

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 14:25-33 – How can we love and hate at the same time?

Jesus is making his way slowly to Jerusalem. He is constantly being engulfed with people following him. Obviously, we only have a fraction of the conversations that he was having with those around him, but given what he says here, it's obvious that some of them were expressing a strong desire to become one of his disciples.

His opening statement sounds confusing. Surely Jesus taught, advocated for, and commanded, the principle of loving God and our fellow man (Mark 12:30,31). Yet here he is speaking of hating those closest to us. Can we do both? Can we love and hate the same person? Yes, we must be able to because Jesus tells us to do both. But how is it possible to do so? It is possible by loving people but hating anything in them that is at odds with what God teaches and requires of us. There isn't an option here, this isn't up for negotiation; anything that would hinder you from wholeheartedly seeking first the Kingdom of God must be hated. Whether that is in your own life or in the life of another person, even if you love them deeply. The teaching of Jesus is clear and unequivocal - our love for him must supersede all other loves and manifest itself in such hatred. Of course, phenomenal wisdom must be exercised, and care taken, in the expression of this hatred. This isn't easy because of the deceitfulness of our own hearts. Let's face it, we struggle daily with mourning and the putting to death of the sin in our own lives, and we must be very mindful of Matthew 7:5, where the Lord chastised those who were quick to point out the sin in another's life with the words, "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." However, the point remains, we can't say we love Jesus and engage with an activity with those who do not, which clearly is sinful. It is a fact that Jesus expressed in various ways throughout his ministry, see also Matthew 10:27, 19:39; Luke 18:29.

- Q1. When Jesus says that we are to hate others, what does he mean?
Q2. When we do hate others, what care must we take?

Thursday – Please read Luke 14:12-24 – Come to the Banquet!

Yesterday we saw that the invited guests made their excuses for declining the invitation to the wedding banquet. The host isn't pleased and rightly so. Why should he be, given what he has done? So, he sends his servant out into the city to bring in those that they are poor and in need. And then, as word comes back that there is still room, the servant is sent out again, this time into the country to compel those he meets to come to the banquet.

Who are these men and women who are compelled to come to the banquet? Paul identifies these called ones in Ephesians 2:12 as people who previously were "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." In terms of ethnicity, they are gentile men and women, like you and me. In terms of moral standing, they are the same as the Jews who were dead in their trespasses and sin and, by nature, objects of God's Holy wrath. However, by God's grace, they are going to be those who shall be called out. Redeemed from their world of darkness and rebellion against God. And this will happen as the gospel, the good news of new life in Jesus Christ, is preached in their hearing. It will be an effectual call, one which all who hear will respond to in faith and obedience. None who are called will reject it. Because it comes through the voice of the Lord Jesus (Romans 10:14) and in the power of God the Holy Spirit (Romans 1:16). This powerful work of the Holy Spirit enlightens the mind so that one can understand the things of God; it replaces the unregenerate hard heart with a heart that is receptive to God's truth, and it renews the will, so that the person will be responsive to God's Word.

What a wonderful encouragement to go out with the gospel, through our lives, lived in Christ, and declaring the words of new life in Christ. Yes, there will be those who will refuse to hear the good news, and they will suffer the consequences of their hardened hearts, regardless of their excuses; but Christ will build his Church, and the Great Banquet will be full!

Q1. What was the host's response when those invited wouldn't come?

Q2. Why can we be sure that the gospel preached will work?

Monday – Please read Luke 14:7-11 – A lesson in humility.

On Friday I said that Jesus was at a wedding banquet. That was wrong: he was in the home of the Pharisee ruler when he told this parable.

Returning to the parable today, we see that Jesus is teaching us about how we are to view ourselves. In particular, the necessity of seeing yourself as less important than maybe we think. Even the apparently humblest of people can have a heart that exudes pride when set in the right context. Jesus' point is blindingly clear – why make your way to a prominent seat, based on the assumption that you are going to be one of the people most entitled to such a place. He says, what if more prominent people come in and you are asked to relocate, how are you going to feel then? Would it not be better to sit back and then be honoured through an invitation to move up? Of course, you and I wouldn't think like that. We always hang back and let others get seated first, or take a back seat from the outset. That is probably true, but Jesus' teaching to humble oneself arises in several scenarios; for example, in regard to how we pray (Luke 18:14), how we view our place in heaven (Matthew 18:4), how we face anxiety in our lives (1 Peter 5:6), how we interact with the world (James 4:6), and how we live with and love each other in the church (Philippians 2:1-11).

