

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 – Read Luke 16:1-7 – The dishonest manager’s solution.

The dishonest manager has stolen from his employer, and it’s been on a huge scale. Told to bring a final settlement of his accounting, the manager uses the little time he has and implements a plan to provide for himself in the future, at the further expense of his employer. Physical labour was going to be too much for him; he’d lived a life of relative ease and wasn’t going to get his hands involved in hard work at this stage in his life. He was also too proud to beg; that wouldn’t have sat well, given his reputation as the manager of one of the main estate owners in the community. So, he uses his evident intelligence and business skills to employ a relatively simple strategy. He contacts and calls in each of his boss’s debtors, individually and without witnesses, and proceeds to strike a deal with them to pay off what they owe at a reduced rate. The figures involved are substantial; for example, the 100 measures of oil equates to around 3,000 litres, so when he writes an invoice for 50 measures, he is writing off income from 1,500 litres of oil, a really significant amount. The reason he probably thought he could get away with it is because it is comparatively easy to adulterate olive oil, so the interest rates were higher than for grain. Then, he continued to work his scheme with the wheat, telling his employer’s debtor to reduce the bill for what he owed from that which would have been produced from 100 acres of arable land down to what 80 acres would have produced. Again, we’re not talking here about a few handfuls or a bag or two of grain. The game plan was simple – by reducing the debtors’ debt to his employer, he was obviously going to open doors for himself when he would find himself out of his job. So, this is a real sharp move that this man puts on his employer. Of course, he was never going to get away with it, he knew that but what did he care; the bill would show up in the accounts as being paid and it would take an audit much later on to discover what he had done. By that time, he would have moved on and his reputation as a fraudster would already have become public knowledge, so how much more could it impact him? Plus, in the often mirky waters of the business world, it’s often the case that having a ‘name’ for dishonest dealing will open certain doors. The real problem is prison time or loss of funds or access to them.

Next week we will see how his employer responds and the point Jesus is seeking to make in this parable. Until then, just to be clear, Jesus is not either advocating theft or fraud.

- Q1. Why did the dishonest manager come up with the scheme he did?
- Q2. What was his scheme?

Thursday – Read Luke 16:1-15 – The dishonest manager’s problem.

Jesus has been speaking to the Pharisees and scribes. Now he turns his attention to those who are following him and tells them a parable. But note that the Pharisees are still in the background listening, for they scoffed at what Jesus said in verse 14.

This is regarded as one of the most difficult parables to interpret. Jumping ahead to verse 8 we read that the man who is defrauded in the parable actually commends his dishonest manager for doing so. How are we to understand this; and understand it we must, because having read it, if we don’t get some idea of what is being said here, it is simply going to stick in our minds and bog us down. So, let me deal with it briefly now to see if we can make some headway. The thing to grasp is that the defrauded rich man is not commending his dishonest manager for his commercial dishonesty, but for his astuteness in dealing with the situation he found himself in, and that is the key lesson Jesus is teaching his disciples. So, with that in mind, let’s get into this passage.

It unfolds in three parts; we are told first about the dishonest manager’s problem (v1,2), then of his approach to addressing that problem (v3-7), and finally of the rich man’s response (v8).

The dishonest manager’s problem – this man had a significant job managing someone else’s property, and that someone else was a rich man. So, this job would have presented many opportunities for engaging in both poor practice and abuse, and that’s what happened. News gets back to the estate owner that the man managing his affairs has been wasting his money, and it’s not a few hundred dollars here and there. Such is the scale of the profligacy that it can neither be hidden nor excused. This is a major fraud that’s been going on and probably for some time. Faced with such a dereliction and abuse of trust, evidently supported by ample proof, the estate owner brings in his manager, and, without any questioning, demands that he give him a final statement of accounts before being dismissed. The absence of any plea of mitigation on the part of the manager speaks loudly to his obvious guilt.

What is Jesus saying to his disciples here? He’s telling them that they are managers or stewards of the gifts which God has freely given to them, and they need to understand, and very clearly so, how they are to exercise that responsibility. You and I have a stewardship given to us by God as His image bearers, and if we know Christ we are to be stewards of the good news of the gospel and must give an account one day for our lives and our witness (1 Corinthians 4:2). So, what we learn from this parable is applicable to us.

Q1. Who is Jesus addressing and who also is listening?

Q2. What had the rich man’s manager done?

Monday – Read Luke 15:17-24 – The joy of the son’s return.

V17. The son’s previous choices have come back to haunt him in the far country, and they have done so because of the ‘seeking’ Shepherd and the work of Holy Spirit. Coming to a realization of his sin, he resolves to return home, his speech is prepared. But note from that speech how he understands that his sin is before heaven first and foremost, and then against his father. We think when we sin against someone that they are the person we need to address and that is true, but we should do so having addressed it with God first. Why? Because sin is always against God for it is He who is holy. As David writes following his sin with Bathsheba, “Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” Psalm 51:4.

Note also, that having resolved, the son then acts, it’s not just words. How often we resolve to do things but then don’t do them. Having a ‘killer instinct’, when it comes to addressing the sin in your life and turning to God our Father, is something you must constantly be focused on.

