
October 29 : Scriptures Luke 12-14

SUMMARY

In the last chapter (11), we read about Jesus excoriating the leadership for their hypocrisy. They load their followers up with man-made laws and traditions they refuse to follow. The hypocritical leaders perform their outward show of piety, yet they lack the moral integrity to support their claims. But the Almighty God sees right through them.

The start of chapter 12 continues Jesus' rebuke. He warns His disciples about the "yeast of the Pharisees," which is hypocrisy. Like yeast spreads through the dough, hypocrisy wholly and quickly spreads through many areas of a person's life. It can also spread from person to person and gradually influence a group. When some people see that they can snow others into believing they're good when they're not, they often take advantage of that situation. Take politics, for example. Oh, and academia. And business. And every other situation in life where people are involved, even the Body of Christ, which ought not to be.

Jesus not only warns His disciples against hypocrisy because it spreads but also drives home the point that hypocrisy will eventually be exposed (12:2) and become public knowledge. For sure, *all* hypocrisy will be revealed when people stand before Jesus for their Judgment Day, which will be terrifying, and they won't be able to hide a thing, especially from a holy God. Therefore, Jesus' disciples shouldn't fear the worst that the hypocritical leaders could do to them (12:4).

Jesus says we should be more concerned about God than others. So, what is the worst thing people can do to us? Kill us. But in my perspective, what are they threatening us with? Heaven! And once we've left our bodies, they can't touch us! According to Jesus, the One we should fear is the One who has the authority to throw you into hell *after* death (12:5) because hell will eventually be emptied. All the rebellious people in it will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:15). Now, *that's* something to fear, not hypocrites who threaten us.

Don't worry. If you belong to God, He has your back (12:6). I love the line, "the hairs of your head are all counted" (12:7) because we count the things about which we care. If people are so devoted to counting money (as a banker), sheep (as a shepherd), chickens and crop yields (as a farmer), toys (as a child), and if God counts every single hair on your head, think about how much you mean to Him! God counts the things He cares for and doesn't overlook the tiniest thing about us or our lives. He knows our every good work, faithfulness, and God-honoring word and deed – He knows it all.

Therefore, we should stay tight with Jesus because when we acknowledge Him as our Savior and Lord, He will acknowledge that we're His disciples and are part of His kingdom. If we deny Jesus, "we'll face shame when Jesus returns" (Study Bible). While people can be forgiven if they speak against Jesus, a denial related to God won't be forgiven – denying God's power through the Holy Spirit and instead attributing it to Satan (Mark 3:28-30).

So, don't worry. Jesus tells us that when we're brought to the place where we have to testify about Him and even face the most severe threat (even death), let your words fly! Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will speak through us!

I can testify that I've seen the Holy Spirit override a person and insert thoughts into their heads and words in their mouths that come out as the spiritual gifts of knowledge, wisdom, and prophecy. The funniest part was I watched it happen to a person who refused to believe the Holy Spirit's gifts still operated today. So, don't worry. The Holy Spirit *will* help you.

As we move on, Jesus is asked to settle a dispute. According to my Study Bible, disputes over inheritances were "normally handled by rabbis," likely because they knew the Torah. If this dispute revolved around family land inheritance, the wisdom to settle disputes would undoubtedly come from God's word. However, Jesus refuses to step into the fray. Instead, He turns the request into a teachable moment. According to Jesus, greed is the main issue (12:13), and He warns His disciples against it. The danger of greed is that it causes us to focus on temporary things that mean nothing once we're dead, and after that, all our anxiety-driven hard work and planning go *poof!* Our treasure on earth will disappear, and we'll have nothing in heaven as a reward. As I often heard said, "I've never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul." So, how do we become "rich toward God" (12:21)? First, we're not to worry about what we need. God cares for birds (food) and flowers (clothing), two of life's basic needs. I've never seen a bird anxiously wring its wings because it can't find food because there's bird food all over God's creation. And I've never seen a flower fret about blooming. It just does. Worrying doesn't produce a single thing for us. Worry is "to feel anxiety or mental trouble." Worry also means "to strangle," as in a dog worrying a toy, shaking it back and forth to "kill it." Worry does nothing but strangle our lives and keep us unproductive for Him. That brings us to 12:31 and how we can become rich toward God.

Seek His Kingdom (12:31)! We're to be concerned about what He wants to accomplish and how we fit into His plan. We're to focus on our Heavenly Father and His Kingdom first, and He's more than able to provide what we need. As I said before regarding

Matthew 6:33, God assures us, "You mind My business, and I'll mind yours." When we live for Him and His kingdom (living right and doing loving things for others), we create treasure in heaven, rewards God will give us when we arrive. As a pastor quipped, "We can take it with us, but we can send it on ahead." Too true. Trust your Father. What we trust reveals upon what our hearts are set. We have to keep the right priorities – God or goods?

As we begin to tear ourselves away from goods and learn to trust God, we must also be continually prepared for Jesus' return, regardless of whether it's the Day of the Lord or the day we die. The parable about a person unprepared for Jesus' return (12:35-40) makes me think humanity will be almost clueless that Jesus' return is approaching. I even believe that when Jesus comes with the clouds, people will completely misjudge what's happening, just like so many people of Jesus' day completely misjudged and missed Jesus' first coming because it didn't meet their messed-up expectations. Jesus tells us His return will catch multitudes by surprise, but it shouldn't be so with His followers; *they should be prepared*.

