

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 1

Last week we finished our study on the Wisdom from the Proverbs and we spoke about the wonderful promises for the righteous. We reminded ourselves that in the New Covenant, righteousness is obtained by grace through faith in Jesus. If we believe that we are righteous by faith and that God is good, we qualify for the promises like Prov 10:24 that says, *“The desire of the righteous will be granted,”* and *“the Lord answers the prayer of the righteous.”*

Today we start with our new study on the book of Luke's Gospel, and in chapter 1 we look at the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, who were old and barren. One day, while Zechariah was on duty as priest in the temple, an angel visited him and told him not to fear, for his prayer had been answered. He was told about the birth of his son, and his name was to be John. And then there follows an amazing prophetic word about his life. *“He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”* Luk 1:14-18.

This is a powerful word spoken about him before he was even conceived. So what was the response of Zechariah? Sadly he doubted this could happen, for he said, *“How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”* In other words, humanly speaking this is impossible. He did not believe God could do such a thing.

The angel said that he had been sent to give him this message, and because he did not believe the word, he would be silent or dumb until the day that happened. When a person is cynical and unbelieving, his words cannot bring life to anyone. Because unbelief brings death to people, it was better he was dumb at that time. If he kept speaking his doubts, unbelief and fear, it could have prevented God's purposes for the prophet preparing the way for the Lord.

We can compare this very similar series of events when Abraham was visited by an angel when his wife was also old and barren. His response was different and full of faith. Rom 4 says, *“Against all hope Abraham believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'so shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith, and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”*

Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, also had faith when she heard the message (or read it). She said, *“The Lord has done this for me. In these days he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people.”* Notice that here she probably had not even conceived yet, but she confessed the promise of God and declared His favour over her life. She could have doubted and feared like her husband, but she received the word with great faith.

Six months later, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary, a virgin pledged to be married to Joseph. He said, *“Greetings, you who are highly favoured. The Lord is with you.”* Mary was troubled, but he continued, *“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.”* And he told her that she

would give birth to a son, and to name him *Jesus*, who would be great and would be called the son of the Most High. His eternal kingdom would never end. He went on to tell her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, so the holy one to be born would be called the Son of God. She was also told about her cousin, Elizabeth, and he said that *“Nothing is impossible with God.”* vs 37.

What do you think went through Mary's mind? And what was her response? Yes, she received and declared God's Word over her life. She said, *“I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said.”* In other words, - *“Amen! I receive this word and I believe it will happen because nothing is impossible with God.”*

We know the story how Mary went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, and when she entered their home, the baby John in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy. It says in V41,42 that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she prophesied blessing over Mary and Jesus to be born; she acknowledged that Mary was favoured and prophesied the wonderful truth over Mary and every woman who would believe God's promises - *“Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.”*

And then Mary burst forth in amazing praise and prophecy that has brought life to millions. She glorified God and rejoiced in God her Saviour. She prophesied that all generations would call her blessed, declaring that God had done great things for her. She worshipped His holy Name and declared God's mercy over every generation. She acknowledged that God had done mighty deeds, and even overcame rulers of darkness. She declared God's provision and remembered the unchangeable everlasting covenant of blessing made to Abraham and his descendants forever. All this time, not a word came from Zechariah.

It goes on to say that Elizabeth continued to testify to her

neighbours about the Lord's great mercy to her. When her baby was born, she gave his name as *John*, meaning, "*God is gracious!*"

Then Zechariah was asked, and for the first time he repeated the word of God to him, "*His name is John*". Then immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed. Now he began to praise God and was filled with the Holy Spirit. He began to prophesy and declared that God had come to redeem his people, even though Jesus was not yet born. He declared Jesus as the Horn of salvation, giving us salvation from our enemies, and enabling us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness. He prophesied over his new-born son to be prophet of the Most High, who was to prepare the way for Jesus, and he would teach his people the knowledge of salvation through forgiveness of their sins; and that the sun of favour would shine on those living in darkness. All that was prophesied happened. John became all that his father prophesied over him. Jesus became all that was declared about him.

What do we learn here? When God speaks a word or promise to us, what is our response? Do we receive and declare what God has said? Do we believe and begin to prophesy life over ourselves, over our families; praise him and and speak life over generations to come, like Elizabeth and Mary did - and only later, Zechariah?

Or are you unbelieving and speaking your doubts and fears? Do you ask for a sign and ask, "*How can I be sure?*" Jesus said the unbelieving ask for a sign. Your life will be unfruitful and sterile, until you begin to declare what God has said. Then only life will begin to flow by the words you speak. So, speak his promises, declare the prophecies spoken over your life, echo the words of God. Remember, "*God calls things that are not as though they were.*" We are called to do the same, to say the same things that God said to us. So begin to declare today, "*God has met all my needs according to his riches in glory. God is faithful and protects me from every danger. God said he would give me the desires of my heart. This is the year of the Lord's favour. God has given me a good job. My business is growing, because of God's faithfulness. I declare God's healing over my sick body.*" Believe that nothing is impossible with God and that because of Jesus, you also are highly favoured! God bless you till next week when continue with the *Lessons from Luke*.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 2

We started a new series last week on Lessons from Luke, and we looked at the responses of Zechariah and Elizabeth and Mary, when they were told by God of the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus, respectively. Zechariah doubted and was mute until the birth of his son, whereas Elizabeth and Mary both received the words with faith and also spoke amazing words of praise and prophecy. We encouraged you to speak the words that God spoke to you in his promises.

Today we look at the second chapter at Jesus' birth and the response of those who saw him. At that time Mary and Joseph were told to register for a census in their home town, Bethlehem. While they were there, Jesus was born in a stable, as there was no place in the inn. Jesus had a humble beginning, with no family there to welcome him. The Kings and priests did not know about his birth. But the first admirers of the new baby were the humble shepherds who were told about him by an angel while they were out in the fields nearby. James 2:5 says, *"Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?"* They were told that a message of joy was on offer for *"all people"*. This Saviour had come to save all people from their sins and was Christ and Lord. The divine Messiah would bring forgiveness and reconciliation with God for all people. It was a message of God becoming man! They were told to look for the child and they would find him in an animal feeding trough, wrapped in strips of cloth. Soon many angels joined in with singing and praise, *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests."* vs 14 This means *"God be honoured, because we see what He is like and what he has done."* The peace promised, is not the peace of an easy life, but peace through

being reconciled with God. It is peace among people who are to be favoured and blessed, those who believe in him.

Jesus was no ordinary baby and the angels came to proclaim that. He is "*the Lord*"; He is "*son of the Most High*" (Luk 1:33) and the "*Son of God*" vs 35. And Luk 1:76 tells us that John the Baptist would be a prophet for "*the most High*". Now the shepherds were told, "*He is a Saviour*", He is "*Christ the Lord*" (2:11) He is "*good news*" vs10.

So what is the response of the shepherds? They respond with faith, searching until they find the baby and they start telling everyone they meet what has happened. It says "*all who heard it were amazed at what was told them.*" And it says Mary "*treasured up all these things in her heart.*"

You see, the birth of Jesus requires a response. New-found salvation cannot be kept quiet for long.

Then Luke continues telling us that Jesus was presented at the temple on the 8th day. He was born under the law so that he could perfectly fulfil the law on our behalf. Now there was a righteous man, Simeon, living in Jerusalem who was specially waiting for the coming of the Saviour. He was a man close to God and God had let him know that he would see the Saviour in his lifetime. He was led by the Holy Spirit to the temple at the very moment when Jesus was being brought by his parents for various legal ceremonies. He took the child and gave a prophecy. He rejoiced that such salvation is to be for the whole world, a light for revealing things to Gentiles (2:23). He said, many would "*fall*" because of Jesus. Others would "*rise*" because of Him. He would face much opposition and Mary herself would suffer greatly, because she would see Jesus suffering on the cross. The secret thoughts and purposes of many people would be revealed. (2:35)

You see, when Jesus comes, people react in one way or another. No one can be neutral or impartial when they meet Him. Some will fall, they will reject him in anger and disbelief. Others will rise. They will find in Him, One who brings forgiveness, the knowledge of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. In one way or another the true thoughts of the heart get exposed when Jesus draws near. Some thoughts reveal faith; other thoughts reveal unbelief and antagonism. But no one stays the same, when Jesus comes and touches their lives.

Then it says in 2:33 that *“the child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him.”*

After Simeon came Anna. The elderly man is followed by the elderly woman. She was a prophetess and a widow, who was called to spend much time in praying and giving words of prophecy to those coming to the temple. She publicly praised God for sending Jesus. And she knew her task was to tell everyone God's programme had started moving forward. The Saviour of the world had been born.

After their visit to Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth in Galilee. The Saviour was born and now had to grow up. He would not start his main ministry until He was a man. But he was a real human being. He was not an angel or a spirit, but a human being. He knew then and He knows now, exactly what it is like to live a real human life. He grew physically. Luk 2:40 says, *“The child grew and became strong.”* He grew in wisdom. He knew God from his earliest days. Michael Eaton puts it like this, *“At some point he came to know that He was God's son in a unique way. God was the only Father He had.”* And he grew spiritually - *“the grace of God was upon Him.”* God's favour was upon him. He obeyed God in everything and learned to pray. God was putting Him through the ordinary processes of human life, so that He could be a real human being, able to sympathise with us at every point of our lives. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that *“we do not have a high priest who is*

unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.”

Luke 2:52 says again that Jesus grew in wisdom, and stature and in favour with God and men, that is mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially, a steady all-round development. God was getting him ready for His purposes to bring salvation to all men.

