

## *Open Heart, Open Bible*

Genesis and Luke's Gospel

Linking Theme: Covenant

*Bible passage for weekly readings (week 14):*

*Luke ch.'s 19 – 24*

“Other religions are characterised by man seeking for God. Christianity is God seeking for men” (David Watson). “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (The Lord Jesus Christ – Luke 19 v.10).

Jesus gave three telling illustrations of that which was lost being found in ch.15. Ch.19 begins with an actual instance of this in the person of Zacchaeus. All he wanted to do was to see Jesus (so he thought). Jesus saw his heart and knew he wanted more. His life was changed, forever! The parable of the ten minas flows out of the meeting with Zacchaeus, and shows how we must all work with the gifts God has given us in order to make something of them. The servant who made nothing from his mina was paralysed into inactivity because of an ignorant view of God – “**you are a hard man**” (v.21). He did nothing to inform himself properly. Remember that this parable is addressed to the noble's servants. It therefore clearly teaches that we can fail to produce anything that is of worth in God's sight, if we have a mistaken view of His true nature, even though we are numbered amongst His people. Those who rejected him were themselves rejected. They are unbelievers (v.27).

Our Lord then enters Jerusalem with a paean of praise from His admirers, but He well knew how superficial that praise was (vs. 41 – 44). The scourging of the Temple further antagonises the Jewish leaders, and tensions increase sharply. He easily counters their hostility as they question His authority (ch.20), and tells the parable of the tenants directly against them. They knew it! (v.19). Their attempts to outwit Him all meet with hopeless failure, and Jesus fully exposes them within the earshot of the crowds (v.45). In particular, their exploitation of widows (i.e.-society's vulnerable people), leads to the touching story of the widow's offering in ch.21.

In Luke's version of Jesus' end-time teaching, our Lord brings together various strands that He has already taught His disciples. Thus, when He wept over the City (19 vs.41 – 44), He foresaw its destruction, and it is this prophetic scenario that begins the discourse of ch.21. When Jesus' followers are brought to trial, they will be given words of wisdom (12 vs.11,12), and the division amongst families that He spoke of in 12 vs.51-53 will become much sharper (v.16).

Vs.20 – 24 surely relate to the sacking of the City in A.D.70 by the Romans, but, like all prophecy, the possibility exists of deeper meaning. Many prophetic scriptures of Messianic significance relate to a near future as well as to a distant future. So it is here. V.24 is of great importance – **“Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”**. Is Jerusalem still being “trampled on”? Have the times of the Gentiles been fulfilled? I would suggest that the answers are “yes” and “no” respectively, but, even in our own day, it is possible to see an end to these things. We “Gentiles” must have an understanding of the times (12 v.56), and be spiritually prepared for that which is about to happen (12 v.40).

The analogy of the fig-tree recalls the short parable of 13 vs.6 – 8. The fig-tree was often used in O.T. prophecy (like the vine) to picture the nation of Israel and to show her failure to produce fruit (Jeremiah 8 v.13, Micah 7 vs.1,2). In cursing the fig-tree in Mark 11v.14, Jesus’ anger was directed at a tree which displayed an abundance of leaves, but no fruit. There was significance in this as the Lord was just about to enter Jerusalem (Mark 11 v.15). Here, in Luke 21 v.30 the tree is beginning to sprout leaves, as indeed are all the others. Israel, as a nation, is now “in leaf” once more. The **“kingdom of God is near”** (v.31). We are therefore told to **“be careful”**, lest we be unprepared for Jesus’ coming, recalling the earlier parable of the wise manager (12 vs. 42- 48).

We now move into the final two days of Jesus’ humanity, the heart of His Passion. We can never fully plumb the depths of the Gospel accounts of our Lord’s crucifixion, “the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God” (1 Peter 3 v.18). Nevertheless, if we will dwell on these chapters in our reading, God the Holy Spirit will reveal to us as much as we can currently bear (John 16 v.12).

My linking theme throughout Genesis and Luke has been that of Covenant, and here is seen the fulfilment of the divine Covenant agreement between God and man. Central to it is the shedding of blood, but now it is God through Jesus who has shed his own Blood (22 v.20). **“This cup is the New Covenant in My Blood, which is poured out for you”**. My own blood should have been shed, because sin deserves death, but I can offer to my God the perfect substitute, the Blood of His only Son, shed on a Roman gibbet. Noah sacrificed “clean” creatures in his offering to God in Gen.8 v.20, and the mercy of the Lord to fallen mankind in the gift of life on this beautiful planet was then forthcoming. Jesus had to be utterly sinless – “clean” in every sense of that word. Abraham offered animals of God’s prescribed choice (Genesis 15 v.9) in the specific Covenant of Promise to what would become the nation of Israel, the Covenant which found its perfected expression in the Blood of Jesus Christ. His Blood brought salvation to the Gentiles i.e. – every nation on earth.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has fulfilled everything that is written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24 v.44). Jesus opened the minds of His disciples so that they could understand the Scriptures and, later, preach the Gospel. All that remained was that they needed to be “**clothed with power from on high**”. Word and Spirit needed to come together in knowledge and experience.

**Food for thought / discussion / prayer**

1) I said in my earlier notes in Genesis that when God makes a covenant with man, it is non-negotiable, contrasting it with any other covenant from one person to another at law. It is for us either to accept the covenant or to reject it. Abraham and his descendants were told that they must “keep covenant” with God in Genesis 17 vs.9&10. For them it meant observing the law, in this particular instance the law regarding circumcision. How do we “keep covenant” in these New Covenant days?

2) How does the parable of the ten minas challenge us to “grow in grace” and in areas of spiritual responsibility in the Church of Jesus Christ? (see 1 Peter 3 v.18). Do you feel you’ve come on as far as you can in this way, or do you feel there’s plenty of untapped potential waiting to be released?

3) I didn’t write much about the final three chapters of the Gospel because they must somehow sink as deeply into our beings as is possible. They require something more than a set of notes! Can we give time and space to them, and be Marys rather than Marthas? The essential thing is that, for those first disciples, the O.T. Scriptures blazed gloriously into life as the risen Lord demonstrated that they all spoke of Him. Let’s pray that the Holy Spirit of God will inspire the Scriptures to us in the same way? After all, Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever! (Hebrews 13 v.8)

**Next week’s passage:** Exodus ch.’s 1 - 6