

Open Heart, Open Bible

Genesis and Luke's Gospel

Linking Theme: Covenant

Bible passage for weekly readings (week 13):

Luke ch.'s 13 – 18

The Cost of Discipleship

The real-life instances cited by Jesus in vs.1-4 of ch.13 teach us a very important lesson. So often we can feel (almost superstitiously) that people who lose their lives tragically do so as a consequence of something sinful. Jesus is saying that we will all lose our lives tragically as a consequence of sin, if that sin is unremitted. The circumstances in which lives are lost are of much less importance. Only eternal security matters, and we are given that security when we repent of our sinfulness. None of us knows when we will depart this life. We must be spiritually ready when we do! The parable of the fig tree illustrates the mercy of God. He gives us additional opportunities to be fruitful in life, and creates the conditions for that to happen. If, in spite of this, we still cannot take those opportunities, judgment will come – “cut it down” (v.9).

After the healing of the crippled woman, the rest of the chapter makes uncomfortable reading for the Jew. We know from Paul's teaching that salvation is “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Romans 1 v.16), but here, as our Lord gives two parables to teach about the Kingdom of God, He makes it clear that the last shall be first and vice versa. Many people to whom He was then speaking would be excluded (v.28). The traditional, legalistic religion of Judaism could not receive the love and freedom of His Kingdom, and Jesus weeps over that condition as He weeps over Jerusalem (13 vs.34,35). He indirectly predicts His death at the same time (v.33).

Ch.14 goes on to demonstrate how that hardened “religious” attitude can manifest itself – no healing on the Sabbath, pride of place at the wedding feast. Jesus' feast is for the outcast, never for the select few. This is the nub of the story of the Great Banquet. The excuses of those invited are still so very topical. There's nothing new under the sun! (Ecclesiastes 1 v.9). The following verses spell out the cost of following Him (25-35). The stories He tells by way of explanation are best seen in the challenge they give to look hard at the lifestyle He offers, rather than glibly embarking on it. If we fall away, having begun the journey of faith, we bring discredit on both Himself and ourselves. We must remain salty! This negative sounding reference to “saltiness” is actually a call to purity. Salt obtained from the Dead Sea had to be sifted finely to separate it from sand and other impurities. If we count the cost, we won't let our “salt” be mixed in with the world's “sand”.

Again, we see Jesus dealing with hardened religion in ch.15. The three parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son all make the point about the need for repentance. **“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”** (Luke 19 v.10). Traditional Jewish religion knew nothing of this. The story of the Shrewd Manager is a worldly illustration to show how those without faith operate to protect themselves in a crisis. This is never the way in Kingdom business. Only trustworthiness and honesty are acceptable here, the love of money being incompatible with the love of God.

The next story of the rich man and Lazarus is really an illustration of the blessings and woes of ch.6. The rich man had received his reward in this life, and his eternal destiny was one of “woe” (6 v.24-26). The beggar was the exact opposite, and was now receiving comfort. Again, the key to the parable is that of repentance (v.30), not so much the possession or the lack of worldly wealth. The rich man, in his tormented state, realises this.

In the next few verses (17 vs. 1-10), the connection between repentance and forgiveness with the life of faith is brought out in context. We cannot live in faith when there is any resentment in our lives (1 John 3 vs.21,22). The closer we walk with God, the more we will realise the utter privilege of serving Him, no matter how long the hours we may be called on to work (vs.7-10)! Add to that gratitude – as in the case of the one leper who came back. Jesus makes us whole, something that no human agency can ever do.

How important, then, for disciples to know that the kingdom of God is within them, for we will need to know this in practice to remain steady when upheavals come. Just as in the early judgments in the days of Noah and Lot, so those who are not in God’s kingdom will be eternally lost when the Lord should return. **“Remember Lot’s wife!”** (See Luke 9 v.62). This is again the principle behind the two stories of the tower and the king about to wage war (ch.14). Having started, we must finish! To walk away from our calling makes us deserters in God’s sight. We can lose the way through our own foolishness (the Lord can always redirect us), but this is very different from a deliberate decision to forsake the Lover of our souls.

The enigmatic comment of Jesus regarding the gathering of the vultures (A.V. “eagles”) is filled with foreboding, and has a connection to the description of John in Revelation of the birds of the air “gorging” themselves on the flesh of those who have warred with satan against Jesus in the final battle. Remember that there were no birds of prey prior to the fall of man – sin caused certain types of birds to become predatory. In Revelation 19 v.21, we see that link between sinfulness and the eating of blood in its most extreme form on a mind-boggling scale. An horrific picture!

Therefore, we must not give up, for the Son of Man must find faith on the earth when He comes, faith expressed by those who are calling out to God day and night for justice. The story of the Pharisee and Tax Collector is again one which concerns repentance and humility before God. Jesus' next two meetings, those with the children and the rich ruler, caused Him to speak of the need for simple faith and simple lifestyle. With the one we enter the Kingdom, and with the other we enjoy it. He again predicts His death, this time more directly than before (13 v.33), but still the disciples cannot grasp it. This is the way God works. We cannot grasp spiritual truth at all unless He reveals it to us. No-one can be saved without the enlightenment of God's truth (vs.26,27). Perhaps to illustrate the point in the physical realm, we are now told of the healing of the blind beggar. He knew that Jesus alone could give him his sight, and he would stop at nothing to receive it. Oh, that we would stop at nothing to receive better vision from our Lord and Teacher! Faith must play its part "**when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?**"

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

1 Just as last week's readings brought out the need to listen to God, so this week's passage stresses the need for repentance in our walk with God, repentance in saving faith, repentance in spiritual growth. Here are some of the references:

13 v.5; 15 v.7; 15 v.10; 15 v.21; 16 v.30; 17 vs,3,4; 18 v.13.

Repentance involves humility before God, whereas lack of repentance reveals pride. Our Lord is totally unsentimental about life or death from a physical standpoint. We are in a state of living death unless we repent. The call to repentance is a prophetic call. It characterised the ministries of all the O.T. prophets, of John the Baptist and now of Jesus. Is that call being sounded clearly by the church today, or has she lost something of that prophetic edge in the attempt to be "relevant" and "user-friendly"?

2) We place great emphasis today on the well being of our own families, and much less on the well being of the wider family of God. Much of Jesus' teaching on discipleship appears to run counter to this – 14 vs.25-27, and see also Matthew 12 vs.46-50. Obviously, there are other N.T. references which bring out the importance of caring for our immediate families very conscientiously. Can we pray that we get the balance right in the pressurised times in which we are living?

3) From ch.17 v.'s 10&16 we can understand something of the privilege of being called by the Lord to His service, together with gratitude for the wholeness only Jesus can pour in. How much do privilege and gratitude motivate me to give of my best to Him? How much do these things motivate you?

Next week's passage: Luke ch.'s 19 - 24