Applying this to our life in the church, of course, we aren't going to take the prominent seats at a special gathering. But what about when you see a bible on the floor of the church that a child has set down – well, someone else will bend down and pick that up. When it comes to going up to a visitor at worship and simply saying 'Hello, good to see you' – well, there are people in the church who are good at that, I have my friends to speak with. When it comes to helping with the cleanup after fellowship on a Lord's Day evening – well, we need to get home, someone else will do that. When it comes to making a meal for a family in need – well, there are people in the church who love doing that sort of thing. When the toilet roll in the washroom is getting low – well, we have a paid cleaner, it's their job to see that doesn't happen. Having a humble attitude isn't just about where you sit, it is about what you choose to do when you see or hear of a need that you could, with a simple action, address to the glory of God.

Q1. Does Jesus only speak of humility in terms of where you sit at a meal?

Q2. What is humility in reality?

Tuesday – Please read Luke 14:12-24 – Who should we invite?

Turning his attention from the guests, who were clamouring to get the most prestigious couches, Jesus now speaks to the host, and in doing so shows us how we should deal with others. He doesn't turn to the disciples and start talking about the man behind his back; he knows that gossiping is not good (Proverbs 18:21, Ephesians 4:29, James 4:11).

Jesus says to the man – 'Don't just invite the people you know will return the favour; reach out also to those who, because of their circumstances, can't.' Then he gives a reason, "You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." Jesus is calling this man to look at life through the lens of eternity. Our lives cannot just be about acquiring or receiving material benefit for everything we do. If that is the only approach we have in life, then we are going to seriously impact the size of our heavenly reward. We have got to think beyond what we can get when we give, and get the fact that an eternal blessing will be far beyond anything we might get on earth. Jesus is serious about our giving to those who are genuinely in need, and we need to stop and think about that. The question of our willingness to engage as; individuals, families, and a church, with the genuinely needy, has to be faced. As the congregation develops and grows in Christ, this is something we're going to have to give serious thought to. We have to grasp that not everyone we interact with as a church is going to be 'a ready-made churchgoer'.

V15. Jesus' reference to the resurrection sparks a pious exclamation from one of the guests – "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Was this a serious comment borne of genuine interest, or simply a platitude, something that someone might be expected to say? The man may have been sincere, but from what Jesus says in response (and we look at that tomorrow), it is clear that whatever the man was trusting in, he was sincerely wrong. This shows the need for us to use our spiritual common sense at times. Sometimes, out of a desire to be friendly, we can be too quick to jump in and immediately commend. It is often better to pause and consider what is being said, before saying anything.

Q1. Who does Jesus address and what does he speak to the man about?

Q2. Why is our giving to those who cannot pay us back so important?

Q3. Should we always commend when something sounds right?

Wednesday – Please read Luke 14:12-24 – What excuse?

V16. A man once gave a great banquet - the term "man" is referencing God, obviously not His being, but a description of His acting. The story is simple; the banquet preparations are made; the first invitations go out. No one declines the request. A second invitation is then delivered by the host's servant. Sending out two invitations was the cultural norm, see Esther 5:8 and then 6:14. It seems that people did not attend a banquet unless they were invited twice. No one would decline the first invite, so it was the second 'it's time to come' invitation which showed who would actually come. Now all the invited guests make excuses as to why they cannot come. Tomorrow we will consider how the host responds, but for now let's look at the excuses made.

Three excuses are highlighted and, in stating these, Jesus is covering every type of excuse that someone might use for rejecting him. The excuse-makers know that they are seeking to justify their refusal to come to the banquet. The first invitee pleads necessity. As he sees it, he is compelled to go and see his newly bought field. He is putting property first. The second man has just bought five yoke of oxen, and he needs to go and see if they can actually do the job he has bought them to do. He is putting his business first. The third man isn't as polite as the first two; he is more direct. His issue is that he has just married. He is putting family first. We undoubtedly have family, work, and property responsibilities, but none of these, whether taken on their own or combined, can rule out the principle need in our life – to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and seek first His Kingdom. Whatever the excuse, they all amount to the same thing – rejection of God and his promised blessings. It is amazing how people seek to justify their rejection of the free offer of the gospel. Of course, some of the best excuse makers sit in churches week in, week out. Going through the motions, they possess no genuine heart-love for the Saviour, and refuse to repent of their sin and obey Him daily.

Q1. When the invitation first went out what did the recipients do?

Q2. Why then did they not come to the banquet and what did the host do?