

# Family Worship Booklet



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,  
day after day, and that the people of God  
were filled with joy!

**Friday - Please read Luke 13:18-21 - Look at the global growth.**

This passage opens with the word 'therefore', which shows that this teaching arises from what has just taken place. Whilst the people rejoiced at His rebuke of this one synagogue ruler and His power to heal, many would have questioned the idea of Jesus being able to do anything on a national scale? Jesus now addresses that through two parables.

We will consider the first today. But before we do, a general point - Jesus had used these parables before. Matthew and Mark (Matthew 13:31-33 and Mark 4:30-32,) both record similar parables from early in Jesus' ministry when He was in Galilee. Luke records these parables when Jesus is in the last year of his ministry and on his way to Jerusalem. As we have seen before Jesus was not beyond teaching the same thing two or three times. This also accounts for slight difference in emphasis here in Luke. Matthew and Mark both focus on the difference in size, between the smallness of the seed, and the largeness of the plant that grows from it. Whereas here, we see that the size of the seed is less important than what is finally produced. There is also a difference in the gospels in the location of the sowing. In Matthew and Mark, the sowing takes place in a field, and on the earth, respectively. Here the man sows the seed in his garden. The point is not where it is sown, but the fact that it is sown. Note also that there is nothing special about how the seed is planted; in all three gospels, the seed is sown, presumably by just throwing it unto the ground. Again, the point is that the seed is sown. While those points are not critical in the parable, they are nonetheless worth keeping in mind.

The critical point of the parable is the growth that takes place. The growth from this one grain of seed is so great that the birds of the air can nest in the plant's branches. One commentator writes, "The birds roosting in the branches are often a symbol for the nations of the earth, (Ezekiel 17:23, 31:6, Daniel 4:12,21). The Kingdom will be universal. Men from all nations will find themselves therein." And you and I are living testimony to that. Had Jesus tried to explain to those listening that his Kingdom would extend across the entire world, they would have found it hard to imagine, and yet it does.

Q1. Jesus tells a parable about what?

Q2. What is the point of the parable? How do we know it has been realised?

#### **Thursday - Please read Luke 13:10-17 – A direct rebuke!**

We saw yesterday how Jesus took the initiative and healed a woman who had been disabled for 18 years, transforming her life in the process and leading her to glorify God. The synagogue ruler's reaction to this wonderful miracle is shocking. Far from an expression of joy, he is indignant, and he lets everyone know what he thinks. You can sense the anger in his voice. Note though; he doesn't direct his venom at Jesus. Not because he didn't want to, but because there is nothing wrong in what Jesus has done. Jesus hadn't promised or pronounced healing on the woman; He merely stated that this woman was freed from her disability. A statement of observable fact. Taking the fourth commandment as the pretext for his scathing rebuke, the ruler announces to those in the synagogue, with all the authority of his office, that there are six days in the week when such healing can be sought, but not on the Sabbath. In other words, this should not have happened.

V15 - Luke's use of the term "Lord" adds all the weight of Christ's divinity to Jesus's response – "You hypocrites!" His indignance is aimed at both the synagogue ruler, and everyone nodding in agreement with his words. Jesus now lays out the warrant for the use of the term 'hypocrisy' in the form of two questions. The reference to just one animal addresses everyone, because many of them would have had more than one. But it also led them to total up the frequency of their 'law-breaking' each Sabbath, given that the act of untying and holding a rope, and then leading an animal to the water, whilst being granted as an act of mercy by God was classed as 'work' by the rabbinical teachings.

The second question Jesus focuses on the woman whom he has just healed. She is not an animal, but a daughter of Abraham, one of the household of Israel. The moral imperative for her to be healed is obviously greater. She is one who needed to be freed from Satan's binding for eighteen years, and not just given some water to drink.

In two simple questions, Jesus devastated the synagogue ruler's statement, and silenced both him and those who had nodded their approval of his rebuke. Others seeing the power of Jesus rejoiced, literally a wave of rejoicing came over the area as they saw Jesus' power.

Q1. How did Jesus respond to the synagogue rulers rebuke?

Q2. What was the reaction of the people in the synagogue?

#### **Monday – Please read Luke 13:6-9 – There's something wrong.**

Jesus now teaches a parable that is a follow-on from what he had just said about needing to repent or face the terrible consequences of perishing eternally. It's about a fig tree which for three consecutive years has not produced any fruit. Given that most fig trees produce fruit twice a year, the owner has good reason to feel disappointed with this particular tree. So, he approaches the vinedresser, and tells him to cut the fig tree down, making the point that the tree is only taking up space in the ground if it's not doing anything. So, it's not just about what the tree is not doing, it's about what it is preventing another tree from doing. The vinedresser suggests giving the tree another season, and he will try and give the tree all the help he can to produce fruit. He will dig around its base and put some manure in, which might fertilize life and growth. If the tree does bear fruit the following year, well and good, and if not, then it can be cut down.

