

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 21:1-4 – The widow who gave her all.

Having just spoken in condemnation of the Pharisees and Scribes because of the sinfulness of their pride-filled hearts, seen in both their parading of themselves and in their greed when dealing with the widows, Jesus is now sitting calmly and without fuss, watching people deposit their offerings into one of the thirteen metal receptacles, each marked with a Hebrew letter that stood in the Temple court. What he observes gives rise to what he says to his disciples. As he watches, he sees all sorts of people putting their offerings into these large receptacles, including those who were very wealthy and giving a lot in quite a noticeable way. But there is one individual who catches his eye. It's a woman, a widow, an extremely poor widow. The fact that Jesus has just condemned the religious leaders because of their financial abuse of widows is no 'coincidence'. Luke uses a word for poor which means penniless. Her appearance would undoubtedly have spoken to her poverty, but Jesus sees more; he sees that what she is giving is all she had, everything that she owned in financial terms. Poverty-stricken and destitute, this woman gives everything she owns – two small copper coins. The monetary value of what she gave was so insignificant that it wasn't even worth her effort. In terms of those counting the offerings, it wouldn't have been worth the effort to lift them out of the container, and I am not exaggerating. We are talking about a ¼ of a cent here. If this were a parable, your heart would go out to this woman, but this is a real live person doing something unbelievable, and we are not even given her name. But don't misunderstand – her name is known to God. For this widow gave herself, all she had, in worship to God. As Jesus says to his disciples, it wasn't like the others who all contributed out of their abundance; this widow gave out of her poverty and gave it all.

Does that mean that you must sell everything you have and give it all as an offering to God? Well, the issue is one of what's in your heart. It may be that you do have to look at what you are returning to the Lord and reflect on whether it demonstrates real dependence upon God. But it may be that the issue you have to face, in terms of your dependence upon God, is in other areas of your life. Ask God to help you understand that all you have and are comes from Him, and then respond accordingly.

Q1. What is Jesus doing now?

Q2. Who does he see giving their offerings, and who draws his attention and why?

Q3. What response do you have that shows your utter dependence on your God?

Thursday – Luke 20:45-47 – The abominable behaviour of the leaders.

Luke now covers Jesus' warning to the scribes in three verses, something to which Matthew devotes an entire chapter (Matthew 23). But the reality and horror of what Jesus declares is not diminished by how Luke records it under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is surrounded by hundreds, if not thousands, of people who are in Jerusalem for the Passover, and we see from Matthew 23:13 that Jesus speaks directly to the crowds about the Pharisees and scribes. It's devastating what Jesus says. In their presence, Jesus warns his disciples and all who are listening about the threat the Pharisees and scribes pose to them. We could easily pass over this, but this is a phenomenal moment in Jesus' life, as he addresses the heart of the problem with these religious leaders – their hearts.

They loved to be seen and lauded in public as they paraded around the streets of the city dressed in their long white expensive robes, garments worn only by dignitaries on special occasions. They are attired like this all the time, and the impression they seek to create is that they are significant, influential men. They purposely visit the crowded marketplaces so that they will be seen and respectfully greeted by as many people as possible. It's all about the show, and the show consists of them walking around. Then there is their posturing in the synagogue. The place of public worship becomes a stage on which they seek to perform. They expect and silently demand the most prominent seats possible besides the ruling elders. Why – so that they can give themselves to hearing God's Word as it is read and taught, but rather that they might gain a following when asked to impart their wisdom on a passage. Likewise, at any of the significant feasts, they expect to be seated in the best possible seats, as is befitting their standing in the community. It's always all about them. It is all about their pride and standing in the community. Yes, they are serious about God and His Law, but, in a real sense, for them, God is a facilitator of their sense of entitlement.

Having highlighted the condition of their hearts, Jesus exposes that sinfulness as manifesting itself not merely in their seeking admiration but also the pursuit of personal gain. Taking the responsibility to care for the widows and the orphans, they have abused it to such an extent that they are devouring what little the widows have, while at the same time parading their 'holiness' through their long prayers. Abominable, and Jesus doesn't miss the mark. If you have time, read Matthew 23 to see what he says.

Q1. Who does Jesus speak to and about whom?

Q2. What does Jesus say about what the religious leaders are doing?

Q3. What will be the outcome of their behaviour?

Monday – Luke 20:27-40 – The Sadducees confront Jesus.

Matthew (Matthew 22:23) tells us that this happened on the same day the Pharisees and the Herodians tried to entrap Jesus with their question about whether taxes should be paid to Caesar. This time it is the Sadducees, men with a much more liberal view of the law and life than the Pharisees, who confront Jesus. Their question, respectfully put to Jesus, relates to one of their key doctrines, for they did not believe it was possible to be resurrected. The fact that Abraham, the 'father of the faith', believed in resurrection (Hebrews 11:19) indicates how strongly they held this conviction.

The point of the story they outline is to show that resurrection is impossible because the outworking of it to them is absurd. Jesus doesn't call them on the absurdity of the marriage scenario they present. The kinsman-redeemer principle was well known (Genesis 38:8, Leviticus 25:25-55, Ruth 3:9). But the idea that six brothers would have to fulfil this role on behalf of a deceased brother stretches it a bit far. But, as I say, Jesus doesn't question the absurdity of their hypothetical story. What's interesting about this is that it shows that what we face sometimes, that is, the art of trying to play a biblical principle/practice against a biblical doctrine, is not new; e.g., "You say 'God is love,' but how does that square with his killing of babies in the Old Testament?"