As we saw on Friday, the father runs to the son out of compassion, having been surveying the horizon for his return. The embrace is real and, as the son begins to speak, he is immediately interrupted by his father. Why? Is the father going to give his son a stern rebuke for the callousness he had previously shown? No, the interruption is to convey his love, just as his embrace is so doing. The son is trying to express his desire to be a hired servant, but his father is having none of it. He calls for a robe, the best robe, a sign of position, a ring, symbolizing authority, and shoes for his feet, for he will not be a slave but a freeman. There is evident joy in the father’s heart, and it is seen in his running, in his embrace, and in his instructions about providing the best clothing and the holding of a great feast to celebrate his return, as if it were from the dead.

One theme dominates these three parables – rejoicing in the heart of God and before the angels; and Jesus drives it home to these Pharisees and scribes as they grumble at him for eating with tax-collectors and sinners.

Surely there is something in that for us. First, are you looking and praying for the salvation of one person in your life, one person who is dead in their trespasses and sins? Second, if by God’s grace they or someone else is converted, are you willing to be filled with rejoicing, or do you take the skeptical approach of, well, we will wait and see if they ‘prove’ themselves. Yes, we have to be discerning, but surely our interactions must be ones marked by words of encouragement as well as discernment.

Q1. What point is Jesus making to the Pharisees and scribes?

Q2. What do these parables teach us about how we should react when someone is saved?

Tuesday – Read Luke 15:25-32 – The older brother’s reaction.

In many ways the three parables we have considered could have ended at verse 24. The sheep was lost, the coin was lost, the young man was lost, and when they have been found, there is wonderful rejoicing. But what we have in these verses is a postscript and it centers around the older brother.

It’s clear from the outset that this man is very unhappy. He complains both to, and about, his father. His complaint to his father is that his younger brother has taken the inheritance he received at great cost to his father, and having squandered it, is now back home as the center of attention at a great celebration. This in turn leads to his complaint *about* his father. A complaint that focuses on the fact he has lived and served his father all his life and never once has his father offered him as much as a party with his friends.

Who is this older brother? Well, in a sense he is you and me, is he not? Are we not given to resentfulness much more often than we should be? Are there not occasions when someone receives a blessing from the Lord, and we think that surely our contribution to the kingdom is somewhat greater than their’s is? Anyone looking at it in a fair-minded way would have to agree that what we have done is more than what the blessed person has ever done. Have you never had that thought?

Yet, the older brother is a man who fully resembles the Pharisees. The language he uses when speaking of himself pervades total self-righteousness; it’s as though he has been the model son. These are the words of someone who has never experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating the heart and renewing the mind. But it’s not just that he is filled with arrogance and pride – the words he uses when talking about his brother are both censorious and judgmental. In verse 30, he doesn’t even refer to his brother as his brother; he speaks of him as his ‘father’s son’. As far as the older brother is concerned, the day his younger brother took his share of the inheritance, and by implication stated that his father was dead to him, was the day that his younger brother became dead to him. They might all be rejoicing, but he wouldn’t be joining in; after all, who rejoices for someone they regard as being ‘dead’, and especially so when, as he sees it, his younger brother has utterly wasted all that has been freely given to him. Note how he doesn’t hold back in exaggerating what his younger brother is supposed to have done. This is far removed from that which emanates from the heart of the believer, who must always put the best construction on the words or actions of a brother or sister in Christ (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Q1. How does the older brother respond?

Q2. How are we to think and speak of others?

Wednesday – Read Luke 15:25-32 – The father’s response.

As we saw yesterday, the older brother is not only self-righteous, but he despises his younger brother and reacts as though he were dead. This joylessness in his life comes out even more in his interaction with his father. It’s interesting that, even though he sees himself as a son to whom his father should have given more to, the verb he uses, when speaking of his many years of service, conveys the sense that he sees himself as having done so as a slave, literally ‘to serve as a slave’. What does that say? It tells us that he didn’t understand what being a son means. Which is why he says what he does to his father. He doesn’t understand the nature of their relationship. Look at how his father responds though. He says to his oldest son, with real tenderness, ‘Son you are always with me...’

Now before we go on, let’s be clear, we could take the fact that the father calls the older brother his son to mean that the older brother is a Christian, but he’s not. Yes, he is a son of the household of God on earth, a son of the covenant, but that does not mean that he is an adopted son of God by salvation. Sadly, there are many sons and daughters of the covenant who will not be adopted into the family of God. Take Jacob and Esau, both sons of the covenant, but God says, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated,” (Romans 9:13). We shall see in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, when we come to it in Luke 16:24, the difference between the son of the covenant who is in hell, and the sonship of spiritual adoption. This is a son of the covenant who, despite the pleading of his father to join them in the celebration, is angry and refuses to do so. And yet his father continues to speak so tenderly to him, even when the older son challenges him about his response to the returning younger brother. Why does the father do so? Because he desires that his older son will stop and think about the privileges and blessings he has, and then come to his senses, just as his younger son, his brother, had done in the far country. After all he’s still alive, and there is still time, for today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

What is Jesus doing here in leaving the parable open ended in this way? He is telling the Pharisees and scribes, those who have been grumbling to him about his interaction with the tax-collectors and sinners, that there is time for them to seek him with all their heart, mind and soul. If you are reading this and you haven’t done so, please, please, do not delay in seeking the Lord.

Q1. How does the son see his relationship with his father?

Q2. How does the father respond? What is Jesus’ point?