

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 – Luke 17:20-30 – The Kingdom is here but has yet to fully come.

The issue of when the Kingdom of God would be coming was huge for the Pharisees; in many ways, it is what they lived for, in anticipation. The problem was that their understanding of what the Kingdom of God would be like is nothing like what Jesus says it is. At this point, the Kingdom is about Jesus' presence in Person and ministry on the earth. Ultimately their failure to grasp lay at the root of the Pharisees' antagonism toward Jesus.

Jesus now turns to his disciples and speaks with them about the future revelation of the Kingdom that is currently in their midst through his because of presence. This future coming of the Kingdom is to be looked forward to, but in doing so, they and we must not get caught up in human predictions of when it will happen because no one knows the day nor the hour. What Jesus does reveal is that, before the Kingdom comes in its final glorious manifestation, he must suffer its realisation. Ultimately that suffering will culminate in his death, although he doesn't specifically speak of that here. He does speak of what it will be like in the world when he returns, in what we know will be his risen glorified form as Mediator King. As he describes the coming of the Kingdom in its full consummation, Jesus paints a picture based on two devastating historical events, both of which those listening to him would have known of. First, the global flood in the days of Noah, and second, the judgement of God upon the city of Sodom. The crucial point he is making is the total unpreparedness of humanity for the sudden onslaught of judgement, despite the repeated warnings that had been continuously given (2 Peter 2:5-7).

The reality of Jesus' second coming should ever be before us, for it will come like a bolt of lightning, yes expected during a storm, but unknown in terms of the exact timing. Christ will return when men are going about their daily lives oblivious to and disdainful of what will happen; the devil has lulled them into a complete and utterly disastrous false sense of security. Having chosen to ridicule and reject the good news of salvation freely offered in the gospel, they are blinded to the reality of what awaits them. Note that when Jesus uses the word 'destroyed' twice, he does not mean eternal destruction in the sense of being obliterated. He is speaking of destruction in terms of the just, terrible, and eternal punishment that everyone who has died not believing in Christ will experience. Destruction at the hand of the holy wrath of God that will never end. A truly unspeakable and frightening truth.

- Q1. Can we tell when Jesus is going to return to earth again victoriously?
Q2. What awaits those who reject the good news of the gospel?

Thursday – Luke 17:11-19 – The Samaritan returns and praises God.

As we saw yesterday, the lepers are obediently on their way to the priests in obedience to Jesus when they are miraculously healed. All that they need to do now is to follow through on what Jesus says and go to the priests to receive their cleanliness notification and re-engage with their community.

But one man doesn't do that; a Samaritan by ethnicity leaves the others to go on to the priests while he returns to see if he can find Jesus. But before we see what happens when he encounters Jesus, let's take a moment to think about how this Samaritan could have come to be with these nine Jews. It certainly wasn't because Samaritans and Jews usually enjoyed each other's company socially. In the account of Jesus' meeting the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar, the woman asks Jesus why he, a Jew, would ask her, a Samaritan, for a drink. John offers an explanatory comment, "for Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (John 4:9). So there had to be something that brought and bound this man to these nine Jews. It was the devastating needs that came with being a leprous human being. He lived outside the normal social boundaries, and the others welcomed him because their shared need was greater than what separated them. It's interesting how *need* will always trump usual social biases when it comes down to it.

This healed Samaritan man finds and approaches Jesus, something he couldn't have done before. Falling on his face, he expresses his thanks to the Lord in a genuine show of humility. He believes that God has just worked in his life, and he relates that directly to Jesus. Jesus' comment about the man's praising God makes that clear. The ensuing conversation shines a light on a human trait that is sadly lacking in believers – the want of a thankful attitude. Were the other nine grateful for what had happened to them? Indeed, they must have been. I don't think it could simply have been due to an inflated sense of entitlement that these nine Jewish men acted this way. So, what lay behind their decision? Well, either they didn't think about it, which is highly unlikely since the Samaritan man would have told them what he was going to do, or they were so taken with the need to see the priests to be formally declared clean that they decided not to go and thank Jesus. Is it the case that we also fail too often to take the opportunities we must, to tell each other just how thankful we are for what God has and is doing in our lives? Is this something that would warrant a bit of thought on our part?

Finally, Jesus' statement to him must have been wonderfully affirming in terms of his newfound faith.

Q1. Who was the one man who went back to Jesus and thanked him?

Q2. Is there anything you can learn from this?

Monday – Luke 17:1-4 – Leading others astray and forgiveness.

We enter a chapter now with no apparent link between the paragraphs. It is almost as though Luke is gathering a collection of things that Jesus taught and putting them into this section of his gospel.

In the opening verses of the chapter, we have an acknowledgment of the reality and inevitability of temptation, but then there is a statement that demands our attention. Because temptation is not something that just happens, it must be engineered in someone's heart. James makes this clear when he writes, "each person is tempted when is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin." (James 1:14,15). Jesus is talking here about the danger you will be in if you actively instigate that process in another's life. If you are implicit in hindering another believer's life in Christ, the consequences will be disastrous for you. Our natural response is to say, 'I'd never do that.' So, the prospect of a millstone (a heavy stone used for crushing the grain to get the seed out) being hung around my neck, and me being thrown into the sea, is zero. But let's not jump ahead based on our perceived innocence. Is there not a case that, if we present a wholly inadequate testimony of what we profess Jesus to have done in our lives, then, in some sense, are we not tempting unbelievers to deny the work of Christ? A thought to be considered.