We should not only be prepared but working for Jesus. That's the point of Jesus' second parable in response to Peter's question (12:41). Peter wants to know if this is something for just the "parable insiders" to know or everyone, including those outside the kingdom, i.e., "are you telling this parable to us or to everyone?" Obviously, it's for the insiders because only those who have Jesus as their Master would understand what Jesus says. For the servant who diligently works, there will be many commendations, rewards, and more responsibilities. The rotten servant will face terrible consequences and risk being "fired" from the kingdom (12:46). Notice 12:46, "that servant *who knew his master's will and didn't prepare himself or do it* will be severely beaten." "Preparing and doing" is what's expected of us as Jesus' disciples. "The difference between punishments is the principle of accountable stewardship. More is expected from those who have been given much" (Study Bible). So, what has Jesus given you, and what should you do for Him in return?

As we move on, we come to some scary words. Was Jesus a revolutionary terrorist? His remarks in 12:49-53 seem to indicate that. What is He teaching us?

As the Son of Man, Jesus will bring judgment on the earth. That's desirable because it's a prelude to restoring the world to what it was created to be. God's kingdom will be here (12:49). But Jesus must go through His crucifixion first, and He's totally focused on that at the moment (12:50). As the Gospel goes forth, it will become divisive as some receive it and others reject it (12:51). The response to Jesus and His demands for being a disciple will even set family members against each other (12:52-53). Talk to any Christian who

converted from Judaism, Islam, or any other religion, and most will testify to the reality of which Jesus speaks.

Jesus turns to those around Him and rebukes the crowd following Him for not recognizing what's happening around them. They can rightly interpret the weather (west winds bring storms off the Mediterranean and south winds from the Negev/southern desert bring hot and dry days), *but they don't recognize Messiah is with them at that time* (12:56). They're missing their "time of visitation" as Luke will write in 19:44. Using another parable, Jesus tells them *now* is the time to settle accounts with God before judgment comes because by then, it'll be too late (12:57-59).

Speaking about being out of time, Jesus refers to a rather terrible incident as a continuation of His teaching in chapter 12. Chapter 13 opens with Him hearing a report about Jewish worshipers "whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices," meaning there was some altercation in the Temple courts. Pilate sent in Roman soldiers to stamp it out. Why did these people bring the news to Jesus? Perhaps because they believed Jesus was the Messiah, this kind of news might prod Him into retribution against the Romans and spark a Great Revolt led by the miracle-working Rabbi from Galilee. The Romans wouldn't stand a chance against Him. But Jesus has other ideas. He uses the Temple incident and the toppling of the Tower of Siloam event to make a point. "You mistakenly think these terrible events happened to people as punishment for their sins. Not so. However, all people will be punished if they don't repent of their sins. This teaching relates to Jesus' message, "Repent, for God's kingdom is coming," and the kingdom's arrival brings rewards and punishments, even perishing for one's sin.

Speaking of judgment, Jesus tells a parable about a fig tree (13:6-9). Young fig trees take time to produce fruit. According to my sources, fig trees start to produce fruit by their third year. If a tree doesn't produce fruit, it's cut down. This parable is about Israel. Jesus' ministry lasted about three years. Even though He was preaching and teaching about the new way into God's kingdom and demonstrating its reality, He was inspecting Israel to see if the leaders and the people would respond by bearing the fruit of repentance. No fruit? Then cut it down.

However, as in the parable, Israel is given a little more time to produce fruit under Jesus' ministry, but not forever. The time will come to "put up or shut up." In other words, Israel is on probation. In a sense, the vineyard worker is Jesus asking His Father to allow Him to work with the "fig tree" to see if He can encourage it to be more productive. If not, the Father can "cut it down," i.e., remove the nation. As we'll soon see, Jesus will

lament because too many leaders and people will refuse to embrace what He's offering except for a relative few.

Speaking of resisting Jesus and treading close to judgment, Jesus performs a healing miracle on the Sabbath, which offends the Rosh Knesset (meaning "Head of the Assembly"), the Synagogue leader. How dare Jesus' do "medical work" on the Sabbath. Jesus rightly calls him out for his hypocrisy because He knows the man and others like him would "untie" a mere animal for the sake of comfort. How much more should the woman shackled by a demonic spirit be "untied" from her 18-year stooped condition (13:16)? Jesus' wise ruling and compassionate work shamed the hypocrites (13:17).

After the synagogue leader attempts to stop Jesus and God's kingdom moving through Him, Jesus tells two short parables that say, in effect, "You can't stop the kingdom!" (13:18-20). God's kingdom will start small but grow huge and extend around the entire earth. Amazingly, the kingdom will grow extensively even though getting into it is not easy, for the way is narrow.

In 13:23, a person asks if only a few people will be saved (13:23). Perhaps it seems to the person that not many people were responding to Jesus' message to become disciples even though multitudes were coming to get their needs met (healing, deliverance, free food).

