

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 16:14-17 – How are you seeking to be justified?

The Pharisees, who loved their money, did not miss the meaning of what the Lord was saying. Isn't that interesting? We tend to think of the Pharisees as a bunch of men who were only focused on telling Jesus what they thought, but they did actually listen to what he had to say, and they did engage with it, albeit it selfishly and in line with their predetermined views. But they did listen, and that's not a commendation – it's just a recognition of what they did. I wonder, sometimes do we read or hear what Jesus has to say, but not really listen to it?

When it says that they ridiculed Jesus because of what he said, what thinking lay behind that ridicule? Well, it would have been the fact that they obviously couldn't fit into the category Jesus was addressing, because, after all, they had a leading role in the life of the Church; so they must have been good stewards of what God gave them. In fact, their material well-being simply underscored that. That's why they scoffed at what Jesus had to say. Jesus' response is withering. He speaks directly at them and puts his finger on the key issue. They can seek to outwardly justify their activities all they want before men; but the reality is that God knows exactly what is going on in their hearts. And what he sees is abominable to Him.

Jesus now underscores what he has just said with a stunning statement. Their attempts to self-justify before others is common throughout the entirety of God's Word and is absolutely futile, because it is at complete odds with both the teaching of the law and the prophets. These men, scholars in the law, and the prophets should know better, but they don't. They don't because their knowledge is not motivated by love and belief; it is motivated by a protectionist attitude towards a religious order. They view themselves not in the light of, or as being truly under, the Word of God, but rather as those who sit above God's Word, wanting to school others in it, and to do so, yes for God's good name but, ultimately for personal gain. Now they are trying to ride roughshod over the preacher of the good news of the Kingdom. The one who has come not to destroy the law or the prophets, something they believe He is seeking to do, but to properly fulfil them, for the Word of God will never pass away.

Q1. Why did the Pharisees ridicule Jesus?

Q2. How long will the Word of God last?

Q3. What do you think the statement in verse 16, "and everyone forces his way into it" means?

Thursday – Read Luke 16:10-13 – No one can serve two masters!

This is one of those verses in the Bible that is quoted fairly often, but what does it mean? Well, it is simple isn't it; it means that you can't believe in God and do what He wants you to do, and at the same time do what your saved, but still sinful, heart desires and demands, especially where money is concerned. But is it really that simple? If it is, then why do you and I wrestle so much with what Jesus says here is impossible to do. Trying to be friends with the world and with God at the same time. But 'I don't do that', do I hear you say? Do you not? You may be surprised by just how much you are allowing the world and its ways to influence and shape your perceptions and thoughts about material things. And what about your affections; how easy is it for us to become subtly immersed in what the world sees as being really important?

Here is the problem – divided loyalties are impossible to sustain. You can't walk on both sides of the divide. The godless don't have this problem – they are single-minded in their devotion to the god of 'self', the god that rules their passions and interests in life. It's believers who too often become confused about who they are and who they must submit to. And here is the profound fact about this – in the seeking to find the pinnacle of happiness by trying to walk on both sides at the same time, the believer is actually exposing themselves to real unhappiness, because double-mindedness, without exception, will always bring deep unhappiness. It simply will not work because it cannot work; "no man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other."

Think about this because it is much more subtle than we think. We're not just talking here about wasting our money recklessly like the prodigal son. It might just be that you are investing yourself so much in trying to provide financial security for yourself for the future, that you failing to utilize the gifts God has given you to bring Glory to Him in the present. And that might be the root cause of a certain amount of your current unhappiness. If the reports are true, why has Elon Musk sold his seven homes, for a reported \$128 million, and is now living in a small rental property near his aerospace company in Boca Chica, Texas? It's because he has worked out what is really important to him, and, without advocating him as an example, I am simply making the point that you and I have to decide between what is really important to us and what is not, and then act accordingly.

Q1. Who are the two masters whom Jesus warns us against trying to serve?

Q2. Why does Jesus do so?

Monday – Read Luke 16:1-9 – Wisdom is needed!

Last week, we read about how this dishonest manager defrauded his rich employer. What grabs our attention though is the reaction of the employer. One would expect him to be angry at his former manager who, after all, has not only abused his trust, but has then stolen from him. Surely this is deserving of the strongest possible response. But no, the employer commends his manager, yes you heard it correctly, he commends him (v8). Why? Is the employer ignorant of what his manager has done? No, he knows full well what his employee has done, and the fact that it is wrong. There can be no excuse for breaking the eighth commandment, or any commandment for that matter. If he's not ignorant, then is the employer just naïve? Far from being naïve, the employer's response is well thought through. While neither approving nor condoning the crime, the rich man both sees and appreciates the shrewdness of what his former employee has done. Yes, his actions were disgracefully dishonest, but his scheming and the execution of his bold plan is what impresses his employer. The simple fact is that this parable highlights the reality that the world is a place where sharp and shrewd practices are very much part of every-day life. So much so that those who engage in them are often applauded for their activities.