So we see that the shepherds responded with joy and faith and testified to all people about the coming of Jesus. The angels glorified him. Mary marvelled and treasured these things in her heart. Simeon praised God and prophesied that he would be a light to the Gentiles. Anna thanked God and told all about Jesus as the redemption of Jerusalem. Later in that chapter, we are told that at 12 years when he was left behind at the temple, listening and asking the teachers questions, that *“everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”* (2:47)

So the question is, *“what is **your** response to Jesus today?”* We simply cannot be indifferent when we meet Jesus. Are we going to be those who rise to receive the wonderful life he offers us, or are we going to be those who fall and stumble at his words and ultimately face judgement because of rejecting him? John says in chapter 3:18, *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”* Jesus who became a man, came to live a sinless life, to save us from our sinful lives. I urge you, if you have not yet received him, do so today. His coming to this earth demands a choice and decision, to either receive his salvation or reject it, but no-one can remain neutral. There are only 2 choices. I do pray that you would make the wise choice and choose life. His life is eternal life.

Pray with me now if you would like to receive him. *“Lord Jesus, I believe that you came to save me from my sins. I turn away from my old sinful life and come to receive your sinless life. Forgive me and change me. I believe that you are the Messiah and Christ the Lord. Thank you for saving me now. Amen.”*

God bless you till next week when will continue with the *Lessons from Luke*.

Lessons from Luke Chapter 3

Last week we looked at Jesus' birth in Luke chapter 2, and the response of the shepherds, and Simeon and Anna the prophetess, when they saw Jesus. Each of them praised and thanked God for his salvation and began to tell everyone of the coming Messiah. And we said that when we come into contact with Jesus, we cannot remain neutral – either we will rise to new life, or we will fall and stumble at his words, and face judgement by not believing in him.

Today we study chapter 3 and the message of John the Baptist, and the different baptisms that are spoken about in this chapter. John was to *“prepare the way for the Lord.”* He had a unique ministry and we know that he was full of the Holy Spirit. (1:15). He was a man who lived with unusual self-restraint and had been led by God to live in the wilderness of Judea. He preached about sin and judgement, and salvation. It says in 3:3, *“he preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”* What does this mean?

This means it is a baptism that follows repentance. John called men to turn away from their sins. The acceptance of baptism was a sign that they had done this, and the purpose was forgiveness. This was water baptism. The water did not do anything. It was spiritually symbolising the cleansing of sins. It was an expression of repentance and a way of publicly saying, *“I have changed my mind about my life. I have come to see that I must believe in the salvation of God.”* In Rom 6:3 Paul speaks about this baptism as a baptism into the death of Jesus. He says, *“Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was*

raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

John goes on to say that those who want to be restored to newness of life need to make a straight road for Him (3:4) then impossible obstacles will be cleared out of the way; valleys and mountains, and the crooked and rough will be made smooth, and *“all mankind will see God's salvation.”* Others will see that God has changed our lives and smoothed out the hindrances that blocked our way to life.

John continues preaching and warns the religious people to *“produce fruit in keeping with repentance”*. (3:8) He warns them against relying on having Abraham as their father, and then imagining that they would be safe from judgement if they became a bit religious, but yet they had no interest in a godly life. Unless they came to experience salvation, they would still face God's punishment for sin. This would be like chopping down a fruitless tree and throwing it into the fire. (3:9) It means everything in the lives of religious people will come under the exterminating fire of God, like rubbish being thrown into a burning pit, unless they find salvation in Jesus alone. In John 1:29, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the only way, and said, *“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”*

What is this fruit of repentance? He says a man who has 2 tunics should give to him who has none, and one who has food should do the same. Tax collectors (or those demanding payments) should not collect any more than required to; and the soldiers, (or people in power) should not bribe and use forceful ways to oppress others or accuse them falsely. John gives detailed instruction about how the godly life should work out in practice. The essence of this godly life is generosity and kindness.

John then explained that He was not the Christ, and said, *“I baptise you with water, but one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”* No water baptism conveys the Spirit. No-one can give the Holy Spirit. Only Jesus can give the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit is what happened on the day of Pentecost. Michael Eaton puts it so well. He says, *“It is the work of Jesus when he pours out his Spirit upon a believer, and in which there is given assurance of salvation, boldness in witness, ease in prayer, consciousness of God's love, joy unspeakable and an intense awareness of the presence of Jesus in the believer's life.”* Luke, who is also the author of the book of Acts, goes into great detail in the first few chapters of Acts, about the baptism in the Holy Spirit, when flames of fire rested on each of the disciples. We find some factors that were evident as a result of this Holy Spirit baptism in the experience of those believers. There was an overwhelming in-breaking of God's presence, and a clear transformation and power in the lives and witness of the disciples. Some spoke in tongues and it led to huge growth in the church.

But many people today are afraid of the spiritual realm. The Lord expected this and gave Scripture to come against misunderstanding that is rooted in fear. Jesus said in Luke 11:11-13, if we ask for the Spirit, the Father will make sure that nothing else is received. He says, *“Which of you fathers if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?”* So we are encouraged to ask for the Holy Spirit, and for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8 says we will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, so we can be His witnesses

in our home town and beyond and even to the ends of the earth.

Then John continues, *“His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”* How are we meant to take the reference to fire? Some people interpret it as speaking of testing. Fire either purifies or destroys. Jesus the Saviour baptises with the Holy Spirit with fire that brings purifying and refining and sets us ablaze for ministry. But for those who refuse salvation, the fire brings the destruction of God's judgement. That is the picture of the wheat separated from the chaff, which is thrown into the unquenchable fire.

Chapter 3:21 tells us that Jesus came to the Jordan river and John then baptised him. Then it says, as Jesus was praying, *“heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.’”* Jesus was baptised in water, not to express repentance, because he was without sin, but to put himself among sinners who needed repentance. But even Jesus needed the baptism with the Holy Spirit. As for Him, so for us, the gift of the Spirit was an empowering for ministry and an assurance of sonship. Jesus received an added confirmation of His being God's Son.

So to recap – John taught about the baptism of repentance, which is baptism in water, as a sign of repentance and burying the old life, which is administered by man. He also taught about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and with fire, which is administered by Jesus and this is for us to receive power to be witnesses in the world. This baptism with fire, is also a refining work for believers, but a separation and final judgement for those who reject Jesus.

As John pointed to Jesus, I want to point you to Jesus today. If you have not received him into your life, you also need the baptism of repentance for salvation. And we all need the Holy Spirit baptism, for power to do his work. Then we will be gathered as wheat into his barn, and not thrown into the fire of judgement one day.

God bless you till next week when will continue with the *Lessons from Luke*.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 4

Last week we looked at Chapter 3 and discussed the message of John the Baptist who spoke about the baptism of repentance, which is water baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, for power to do God's work. John also said that those who have not received the forgiveness of their sins, are like a tree that will be thrown into the fire of judgement one day. And we are called to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Today we want to look Chapter 4 where Luke relates the temptation of Jesus when he fasted for 40 days in the wilderness. Before Jesus' ministry began, 3 things happened in His life. He needed to be baptised, He needed to receive the Spirit, and He needed to prove He could withstand temptation. So every Christian who wishes to be used by God has to overcome temptation. In our lives there will come times when we will be tested and need to resist the devil, and then we can share with others how to do the same.

Luke says in 4:1 that after Jesus was baptised with the Holy Spirit, he was "full" of the Spirit and the Spirit led him to fast for 6 weeks in the desert, and to seek God's will before his ministry. Many times in our lives, too, the greatest attacks from Satan will come after our greatest times of blessing.

The first temptation Jesus faced was to put His physical welfare above the will of God (4:3-4). Satan tempted him to turn stones into bread, knowing that Jesus was very hungry during his long fast. But Jesus answered, "*Man does not live on bread alone*", meaning that spiritual food that was of more importance than physical food, and that God would not want Him to perform miracles for His own advantage.

The second temptation in 4:5-8 was when Satan showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and if Jesus worshipped Satan, he would give him the authority and splendour of his kingdom. John 12:31 also speaks of Satan as the “*ruler of this world*”. Jesus could set up a government on earth, that was stronger than that of the Romans and concern himself with the welfare of the people, but it would mean compromise to his calling. Jesus' kingdom was of a different kind. Jesus needed authority and it was God's will that he should get glory, but both His authority and glory were to come from God alone. So He answered, “*It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'.*”

The third temptation was to prove His Messiahship in a sensational manner (4:9-12). There was a traditional belief that the Messiah would show Himself by standing on the roof of the temple. So Satan took him to the highest point of the temple and said that if he was the Son of God, he was to throw himself down from there, because it was written that God would command his angels to guard him so he would not strike his foot against a stone. This pointless miracle would compel people to wonder and believe him to be the great Messiah. The tempter twisted the Bible for his own purpose. But Jesus answered, “*It says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*”

Each of these temptations could have trapped Jesus, but he defeated Satan due to the fact that He had been filled with the Holy Spirit and was secure in his sonship and the love of the Father. (chap 3). He was full of confidence in God. And even in the desert Jesus was living in prayer and worship and fellowship with the Father. Jesus knew the Word of God and could use it as a weapon against the enemy.