The new way into God's kingdom is through faith in Jesus, and that's the only way we get to know Jesus and for Him to know us. In the parable, some people make their appeal based on their "knowing Jesus" socially or through His ministry (13:26). The only thing that counts is getting to "know" Jesus, meaning by personal, intimate experience. This kind of "knowing" is the same type of tight, familiar, and trusting relationship that ideally should be between a husband and wife. The shocking part, according to Jesus' parable, is that those who should have embraced Jesus (His people) will be replaced by others who are not Jewish and are welcomed to the Patriarchs' table (13:29). Those who are last (Gentiles) will enter into God's kingdom before those who should be first (the Jewish people) (13:30). However, we do know that Israel will be entirely saved at the End (Romans 11:26).

The final verses of chapter 13:31-35 are connected. Some Pharisees warn Jesus to flee the area because Herod Antipas is looking for the miracle-working Jesus. We know it was out of curiosity at this point. However, the report about Herod's interest could also be regarded either as a threat to Jesus or an excuse by the Pharisees to scare Jesus away from the region (13:31). Is Jesus deterred? No. His mission is to reach Jerusalem, where He'll complete His ministry with His atoning death on a Roman cross (13:32). Not even the

possible threat of arrest will prevent Him from reaching the city. Why? Because Jesus knows He's going to die, dying in Jerusalem is "ground zero" for His work.

God's plan has focused on Jerusalem for centuries. Jerusalem's Temple Mount is Mount Moriah, where Abraham set himself to sacrifice Isaac. Mount Moriah is the same place where God showed David he was to build the Lord's Temple. God sent prophets to the people in Jerusalem to warn them to turn from idolatry lest they and the city would be destroyed.

Satan's play is to preempt God's plan by killing His servants. If death is what met many of God's prophets in Jerusalem, how much more the Father's Ultimate Prophet, Jesus (13:33-34)?

Despite his people's stubborn streak, Israel's God continually wanted to draw His people to Himself, but they refused. In earlier days, it was because of idolatry. In Jesus' day, it was also a form of idolatry – their mistaken perception of God's plan through Messiah. The people wanted God's kingdom, but not God's way, His narrow way, which could only be entered by receiving Jesus. That meant they all had to adjust their thinking about what it meant to be in God's kingdom under the New Covenant. Sadly, the nation's unwillingness caused God to turn His back on them for a time (your house is abandoned to you), and "you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (13:35). In other words, they will not see Jesus until He returns to Jerusalem and His people as their Messiah. However, we know that will happen eventually.

In chapter 14, Jesus again confronts the Pharisees during a Sabbath meal (14:1). They watch Jesus closely to see if He would do something on the Sabbath that would violate the Sabbath and break a Torah command. Of course, Jesus' compassion led Him to a man with edema (14:2). By healing the man on the Sabbath, Jesus captured the essence of the Sabbath as a time to do good and bring glory to God, neither of which the Pharisees present were willing to do. To agree with Jesus' questions (14:3, 5) would be to repudiate their position, so they remained silent out of pride.

Speaking of pride, Jesus moves to a lesson on the antidote to pride – humility. To the guests who think they're important, Jesus instructs them not to assume honor for themselves by choosing a place above their "pay grade" lest they be humiliated by being asked to take a "lower," less honorable seat. It's better to assume a more humble situation reflecting a more humble attitude and be blessed by being "raised" to more honor.

Of course, this is about more than just seating arrangements. Jesus' teaching is about our tendency toward pride. Out of pride, do we make assumptions above our pay grade, or do we approach all situations with humility and wait to be recognized? It's far better to be surprised by "elevation" rather than by "demotion." Even if we're not elevated to higher honor, we haven't lost anything or been humiliated. Also, a humble person is appreciated far more than a proud person.

Jesus then turns to the host and addresses him about his reason for showing hospitality. Notice the comparison – inviting "friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors" who will "invite you back, and you would be repaid" (14:12) vs. "poor, maimed, lame, or blind" who "cannot repay you" (14:13-14).

Hospitality demands a person puts them self out for another's comfort. In this instance, the host offers hospitality, but Jesus recognizes it's to people who can pay him back. Therefore, he's out nothing for his efforts. There's nothing special or sacrificial about that. However, if the host follows Jesus' guidance, he will be out a great deal, but that which he loses will have been given in service to the Lord. His efforts would be to bless those who would never be invited to such a wonderful experience, an utterly one-way effort. However, God Himself would repay the host in the resurrection of the righteous.

And since we're on the subject of banquets and invitations, one of the partygoers overhears Jesus mention the resurrection of the righteous and proclaims, "Blessed is the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (14:15). Jesus turns the exclamation into a lesson on just who will be eating bread in the kingdom of God. It turns His hearers' expectations upside down. According to Jesus' previous lesson, He was at a banquet with many "important" people (14:7, 14). Perhaps Jesus' hearers assumed they would naturally be at God's grand post-resurrection feast. However, in Jesus' parable, those the king invited declined for lame reasons. After all, what reasonable person would buy land or oxen without first seeing them? And who would turn down a king just because he just got married? Without question, the king takes priority.

