as we should be, we are going in the wrong direction.

Human beings are made in the image of God, but you refuse to reflect God, you refuse to relate to him, then you are not functioning as a human being. A human

being exists in the image of God. When you are not functioning in the image of God that means you are not functioning as a human being should, a true human being who is truly liberated to be who he should be that noble being who resembles God, who is like God, who relates to God, who worships God, that worship is his singular obsession. That's a grand vision of who we are and here in our lifetime we are heading to hell when we become like the rich man. All that you can see of the rich man is his riches. Nobility and love for God were not there anymore. So in hell you are going to cease to function in the image of God.

Universalism is based on these verses

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (ESV) This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Romans 5:18 (ESV) Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

John 12:32-33 (ESV) And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Obviously, it is the same thing that said When God so loved the world that he sent his son to die for the world. But that all doesn't mean all man without exception. It just means the all beings, all man without distinction. That means there is no distinction, you are qualified by faith. So basically just grabbing these verses and focusing on them. There is no scripture that cites that you could be saved after a bit of roasting after death. There is no scripture at all. In fact, if you look

John 3:16-18 (ESV) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already

Hebrews 9:27-28 (ESV) And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, 28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Universalism says that Christ bear the sins of all, no Christ bears the sin of many. So the other philosophical objection, if you are going to be saved after you die then what happen to free will.

- What about the consequences of free will?
- What about evangelism. That means if you are going to be saved after you die, what for I spent money to send you to missions. What for I share the

gospel? What for people die to share the gospel? It makes it absolutely pointless.

- Universalism makes the cross unnecessary and compromises God justice. Why Jesus take all the trouble to die. After all, you die, wait for few years and then you also go to heaven. It makes a total travesty of the cross.
- Hell will not reform hearts that in this life grace had not. The key to the human heart is love. Love is the only thing that touches a human heart and here you actually have in life where God has showed you love and God's son died on the cross for you and you won't turn to him.

Hell is a place where people are eternally separated. They don't function as human beings and they are going to be tormented as punishment for ever. Should we preach about hell?

Some people write, *Religion has hijacked the gospel, made 'escaping hell' its focus and used the threat of eternal damnation to scar people into the kingdom.*

Dr James Kennedy writes,

"John, if God would dip all pastors in Hell for a fraction of a second and then yank them up by their shirt tails—as they're standing there smoldering and their clothes and skin are full of black soot, and their shoes have half melted off, I think their commitment to the Great Commission would substantially increase."

So here is hell as an incentive to preach the gospel. Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon called, 'sinners in the hands of an angry God'. He preached this to a town in New England, which at that time was going through great revival all over New England. People were coming to know God by 1000s except this particular church. They were all hardhearted, nobody become a Christian there. Jonathan Edwards was not supposed to preach and on that day he replaced somebody. When he preached that sermon, people started screaming because they felt the souls of their feet burning as if they were in hell. Everybody there all became Christian. Then you try this same sermon in other places, it doesn't quite work. In fact, I actually read this sermon and I fell asleep.

Now if you look at the New Testament, how did they share the gospel. Here is the first sermon ever shared, whole bit of theology which Peter talked about

Acts 2:37-38 (ESV) Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Another one,

Acts 4:11-12 (ESV) This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

All along the New Testament in Acts, you don't see apostles telling people you are going to hell. The New Testament doesn't practice that.

The central thrust of the message is the kingdom of God...It is an ultimatum from God for man to repent and submit to the King (Acts 17:30)

Mark 1:15 "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Even when you look at Paul, he is balanced

Romans 2:4-5 (ESV) Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing **that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?** 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Romans 6:23 (ESV) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The love of God leads you to repentance. When someone hear the gospel, he is so touched by the love of God that he becomes a Christian. You cannot be so touched by hell that you become a Christian. He says that the kindness of God is meant to lead you to repent, not the threat.

So we are always emphasizing the free gift of God, which is eternal life. We don't ignore the fact that there is hell but that doesn't become the first place what we actually share. How you share with them actually doesn't matter. Most of us are driven by something to Christ. So it doesn't matter what drives you to Christ, as long as when you come to Christ it is what we make of Christ, which means if you come to Christ and you stay because you fear hell or you stay because God is going to give you all the goodie goodies then I don't think you are a Christian. If you stay because you love him, his glory then that is Christianity.

So I don't care about what drives you to Christ, but as long as we go to Christ, the love of Christ, the glory of Christ, the beauty of Christ keeps you there, but you are there just because you fear him and just because you want to get blessing that's inappropriate,

Luke 12:4-7 (ESV) I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. 5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

Which means on one hand you should fear God, why, because fear God rather than man because of hell but

6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. 7 Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

On one hand you fear God rather than man, on the other hand when you come to God you don't fear him, because you are more valuable than the sparrows. It works both ways. So if you come to Christ

1 Cor 16:22 If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.

Matthew 10:37 (ESV) Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

So it doesn't matter what drives you to Lord, as long when you come to God you find him lovely and find him beautiful and you stay there and in fact Paul writes,

Philippians 3:8 (ESV) Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

Paul is actually driven to God through a whacking. He got no choice left and then he went to Christ. But when you come to Christ, how you value Him really matters.