These 3 temptations of Jesus are similar to the worldly cravings we face. 1 John 3:16 mentions them: “*For*

everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.” The first temptation of Jesus to turn stones into bread was also a craving of the flesh; and the second was the lust of his eyes – to own all that his eyes could see by worshipping Satan; and the third was proving himself and the boasting of what he did if he jumped from the temple pinnacle. So Jesus was tempted in each of these areas of temptations we face in the world today, too. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that *“we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.”* Jesus resisted temptation as a man, not as the Son of God. He identified with us as earthly men in every temptation we may face, and showed us that there is a way out of every temptation.

Also James 1:14 says, *“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after his desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”* Temptations begin with thoughts and desires that Satan sows in our minds. If we will nurture these evil thoughts and desires, they soon will be strong enough to drag us into the trap of sin. We may have heard the explanation that Satan can send a thought to us, like a bird that lands on our heads, but we need not let the bird make its nest there.

We can take notice that Jesus was tempted when he was alone and no-one was there to actually see if he would fall into the temptation. So also the tactic of the devil is usually when we are alone or with someone we want to commit the sin with. It is in that moment of aloneness that we need to take heed of what Jesus said, in Matt 26:41, *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak.”* We need to always be aware that the enemy wants to trip us up in order to destroy our lives. So

let us be praying and calling on His Name. James 4:7 also says, *“Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”* You can say, *“Lord, I am your beloved child, and have your Spirit living in me. I will obey only you. Give me strength not give in to this worldly craving. I believe that I am more than a conquerer. And we can say, “Get behind me, Devil, I belong to God and will worship him only.”*

And 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”* There is always a way out, and Joseph showed us how to take that way. When Potiphar's wife tempted him to sleep with her, he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. Also in the movie, *Fireproof*, it showed how the guy who was being tempted to go onto dodgy internet sites, he decided to smash his computer with a baseball bat. That may seem extreme, but we must remember, there is always a way out of the temptation that we can take.

Jesus did not have a long discussion with Satan, or spend a lot of time wondering whether maybe the devil's suggestions were good ideas. He knew his Father loved him and his bread was fellowship with him, and feeding on the Word with his Father. And no-one could demand his worship, except God. Nor he did not want to step out of the perfect will of God. So how do **we** resist temptation? Like Jesus, we must be filled with his Spirit and know our secure position as children of God, who are deeply loved by our Father. Then we will choose to live in fellowship with him, and feed on the bread of his Word; we will want to worship only him, and we will desire to know and live in the perfect will of the God and not put God to the test. And the Word of God will be our weapon when we face temptation. Even though we may feel weak in that moment, the power of the Spirit-breathed Word in us will drive away the enemy.

When Jesus resisted the devil in this way, it says the devil left him for a time. When we withstand temptation, the devil will also leave us. But we will be ready for him even the next time, because we are becoming stronger and stronger in the Lord.

God bless you till next week when we will continue our Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke Chapter 5

Last week we looked at the temptations of Jesus in Luke chapter 4 and how **we** are to resist temptation? Like Jesus, we must be filled with his Spirit and know our secure position as children of God, who are deeply loved by our Father. Like Jesus we will choose to live in fellowship with him, and feed on the bread of his Word; we will want to worship him only, and we will desire to live in the perfect will of the God and not put him to the test. And his Word will be our weapon when we face temptation.

Today we want to look at chapter 4-5 and look at a few situations that speak of the **authority** that Jesus had. 4:31 says when Jesus began to teach the people on the Sabbath, *“they were amazed at his teaching, because his message had **authority**”*. Then in the synagogue a man who was possessed by an evil spirit challenged Jesus, who said, *“Be quiet!”* and *“Come out of him!”* and it submitted to him and came out of the man. It says again the people were amazed and in v38 they said, *“With **authority** and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!”* Also in vs 41 it says demons came out of many people when he rebuked them. When he spoke to demons they obeyed.

Then the next story reveals that Jesus had **authority** over sickness; when Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. Vs 39, *“He bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.”* And that evening the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them all.

Then in the next chapter Jesus heals the man who was

lowered through the roof of the house where he was teaching. And the first thing he said, was, "*Friend, your sins are forgiven*". Now Jesus saw the man's *real* need and first addressed that – his sinfulness. The Pharisees began to think that he was speaking blasphemy, because only God can forgive sins. Jesus addressed them and said, "*That you may know that the Son of Man has **authority** on earth to forgive sins.*"

So Jesus had authority in his teaching, authority over evil spirits, authority over sickness, authority to forgive sins. In Jesus' story we notice the vital importance of authority. In some circles "authority" is not popular. It reminds some people too much of harshness, restraint, bondage, intimidations. Perhaps the first thing that needs to be said is that there is a difference between *authority* and *authoritarianism*. True authority does not have to be heavy-handed or tyrannical. Jesus' authority was simply the fact that He knew what was right with one hundred percent certainty. He preached and taught without harshness, but He knew that what he said was true. He could also order a demon to leave and it obeyed; or a sickness to leave and the sickness obeyed.

What is it that produced the authority that Jesus had? And what gives us authority as believers of Jesus? First of all, Jesus' authority came from God. It was sustained by the fact that he liked to spend time with his Father. He found the opportunity to regularly get away from the people and pray. In v42 it says, "*At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place.*" Although the crowds were seeking Jesus, (vs 43) he was not seeking any greater popularity. He was living for God. When everyone was seeking him, he was seeking his Father. In chapter 5 and v16 it says again, "*Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*" This dependence on the Father gave Jesus the authority and is what will give us

authority in teaching, authority over evil spirits and authority to heal the sick. It also seems to say in James 5:15 that as we pray for healing, people's sins are forgiven, *“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.”*

Secondly Jesus' authority came from the fact that he was obedient to his calling, and that was to preach the good news of the kingdom, and to make disciples. V43, *“He said, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.”* Jesus preached at the Lake of Gennesaret, and it says the people were *“crowding around him and listening to the word of God.”* The good news that Jesus preached gave him this authority.

And what drew his disciples in chapter 5 to leave their nets when Jesus called them to follow him, and Levi from being a tax collector? These men saw his **authority** and it says, *“They pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.”* Jesus said to Simon Peter, *“From now on you will catch men”*.(5:11) Levi, the tax collector also *“got up, left everything and followed Him.”* (5:28)

So what happens when we receive the good news of Jesus? Many religious ideas we hear today are not good news but bad news. It is bad news to tell me that I must somehow find the strength to amend my life, or that I have got to be highly religious and have to go to lots of meetings and do lots of fasting. It is bad news to tell me that I have got to be very clever and understand a lot of doctrinal teaching. Often the gospel is preached in such a way that it becomes bad news. Jesus was not telling the people about laws or rules or religious or intellectual facts of understanding. The good news of the kingdom is that God sent his Son Jesus, to pay the price for our sins, and because of Jesus, God forgives

US and is willing to act powerfully as a king in our lives and in our circumstances. When we receive the good news of Jesus, God's authority is released into our lives. John 1:12 says, that *“All who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right (**authority**) to become children of God – children ... born of God.”*

In Matt 28:18 Jesus said to his disciples just before he ascended into heaven, *“All **authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* This authority comes with receiving His good news, and when we preach and teach the gospel and make disciples, just like Jesus did. Jesus gives us this authority to continue his work to preach the good news of the kingdom, and also to heal the sick and cast out demons. This is clearly seen in Luke 9:1 when Jesus sent out the Twelve. It says, *“he gave them power and **authority** to drive out all demons and to cure all diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.”* And this was even before the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and before the outpouring of His Spirit. When we step out in faith and obedience to his call, to preach the good news, and heal the sick, we have his authority. And even more so now - we stand on the finished work of the cross, that broke every power of darkness, and disease. Now we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, who gave us power to be witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Let's remember that Jesus knew that his authority was given by God, and was sustained through his prayer and dependence upon his Father. His authority in teaching and preaching the good news, his authority to drive out demons, to heal all sickness, to forgive sins, was released when he preached the gospel of the kingdom. So our authority as believers is given by God when we receive Jesus. And we have his powerful Holy Spirit now, and as we depend on His Spirit, authority is released as we preach, teach, heal, cast out demons and make disciples of all nations. We need never feel inadequate or weak, because **his** authority and power is released through us as we step out and share the good news, and his authority is sustained and increased as we remain in prayerful dependence on Him.

God bless you till next week when we will continue our Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke Chapter 6

Last week we looked at Luke 4-5 and noted that Jesus had authority to teach and preach the good news of the kingdom, authority to cast out demons, to heal the sick and to forgive sins. We looked at Scripture that tells us that as we receive Jesus, we have authority to become children of God and that authority is released as we step out and share the good news and it is sustained and increased as we remain in prayerful dependence on Him.

Today we look at Luke 6 and the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus teaches us godly attitudes that are directly opposite to those that the world promotes today. Jesus' teachings are not a programme for social reform, but practical guidance for a life of godliness, and a description of the character of the kingdom of God.

Firstly he shows that there is blessing in the kingdom of God if its members are free from self-sufficiency, and worldly popularity. The disciple who is truly blessed, and happy, and to be congratulated, is one who is poor (v20), one who is hungry, (v21a), who is sorrowful (21b) and persecuted for the sake of Jesus (v22-23). It is a surprising way of speaking. Most people dread the thought of those things. Yet Jesus said that those people will soon experience the kingdom of God. They will be satisfied; will soon be laughing and leap for joy at the privilege of suffering for the sake of Jesus. But does this all make sense?