Having been snubbed, the king turns from the reluctant and refusing "important" people toward the common folk that important people often look down on, the poor, maimed, blind, and lame who would truly appreciate such a blessing (14:21). What's more, there's still room even after the "misfits" enter the hall. The king tells his servant to go far and wide and invite all the willing and appreciative people to come.

Jesus' point? His people were rejecting His Father's invitation to the kingdom. The people of Israel were the knowledgeable ones who should be accepting God's invitation into His

kingdom. Therefore, God will graciously reach out to those usually marginalized (Dr. Luke's compassion and worldview again). The additional space for guests reveals God's plan includes many people from all the Gentile nations to be seated at His table (14:23). Sadly, (and I mean that deeply!) many Jews who should be in God's kingdom and at His table will be excluded because they refused Jesus. Those are not my words. That comes from their Jewish Messiah (14:24).

Why did people make excuses about following Jesus? Because the cost of following Jesus is too high. As Luke notes, we must be willing to put Jesus first, even over our families (14:26) and self (14:27). In verse 26, "hate" doesn't mean emotional hate. It means "to prefer" and "prioritize." Before we commit to Jesus, we must consider what it will cost us. And if I may, we need to be counting and paying the cost continually, even when our lives change. Our commitment to Jesus must never be renounced once we've made it. "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

INSIGHT

Why was Jerusalem so important to Jesus and the focal point of His salvation work via crucifixion? Because His Father made it so. Upon this entire planet, there was to be one point, one place, and one epicenter to which God wanted to fix the world's attention to make His plan of salvation and worldwide the epicenter. As a foreshadowing of Jesus' sacrifice, Abraham nearly sacrificed his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah (the future Temple Mount). The Temple Mount was where God placed His name to stake His claim on the earth, show His commitment to saving His children, and reinforce how sin would be atoned – by a sacrifice. Therefore, to fulfill all the pictures of God's plan that He placed upon Jerusalem, there was no other place on earth where Jesus had to be at the culmination of His earthly work.

Another exciting thing is that Jerusalem will be where Jesus will return to fulfill all prophecy and wrap up His Father's work before we move into eternity with Him!

October 30 : Scriptures Luke 15-17

SUMMARY

As a “good evangelical,” I’ve always looked at the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin from a non-Jewish perspective and how unsaved people need to be found and saved to use the evangelical vernacular. Don’t get me wrong. That is true. However, the first two verses in chapter 15 put the parable in a much different light. “All the *tax collectors* and *sinners* were approaching to listen to him. And the Pharisees and scribes were complaining, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” About whom are the Pharisees talking? Fellow Jews! These aren’t people who don’t know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob like Gentiles don’t. The people in question are Jews who weren’t walking committed lives with Yehovah. They were lukewarm or marginal Jews. In today’s Christian terms, we would call them backsliders and nominal believers.

Both Jesus and the Pharisees wanted to see the “sinners” get more serious about God, which was the point about dinner with sinners in Matthew 9 and Mark 2. In this section, the sinners are regarded as “lost,” perhaps hopelessly beyond God’s help. The Pharisees seem to disparage Jesus because He’s bothering to reach out to the “down and outers” and marginalized loose-living Jews. Culturally, one doesn’t eat with someone unless they accept them, so Jesus’ dinner with sinners reflects poorly on Jesus in the Pharisees’ eyes. Again, here’s Luke’s focus on the weak and vulnerable.

How do we know the Pharisees might have viewed these sinners as hopeless? Because of the illustrations that Jesus uses for His first two parables. A lost sheep? So what? Why bother? The poor thing was probably eaten by a predator anyway or wandered off beyond finding. It would be reckless and irresponsible for a shepherd to leave 99 sheep and do an extended search, expending much effort to locate a lost sheep. But not if you’re a shepherd who owns said sheep. It’s important to you, and you take great joy in finding it and restoring it to the flock, which is what Jesus is trying to tell the Pharisees to get them to think like God. God loves sinners. They belong to Him, they’re important to Him, and He is pleased when He finds them, and they’re restored to the flock.

The same is true with the woman and her lost coin. The coin in the parable is a drachma, about one day’s wages. Since homes were basically clay boxes, the woman would need to light a small oil lamp, get down on her knees, and peer closely to find a dust-camouflaged coin. So what? She has nine other coins. Does it really mean that much? To the woman, yes. That coin would buy food for a day. And for the same reasons the above shepherd has – ownership, importance, and the joy of finding the lost item – the woman rejoices when she finds the coin.

In the first parable, "heaven" rejoices over the found sinner. "Heaven" is a euphemism for God, so God rejoices over a repentant and spiritually revived Jew. In the second parable, God's angels rejoice over the same. How much more do God and the angels rejoice over the person, Jew or Gentile, who is completely cut off from God but who comes to Him through Jesus? It's party in heaven time!

The third parable is well known, and I want to put my spin on it again. The younger brother is a backslidden, world-loving, God-rejecting Jewish sinner. He has walked away from God and decided to live as the Gentiles do. He spends his life in wild living and gets to the point where he's morally, spiritually, and physically bankrupt (much like the people with whom Jesus is sharing a meal). The sinner comes to his senses and realizes he wants to return to God, but because of his guilt and shame, he's willing to live on the lowest rung of God's favor, not even thinking God would ever regard him as a son ever again. That's how unworthy of God he feels.

