

Open Heart, Open Bible

Genesis and Luke's Gospel.

Linking Theme: Covenant

Bible passage for weekly readings (week 12):

Luke ch. 's 7 – 12

The Word in action

After the Sermon on the Plain, the ministry of Jesus grows apace. The sick are healed, the dead are raised. Our Lord confirms the prophetic nature of John the Baptist's role, fulfilling the word through Zechariah his father in Luke 1 vs.76,77. The anointing at the Pharisee's house causes Jesus to state the important principle that those who have been forgiven much, love much, and vice versa. The parable of the Sower in ch. 8 is worth many readings. In particular, I like Luke's description of the seed which falls on the good soil (v.15). All of us, as those who would follow our Lord, must aim to make up this kind of seed. The calming of the storm is like a physical illustration of what Jesus does in the lives of those to whom He ministers – the demoniac, the woman with the issue of blood, and the healing of Jairus' daughter. In each case, Jesus brings His calmness into troubled lives.

Have you ever begun to feel that you were making progress in a certain area, and then seen your mentor tackling and succeeding in something that made you feel you were really still at square one? The disciples obviously felt pretty good after their "success" on their first mission (vs.6&10), but they were totally unprepared for what followed. His command to them to give the crowd "something to eat" totally threw them. Afterwards, all they could do was to pick up the pieces!

Peter confesses the Lordship of Jesus, and the Master then teaches them the full cost of what it means to follow Him – v.24...."**whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it**".

Again, the disciples were found wanting in the case of the boy with the evil spirit, who Jesus then restored with a word of rebuke. They still could not understand Jesus' destiny, and were arguing amongst themselves rather than seeking to grow spiritually. He then clearly spells out the cost of following Him, and makes it seem very unappealing. Those who want worldly comforts will not be applying! (57-62). Ch.10 develops the mission emphasis of ch. 9. This time, a larger group, 72 of them, is sent out. If the people or communities reject them, they are really rejecting Him, because they go out in His name, as His representatives. Although Jesus reinforces the fact that those who go in His name have power and authority,

He counsels them in the need for humility, for childlike trust and dependence on Him. If this is their attitude, more of God's grace will be revealed to them. They are truly and uniquely blessed! (vs.23,24).

The most unlikely people can be used of God to fulfil His purposes (the Good Samaritan), and He esteems those who take time to learn from Him and listen to His voice (Mary rather than Martha). The sovereign choice of God in the person of His Son was made evident to Jesus' closest followers on the Mount of Transfiguration (9 v.35). The one thing they must do was.....what?

The Lord now teaches His disciples the "model" prayer, and links it with the story of the persistent friend (the word "boldness" in v.8 translates equally well as "persistence" – see N.I.V. margin). The word persistence is the filling of the sandwich that has its outside layers as the Lord's Prayer, and the work of the Holy Spirit (v.13). It is equally interesting that Jesus goes on to teach on the demonic (vs.14-26). He made nonsense of the assertion that He was driving out evil spirits by Beelzebub, and left them with the uncomfortable truth that His authority in that sphere was a demonstration of God's Kingdom rule (v.20). Those who have been delivered of evil spirits must needs be filled with God's Holy Spirit, otherwise their susceptibility to re-entry remains a strong likelihood. **"He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world"** (1 John 4v.4), but we must ask, seek and knock for this sort of authority/anointing. It's not given casually!

The rest of the chapter brings out Jesus' censure of the generation in which he lived (and every other, for that matter), and issues such as superficiality, darkness, greed, injustice, exploitation, bloodshed and folly are all identified, the Pharisees taking the brunt of it. The "hypocrisy" referred to in 12 v.1 sums it up. We should fear God and not man, and acknowledge the Son of Man in our lives. We must never blaspheme the Holy Spirit, by attributing His works to those of satan. Only He can relieve us of worry when we find ourselves under inquisition because of the gospel, and give us the on-the-spot wisdom necessary to counter false accusation (vs. 11,12).

The parable of the rich fool is unique to Luke, and makes its point powerfully – hoarding wealth to secure one's future is not Kingdom business, for it detracts from the essential richness towards God which should be the possession of every believer. Jesus teaches us just why we don't need to hoard in v.'s 22-31, and then tells His listeners to sell all in order to know Kingdom blessing. I wonder how they coped with this! (They lived in a less materialistic age than we do – how do we cope with it?)

The teaching of v.35 onwards is made clear by v.40 – the Son of Man will come when we do not expect Him. Those who have been trusted with spiritual responsibility must acquit themselves well, for to know what to do and not to do it

is sin (James 4 v.17), and those who have been given leadership roles will be judged more strictly (James 3 v.1). Jesus' reality will bring division amongst families, and although He tells us to be reconciled with others, this can only be "as far as it depends on us" (Romans 12 v.18). Keeping our lives free of bitterness and broken relationships enables us to understand the times aright and "to apply our hearts unto wisdom". (Psalm 90 v.12 A.V.)

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

1) This week's chapters stress the importance of listening to the voice of God, of hearing, understanding and outworking His word. Here are some of the references:

8 v.15; 8 v.18; 8 v.21; 9 v.35; 10 v.39,42; 11 v.28

The whole area of "hearing" God is usually very subjective, and quite hit and miss for most of us. To Jesus, it was as natural as breathing. Our Lord is, however, very clear – blessing comes from hearing the word of God and obeying it (11 v.28). Paul puts it in his language in Romans 12 vs.1&2. Reading the word of God together and meditating on it is the best and most obvious way of bringing blessing into our corporate life. Let's continue in it! (John 8 vs.31,32 – A.V. – If you **continue** in my word....etc.).

3) Ch. 11 vs.1 - 28 give wonderful teaching on (a) prayer, on (b) the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and on (c) defeating the work of satan. If we major on (a) and (b), (c) need not concern us. In fact, the Lord will probably use us to alleviate the concerns of others as far as (c) is concerned i.e.- in deliverance. In lambasting the Pharisees, Jesus is really speaking of the abhorrence to Him of deadened, hierarchical religion, which imprisons people rather than setting them free. It takes the life of the Holy Spirit to set us free, and for this we need to be sure that we are ministering the New Covenant and not the Old (2 Corinthians 3 v.6). Can we pray for an increased sense of freedom amongst us in these days? (2 Cor. 3.v.17). How free do I feel, as a church leader? How about you? Let's pray!

Next week's passage: Luke ch.'s 13 –18.