Jesus is not saying that poverty in itself is a blessing. He says, "Blessed are you poor ..." He is referring to people like the disciples who had little wealth, yet they had trusted their lives to Jesus – and those poor people are blessed. The writer, Luke, shows special interest in outcasts, the poor

widows, the weaker people in society, who are invited to find exaltation in the gospel of Jesus. We can also say, there is blessing for the needy person whose sorrow and need drives him to Jesus. But Jesus predicts misery for the arrogant, the rich (v24), the well-fed (v25), the person who has no worldly cares or concern for God, and who is wanting the praise of others. (v26)

Secondly, there is blessing in the kingdom of God if its members are people of love. This is perhaps one of the most difficult pieces of teaching to apply in our lives. In the kingdom of God, Jesus asks us to show love for our enemies, (v27) to do good to them, to pray for those who mistreat us (v28), to turn the other cheek. This means to refuse to show resentment or use harsh words in reply to harsh words. If someone strikes us with their words or actions, we are to accept it with a willingness to be struck again. Apparently the word for *cheek* is more accurately the word used for *jaw*; like a punch on the jaw. Our natural inclination is to strike back hard. Jesus is speaking about a godly attitude. When we receive an injury we must not seek revenge, but be ready if need be to accept another such injury. It is moving in the opposite spirit to the one who hurt or offended us.

The principles of love in this chapter are summarised in the one sentence: it is treating others the way you wish to be treated yourself. It is only this kind of love that goes beyond the average lifestyle that people live. This love does not judge or condemn others. Jesus says you can find plenty of nice pagans, who are sweet and kind to their fellow sinners. If Christians are only sweet-natured to others who are sweet-natured, what is so special about that? If you are only generous to people who will repay you, what is remarkable about that? (v 34). We are to live at a miraculous level, a supernatural style of living that can be explained only by the

amazing grace of God in our lives. We are to be brought by God to a level of miraculous love – to love our enemies. And it is a love that is practical - doing good to them; a love that is considerate - lending to them without expecting to get anything back; a love that is God-like – we are sons of the Most-High; a love that is kind to the ungrateful and wicked; it is a love that is merciful – just as our Father is merciful; a love that is non-judgemental or condemning, but forgiving.

He not only tells us not to judge, not to condemn, and to forgive, but we are to be generous givers. Giving is the nature of God, and always brings reward, and the return is always much more than what we gave. Jesus said, *“Give, and it will be given to you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* Generous giving reaps an even more generous reward.

If we know the grace of God in Jesus, we can live in such a way that Jesus asks us to. We have an advantage now that we look back on the cross as a finished work, where the power of revenge, self-centredness and selfishness was broken. And we now have the gift of the Holy Spirit as well, and the very nature of Jesus who lives inside us. As we live in this understanding and yield ourselves to his Spirit, our very attitudes will exude the same spirit of Christ.

But I want to make a few points regarding forgiveness of someone who has really hurt or offended you. You may be thinking, *“if you knew what happened to me, you would not be able to forgive.”* A forgiving spirit is evidence that a man himself has been forgiven. Jesus comes back again to the same words a second time, *“Love your enemies and do good to them.”* (vs 35) This love for our enemies is not natural affection (*storge*), or romantic love (*eros*) or love of friendship even (*philia*). He uses the word (*agape*) for love that is even for the unworthy, which comes from the fact that we have to choose to love. This is in the spirit of Jesus himself. It is

not enough to refrain from revenge or hostile acts, but we are “*to do good to those who hate*” us. In society we may also think that we must resist someone who is evil, but a man, Caird, said, “*He who retaliates thinks that he is manfully resisting aggression; in fact, he is making an unconditional surrender to evil.*” This agape love is to find expression in our words and actions. If we are cursed, we must bless them, the totally opposite of what the world would do in that situation. If *mistreated*, we are to *pray for* them. (v 28)

Someone once said, “*Always forgive your enemies. Nothing infuriates them more.*” We need to draw from the supernatural Spirit of God within in us. Remember that forgiveness is the greatest gift you can give yourself, because you yourself will be freed and no longer be chained to the awful deed of the offender. We may think that its possible to forgive inwardly, without the need to show them love. But Jesus asks us to show them this agape love.

Jesus continues, “*When your cloak is taken, do not stop him from taking your tunic also.*” In other words, love must be ready to be deprived of everything if need be, and we must lend without expecting to get anything back. Then, he says, “*your reward will be great.*” We can emulate Jesus, because his Spirit lives within us.

To summarise then: Loving our enemies, blessing them, praying for them, turning the other jaw, lending without expecting a return, doing good to the offender, being merciful, not judging or condemning the guilty, forgiving them and giving generously when we are needy ourselves – these are certainly a tall order. But Jesus himself showed us how, and he will enable us to live this way, by his Spirit. But out of this kind of love, a great reward flows, a life-giving power that has a great impact on your own life and the life of the offender. Love has the power to change even the hardest criminal, and to break down the thickest wall.

Let's draw on his Spirit and his love that has been poured into our hearts and let us pour it out on those who least deserve it – then, watch and see what happens!

God bless you till next week as we continue our Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 7

Last week we looked at Luke 6 and discussed the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus told us to love our enemies, to bless them, pray for them, turn the other cheek, lend without expecting a return, do good to the offender, be merciful, do not judge or condemn, forgiving those who offended you and give generously. Though it may be hard to live this way as believers, Jesus himself showed us how, and will enable us to live this way, by his Spirit. And out of this kind of love, a great reward flows, a life-giving power that impacts one's own life and the life of the offender.

Today we look at Luke 7 and the story of the centurion, probably one of Herod's soldiers, who came from outside Israel. This centurion had a servant who was seriously ill. He had heard that Jesus was in Capernaum. He believed in the God of Israel, so he asked the elders of the synagogue to call Jesus to come and heal his servant. The elders plead with Jesus to come to his house because they said he was "*worthy*", and that he was a supporter of the synagogue. So Jesus started walking to his house. But then the soldier no longer thought that this was necessary and he sent a message back. "*Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, "go", and he goes; and that one, "come", and he comes. I say to my servant, "do this" and he does it.*" Well, Jesus was surprised and praised his great faith, and the servant was healed (v9,10).

We see from this story that some believers have greater faith than others. There is such a thing as great faith. This

man was a believer of God, but also his faith was greater than others. But there is also such a thing as “*little faith*”. In the next chapter of Luke when the storm was raging and Jesus was asleep in the boat, he calmed the sea and then rebuked the fearful disciples saying, “*Where is your faith?*” Also in Matt 7:30, Jesus says that someone who worries about what to eat or wear, is someone of “*little faith*”.

What makes a person to have great faith or small faith? And can we grow our faith? What we do notice is that great faith brings results, and little faith does not. Great faith pleases Jesus, and little faith seems to disappoint him.

But from this story we notice that faith can grow. A careful reading shows that this centurion's faith was growing. He begins by asking Jesus to come (v3) but then a little later he has more faith and feels even that is unnecessary. He believes Jesus only needs to say the word for the healing to take place. Also later in this gospel, the apostles come to Jesus in chapter 17:5 and ask, “*Increase our faith.*” But then Jesus tells them, “*If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.*” To us that seems a total impossibility. But then, faith only works in the face of a human impossibility, otherwise we would not need any faith. We are sometimes waiting for the day when our faith will be stronger before we dare to believe for an impossibility. But Jesus encourages the disciples here to use even the little faith they have, and he says that miracles will happen. That is the secret of faith: we need to use the little we have, for it to begin to grow and be effective. Maybe you have never dared to pray for someone to be healed before; but if you step out with the little faith you have, and pray for people without giving up, your faith will grow, and soon you will be seeing more and more healings.

Michael Eaton says that in this story we can also see that faith is logical. The centurion uses logical argument, saying *“I know about authority, and I know that one word of authority can get things done. I know Jesus is a man of authority also.”* Faith looks at God and argues with itself, *“I know Jesus has great authority and Jesus has great mercy, and great power. I know that Jesus is a man of compassion, so I reckon that He is able and willing to do this thing for me.”* That is the spiritual logic of faith, which is greater than first seeing in order to believe. The centurion had not seen Jesus, and Jesus had not seen the servant. And he did not need to see Jesus, because the Holy Spirit opened his spiritual eyes. He can do the same for us, and we also will reckon that He has authority, mercy and power to do anything that is within His will and purpose for us. And another place where we see the logical side of faith, is in Matt 7 where Jesus tells us to look at the birds of the air that neither sow, nor reap nor store away in barns, yet the heavenly Father feeds them. So logically are we not much more valuable than they? And we are to see how the lilies of the field grow without labouring or spinning, and God clothes the grass of the field, so logically how much more will He not also clothe and care for us?

We also learn from this story that great faith does not depend on one's worthiness. It was the elders who spoke about the centurion's worthiness, whereas he himself saw his unworthiness. He said, *“I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.”* Great faith trusts in Jesus' worthiness. You might see yourself also as unworthy before God, but if you take your eyes off yourself and see His great mercy, His worthiness, and because of that, you ask him, then God will also respond to your faith. The point is, it has nothing to do with you anyway, your worthiness or lack of it. Faith has all to do with believing in His worthiness, His mercy, His willingness and power. When we pray for healing, we think it depends on how holy we are. No, it depends on our understanding and believing in His love.

Then we see that the centurion used a key to unlock his faith. He said to Jesus, “*Just say the word.*” The centurion knew that Jesus just had to “*say the word,*” and his servant would be healed. He also spoke out his own faith by telling his messengers to say to Jesus that he believed that Jesus' word was enough to heal his servant. Also in the following story in the same chapter Jesus stopped a funeral procession in a town called, Nain, and Jesus was filled with mercy and compassion for the widow who had lost her only son. He went up to the coffin and said, “*Young man, I **say to you, get up!***” and the dead man sat up and began to talk and Jesus gave him back to his mother. Wow! It was when Jesus spoke the word. Our faith needs to be ignited by our words. We need to speak our faith, declare the answer to your situation. Speak the healing or breakthrough that you are believing for. Base your words on the promises and word of God. Say what God says!

