

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 21:10-19 – Persecution from those who say they love you.

The verses at the end of this passage are not easy to read because they talk about ‘hatred’. The hatred the apostles’ family and friends will have for them. A hatred that will lead to their persecution, even death. They say that ‘blood is thicker than water,’ but even blood will not prevent you from being despised because of your faith in and love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Not all persecution is loud and aggressive, and thankfully it doesn’t often end in death; nonetheless, experiencing rejection from family or friends because of your submission to God is not easy to bear. That’s why it is essential to understand that the issue is not primarily with you but with Christ, for as Jesus says in John 15:18-21, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.”

It is disturbing to think that people who say they love you and are your friend are actually the ones who will be most vehemently opposed to your Christian walk. But note what Jesus tells the disciples in verse 18, “not a hair of your head will perish”. This is a promise to these men and to all who experience persecution, yes it will come, yes, it will be traumatic, yes, it may end in death, but it will not go unseen, and by unseen Jesus means by Him, God the father, and God the Holy Spirit. What an exhilarating and comforting promise. And it is this promise that leads to and provides the basis for Jesus’ call to these men and to us, to endure. To face what the world will bring at us can be something very quiet and subtle from a family member that no one else knows about. And we are to stand firm, as James writes, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12).

Q1. Whom does Jesus say will be the instigators of some of the persecution the apostles will face?

Q2. Why is this the case?

Q3. What comfort does Jesus give, and what call does he make on their lives?

Thursday – Luke 21:10-19 – Persecution is a reality and an opportunity.

Yesterday we read about the fact of conflict and war, now, we read in verse 11 of signs on the earth and from heaven. Signs that speak of the fact that both heaven and earth, in their current form, are not eternal. The world is coming to an end; it will be destroyed and then reconstituted by God (Revelation 21), and while we must not be abusers of what God has blessed us with, the idea that man can prolong the duration of the planet is a fallacy.

Verse 12 is sobering because it speaks of the imminent persecution the apostles will face because of their love for the Lord Jesus. You don't get too far into the book of Acts before you get to what Luke records about what these men experienced at the hands of those who hated the gospel, both Jews and Gentiles. And it didn't end there. Persecution for the sake of the name of Christ, like war, has permeated every year in the history of the world since. We sometimes talk of the difficulties we have living within Canada, but we need to be careful because they pale into utter insignificance when compared with the plight of tens of thousands of our brothers and sisters in other nations.

Verse 13 does make it clear, though, that during this persecution, there will be opportunities to bear witness to the power and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. And again, in passages like Acts 4, we see Peter and John bearing such witness in the face of persecution; and, in Acts 16, we see Paul and Silas do the same thing, just in a different way. One of the blessings of reading the accounts of those persecuted in seventh-century Scotland is to hear of their submission to and passion for the Lord Jesus Christ, even as they are being put to death. There is something about it that stirs the soul. The way that Jesus puts it gives it a positive connotation; that is, we shouldn't be afraid of the prospect but rather seize it, should it come our way as a wonderful opportunity to bear testimony to His eternal power and grace. May the Lord grant us the grace to see it that way should God ever permit it to come our way.

In that context, Jesus now tells the apostles just how much he loves them by telling them not to invest themselves in being concerned about what to say, for when the moment comes for them to speak about Him, He will give them the words to say. What a glorious promise. In other words, don't be concerned with the future, even in the sense of thinking about how to testify; just trust in the Lord's provision. Something we could all learn from and take to heart.

- Q1. What does Jesus say to the apostles about persecution?
- Q2. What opportunity will it give them?
- Q3. How should they prepare for it?

Monday – Luke 21:1-4 – The widow who gave her all.

I know we looked at these verses as the last one of our studies in June, but looking at them again puts us back into the moment in the temple.

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 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. Regarding 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 absolute 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. Whom 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?

Tuesday – Luke 21:5-9 - The destruction of the Temple – a warning.