Secondly, we are to rebuke one another when there is a public sin, and we are to do so to seek repentance. If there is repentance following confession, then immediate forgiveness must be given. However, the question is often asked, 'who and when should I forgive?' During the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, following a murder, a Christian relative would sometimes be asked by the media if they could find it in their heart to forgive the terrorists, and the Lord's prayer would be invoked, 'forgive those who sin against you.' The New Testament does talk a lot about forgiving others and doing so for different sins; that is the point about the seven times in verse 4; however, forgiveness is only to be given to a brother or sister in Christ who repents. (Interestingly, as an aside, this is the first use of the 'term' brother in Luke.)

But what if a brother or someone does not repent – can we still forgive them? Yes, but we are not commanded to do so. It is our choice, just as Jesus chose to forgive those who jeered at and scorned him on the Cross (Luke 23:34).

Q1. What are we not to do in respect of others?

Q2. Must we forgive everyone for everything they do?

Tuesday – Luke 17:5-10 – Increase our faith.

The apostles, not the larger body of disciples, now ask Jesus to do something that seems wonderful. What is it? To increase their faith. Is this just a random question, or is it linked to the command to rebuke and forgive sin when repentance has been entered into? I think it is linked. I think the apostles are asking Jesus for greater faith to fulfil the responsibility of paying attention to their brothers around them. James would later write, “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” (James 1:19,20).

Whatever the reason for the apostles’ question, Jesus’ response deals not with the quantity but the quality of their faith. He’s not saying to them, ‘if only you had faith.’ They have faith; they have shown that in leaving everything to follow Jesus, the issue is how they are applying it. Jesus is encouraging them to grasp that their faith in Him, God the Father and the Holy Spirit, is sufficient. He is telling them to take their God-given faith and use it more.

In the illustration of the mulberry tree, Jesus is telling the apostles that it’s not about them nor their faith; it’s about God and His power. God is the agent in the passive verbs of both acts of uprooting and planting. What they must do is to believe that the promises of God are as good as fulfilled and to act accordingly. Indeed, that is precisely what is required of us – to believe and act. To believe in the promises of Christ that He will build His church and then apply ourselves to using the means of grace that He has given us for the purpose.

To drive this home, Jesus speaks of a slave who, having done his day’s work, doesn’t return home expecting to sit at the master’s table and eat but rather understands that he must tend to his master as he sits at the table, and to do so without any expectation of a word of thanks. This must be our attitude as we strive to serve the Lord Jesus by God’s grace. It is an ugly thing when men and women in the church think they are justified and to be thanked for their faith-based actions. Of course, we should express our genuine appreciation of what our brothers and sisters in Christ do, we don’t do it enough, but that’s different from seeking either justification and/or thanks through doing those things that are our duty. We have absolutely no claim other than the right to serve as a blood-bought slave, and God blesses astonishingly; then so be it.

Q1. What is the crucial thing about having been given faith?

Q2. Is there any place for being proud of our faith in our lives?

Wednesday – Luke 17:11-19 – Ten lepers, faith, and healing.

Luke must be dropping this in here because it doesn’t fit any natural travel order. It says that Jesus is travelling along the border between the two provinces of Samaria and Galilee, but Jesus has left the border region behind him and is on his way to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). So, either this took place earlier, or Jesus turned back and went north for some reason. The fact that the village is unnamed doesn’t sort the issue for us.

On entering the village, ten men meet Jesus, but they don’t approach him because they are lepers and are required by law, because they are unclean, to stand some distance away (Leviticus 13:46). However, there is no law preventing them from calling to him, and although leprosy does impact the voice, they join in a chorus of appeal because of their individual need. They call him by name and title, but interestingly their request is not to be healed but for mercy. A sign of their humility? Probably given their life circumstances, but their desire would have been for Jesus to show his mercy by healing them. Their need led them to call out.

Jesus hears the calls for mercy, sees the men, and utters what appears to be a simplistic response that bears little reference to their needs, but it is his word. What were the priests going to do? The lepers are unclean, so the priests wouldn’t be able to engage with them. The only reason for going to the priests would be to receive a formal declaration that one was clean and eligible to rejoin normal societal life (Leviticus 14:2ff). Of course, that could only happen if somehow you had miraculously been healed. But Jesus hadn’t healed these men. So, what happens? They stand around and chat about how they can always talk about the day they saw and called out to the great Rabbi Jesus. No, they take Jesus at his word. They do as he says, and they obey him and set off to see the priests. Madness! What will the priests say to them when they turn up at the door? That question isn’t even raised as the Lepers make their way. Why? Because a glorified madness, an assurance in the face of ridiculous odds, has descended upon them. The usual approach to making life choices based on what is seen, heard, and touched is gone. Now they are infused with an “assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1). And as these ten lepers make their way to the priests, their diseased and decaying bodies are healed! Astonishing, amazing! Their lives are transformed in an instant. How? By whom? By Jesus, and miraculously so. How is that possible? Jesus isn’t with them, and he hasn’t said anything about healing them. It is possible, and it happens because Jesus is the Son of God, and he decrees it.

Q1. What did the ten lepers do and why?

Q2. What did Jesus tell them to do, and what happened and why?