Then we also see that the centurion put action to his faith. He did not just believe Jesus could heal his servant; he acted on his faith and he sent a message saying Jesus need not come to his house anymore, but just to speak the word. He added action to his faith. James also tells us that faith without works is dead. We should act on that believing. If you believe Jesus will provide, you need to take a step of faith toward your goal, acting upon your faith. If you believe That God heals, you need to step out and and lay your hands on the sick person and pray. Say to the person, “*Be healed!*”

So to re-cap then, we learn here that faith can grow. How do we grow it? We recognise and meditate on the character of God – his authority, his mercy, his power, his promises. We can see that faith is logical and we can conclude from other evidence that what God has done before, he will do again. And then we can activate our mustard-seed faith with speaking the word he says. And we must realise that is not related to our feelings of worthiness or unworthiness, but that He is worthy, He is faithful, He is good, He is kind and willing. We can expect Him to do for us what we know is humanly impossible. We also see that there must be actions that follow our faith. So let's learn from the centurion to activate and grow our faith. Like the centurion, trust God for miracles or impossibilities you may be facing in your life today.

God bless you till next week as we continue with our *Lessons from Luke*.

Lessons from Luke Chapter 8

Last week we looked at chapter 7 and the story about the centurion who asked Jesus to come to his house to heal his servant who was ill. This man had great faith, because he recognised Jesus' authority and he concluded that just a spoken word would heal his servant. He realised that it was not related to his unworthiness, but the mercy of God. He also put action to his faith by sending Jesus a message just to speak the word instead of coming to his house. We, too, can activate and grow our faith as this centurion did.

Today we look at chapter 8 and the mystery in the parable Jesus told of the Sower and the Seed. First we must understand that in all the parables, Jesus was preaching about the Kingdom of God. "*Kingdom*" is mentioned 7 times in the first 8 chapters. When we come into the kingdom of God, we come under the powerful reign of our King. Michael Eaton put it so well: "*The kingdom of God is the presence of Jesus as King. And where Jesus is, there is the kingly power of God.*" In Luke 1 it says, "*Of his kingdom there shall be no end.*" Jesus also said, "*I must preach the Gospel of the Kingdom.*"(4:43) He said to the poor-but-believing disciples, "*Yours is the Kingdom of God.*" (6:20) It says in chapter 8:1 that Jesus was "*proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.*" And in 8v10 He said to the disciples, "*The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you,*" but to others he spoke in parables.

We may wonder why Jesus hides the truth of the kingdom from some by preaching in parables? He is not hiding it, but it is a mystery. And many do miss the experience of God's kingdom and power, but it is not God's fault. The power of the kingdom does not work automatically. It still needs persistent attentiveness and faith. Jesus says, no one lights

a lamp and then covers it or puts it in a place where it will not give light. So he says, there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed or brought into the open. For some people, they may know these secrets of the Kingdom now in their lives; for others it will be known eventually, but then it will be too late to do anything about it. The parables are a judgement on those who refuse to hear. (v10) That is why Jesus goes on to say, "*consider carefully how you listen.*" (v18) We need to listen with a willingness in our hearts to be changed by his word. To experience the kingdom of God in its fullness, we need to be attentive and receptive to His Word.

Jesus explained this clearly in the parable of the sower. He said that when a farmer went out to sow his seed, some seed fell along the path and it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop a hundred times more than was sown.

Jesus explained that this parable is about our responsiveness to God's Word, which is the seed. In the first part where the seed fell on the path, "*it was trampled on*", verse 5 tells us. When the Word of God is "*trampled on*", because of rebellion or hardened hearts, the devil comes and takes away the word that was sown, so that they may not believe and be saved. And without faith there can be no salvation, or life in the kingdom of God. The path is a picture of a hardened heart. In Mark 8:17 Jesus asks, "*Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?*" Also in Hebrews 3:8,12, "*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion... See to it, brothers, that none of you has a*

sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Hearts are hardened through unbelief and rebellion against God. The enemy is waiting to steal the Word that has fallen on those hearts that are like a path.

Where the seed fell on the rocky places, they are the ones who receive the word with joy, but they have no root. Jesus says, "*They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.*"(v13) Some miss God's blessings because they fail to persevere in difficult times. When we face tests, do we turn to God's Word or do we turn away from his Word? Many who face great disappointments or trials, lose their faith and become offended and bitter towards God, and they no longer believe that God is merciful and gracious. What are the rocks that prevent the Word from impacting your life? For some there may need some rocks of offence removed, for the Word of God to take root and grow.

Then for some, the seed fell among the thorns. Jesus says, as people go on their way, they allow life's worries, or riches and pleasures to choke the Word, and they do not mature. We can miss God's blessings because of many worries. For many the sin of worry seems a minor issue, but it is a form of fear, that is the opposite of faith. How easily we fret over our problems instead of trusting God. We keep focussing on the problems and not on God as the answer, and His cannot grow and become fruitful in our lives.

Then also, riches and pleasures get in the way of the Word. (v14) Riches and pleasures may seem totally acceptable to us today. And God does not want us to be struggling or not to have any fun. But the emphasis is on the choking obsession with wealth and making more money. Also becoming pre-occupied with sensual pleasures and the entertainment of this world, will also choke the truth of God's Word, and it will have no impact at all in our lives. Then the real spiritual riches and lasting, spiritual joy, that God wants to give us, is then sadly lost. So these thorns of worry,

obsessive wealth, worldly pleasures also will cause pain and need to be weeded out.

And lastly, the seed on good soil speaks of those with a good heart who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. We notice here that we have to hold onto the word, and we need to persevere, to see a harvest come into our lives. So often people receive a word, but if there is not a quick or instant breakthrough or answer, they give up and lose it. The Scriptures constantly remind us to hold onto God's promises and go on believing until we see the fruit. Then we can reap up to a hundred-fold harvest.

Luke goes on in this same chapter to tell the story of the storm on the lake; where Jesus slept despite a raging storm and the disciples woke him up in alarm. In their panic they were not holding fast to their confidence in Jesus, which again makes the point that faith has to persevere even in a storm. The kingdom of God requires persistent faith. It is those who "*hold fast and bear fruit with perseverance*" who reap its blessings. What storm are you going through at the moment? Hold fast to the promises of God and believe that God will open the way for you.

Vs 21 also tells us that we need to hear the word and "*put it into practice*". James 1:25 also says, "*The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.*"

So evaluate your heart today. Is it perhaps a hardened, unbelieving, rebellious heart where the Word of God cannot gain entrance? Or is it a heart with hindrances, like rocks of offence that have caused you to turn away from God in your difficult times, and his Word just seems to have dried up? Or is your heart filled with fear and worry that has strangled the truth? Or are you rather obsessed with money and wealth, which is pushing God's Word out of your life? Or are the sensual pleasures of this world drowning out the voice of God in your heart? Let's trust yours is the open, soft and ready heart that receives God's truth, and holds onto the promises of God, and will not give up until you see fruit and blessing in due season. God bless you till next week as we continue our *Lessons from Luke*.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 9

Last week we discussed the Parable of the Sower in Luke 8. The seed of the Word can fall on a hard heart like a pathway, where the enemy comes and hinders entrance of the Word by stealing it. Or the Word can grow in a stony heart when a person turns away from God in difficult times and rocks of offence result in the drying up of the Word. Or the Word gets choked by weeds of worry, obsession of wealth and sensual pleasures. Or lastly, it can fall on a ready heart that holds onto the promises of God and they do not give up until a harvest is reaped.

Today, in Luke chapter 9, we look at a few aspects of discipleship. It is important to remember that “*following Jesus*” in the New Testament was a matter of becoming a trainee in the work of the Kingdom of God by learning to do what Jesus did.

We see in 9:1 that Jesus called his disciples and gave them the power and authority to drive out demons and to heal diseases. Then he sent them out to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. We too, have power and authority in Jesus' Name and since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we can receive His power to be witnesses, to preach the good news, to heal the sick and cast out demons. It clearly shows that we are called to go out in His Name to destroy the works of Satan where people are bound by demons or sickness, so that the powerful reign of God can be seen.

In this passage we notice that the apostles' ministry was to be hand-in-hand with a simple way of life. Jesus told them not to go out with a vast quantity of supplies, provisions and luxuries. They were to take just what they had and to look to

God and His people to help them. Though these instructions were for the disciples at that time and not literally applicable to everyone, we are still to choose a simpler lifestyle to be able to minister for Jesus, which should be our main focus.

Then vs 5 shows that when the disciples preached the good news, Jesus said that they would sometimes face rejection from people, but they should simply go elsewhere and continue preaching.

Also, we see that after their time of ministry, the disciples spent personal time alone with Jesus. Vs 10 says, "*When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida.*" As active followers of Jesus, who share the good news, it is also good to take a break to be with Jesus after we've been exceptionally busy. We need to be restored by Him. We need time to pray and become conscious of God's presence in our lives.