The question of who the vineyard owner and vinedresser are, is not any easy question to answer. There are two possibilities. There are those who suggest that the vineyard owner represents God, and the vinedresser represents ministers, those who are called to tend the vines, doing what they can to help them grow. However, if the owner and the vinedresser are thinking the same thing about the tree but the issue they are discussing is the duration of 'mercy', then the vineyard owner has to be God the Father, and the vinedresser Christ himself. J.C. Ryle in his commentary says, "We learn, lastly, from this parable, what an infinite debt we all owe to God's mercy and Christ's intercession. It seems impossible to draw any other lesson from the earnest pleading of the dresser of the vineyard – 'Lord, let it alone this year also.' Surely, we see here, as in a glass, the loving-kindness of God, and the mediation of Christ." (I favour this understanding of who the owner and vinedresser are.)

The critical point is that it is possible to either be, or appear to be, planted in the church and yet not produce fruit. The other thing to note is that God's mercy is real, but it does have its limits.

Q1. What is wrong with the fig tree in this parable?

Q2. What does the parable tell us about the mercy of God?

## **Tuesday – Please read Luke 13:6-9 - Fruit needs to be produced.**

We return to the passage we considered yesterday to look more at the necessity for the church of Christ and believer in Christ to produce fruit. J.C. Ryle applies it to the church and writes, "There is a plain warning here to all professing churches of Christ. If their ministers do not teach sound doctrine, and their members do not live holy lives, they are in imminent peril of destruction. God is, every year observing them, and taking account of all their ways. They may abound in ceremonial religion. They may be covered with the leaves of forms, and services, and ordinances. But if they are destitute of the fruit of the Spirit, they are reckoned useless cumberers of the ground. Except they repent, they will be cut down."

Writing about the individual's responsibility to bear fruit he says, "There is a plainer warning still in the passage for all 'unconverted professing Christians'. There are many in every congregation who hear the Gospel, who are literally hanging over the brink of the pit. They have lived for years in the best part of God's vineyard, and yet borne no fruit. They have heard the Gospel preached faithfully for hundreds of Sundays, and yet have never embraced it, and taken up the cross, and followed Christ. They do not perhaps run into open sin. But they do nothing for God's glory. There is nothing positive about their religion. Of each of these, the Lord of the vineyard might say with truth, "I come these many years seeking fruit on this tree and find none. Cut it down. It cumberes the ground."

Churches don't just die for want of young people and money; churches are cut off because the people in them; minister, elders, deacons and members are not producing fruit. Most people don't leave churches where the Word of Christ is truly being preached because they don't like something. In reality they are 'cut off' because of their unwillingness to make the choices they need to, to abide in Christ. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus warned his disciples about this when he said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.... If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned." John 15:1-11. So, it is about abiding in Christ. Nothing more but nothing less.

Q1. What does God, who has blessed us so richly, want from us in our lives?

Q2. What will happen if we don't give Him what He wants?

## **Wednesday - Please read Luke 13:10-17 - A wonderful miracle.**

Jesus is teaching in a synagogue on a Sabbath, the location isn't given, but we do know that this is the last recorded time of Jesus being in a synagogue. What makes it memorable is Jesus' healing of a woman, and the subsequent interaction between Jesus and a synagogue ruler.

Verse 11 begins with, 'And lo, or behold, there was a woman...' which gives the sense that this woman just appeared, albeit in a low-key way because she had a "disabling spirit for eighteen years", which meant that she was "bent over and could not fully straighten herself". Although not as religiously and socially restricting as the illness that the woman in Luke chapter 8 had, this was still a long term, physically debilitating illness.

Unlike many of the incidents of Jesus healing people, this one is not in response to a request; rather unusually, it is Jesus who seeing the demonic root of her disability takes the initiative, stops teaching and calls her over. As she stands in front of Him, He declares that she is free from her disability and then He lays His hands on her, and instantly she is physically restored. Her body straightens under divine power. Jesus could have healed her with no words and no laying on of hands, as he had done with others, but He does what He does on this occasion to communicate his power to the woman and those observing. The woman's response was also immediate; she began to glorify God. She believed that it was God the Father, who had healed her through Jesus. Her life was changed, and this was a day she would never forget for the rest of her life. Surely everyone who knew her would be thrilled at what had happened. No longer would they see her quietly, slowly, painfully making her way into the synagogue to join with other women in the worship of God. Delight must have filled the building as news spread of how Jesus had transformed her life. Not so, as we shall see tomorrow!

Q1. What is different about what happens before this miracle?

Q2. Why does Jesus take the initiative and what does he do?

Q3. How does it change the woman's life and what is her response?