It's nearing the end of Tuesday, in the last week of Jesus' life. From Matthew 24:1 and Mark 13:1, we know that Jesus and the twelve apostles are on their way out of the Temple. For Jesus, it will be the last time he will be in this magnificent structure. Mark indicates that one of the apostles draws Jesus' attention to the beauty of the building as they leave, and, in response to this, Jesus declares the prophecy that he does. In one sense, it's a prophecy that is easy to understand. It's about the destruction of the temple, but the issue of when the prophesied destruction will take place, well, that has engaged a lot of time and effort on the part of some. But before I get into that, I think it is important for us to stop for a moment and try and take in how devastating this would have been to those listening.

When we think of the temple today, we are so far geographically and historically removed from it that the idea of it being destroyed doesn't really impact us, but for those listening to Jesus, it would have been shocking news. Of course, this wasn't the wonder of the world that Solomon's temple would have been, but this was still an amazing structure that had taken at least 46 years to rebuild (John 2:20). A building that 'housed' multiple sacred memories for the Jewish people. This was the building of the holy of holies, where the ark of the covenant and all the associated furniture crafted after the pattern given by God Himself. The names associated with this building throughout Jewish history were legend: David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. This was the building to which every Jew would turn their face when offering their prayers daily. This temple was integral to the historical, cultural, and religious identity of every Jew, and now Jesus is prophesying its destruction. It's hard to quantify the emotional significance of the impact on those listening to what Jesus is saying.

What does it teach us, besides the lesson that the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus would be ushering in a world order for the church? It teaches us that no one and nothing, no matter how important it is, not even if God has given us the pattern for its design, can take the place of God in the affections of our hearts. That bears thinking about because there was a season in the history of the RP Church when too many set their affection on her incredible history and worship practice at the expense of whatever love they had for God and His Son. Ultimately God would not have it, and He removed the candlestick of His power and glory from their midst. A sober warning.

Q1. What day is it in the week, and where is Jesus?

Q2. What triggers the prophecy of Jesus?

Q3. Why would this prophecy have been so emotionally disturbing?

Wednesday – Luke 21:5-10 – The fact of wars!

Yesterday we considered how this news of the forthcoming destruction of the temple, would have been very unsettling for those hearing it, even if it was the second time they had heard it, the first being in Luke 19:44.

This conversation about the temple is now taking place as Jesus and the apostles sit on the Mount of Olives opposite. (Matthew 23:3 and Mark 13:3). As they are sitting looking at the temple, with its magnificent dome of dull gold reflecting the last rays of the evening sun, Peter, James, John and Andrew approach Jesus and ask him privately (Mark 13:3) when this absolute destruction is going to take place and what sign will precede it?

Jesus' response is beautiful in its pastoral concern. His heart hears their concern, and he begins his response to them with a warning not to be deceived. The reason for the warning is that there will be those, many of them, who will come saying they are speaking in his authority to proclaim the Day of Judgement or even that they are him returned. It's a warning that has been proven justified during the centuries since, not least in the past 100 years, as men and women have 'prophesied' about the impending end of the earth and have not had an insignificant number of followers.

You and I need to be wary, to be on our guard because Jesus is not simply talking about obvious cranks here, far from it. He is warning his apostles and us to take care when someone who professes faith in Him wants to share their version of what is happening or going to happen in the world because they have received a vision from God. No matter whom it is coming from, such talk should immediately present a red flag. We know what God wants us to know about the world and its future; we have it in print, and it's called the Bible.

Jesus speaks of tumults and wars and tells the apostles that these things shouldn't terrify them because they are a fact of a fallen world. The 'Great War' of the last century, what we know as World War One, was regarded by many at the time as the 'war to end all wars.' That idea was short-lived, for, within twenty-one years, the world was at war again. Since WWII ended, there have been almost 100 conflicts and wars, with around twelve currently ongoing. So, as always, Jesus, knowing the heart and ways of man, got it right. This leads me to ask, 'why do we hesitate to take Jesus at his word?', preferring to trust our own understanding or the interpretation of another. We need to learn to face the reality that nations will not live side by side peaceably and get on with our lives.

Q1. What is the backdrop to this conversation?

Q2. How does Jesus begin his response to the question he is asked?

Q3. How should we view the fact of conflict and war?