Then we also see that Jesus proved he could provide for all his followers. In the next account we read that 5000 people were fed with only 5 loaves and 2 fish that the disciples gave him, and that he multiplied. They saw Jesus as the creator and King of the universe, and He could abundantly provide for all of His people. So even though we have a little, when we give it to Jesus, He can create enough to have a surplus of 12 baskets of food. There is an abundance of resources and supply in him. Anyone truly in His plan will not lack his provision. And nothing is impossible for Him. We as his called ones should give what we have and He will multiply what we give Him. And he always gives a surplus as well.

Then we see that true disciples have to come to a clear conviction about Jesus. When they were asked by him in vs 21, "*Who do you say I am?*" Peter replied for all of them,

“The Christ of God.” Jesus was the Messiah, the predicted King and Saviour. So, if you want to be a disciple of Jesus, you need to know that He is your personal Saviour Christ, and you must follow and serve Him only.

Also we see that true disciples had to come to understand that the cross of Jesus was to be central to their lives. In vs 22 Jesus told them that the Son of Man was to be killed and on the 3rd day, raised to life. We, as his disciples, now look back on the cross as Jesus' finished work of salvation, where the incredible exchange took place. There our sinfulness was exchanged for his righteousness, our bondage was exchanged for freedom.

In the very next verse Jesus then said to them all: *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* Denying myself means refusing my own independent selfishness; and taking up my cross daily, means counting my old life as having died with Jesus. There is only one cross, and no independent death of our own could ever redeem us, but our identification with the cross of Jesus, is true life to us. Jesus said, *“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”* To follow Jesus, we must give up or lose our independence, in order to gain true life and salvation in Him.

Now, while Jesus was teaching his disciples, a man who was very eager to follow Him said, *“I will follow you wherever you go.”* Jesus replied,(v 58) *“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”* We do know that Jesus lived a very humble and simple life on this earth, with a single-minded mission. And it might mean that we who are called to serve him or preach, may face times of fewer luxuries and greater sacrifice than others, but there will always be the delicious joy of reward for any sacrifice that was made for the sake and cause of Jesus.

In vs 59 Jesus calls another man to follow him, but he first wanted to go and bury his dead father. Jesus said to him, *“Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”* (vs 60). He means that people who are spiritually dead must at times be left to take care of their own affairs, and that disciples cannot delay obedience to serve Jesus, because of them.

Then in vs 61 we read of another would-be-disciple who first wanted to stay for a time with his family before he committed himself to serving Jesus. But Jesus saw that he was simply reluctant to serve him, and he replied, *“No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”* Anyone who becomes a believer and starts serving God or *“puts his hand to the plough”*, but then draws back, will disqualify himself from being useful and fruitful, and from reaping the full blessings of the Kingdom of God. Though he will be saved, his reward will be lost, because he longs more for the familiar and comfortable life, than obeying Jesus call to follow him in sharing the Gospel.

So then to summarise: as disciples we are sent out with power and the authority of the Holy Spirit to go into all the world and preach the Gospel; and to heal the sick and drive out demons. As disciples we must hold to a simple life in dependence on God's provision, and knowing that sometimes there might be opposition when we share his message. Let us spend time alone with Jesus after busy-ness, to be restored and continually to know his presence in our lives. As we give what we have to Him, He will multiply that, and will provide all our needs. So be sure that He is your Saviour Christ; that your old life was crucified with him. And let us as his disciples, daily focus on the power of the finished work of the cross. Although we might face times of great sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel, there will be great blessings to be reaped one day.

So do not delay doing what God called you to do, because of pressure from unbelieving family members. And do not turn back to a familiar comfortable life, as you will then be unfit for service in the kingdom of God, without any fruit. Commit yourself to Jesus, to be His true disciple; someone who is willing to give up all for the sake of sharing the good news, healing the sick and setting the captives free. God bless you till next week as we continue our Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke Chapter 10

Last week we looked at discipleship in Luke 9 and said that Jesus sent out his disciples with authority to share the Gospel, to heal the sick, and to drive out demons. The disciple's life is to be a simpler life, and we are called to spend time with Jesus, being refreshed by his presence in our lives. Whatever we give him, he will multiply and he will provide all our needs. Though there may be times of sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel, we focus on his cross. We are encouraged not to delay or to look back, but to run with the message of the Kingdom.

Today in Luke chapter 10 we look at the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and also the visit of Jesus to Martha's house. In both these stories, we see a common theme of two different approaches to winning God's favour and blessing.

In v25 an expert in the law tried to test Jesus. "*Teacher,*" he asked, "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" It is clear that he was thinking that salvation was by doing something. Many today still ask this question, and also think that it is by good deeds that we inherit eternal life. But the point is, how much must one do, and how much doing will be enough? When Jesus asked him what the Law says, and he quoted from Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18, which Jesus said was a good reply: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.*" Jesus implied that if he wanted a way of salvation by doing, that was the standard, but the implication was that no-one would be able to do it. And if we really love God in the way of which Jesus speaks, then we will need to rely on Him, not ourselves. We can only love God with the love He has given us when we

believe. Rom 5:5 says that *“God has poured his love into our hearts”*. So this kind of love is our response to God's love for us, not the reason that He accepts us.

The law expert had no understanding of God's divine grace. He wanted a set of rules that he could keep to merit eternal life, but Jesus was telling him that to live in love is to live the life of the kingdom of God. If we really love Him, we will love our neighbour too. We read in 1 John 4:20, *“If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”*

Also Rom 13:8-10 says, *“for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law and whatever commandments there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”* Jesus is showing that rules don't count, but there is a higher way of love on the Kingdom of God.

So He told the story of a man who had fallen into the hands of robbers on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. He was stripped of his clothes, beaten and left half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, saw him, but passed by on the other side. Then a Levite also came and passed by on the other side. Ironically both these men worked in the temple of God, yet neither of them showed any concern or help. In their minds, they had done their duty at the temple that day. They had done enough for God to win His approval. And they left this man and ignored his need. That is typically the picture of someone in legalism who follows rules and weighs his works, but has no concept of love. People who believe that good works earn them eternal life, will compare themselves to others who do less and so

justify themselves, as being better.

It was a Samaritan of a despised race, who saw the man, and took pity on him. He showed him love, bandaged his wounds, and poured on oil and wine. He put him on his donkey, took him to an inn and took further care of him, paying for all his expenses. Then he promised to pay any extra expenses on his return from his journey.

Now the Samaritan is a picture of someone who has understood and received the grace of God. He helped and gave and served and paid, without expecting anything in return. Only someone who himself has received undeserved favour and mercy, is able to do the same to others. The oil and wine are both symbols of the Holy Spirit. The Samaritan is also a picture of Jesus, who healed our wounds, gave us his Holy Spirit, himself cared for us in our nakedness and brokenness, and paid all our debt, knowing we can never repay him. We are told to “*go and do likewise*” and to love our neighbours. Compassionate love is evidence that we have come into the Kingdom of God.

So we see the contrast – the law expert who was looking to follow rules and earn eternal life; also the priest and Levite who worked in the temple and felt they had done their duty for the day; with no mercy or compassion for someone in need. It is because none of them had yet received the gift of God's love. Duty and love are totally opposite to each other. Then of course, the Samaritan was moved with compassion, reached out and gave and paid as he understood what grace and undeserved favour was. Jesus' message to the law expert was that to inherit eternal life, one must first realise that God's love is undeserved. And loving God and one's neighbour is only possible when we have received God's love, through no work of our own.

So in the next story of Martha and Mary we see this same contrast of works versus love. Martha had opened her home to Jesus and

his disciples. Her sister, Mary, did nothing to help, but just sat at Jesus' feet and listened to all he said. Martha on the other hand, was busy with all the preparations that had to be done. And typical of someone who works for God's approval, there was criticism, grumbling, and telling God to rebuke her sister, and her heart was filled with worry and resentment. *"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"* Jesus answered, *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her."* (v 41,42)

Jesus showed here that we have a choice to love and listen, or to fret and work. One leads to eternal life, that will not be taken away, but the other has no reward and will be lost, because it is human effort. It will not pass the ultimate test.

Martha meant well. She wanted to do her best for Jesus and his disciples and prepare a good meal and get the place ready for them. But her focus and energy was on doing and working and earning something from Jesus. But with it there is always comparison and worry and resentment and grumbling. Martha could simply not see the value of just sitting and doing nothing.

We see this picture again – someone who is wanting to impress God, and willing to sacrifice and work for his favour and reward. Yet Jesus makes it so plain and simple – only one thing is needed. That is to do nothing, only to come and to receive His love and to love God and love others. That is the way to inherit eternal life and God's approval. Because no matter how much we do or work, nothing will ever be enough to buy or earn our salvation. It is a free gift, but one needs to come and receive and love. That will never be lost, and is eternal life.

Where do we fit in as we look at these two approaches to God? Do we strive and try and do good and pray and weigh and measure with resentment and grumbling? Or do we realise that nothing we have or that we do, can ever buy God's approval and blessings. When we realise that, we stop striving and working, but we come and sit and listen and receive and love Him and others. God bless you till next week as we study some Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 11

Last week we looked at the story of the good Samaritan and the visit of Jesus to Martha's house. We saw how some of us approach God by our own works and striving without the love of the Kingdom of God. Or like the Samaritan, once we know God's love, we are able to give sacrificial love to others in need. And Mary is the good example of one sitting at Jesus' feet and receiving and worshipping – which Jesus said, will never be taken from her.

Today we study Chapter 11 and look at the emphasis on prayer. Jesus' disciples realised the importance of prayer and asked him to teach them how to pray. They realised that if Jesus needed to pray, and John the Baptist made prayer a major part of his life, they also needed to pray. We also see here that prayer can be taught.