But God, depicted as the father in the parable, seeing the sinner make a move to return to Him, hikes up His robes (a *very* undignified thing to do for an honorable, respectable, and *holy* God) and runs to embrace His wayward boy. The sinner son wants to tell God that he knows he's incredibly unworthy of anything his Heavenly Father has for him, so the sinner tries to ask God to "just make me your demeaned slave, and I'll be satisfied with that" (*as if we have to work off our sin before God takes us back*).

Sorry, that's not good enough for the Almighty. He's so overjoyed that His sinner has returned to Him that He restores the former sinner's sonship and everything that goes with it and throws a welcome home party for the guy. Meanwhile, the older brother sulks because he's "never sinned" against his dad and never got that kind of celebration or blessing.

The dad, God, turns to his eldest son, the Pharisees, and says, "You're with Me always. All I have is yours, and you are mine. You're my 99 sheep and My 9 coins, and that doesn't make me love you or enjoy you any more or less than your sinful brother who has returned to Me. Join in the fun. Your brother is home!"

Yes, Jesus' point is about returning sinners, and the other side of His other point addresses the Pharisees' attitude toward the backsliders. "We will accept you when you clean up your act" as opposed to the Father's "I accept you, now clean up your act as we celebrate your return." There's more that can be said, but I'll let you figure out some of the nuances. Okay, just one. Both sons misunderstand their father—mull on that for a while.

Okay, here we are at chapter 16, a continuation of Jesus' talk. We know this because 16:1 says, "He also said to His disciples..." Jesus turns from the Pharisees and scribes to teach His disciples a curious lesson. A rich man has a manager (Greek – house steward) overseeing his estate. After what appears to be credible accusations of mismanagement, the rich man tells the manager he will fire him. Since the next manager needs to know precisely everything under management, the rich man demands a full accounting of all assets.

What follows stumps many of us. The manager goes to all those in debt to the estate and tells them to downgrade the amount they owed; 100 measures of olive oil to 50 and 100 measures of wheat to 80. There's a lot of speculation about why the manager did this and if it was legal. Because the rich man was stoked about his manager's actions, there appears to be no broken laws or deceit by the manager. *But the legitimacy of the manager's actions is not Jesus' point.* His point is that worldly people are more astute about using money to advance their influence and the master's business than God's people are about using money to influence the world for God and advance His kingdom (16:8-9). Let's face it. Some Christians can be pretty ignorant about using finances and other material goods for God's kingdom out of fear of sinning or using "filthy lucre." If Israel's power to create wealth comes from God (Deuteronomy 8:17-18), then we should use our God-given wealth for Him.

So, let's do some scriptural dissection, shall we? 16:9 "And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of worldly wealth so that when it fails, they may welcome you into eternal dwellings," means use your wealth to help lead people to God's kingdom "who thus become friends forever" (Study Bible).

16:10 "Whoever is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and whoever is unrighteous in very little is also unrighteous in much." This verse applies to spiritual *and* material things. Start small and prove yourself able to handle more responsibility from God. Whether you like it or not, all believers are stewards of material and spiritual grants from God. As I've said, "For those whom God trusts, great things can be entrusted to them."

16:11 "So if you have not been faithful with worldly wealth, who will trust you with what is genuine?" Spiritual things are far more important than worldly things, but worldly things prove whether we're trustworthy or not because material goods tempt us to use them selfishly. If we're selfless with material goods, we can be entrusted with more important things, spiritual matters, and responsibilities.

16:12-13 “And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you what is your own? No servant can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” Material goods prove who our absolute master is – ourselves or God.

Speaking of money (do you see how Luke ties the themes together?), “The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and scoffing at him” (16:14). The word for scoffing is sneering, showing contempt. Why? Because their values are the opposite of God’s kingdom values regarding money and material goods, which is a sad commentary on the leaders. Like we see today, some spiritual leaders see their responsibilities and jobs as income sources rather than service to God. That’s being unfaithful to God. Jesus calls the Pharisees out for their love of money, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the sight of others, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly admired by people is revolting in God’s sight” (16:15). *Kingdom values include being free from the love of money and material things.*

I shudder today when I think about the prosperity preachers and wealthy preachers. It takes a lot of godly virtue to handle such great sums and not succumb to temptation, focusing on that which masters them rather than their Master. And don’t get me wrong. Plenty of poor pastors and church leaders are just as entangled by the little they have and always wanting more. Rich or poor, our hearts must *never* be bound by material things or desires that lead us away from devotion to God.

John the Baptist was the last prophet of the Sinai/Moses covenant era. Jesus is the announcer and initiator of the New Covenant era, and everyone is invited to come to the kingdom through Jesus (16:16). But again, the New Covenant era doesn’t mean an end to the Torah, God’s Law. “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter in the law to drop out” (16:17) which means the Torah (God’s commands, guidelines, and instructions) carry forward into the New Covenant. The innovation is they are implanted *in us* (internalized with the motivation to obey) and the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us. *Kingdom values include God’s way of life as spelled out in His commands.*

And then comes Jesus’ ruling on divorce (16:18). “Any cause” divorce is not legal according to God. Only adultery threatens to end the marriage because it proves one partner (or both) has broken the covenant. The covenant can be renewed if they desire. But if there’s no adultery (or abandonment per Paul), divorce is simply the recognition of a broken covenant. As such, divorce is not a sin. The betrayal that ended the relationship is the sin for which the guilty spouse(s) should ask God for forgiveness. *Kingdom values*

include being faithful to your covenant commitments, most notably marriage, and especially to God.