In the closing sentence of verse 8, the point is well made, that when it comes to interacting within their own community, the street wisdom of the world is much more finely tuned than that of the godly. There is a down-to-earth realism and a characteristic cleverness in the way the ungodly operate that is largely absent among Christians. And, in a sense, that is to be expected and desired, because we are children of the light and therefore at odds with the world and its practices. So, we need to be careful here, Jesus is not condoning sharp and shrewd tactics to either get one's way or gain a financial advantage; what he is doing is that he is making the point that sometimes as Christians we can be extremely naïve about how we go about things. It's almost as though we expect that because someone calls themselves a Christian, they automatically have our best interests at heart. That's a fallacy. Yes, we are to think the best of who people are, and of what they say, and of what they do, but we must do so with our eyes and ears wide open. Yes, we are to always give people the benefit of the doubt, but only the benefit of the doubt; not the right to run rings around us if their behaviour is obviously wholly self-interested and abusive in some form or other. We are to engage our minds, as well as our hearts, when interacting with people, regardless of who they say they are.

Q1. What did the rich man think of his manager's fraud?

Q2. In what sense are we to give other believers the benefit of the doubt?

Tuesday – Read Luke 16:1-9 – We need to be shrewd!

In verse 9 Jesus begins an explanation of the parable with the words – “I tell you”. In doing so, he is not simply saying, ‘listen because I want to tell you what this parable means’. It’s a much stronger statement. Literally it means, ‘I myself am telling you, and want you as my disciples to hear what I have to say’. So, what does Jesus tell his disciples and us? He tells us that we are to become much shrewder in our use of the resources he has given us, albeit never for our selfish gain, but for the good of his kingdom.

The manager in the parable is a steward, entrusted with the management of his boss’s property – as are we; we are to be wise stewards of our lives and gifts in Christ. The manager makes friends by leveraging the debt others owe his employer to provide financial security for his future; we are to use wisely what God has given us to provide for our eternal future. Note, Jesus is not saying that you use what God has given you to barter or buy your way into heaven; that cannot be done. What Jesus is saying is that once a person comes to faith in him, then he must use what God gives to him solely for spiritual and eternal ends. It’s the same thing as Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19-21), where he schools us to stop storing up treasure for ourselves on earth, where over time they will be they stolen or destroyed; but rather to invest in things that will reap an eternal reward. *This is the point Jesus is making about being shrewd.* Once the manager knows that he is about to be fired, he becomes totally focused on sorting the best possible future for himself. Once we are converted and in-Christ, our mindset should be exactly the same. We should be totally focused on getting the absolute best out of what God gives us for His glory. Whether it is our life, our money, our relationships – whatever it is, we should develop and maintain a one-track-mind that is geared to investing what we have been given, so that it will produce the best possible heavenly return. As Jesus says in John 6:27, “Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.”

Again, at the expense of repeating myself, there can be no buying our way into heaven, with money, with works, with obedience, with whatever. There is only one way of salvation, and it is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ; but once saved, then we need to put our heads into gear and invest everything we have for God’s glory and our future eternal reward. That’s what Jesus is getting at here when he talks about our being shrewd.

Q1. What does Jesus mean when he tells us to be shrewd?

Q2. Can we, by shrewdness, gain entry into heaven?

Wednesday – Read Luke 16:10-13 – Why we need to be shrewd!

Yesterday Jesus taught the necessity for us to be shrewd in taking everything that God gives us, and investing it to God’s glory, and for the best possible eternal harvest for ourselves. Now Jesus presents a three-fold argument to support why we should do that.

First, we have the principle stated; it is a simple truth about basic commitment: Whoever can be trusted with handling something small in a way that is marked by integrity and honesty, can also be trusted with something much larger. Why is that the case? Because, if you are willing to take the time and make the effort to care about the insignificant little things in your life, things that will apparently give you little or nothing in return, either materially or in terms of recognition, then your head and heart are in the right place. You are making decisions for the correct reasons. How someone fulfils the little responsibilities in life is always the best test of their character.

Second, this principle is then applied to the level of trust we will receive in the kingdom of God. Jesus says that if you misuse the material things God gives you, then don’t expect to be given much responsibility in the Kingdom of God. The two are intimately linked in God’s mind. Truth in faith will always be evident by the fruit it bears. Get it repeatedly wrong in the personal affairs of your life and you can forget about ever being handed any responsibility in the church. God just won’t have it. And if you have such responsibility and you start messing about in your personal life, being dishonest and wasting what God has given you, He will soon take the responsibilities you have in the Kingdom from you.

Third, the principle is applied not only to how we use what God has given us, but in respect of how we use what God has given to someone else. It’s bad when we misuse and abuse what God has given to us, but it’s worse if such a thing can be said that we misuse and abuse that which belongs to another. But you may say – I don’t have anything that belongs to someone else. Do you not? What about your life? As a professing believer in Jesus, are you not a blood-bought slave of the Lord Jesus Christ? Does God not own us, having redeemed you by the uncalculatable price of the blood of His only begotten Son? I have an aversion to the use of the word ‘volunteer’ in the life of the church; for no true believer in Christ is a volunteer – we are all, every single one of us, the possession of the Lord Jesus, and thankfully so.

Q1. Why is it important to do the simple small things well?

Q2. How are we to treat what God gives us and others?