Jesus does not say anything about posture or place or type of language, but taught them what they should pray for, (v2-4) and the character of true prayer (v5-10) and the willingness of God to hear us (v11–12) and also the greatest gift to pray for. (v13)

First Jesus gave his followers a model of prayer to give an idea of what to pray for. It begins with the realisation of who it is that we are praying to - "*Father*". We cannot say to God, "*My Father*" if we are not his child. So that is obviously the first step. Jesus said, "*To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*" So each of us needs to know we are born of Him by believing and receiving him. Maybe your earthly father was a poor example of God, but our heavenly Father is the perfect,

loving, non-aggressive, and non-accusing Father. All the anger for sin was carried by Jesus, who took our blame. So we, too, can learn to pray and start by focussing our hearts on our loving and faithful Father. Then, "*Hallowed be your name*", means his name is holy and that God's character is in his name. He is a holy God. "*Your Kingdom come*", means, "*let your kingship come in my life as I submit to you, and let it spread throughout this world.*" And, "*may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" Again this refers to my own life and on this earth. As we regularly acknowledge that we are submitting to his rulership and will, we will experience great peace and blessing.

The next petition is for our daily bread, which means the provision of our daily needs. It is in the continuous tense - "*keep giving us our daily bread*", so we remain in a state of continual dependence on Him. God does not get tired of us asking him continually to provide our needs. Jesus taught us to do this. And just as Matt 7:9 says, "*Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish will give him a snake? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*"

"*Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us*". It does not make it conditional, or that our forgiveness is on the ground of merit, but forgiveness comes from God's heart of grace. It means that "*since even sinful men like us forgive, we can confidently approach a merciful God.*" How wonderful to know that "*if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*" (1 John 1:9). God not only forgives, but he cleanses and restores us. In fact the cleansing by Jesus' blood is ongoing as we believe that.

“And lead us not into temptation”, is a prayer for us never be brought into a situation where we cannot stand. James says that God does not tempt us. But we can pray that we will not get to those dangerous stages. *“Keep me from temptation; keep temptation away from me.”* We ask not to be brought “into” that situation where we are likely to fail the test and fall into sin. God can do that for us, and we can ask him to protect us from those situations.

Next Jesus begins to teach his followers about persistence in prayer, by telling us a parable. Imagine that you are in a situation of serious need. A visitor arrives at your home and you are obliged to feed him, but you need some bread. So at midnight you go to your friend who lives nearby and explain to him your problem, calling to him from outside. He calls back from his bed, *“Don't bother me at this time of night. I don't want to disturb the children.”* (v7) But you go on asking and pleading that you are desperate. Finally the man inside gets up and helps you. Jesus comments that it was not friendship that made him get up and do something, but the shameless persistence and audacity. The point of the parable is not that God is half asleep, but that persistence wins an answer!

So if you are praying for an answer, do not give up, but ask with shameless persistence and audacity. In other words, ask BIG and go on asking, because God's heart of love is big and Jesus said He will not give you a snake instead of a fish. The basis of our confidence is the goodness of God. Even sinners have enough goodness in them so as to be able to give good things to their children. Will God not do even better? He is a good Father and when we come to him making it clear what we need, by persistent praying, He will give to us an abundance of good things. But as Leon Morris said, *“If we do not want what we are asking for enough to be persistent, we do not want it very much.”*

Jesus goes on to so say, *“Ask ... seek ... knock”* and promises that

we shall be heard (11:9-10) and that what we shall be given will be good. But each of these verbs is continuous: ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking. Again Jesus is saying that those who persist in asking will receive, and those who persist in seeking will find, and those who persist in knocking will have doors opened for them. Jesus does not say that if we pray, we shall always get exactly what we ask for. After all, “No” is just as definite an answer as “Yes”. He is saying that true prayer is neither unheard or unheeded. It is always answered in the way God sees is best.

Many of us have struggled over the question of why we do not always see our prayers answered, when maybe we feel we have prayed with persistence and faith. This is one of those issues that we cannot fully understand, but yet we should never reason that God does not care or that we are not good enough for him to care about. And don't conclude that God is not good or loving or caring. He is total perfection, and any lack of perspective in the matter is from our side as fallible, limited human beings. Turning against God because your cry was not answered in the way you wanted, will only bring pain to your own life. A few verses later, Jesus is dealing with blasphemous accusations against him, and he says in verse 23, “*He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.*” Always know that God is good and that God loves you with an incredible love, and he promises to answer our prayers if we pray with persistence and faith.

Then Jesus tells us that the greatest gift for which we should pray for is the gift of the Holy Spirit and his work in our lives, which is for our highest good. “*How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.*” (vs 13) It is not exactly praying for the Day of Pentecost, or for the baptism of the Spirit, but rather that we need the help of the Holy Spirit to daily empower us in everything we face and do.

So let us learn to pray as Jesus taught us in the model prayer, to our loving heavenly Father, with shameless persistence, asking and keeping on asking. And pray for the power and help of His Holy Spirit in our daily lives. He promises to answer that prayer. God bless you till next week as we continue our Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 12

Last week we learned about prayer from Chapter 11 and looked at the model prayer Jesus taught us to pray to our Father. Jesus told us what to pray for and that the secret is persistence in our asking and believing. Jesus said that God is more willing to bless us, even than we want to bless our own children. And the greatest prayer to pray is for the Holy Spirit and his work and power in our daily lives.

Today we look at Chapter 12 and some of the warnings and encouragements that Jesus gave his followers. The first warning was against hypocrisy, which he likens to the yeast of the Pharisees. It means saying one thing and doing another, which ultimately eats at one. Jesus points out that it is a short-sighted approach to life, as in the end everything will be exposed. The art of being a hypocrite depends on the ability to hide things. But Jesus says, on Judgement day all things will be uncovered. Whispered secrets in private rooms will be proclaimed from the roof tops; that is the fullest publicity. The picture of yeast means that hidden shameful secrets will grow, permeate and affect one's whole life. So it is best brought into the open now, when forgiveness and restoration can be found.

The second thing Jesus warns about is Judgement Day. He tells us not to fear mere humans who can kill the body, but after that their power extends no further. But he says, "*Fear him, who, after killing of the body has power to throw you into hell, Yes, I tell, you, fear him.*" (v5) God's authority extends beyond death and we should fear God. This kind of fear is compatible with the love of God. It is a recognition of the greatness and righteousness of God on the one hand and recognising our readiness to sin on the other. Fear of this kind protects us against presumption and must be

rooted in real faith in Jesus. Matthew Henry says, *“By owning Christ, you could incur the punishment of men, but by disowning Christ, you will incur the punishment of God.”* Vs 9 repeats this, *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. And anyone who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.”* We know that Peter denied Jesus, and he was forgiven, but disowning is turning one's back on God or denying the supremacy of Jesus.

But Jesus reassures us about the care God has for his people. He even numbers the very hairs of our head and notices when a sparrow is sold. *“Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows,”* he said. Then he further encourages us not to worry about when we are being accused or brought before authorities and leaders because of our faith. Sadly, today, many people are still being persecuted for their faith. Jesus reassures his followers that the Holy Spirit will teach them at that time what they should say. If we ever face a time of danger or trial before our accusers, we will know the strength and presence of the Holy Spirit who will instruct and help us.

Jesus then warns us against greed and storing up riches on this earth without any concern for our future destiny. He said, *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”* He told a parable about a wealthy farmer, he called a rich fool, who produced a good crop. He decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones to store all his grain and all his goods. His intention was to take life easy, to eat and drink and be merry or self-indulgent without any thought for his soul or for the needs of others. But God said to him, *“You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with anyone who stores up*

things for himself but is not rich toward God.” These verses say it all – greed, materialism, self-indulgent pleasure, making life as comfortable as possible, without any concern for eternity, classifies such a person as a fool. Man's life hangs by a thread and at any time he may need to give account of his life. Trusting in riches prevents one trusting in God, and we are told to sell some of our possessions and give them to the poor. *“Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and moth destroys. For where your treasure is, your heart will be also.”* A man's heart, the concentration of his energies and his interests, is always with his treasure; with the things he values most. Giving or sharing is a way of investing into our eternal future.

Then Jesus encourages his followers not to worry or be anxious over earthly needs, like what to eat or what to wear. He tells us to look at the birds, that don't sow nor reap, nor have any storerooms to store their food, yet God feeds them. He says, *“And how much more valuable you are than birds!”* Worrying cannot add one hour to one's life. We are to look at the lilies that God clothes in beauty, yet they disappear so quickly. *“How much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!”* Let us trust God to feed and clothe us. He does not want us to be obsessed with these matters and lose our peace over them. A man called Arndt said, *“Greed can never get enough, worry is afraid it may not have enough.”* Jesus continues, *“But seek his kingdom and these things will be given to you as well.”* When we honour God, God honours our faith, and though we may not grow wealthy as the world understands riches, we will not lack. We so easily get our priorities mixed up, by seeking these earthly matters first, instead of the other way around. Jesus is emphasising the importance of trusting God and detaching ourselves from things.

In v35 Jesus tells us to be dressed and ready for service, and ready for his return. *“You must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”* He goes on to tell a story of a master who goes away but puts a faithful and wise

manager in charge of his servants and to feed them. If the master returns and he is doing so, he will be put in charge of all his possessions. But if the master takes long in coming and the manager becomes careless, begins to beat the servants and gets drunk, he will be severely punished when the master returns. Jesus goes on to say that one who knows his master's will and does not do it, will receive a severe penalty, but the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment, will be more lightly punished. Jesus concludes, *"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."* We cannot minimise the importance of doing God's will. We will all be held accountable.

