

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 14:7-11 - Where do you see your place?

Jesus loved watching people to see how they behaved. His observational and listening skills lead to so much of his ministry. We tend to think that he was primarily a reactionary, responding to the needs of people who came to him. But it's interesting just how many times his interactions with people, or his teaching, began with what he saw or heard. Developing the capacity to either see or hear the needs of others is important. It's not complicated. It just requires an attitude that looks beyond oneself and sees the privilege of helping others as a blessing.

Jesus is at a wedding banquet and, as he is watching, he notices how the guests are choosing the seats nearest the top table. These seats would have been couches, large enough for three people to 'recline' on and were arranged in a U-shape, with the 'top table' being the couch at the base of the U configuration. Seeing the scramble for the prominent couches near the base of the configuration, Jesus speaks up. It is interesting that he does so. You'd think that, being an invited guest, he would look, see, and say nothing. Why upset the tone of the banquet? Have a day off, relax, leave it as it is. One can't go changing everything in the world. However, if Jesus had done that, how much of his teaching would we now have, because much of Jesus' teaching arose out of 'life' situations.

This is one of the reasons why ministers need to be among the flock, seeing the lives of God's people up close, so that they can speak truth into where people are actually at. That can be incredibly time demanding, but it is a critical aspect of the minister's care for God's people. It is one of the primary reasons why I try, among other things, to lead as many of the church Fellowship Groups as I can. Of course, some sheep don't like such attention, and in my experience, those who resent it tend to drift to the edges of the flock to avoid it. That is regrettable because the edge is a place where opportunities for such 'life' teaching is minimized. It is also a place from which it is easy to take a short step to another flock, one where the teaching is less directed, less challenging, more generic, or to take a step to no flock at all.

Thursday - Please read Luke 14:1-6 – Deeds speak louder than Words!

V4. Jesus, Luke tells us, takes physical hold of the man and heals him. Deeds always speak louder than words, and no one in the room could misinterpret this deed. Jesus couldn't have said it any more clearly – 'it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath'. Of course, they were of the view, following rabbinical regulations, that it was not.

Jesus, out of love for the man, sends him away. Remember the rebuke that the synagogue leader in Luke 13 issued to the people after Jesus had healed the woman who had been disabled by a demon for eighteen years. Jesus wasn't going to expose this man to the possibility of a similar retort. So, he protects him by telling him to leave. See how Jesus not only cares for the body, but thoughtfully so for the person as well. What a Saviour we have.

He then turns his attention back to the men in the room, none of whom have breathed a word. In Luke 13:15, Jesus argued from the 'lesser to the greater', i.e., 'if this is how you treat a donkey needing a drink on the Sabbath, then why should this woman not be healed on the Sabbath. Is human life not more important than that of an animal?' In this situation, he takes a different tack. One founded on the Divine command to love our neighbour as ourselves, something these men would have been taught from childhood (Leviticus 19:18). The point is clear – 'what you would do immediately for your son or an animal on the Sabbath, you should likewise be doing for your neighbour in genuine need'.

Again, to this simple reasoning founded on Scriptural truth, there is silence. For men who loved to talk, discuss, and debate, this was a unique and strange evening. But it shows what can be achieved when a clear understanding of what God says, including its implications, is allied with a fearless willingness to apply it, even in the most hostile environments.

I wonder, and I challenge myself with, do we know the Word of God enough to be able to speak to such issues, and if not, why not? And second, do we know the implications arising from what God says enough to speak to these issues with sufficient fearless authority that will leave the haters of Christ silent, even if they say a lot of words in the process of responding?

Q1. What does Jesus do?

Q2. Consider if there are any situations where you could pose a question.

Monday – Please read Luke 13:31-35 – Jesus is afraid of no one!

This is a passage that opens with a measure of intrigue. It involves the Pharisees, nothing unusual in that, they were always around and about when Jesus was teaching; what is interesting is how their exchange with Jesus begins. Reading it, one could get the impression that, for once, with their warning to Jesus that Herod is threatening to kill him, they are being sympathetic to Jesus. Certainly, that is how some see it. I find it difficult to accept that there is anything benevolent in their thinking. I think they thought that by warning Jesus, they could get him to leave the region and, at the same time, gain some reputational benefit for themselves. Their goal was undoubtedly to get Jesus to make his way to Jerusalem, where they could utilize their influence in the city to maximum effect. Herod's statement gave them the pretext to pursue their long-held agenda, and they went for it. Remember, these men have been conspiring together for some time how they might destroy Jesus (Matthew 12:14).