Jesus, and it is astonishing the ease with which he does so yet again, bursts the folly of their bubble in a few words. Luke doesn't tell us, as Matthew does (Matthew 22:29) and as Mark does (Mark 12:24), that Jesus told the Sadducees that they are wrong because they know "neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." Maybe that is a line we should take with people who want to play games with God's Word with us. Often, we are too reticent; we don't want to offend, but the fact is that if people are deliberately misquoting the Word of God, they should be corrected for their own good.

Jesus sets marriage in the only context it exists, in life on earth. There will be no marriage in heaven. It's something that people don't always think about. Marriage is only for life; the marriage vow is clear when it says – 'until death do us part'.

Tomorrow, we will consider more of what Jesus says when he responds.

Q1. Who now confronts Jesus?

Q2. What is the doctrine they deny?

Q3. How do they try and show that resurrection is absurd?

Tuesday – Luke 20:27-40 - There will be no marriage in heaven – why?

The Sadducees, one of the groups within Judaism, had cornered Jesus with a question about marriage and resurrection. Jesus, as we saw yesterday, rebukes them (Matthew 22:29), saying that if they knew their Bibles, they'd know that there is no marriage in heaven. Jesus now gives two reasons as to why that will be the case.

We know that marriage on earth has been given to man for companionship and, filling the earth, procreation. (Genesis 2:21-25 and Genesis 1:28). Jesus speaks first about the issue of procreation and says that since there will be no death in heaven, there will be no need to replenish heaven with new life. The number of people in heaven, vast as it will be ('as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore,' Genesis 22:17), is already fixed by God, and since no one can die in heaven because our lives will be eternal there, procreation is not required.

The second point Jesus makes relates to what our lives will be like in heaven. Luke makes up a word here when he writes that Jesus said we would be 'equal to angels'. Some commentators say it means to be 'angel-like'. So, what is meant by it? I think he's talking about our relationship with God in heaven. I take that view because of what Jesus says next about being "sons of God" and "sons of the resurrection". It's helpful to take those three statements together and see in them that we will have an entirely new relationship with God in heaven. One marked by sonship, which is realized through our resurrection, is a consequence of our relationship with Christ, which we received as a gift from God. So, the companionship dimension of marriage on earth will be unnecessary in heaven because we will be in a perfect relationship with Christ and, through Christ, with everyone else in heaven.

Jesus is not content, though, just to deal with the question of resurrection and how it relates to marriage; he goes on to show that resurrection is clearly stated in the Old Testament. He references Exodus 3:1-6, where God speaks to Moses and tells him that he is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. The God of three men who had long since died but in a real sense alive to God; not that they have been raised already, but that they are alive and awaiting the resurrection.

Unusually the scribes, who were Pharisees, commended Jesus, not because he agreed with them but because he had answered the Sadducees in a way they had never been able to do.

- Q1. What two reasons are there for marriage on earth?
- Q2. Why will those two reasons not exist in heaven?
- Q3. What was the response from the scribes?

Wednesday – Luke 20:41-44 – Jesus poses a question.

Jesus has been responding to questions thrown at him. Now he asks the Pharisees a question (Matthew 22:41). There is more dialogue to this than Luke gives us, and it's helpful to have that as it sets the context. Here is what Matthew tells us. Jesus asks the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" To which they respond, "The son of David". Now we come to the question Luke records for us and the challenge to the Pharisees as to how the Christ can just be David's son.

Jesus poses this question based on the content of Psalm 110. It's simply put. David says that the Lord (*Yahweh*) said to his Lord (*Adonai*) to sit on his (*Yahweh's*) right. The point is that in this statement, *Adonai* is being anointed by *Yahweh* to exercise all authority on heaven and earth. And in doing so, *Yahweh* puts all of *Adonai's* enemies under his feet. So, this descendant of David, this *Adonai*, is divine in all aspects of his being and power.

Now the question of who is this *Adonai*, this divine Lord, is posed to the Pharisees. How can the Messiah, because that is who this *Adonai* is, be David's son and his divine Lord at the same time? The problem for the Pharisees is that their belief about the Messiah was constrained by the idea that he would solely be David's son. He would be a majestic and powerful man, but just a human being like his father. They had no comprehension of his deity, even though it was plainly revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. So, the dilemma for them now is how they will answer. Not that this was something new for them because each time they engaged Jesus, they faced the same dilemma. They couldn't say that the Messiah is not the son of David, but, on the other hand, there was no way they could say that he is the Messiah, even though the plain interpretation of Psalm 110 clearly shows that that is the case. So, what do they do? Matthew tells us, "no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions." (Matthew 22:46).

The men of the Sanhedrin had set out to entrap Jesus. They had devised a careful plan that had first pitted the often-opposed Pharisees and the Herodians together, and when that failed, the Sadducees were sent in to try and entrap Jesus. On each occasion, the hunted became the hunter and overwhelmed and silenced in a few words those attacking him. What a Saviour we have.

- Q1. What question does Jesus ask the Pharisees and why?
- Q2. How does this pose a dilemma for them?
- Q3. How do they respond?