

# 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 15:1-7 – Tax collectors and ‘sinners’.

Luke ended the last chapter with the words of Jesus, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." That was said in relation to the necessity for all-in living with and for Jesus. Luke now opens this chapter with a picture of people drawing near to hear Jesus, and not for entertainment's sake. The clear implication is that these people really want to hear what he has to say.

As we have considered before, the tax collectors were viewed as traitors who worked for the subjugating Roman Empire. Jewish men collecting taxes and customs from hardworking Jewish people to finance the occupation of Jewish land by Roman oppressors and lining their own pockets in the process. Synagogues would not receive their alms, and it was widely accepted that you didn't have to keep your word when dealing with a tax collector. Having a tax collector in the family was seen as something the family should be ashamed of.

The “sinners” were either those who lived off various forms of immoral earnings or had occupations that the religious orders regarded as being incompatible with the Law, if not breaking it. The Pharisee, the scribe, the rabbi wouldn't engage, let alone deliberately associate with such people. In fact, the religious elite would go to great lengths to avoid any contact with these men and women. The fact that Jesus did the opposite deeply disturbed the Pharisees and scribes. In a sense, Jesus' behaviour as a rabbi scandalized them, and they weren't slow about making their feelings known.

It is interesting that, despite his perfection, Jesus was like a magnet to the openly godless. It is peculiar, isn't it? You would have thought that this underclass would have stayed clear of him. But the reason for their intense interest was simply because Jesus cared for them as people and spoke the truth to them. The openly godless, though surrounded by people, tend to live lonely lives, and many within their 'community', like themselves, are perpetual liars. So, while it is surprising in one sense that these folks kept being drawn to Jesus, in another, it's not. Some of the most honest and direct conversations I had during my ministry in Scotland were with men who had addiction issues and lived in the streets around our home. I'm not implying I had many such relationships or had a great 'ministry' among them. I am just saying that I enjoyed stopping in the street and talking with them, and from the comments I received from their relatives at their funerals, the men had enjoyed those conversations too.

## Thursday - Please read Luke 14:34-35 – Truly saved?

Jesus says that salt is 'good', which means that He is simply stating that the physical properties and usefulness of salt are good. The corollary is that if salt loses its saltiness, for example because it has come into contact with and been diluted in water, then it ceases to be able to do what it should. If that happens and it can no longer provide flavour to, or preserve, food, then effectively it is worthless. So, when Jesus equates the loss of the flavouring quality of salt to those who have professed faith but are manifesting none of the qualities one would expect of a Christian quality, He is saying something that is very serious. This is a sombre warning, that demands our attention.

Let's be clear though about what Jesus is NOT saying. He is not saying that a truly converted man or woman can lose their salvation. That is not possible, just as our salvation is not won by us, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God, not of blood nor of the will of flesh nor the will of man but of God," (John 1:12). Thus, the retention of our salvation is not held by us either. As Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:12,13).

What Jesus is saying is that someone who has professed faith because of their self-delusion born of their self-deception cannot, if they have truly rejected the gospel, come to faith. As the writer of the book of Hebrews says – "For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt." (Hebrews 6:4-6). Are there examples of this in the Scriptures? Well, we have individuals like Judas Iscariot, Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, Simon in Acts 8:9-24 and the fierce wolves Paul speaks of in Acts 20:28-30.

No wonder that the Lord said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Q1. When Jesus is talking about salt losing its saltiness, what is he referring to?

Q2. Why is this such a serious thing?

## Monday – Please read Luke 14:25-33 – Are you all in?

V27. This requirement to bear one's cross is a command Jesus gave several times (Matthew 26:24, Mark 8:34). We have already encountered it in a positive form in Luke 9:23. As we saw in that verse, the "cross" that must be borne is the suffering that results from obedience to Christ and the life that he commands. If you and I are not prepared to endure the trials that come with submitting ourselves to Christ's rule, he says that we cannot be a disciple of his. It isn't an option. Discipleship isn't a 'pick and mix' thing, it's never going to be about doing the bits you like and leaving those that don't appeal to you. We are either all-in, or we're not at all in.

It is the need for people to really think about that, so Jesus now presses through two illustrations. Jesus' teaching is never in the abstract; it is always focused on a call to the heart. We need to know the truth, and it must be declared to the seat of our understanding, motivation, desire – our heart. Jesus does it time and again. This is what gives his preaching and teaching such authority when compared with the mindless repetitiveness of the Pharisees. Good preaching and teaching will always address the heart, as it feeds the mind and seeks the Holy Spirit's help to move the will.

These illustrations can be read negatively as instructions not to be too hasty in making the serious decision to commit to following Jesus. But I think it is better to view it positively in the sense that following Jesus is to be desired, but that doing so requires thoughtful consideration.