What's the point of Jesus' Parable of the Rich Man and Poor Lazarus? The principle of Luke 13:30, "Note this: Some who are last will be first, and some who are first will be last," and that Kingdom values are opposite of what we value on earth. The rich man didn't lay up treasure in heaven and didn't use his God-given wealth to lead people to God. Because His heart was set on serving His wealth (his master) and not God (his Master), he gained the world but lost his life, whereas the beggar, Lazarus, lost the world but gained his life. There is no hope for salvation or comfort once the line has been crossed. This final state is the inevitable end of our life choices. Will we embrace God's way into His kingdom and live by kingdom values, or will we reject it and lose all? I like what my Study Bible says about the rich man, "Not being able to improve his own lot, the rich man finally showed concern for the eternal destiny of his five brothers." "Abraham's" point is what God has revealed through His word is enough for people to make a fully informed choice, and the Older Covenant scriptures and Jesus' revelation are enough to spark a saving faith.

Chapter 17 contains Jesus' teachings about His Father's approaching kingdom. The first is about offenses. Life is full of people who offend us. An offense is "something that outrages the moral or physical senses" and "the act of displeasing or affronting" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). In other words, people cross other peoples' lines and outrage them, causing them displeasure. We all do that willingly or unwillingly from time to time, don't we?

Jesus addresses the person (believer or not) who offends one of His disciples and causes them to sin, such as one believer verbally abusing another and provoking them to unrighteous anger and resentment. The instigator is as guilty as the offended party. In context, it seems Jesus focuses on a spat between disciples. Jesus wants us to forgive those who sin against us as often as needed. There is no "That's it. There is no forgiveness anymore." That's above our pay grade. When we're willing to forgive, escalation decreases along with the number of millstones that would fit our necks. Forgiveness is meant to restore relationships.

All we need is a little trust to do great things. You know, like forgive other people and pray for their best. And let's not think we're superstars because we do what God expects of us. We're just "unworthy" servants, and we serve because that's what it means to follow Jesus.

As Jesus moves on toward Jerusalem, He and His team walk the border between Galilee and the north side of Samaria. His trek to Jerusalem will take Him east across the Jordan River, down the east bank of the river through the Perea region, where Jesus will cross back over into Judea at the ford across from Jericho and the road to Jerusalem. Along the way, Jesus meets and heals ten lepers who quickly go to the priests to verify their healing and cleansing. The only grateful person was a *Samaritan*. Interesting, isn't it? Both in parables and real life, Luke shows the Samaritans in a compassionate light. 1) This is why Luke pointed out that Jesus was walking along the border (skirting Samaritan territory) to avoid the confrontation between Jews and Samaritans, and 2) Luke includes this account in line with his view that Jesus' salvation is for all people.

As Jesus nears Jerusalem, the topic of God's kingdom comes up again. This topic of discussion is no surprise since Jesus is viewed as a Messiah candidate, and He's been doing Messianic things and speaking about God's kingdom coming. Except the Pharisees and other leaders anticipate a geo-political kingdom, not the rule and reign of God's will in peoples' hearts as Jesus means.

Jesus responds to His disciples about what they should expect. 1) You'll long for Jesus' return when God's kingdom manifests on earth, but they won't see it. 2) They shouldn't be distracted or swayed because they long to see God's Kingdom. There will be no doubt when Jesus returns because it'll be so obvious. But first, Jesus must be rejected and die at His generation's hands (17:25). 3) People will still be going about their usual business when the End Times comes, and then events will suddenly ramp up. When they do, Jesus says His followers should be ready to respond quickly (17:31-32).

INSIGHT

Someone once asked the Christian author, the late Jamie Buckingham, why we see miracles in Third World nations and not so many in the Western First World nations. His answer was much like "Abraham's answer to the rich man asking for a dead person to rise and tell his brothers about the afterlife." Jamie said, "Miracles in Third World nations create faith. Miracles in First World nations create skepticism." So true. People die for their refusal to believe despite the fullness of God's testimony about Jesus.

October 31 : Scriptures Luke 18-20

SUMMARY

I appreciate the Parable of the Persistent Widow. I refer to it as the Parable of the Nagging Widow of "God Loves A Righteous *Noodge*." *Noodge* is Yiddish for a persistent nag or pest. Have you ever felt you had to give someone a little "nudge" to get them moving? Guess what? That's a Yiddish word that found its way into our vocabulary.

Jesus tells us up front the purpose of the parable. It's about "the need for them to pray always and not give up." Here's the context. A widow in those days was essentially helpless because she had no husband to champion her cause. In this case, it sounds like the widow had no one at all to push her lawsuit against an adversary. Plus, she faced an ungodly judge who feared (i.e., respected) no one. A godly judge, meaning a Torah-observant Jewish judge, would have to follow the Torah, which says, "'The one who denies justice to a resident alien, a fatherless child, or a widow is cursed.' And all the people will say, 'Amen!'" (Deuteronomy 27:19). The ungodly judge doesn't care about the widow – at all!