Jesus knows that Herod probably has no intention of killing him, even though he must have said something to that effect. After all, the killing of John the Baptist happened on a drunken night, when Herod was beguiled and acted to keep face among his friends. We know that it had played on his mind (Luke 9:7-9), and it is evident from what transpires later (Luke 23:8) that he wanted to see Jesus so he could see him do a miracle. By calling Herod a 'fox', Jesus is sending a message to him – 'you are a manipulative, deceitful man, and I have no time for you'. Doing so in public also signaled to Herod that Jesus was not unafraid of him. As far as Jesus was concerned, he is going to continue his work as planned. In referring only to his miracles, and not to his teaching, Jesus is telling Herod, 'Don't threaten me, haven't you heard about what I can do? I have power over the demons and physical diseases, and you come nipping at me like a fox?' The setting of a time frame is obviously not literal in terms of the number of days; it is metaphorical. Jesus is letting Herod know that he is working to a time frame, and that it is limited. When he has finished what he has to do in Perea, he will go to Jerusalem to fulfil what he must do.

Q1. What news do the Pharisees bring to Jesus and why?

Q2. How does Jesus respond?

Tuesday – Please read Luke 13:31-35 - Will you 'gather in' with Jesus?

What Jesus says in verse 33 is aimed directly at Herod, and, given who is listening, there is no reason to think that it won't get back to him. Everyone knew that prophets were not killed in the regions; if they were to perish, they did so in Jerusalem. Jesus is effectively saying to Herod, 'calm yourself and let me get on with my work'.

Jesus then declares a heart-felt lament, one full of intense emotion and beautiful tenderness. Unlike the Pharisees, his heart is not cold and hard - far from it. He is almost overwhelmed with sadness when he thinks about the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The repetition of the city's name, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem!', similar to his 'Martha, Martha' in Luke 10:41, and 'Saul, Saul' in Acts 9:4, speaks of a heart of tender love and concern.

Jerusalem, its name means 'city of peace', had through the ages been a place of death for the prophets and those who supported them, and yet God had been eminently merciful and not rejected her. Jesus speaks of his own ministry in the city with beautiful imagery. He had sought to gather his people, this nation, about him, but they had flatly refused to take shelter under his wings, even though it was graciously and tenderly offered. No explanation is given as to why they would not do so, nor is a reason offered. It is just a statement of fact, but what a statement of fact. The gospel had been freely offered and likewise, freely refused. They had looked into the loving face of Jesus and had rejected him.

God is immensely longsuffering, but the point does come where He will say, 'no more'. And, as history tells us, God no longer 'dwells' in that city, not since the persecution of the Bride there in the 1st century AD. One day though, Jerusalem, like the whole of the world, will acknowledge the King of Kings, as Jesus declares in his quote of Psalm 118:26, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

It is a sobering thought that a congregation, or a denomination, can have God in their midst and that He can then depart. The only way to avoid such a departure is to be gathered in with Jesus, through his Word, prayer, and wholehearted obedience.

Q1. What message does Jesus send to Herod, albeit it indirectly?

Q2. How did the people in Jerusalem respond to Jesus, and what was the ultimate outcome?

Wednesday - Please read Luke 14:1-6 – Truth leads to Silence!

It is the Sabbath day, and after the synagogue meeting the Pharisees, as was their practice, would get together in a home to share in a meal and talk about the law, their lives, the community, etc. On this occasion, Jesus has been invited along, something that seems to have happened often. And as usual, those gathered are watching Jesus. "Watching" means they are scrutinizing everything he is saying and doing, to see if they can 'catch' him in some infringement of their rabbinical laws.

What a way to have to live your life, where everything you say and do is intensely analyzed. Jesus' life seems to have been a constant battle at times. A battle against the spiritual forces of evil, as they constantly presented themselves through people with varying demonically induced ailments, and, as on this occasion, through verbal opposition of the Pharisees. It is an indication that even the sinless Son of Man lived his life in 'toil and trouble', as the Psalmist writes in Psalm 90. It is because he lived without sin that Christ can be our 'substitute' and our example.

Again, as often happens at these events, someone suddenly appears. He is a man who has dropsy and has come to Jesus seeking to be healed. (Dropsy is known today as Edema. It is usually swelling in the legs, feet, or ankles, but it can also be in other parts of the body, caused by fluid retention.) We read that 'Jesus responded', but like me, are you thinking, 'we didn't hear the question?' Is that because there wasn't one? Or, as seems probable, is Jesus answering what he knows they will be thinking? If that is the case, and it seems probable, Jesus is going on the offensive. He is not sitting back, waiting for the veiled, subtle, but usual menacing challenge to materialize. The question Jesus asks, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" is kindergarten stuff for these men. This wasn't something that needed to be discussed and debated, any one of these men could have answered it in the blink of an eye. Yet what do we read? "They remained silent." The term is stronger than just expressing that they were silent; the silence was deafening. There's no mumbling, not even a whisper. Nothing! I wonder how long it took before Jesus responded to his own question.

Q1. What was Jesus' daily life like in terms of people's interest in him?

Q2. How did Jesus respond to the man who approached him to be healed?