V28-30. The demands of discipleship are set forth as being distinctly significant because the man in the story is not just building a shed or a house; he is building a tower. We are surrounded by so much 'Christianity' in our culture, yet much of it is nothing more than shed-like construction or, at best, that of constructing a two-bed townhouse. True biblical Christianity is 'tower' like, and our approach to it must have the mindset that it is a mammoth task. It just can't be thrown up in an afternoon or a few months. Stone towers took lifetimes to build, and you certainly didn't want to start without weighing up the cost, for it was huge. The idea of just getting out of bed one day and saying to yourself, 'I think I'll build a tower today' and to go at it with thoughtless abandon for a few weeks would be the height of stupidity and result in laughable failure.

Jesus is not saying, don't build the tower. He wants you and me to build a tower of genuine following after him. But he wants us to know that it will require a lifetime of serious, intentional commitment.

Q1. What are these verses about?

Q2. Is being a follower of Jesus easy? What will it take?

## Tuesday – Please read Luke 14:25-33 – Will you renounce all that you have?

V31. The second illustration of the king having to likewise think through what is confronting him before making a choice sounds the same, but there is a difference. In the 'I will build a tower' illustration, the person decides to do something because they want to. They are making a choice based on their desire. Here, the king is faced with a dilemma that he did not go out looking for. The other army of 20,000 men is coming to his territory uninvited and unwelcome. He doesn't want this war, but it is coming to him, and he needs to face that reality. So, he has a decision to make as he looks out at his force of 10,000 men. Will he go out and seek to fend off their aggression, or will he send a delegation to sue for peace on the best terms that can be negotiated.

You and I, as disciples of Christ, need to realize that we are in a spiritual war. We don't need to go looking for it, the enemy is already at the borders of our lives, and his march is constant and relentless. He roams the world like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus tells us that this is not a proxy war; it is invested with hatred (John 15:18-25). Paul writes in his letter to the church at Ephesus, and he couldn't be clearer – "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12). This is serious; it's not a game. To often you and I just drift thoughtlessly through our lives as Christians. We need to look up and look out, see the dangers that are coming our way, and take the right decisions to employ the weapons which Christ has given us. The key point is that we must not sue for peace with sin and Satan by disobeying Christ, because the reality is they don't know what the word 'peace' means, it's not in their vocabulary. Yes, they will take all we give them, but it won't make one iota of difference, they'll just keep coming at us with the sole intent to destroy.

V33. This counting the cost, this facing the enemy, will always require the total renunciation of self and all that goes with it. This is the only option open to us. It's not easy, in fact it is hard for it requires wholehearted, all-in commitment, and it can only be realised because of Jesus' love for you (John 15:9-11).

What blessed freedom, though, to get to the point in life where, by God's grace, all that matters is Christ, his truth, his way, his work by the Holy Spirit in one's life. The one true place on earth where there is real joy.

Q1. What is the difference between this illustration and yesterday's?

Q2. How must you and I live our lives in Christ?

## Wednesday - Please read Luke 14:25-35 - True Biblical Christianity.

Jesus makes it clear in these verses what it takes to be a disciple, and, as we have seen, it's not easy and none of us are perfect. However, the idea of either exhorting serious biblical Christianity or requiring it for leadership roles in the Church has taken a hammering in our nation. Yes, no one can read another person's heart, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't read their life, as Jesus himself said, "By their fruits, you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?" (Matthew 7:16). If such a 'reading' gives clear evidence of a genuine love for Christ and an 'all-in' attitude when it comes to obeying Him, then we should be thankful to God for what we see. Sadly, and it is sad, there are parts of the visible Church where the exercise of such appropriate and necessary discernment has been set aside. Why? It's because they want to see their church grow, and the calculation is made that it is best not to ask too many questions or look too closely at the person's life, in case the individual might become offended and leave.

What does this type of approach lead to? Well, it does two things: First, it only helps to confirm people in their self-deception, which is a seriously dangerous thing for the person, as Jesus makes clear in Matthew 7:21-23. Second, it harms the church by permitting either spiritually unproven people or unbelievers into positions of responsibility. Many congregations have been seriously harmed by individuals who, because of their personality, ability, and willingness to 'do' things, are given positions of responsibility far too quickly. It usually starts with them volunteering to help with something or being given a small task to undertake. However, not enough attention is paid to their character and love for Christ. Then, over time, their competency leads to them 'climbing the ladder' of opportunity in the church until they reach a position of real influence. By that point, even though it's clear that things in their character aren't adding up, the decision to remove them is almost too difficult to contemplate. The evident lack of aroma of Christ in their words and their attitude when under pressure, the frequent tendency to make decisions that benefit themselves or their friends in the church – these all speak to an absence of true saving faith. Eventually, it will get to the stage where the hard but necessary decision has to be taken. That inevitably involves a lot of time and energy and is often met with confusion and hurt. Ultimately, these situations do not end well for anyone.

Q1. How important is it to test an individual's profession of faith?

Q2. What harm can be done if an unbeliever gets into a role in the church?