What Jesus does is set up an extreme situation to slam home His point. With everything against her, the woman's only "weapon" to see justice done is her annoying, obnoxious, irritating persistence, which gets the ungodly judge to act. So if an ungodly judge can be moved on behalf of a widow because of her insistence, how much more will our Heavenly Father, who stands for true justice, act on our behalf? He'll do so more quickly than the resistant *schmoe* of a judge (another Yiddishism).

So, we don't get an answer from God right away. So what? We have permission to nag our Almighty Father until we get one. Let this sink in! *God Himself invites us to pester Him until He answers!* No holds barred. *Be a Righteous Noodge* and give the Lord the delight in answering a child who trusts Him enough to press in and not give up. Seriously, any father or mother knows this. We love our children, and sometimes we withhold what they're asking for to move them to press into us.

Do you want God to fill your congregation with His presence and power? Be a noodge! Do you want God to save your family members and friends? Be a noodge! Do you want God to change the political climate in a nation that seems to have turned its back on Him and deliberately thumbs its nose at Him? Be a noodge! Seriously. *Pray always and never give up.*

Like the first parable, we get the following parable's purpose up front, "He also told this parable to some *who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else*" (18:9). This compares a scrupulously Torah observant Pharisee to a tax collector who was not. Jesus' point is clear. It's not a matter of the "art" of keeping God's Law, but the "heart" of the sinner who knows God's Law, how far short he falls, and their need for God's mercy. God's forgiveness and justification are for the humble, while those who trust in their performance and are proud will be humbled (18:14).

The subsequent three teachings are about God's kingdom. 1) It's for the humble, who are to be like trusting children (18:16-17). 2) Although good, scrupulous observance of God's commands is not enough for God's kingdom. He wants our hearts, and nothing should stand in the way of our relationship with Jesus. 3) If we need to scrap things of value to enter God's kingdom and serve Him, do so. Eternal life with Jesus will have so much more than this world. Let everything go.

Next, we come to Jesus' third prediction of His death (18:31-33). As we saw in the other Gospels, each death prediction gets more detailed. I see Jesus slowly preparing His disciples for the traumatic events about to unfold.

Jesus crosses the Jordan River and walks through Jericho toward Jerusalem. When the blind man finds out it's Jesus' arrival causing the commotion, he calls out in faith for Jesus to heal Him, which Jesus does. My Study Bible points out an interesting comparison. "It is ironic that the formerly blind man, who now became a disciple of Jesus, could see immediately, while the 12 apostles had no insight into where Jesus and His ministry were headed." (*mic drop*)

Heading into chapter 19, we hit the well-known story used in Sunday Schools about Zacchaeus, the very wealthy chief tax collector. A chief tax collector often received kickbacks from his underlings, who were sometimes overcharging and pocketing the money. Would the Romans discipline such a person? Probably not, as long as the tax revenues kept flowing in.

Obviously, Zacchaeus had heard about the increasingly famous Jesus and wanted to see him in person. But being relatively diminutive in height, Zacchaeus had to get a better view by climbing a sycamore tree. A sycamore tree grows tall and wide. Its horizontal branches are easy to climb to get a good seat for the Jesus Parade. Jesus stops and tells Mr. Z he will have lunch at his home. The word conveys that Jesus' request was a "divine necessity." In other words, "Hey, Mr. Z, God says I'm to have lunch with you and yours today." So much for an invitation, but it was well-received anyway. As Z was getting

down, the usual accusation was voiced. "A sinner? Why would Rabbi Jesus have a meal with a sinner?" Mr. Z, to show his change of heart, pledges to give *half* of his possessions to the poor (10-20% was all the Torah required), and he promises to return 4x the money he extorted from anyone. For the record, the Torah says restitution for a wrong like extortion is only 20% ("add a fifth to it" Numbers 5:7). Zachaeus' faith, proven by his repentant actions, brought salvation to his home.

Later, as Jesus and His entourage approach Jerusalem, "he went on to tell a parable because he was near Jerusalem, *and they thought the kingdom of God was going to appear right away*" (19:11). Okay, we have the reason for the parable. What's the parable's point?

Jesus is almost at Jerusalem. He knows the leaders don't want Him as their Messiah to rule over them (per the parable). Jesus knows that according to His Father's plan, He will be away for an extended time after He returns to rule after He is resurrected. Those who don't want Jesus as their Messiah will eventually be destroyed. This punishment will happen to the spiritual leadership after they reject Jesus and unlawfully have Him executed to ensure He will *never* reign over them. The spiritual leadership was destroyed for the most part in A.D. 70 in the first Jewish Rebellion.

However, the disciples think Jesus will launch God's kingdom as the Son of Man and Messiah in a few days. This parable about delay addresses their misconceptions. Jesus will go away and remain "absent" for an indefinite time (19:12). While Jesus is in heaven, He'll receive His Father's authority to reign on earth when He returns, similar to the scene with the Son of Man in Daniel 7. In Jesus' absence, His followers are to remain at work, using what Jesus has given them – resources, talents, and gifts – in service to their King *in absentia*.

When the ruler (Jesus) returns, He demands an accounting from some of His servants. The only one who failed was the one who, either from fear of the ruler or hoping he would never return, kept the money for himself. **Buzzer** Wrong answer! He loses what He sought to control.

So, fellow Jesus-follower, stay active for Jesus. Use everything you have for His glory and the advancement of His kingdom. Though He delays, He will return!

At this point, Luke's material streamlines with Matthew's and Marks with the Triumphal Entry, Jesus' fruit-inspection tour, and the Jewish leader's challenge to Jesus' claim to Messiahship. For much of this, I refer to the commentary from Matthew 21-23 with a few exceptions.

As Jesus enters the city, the people burst into shouts welcoming their Messiah and the rightful king of Israel, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord" (19:38, from Psalm 118:26). Jesus approves what they're saying because He doesn't stop it. Even when the leaders tell Him to silence the crowd, Jesus says He won't. Even if He did, God would cause the cry to rise by a miracle if necessary (19:40).

Amid this Grand Messianic Parade, Jesus weeps because He knows the Jews' cries of welcome will become cries of terror and despair in about 40 years. The people wanted peace through a Messiah and His earthly kingdom. But what they really needed was peace through Jesus and God's kingdom. They missed it because it was hidden from their eyes because of their lack of faith and misunderstanding of God's plan (19:42). Jesus knew that when He failed to deliver what they wanted, many of the same people would turn against and kill Him. God's punishment for their rejection would be to wipe out the Temple, the City, and the population. All because they "missed their time of visitation."

Upon entering the city, Jesus cleanses the Temple, turning it from the economic enterprise it had become into the place of prayer as God intended (19:45-46). After Jesus had cleansed the Temple, the leadership wanted to arrest Jesus, but they feared the people. They were captivated by Jesus' teaching (19:47-48).

The leaders did the next best thing – they challenged Jesus' so-called authority and teaching. They demand to know the source of Jesus' authority, and he tells them it's the same as John the Baptist's source, and Jesus gives them the opening to admit that the Father backed His Son. But because they wanted to deny Jesus, they, in effect, denied the Father (20:1-8), the One who owns Israel, His Vineyard. That segues into Jesus' following parable.

In essence, the nation of Israel belongs to God. But the leadership was treating their trust as if they owned the nation. Their actions were nothing new either. Over the centuries, the Israelite leaders killed God's representatives who were trying to get the people back on track with God so His people would produce the spiritual fruit of covenant faithfulness and godly society. God's last chance for them in that generation was to send His Son, Jesus, to claim what rightfully belonged to the Father from the beginning. After all, God *did* miraculously conceive Israel through Abraham and Sarah. But Jesus knows they will kill Him to complete their usurpation of the nation.

Jesus tells them it won't go well for them because of what their ancestors had done and they will do (20:16). Jesus also cryptically tells them that their plan won't work. Even though they will reject Him, He will prevail and become Israel's Messiah. It doesn't

matter whether you fall on the Rock or the Rock falls on you, it ain't the Rock that's destroyed. It's the attackers who will be shattered or crushed. The Rock prevails!

The Paying Taxes to Caesar question is a trap because regardless of which way Jesus answers, He could be accused of a crime either as an insurrectionist against Rome or a false prophet/messiah that should be killed. Jesus' reply is similar to the Vineyard Parable above – give to God what belongs to Him (20:25). “The nation isn't yours to exploit, guys.”

When the Sadducees try to trap Jesus with a theological question hoping to get Him to deny what the Torah says (for that would disqualify Jesus as Israel's King) (20:27), Jesus shows the Sadducees that *they're* the ones who are wrong about what the Torah says. And by rejecting the validity of the prophets and the writings, *they* are disqualified for service. The Sadducees' position is ironic because the priesthood was supposed to be the guardians of God's word, yet they are the least able to divide it in this instance rightly.

Jesus caps off the debate with powerful punctuation. In short, He points out that King David knew under the Spirit's inspiration that His descendant, Israel's future king, would be greater than him and worthy of His homage/worship (Psalm 110:1), for King David spoke of his mightier-than-him descendant in the present tense. How could that be? That can only be answered by admitting David's descendant, Jesus, preexisted with God in David's day. That was too much for the leaders to accept.

Luke completes this reading with Jesus' indictment of the hypocritical leaders in an abridged form.

INSIGHT

“Although good, scrupulous observance of God's commands is not enough for God's kingdom. He wants our hearts, and nothing should stand in the way of our relationship with Jesus.” Jesus pointed out to the rich young man that his possessions were the obstacle to his desire.

What are your obstacles?

After writing that last sentence, I reflected for a moment and scanned my life. Do I have an obstacle between myself and Jesus? Is it my home? My wife? My friends? My stuff? If Jesus asked, I think I could surrender all. But then Jesus put His finger on me. “What about your sin, son? Are you able to give up your anger toward those who hurt you?”

What about not being recognized for this and that spiritual gift or education? What about people refusing to use you in ministry for reasons that don't affect how I work for Jesus?"

It's the inside stuff that anchors us. What anchors you? Be ready for deep soul-searching when the Holy Spirit starts tapping on you.