We know that the punishment for sin has been carried by Jesus on the cross, but for a careless and indulgent believer, there will be a forfeiting of blessing and inheritance. There are definitely degrees of rewards for us in heaven one day. And if a leader has been given responsibility in the kingdom of God and he fails to do it; even devouring the flock instead of caring for the sheep, Jesus warns that there will be grave consequences for such a person. We cannot take our calling lightly, as we do not know when our master will return and when we have to give an account of what he has put in our charge.

So to sum up – we are warned not be hypocritical, saying one thing, but doing another. And remember, secrets will be exposed. We are to fear God who will be the eternal judge, and not to fear men who can only hurt our physical bodies. Disowning him will lead to us being disowned before the angels. There follows a warning against greed of material things, while ignoring one's spiritual plight. We are encouraged to lay up treasure in heaven which is an eternal investment. And he tells us not to worry about our earthly needs, as he promises to care for us as we prioritise his kingdom. We are warned to be ready for the return of Jesus and to be doing what he called us to do, as we do not know when he will return. Much more will be asked of us who have received much. And we will all have to give account of the responsibilities given to us. So let us seek his kingdom and be found faithful.

God bless you till next week as study more *Lessons from Luke*.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 13

Last week we spoke some encouragements and warnings that Jesus gave to his followers. He encouraged us to lay up treasure in heaven as an eternal investment, not to worry about our earthly needs but to seek his kingdom. And he warned against hypocrisy, because all men's secrets will be exposed. We are to fear God, not men. He warned against greed and material gain at the expense of one's eternal destiny. He told us to be ready for his return and to be found faithful to what he called us to do for him.

Today we want to look at chapter 13 and the emphasis that Jesus put on repentance and coming into his kingdom. When Jesus was told about some people who had died tragically, he told them that the disaster was not a punishment for their sin, as many believed, or because they were worse sinners than others. But all men ultimately will face their own day of judgement. Then He said two times, *“Unless you repent, you too will all perish.”* (v3,5) He was saying, that their fate was an urgent warning to repent. In this context repentance is a once-for-all thing that shapes the whole subsequent course of one's life. Everyone will face physical death, but not everyone needs to face eternal death.

Jesus continues by telling a parable of a man looking for fruit on a fig tree he planted in his vineyard, but he could not find any. He told the gardener to cut it down, because for 3 years it had borne no fruit. But the gardener asked to give it one more chance. For one year he would dig and fertilise the tree, but if it still produced nothing, he would cut it down. In this parable Jesus is giving this picture to explain the need to repent, or fruit of repentance. We are that fig tree and God is looking for fruit of repentance in our lives. Jesus

is the gardener, who is interceding to give us more time to produce that fruit. This parable shows the slowness of God to punish, but it also stresses the importance of repenting. And it highlights the fact that the opportunity to repent does not last for ever. Many people think that some day in the future they will consider their ways and respond to God. But the problem is that none of us knows when our life might be taken from us, or when our tree might be cut down. The time of grace and God's patience is today, but Jesus makes it clear that the time available to repent and choose life, is not an indefinite time.

Let's look at the actual meaning of true repentance for a moment. First of all, it is the first major condition for entering the Kingdom of God, or becoming a child of God. Gunther Krallman puts it so well. He says, "*It is a totally new orientation in thinking and doing, a complete turn-around in thought and conduct.*" So it implies a change of mind, or a new perspective of sin, its awfulness and consequences, and then follows a turning to God for forgiveness and life.

This means it is a change of action, from rebellion to submission to God. It implies a turning away from all sinful ways as a change of direction, and then offering oneself up to God for ownership. In Luk 18:13 we see clearly how repentance leads to confession of sin in prayer. Jesus tells about a tax collector and a Pharisee who both came to the temple to pray about themselves. The Pharisees prayed, thanking God that he was not like the other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers or even like the tax collector who was standing there. This Pharisees told God that he fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of all he received. But the tax-collector saw his own sinfulness and stood at a distance from the other, and he would not even look up to heaven, but he beat his breast and said, "*God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*" (18:13) The Bible says that this man, and not the

Pharisee, went home justified before God.

We know that Jesus sacrificed his life on the cross, so that our sins could be forgiven on the basis of repentance. And God loved us so much that He was willing to give up his only Son to die on our behalf, so that we could go free from judgement and hell. So Jesus calls us to repent while we are still in the short time frame of grace and mercy, but he shows us that that time will come to an end, and for many it may be too late. He explained this more clearly in v 24-26, when someone asked Jesus if only a few people were going to be saved. He said, *“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’*

Jesus continues to say that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when people see all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but they themselves thrown out. People will come from all over the world to take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God, but only those who repented of their sin and gave their lives over to Him will be able to enter.

Now when Jesus says, *“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door”*, he does not mean that human effort is needed to enter into the kingdom, but it is an attitude of the mind to make repentance a supreme priority. There is a time-limit on the offer of salvation. When the door of opportunity is finally shut, it will be too late. Men must make every effort to enter now. There will be only two classes, those inside and those outside the door to salvation. If people do not take the necessary steps to get inside, they will be numbered with the evildoers outside.

We read that there will be a feast, a messianic banquet, and not only for Jews, but for all peoples who have repented and received his life. Some Jews will be excluded while other non-Jews will be included. Jesus said, *“Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”*

Then Jesus weeps over Jerusalem as he sees the final fate of the city and says, *“How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”* (v34) Many of the Jews were continually rejecting God's messengers and Jesus knew that they would soon be rejecting him as well. When a nation or a man persists in rejecting God, the end is inevitable. So Jesus says, *“Your house is left to you desolate.”* In any individual's life, continual rejection of God will also lead to desolation or exclusion from heaven.

But today Jesus wants to draw you to himself to care for you and protect you like a mother hen does to her chickens, and the choice and decision is yours. He created us with a free will to choose, but the offer is only for a time which will expire, after which it will be too late.

And then just to finish off the picture of repentance, we read in Luke 15 that there is joy in heaven when we repent. *“There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* That is to me a wonderful picture that the angels are so happy when one person turns away from his sin and receives eternal life through faith in Jesus.

It is the kindness, the grace of God which draws us, not the threat of judgement. Rom 2: 4 warns us, *“Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you towards repentance?”* Today the door of grace is still open and His love is calling you to repent from your sins, and to embrace Jesus to be your Lord and Saviour. Allow his love bring you into his kingdom. Don't delay any longer, because you do not know when that season may suddenly end.

God bless you till next week as we have our last session of this year studying some of the Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 14

Last week we spoke about repentance in Chapter 13. God is looking for the fruit of repentance, or a turn-around and confession of our sins. Jesus said, *“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”* We said that the time of grace to turn around and receive forgiveness, has an expiry date, and none of us knows when our tree will be cut down. So we said, each one of us should make use of this time to receive his salvation, because that door will close one day.

Today we are studying chapter 14 where Jesus said, his followers should have an attitude of humility, and also show kindness toward the poor and needy. And then we'll look at God's invitation to all who are spiritually poor and needy, to share at the table of feasting in the kingdom of God. First of all Jesus teaches how we as his followers must not seek honour for ourselves. He says we must not rush for the best seats at a feast. If a man chooses the lowest place, the only way he can go is up. Godet points out that *“if we follow Jesus' instructions, we run no other risk than that of being exalted.”* People today try to raise their social status, just to impress others. But rather than aiming for prestige, we are to look for a place where we can serve others. God will invite us to a higher scale, if he wants to use us there.

But how can we humble ourselves? Truly humble people only compare themselves with Jesus, who was the perfect example of humility. Humility is not self-degradation, it is realistic affirmation. Truly humble people do not get that way by trying to be humble, but because of their relationship with God. Jesus says in v11, *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* We do not need to seek recognition before others,

because God will promote those who do not promote themselves. And God promotes the humble.

Then Jesus he tells us to show kindness to those who live at a much lower standard of living than ourselves. He said that when we give a dinner, we must not invite our friends, relatives or rich neighbours, because if we do, they will return the compliment and we will be repaid. We should rather reach out to those who are less fortunate than ourselves, who cannot repay us, and serve and bless them. He says in v19, *“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”* In our status-conscious society, this is a hard one, because we always try to associate with those who are of a similar class to our own. Many find that people who are lame or poor, actually make them feel uncomfortable. We also fear that those broken, helpless people will become dependent on us in the future.

Now Jesus is not forbidding normal social life or the entertainment of friends or family, but they should not be our only connections. He is emphasising that real generosity is not giving to people who will reciprocate. Our thinking is often to give the poor our second-hand left-overs. But here Jesus challenges our wrong attitudes and shows us how humility is an attitude that greatly blesses those who cannot repay us. And he promises eternal reward for those who have such a heart for the needy.

As the festive season approaches and we focus on the best treats and food and feasting, we are challenged to think of those who simply cannot afford any of those luxuries and who struggle to keep body and soul together. Although the need is immense, let us reach out to one or two people in these days, and bless them beyond what they normally

would expect. Let us humble ourselves to their level with kindness and compassion. That is the attitude of Jesus, who freely befriended the weak and poor. And he promises us reward in heaven.

Proverbs 19:17 reminds us that *“he who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done.”* In Matthew 25:34,35 Jesus also explains that one day in heaven on this throne, he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will reward those who reached out to people in need. He will say, *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”* For *“whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me,”* and v45 says, *“whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”*

Then Jesus tells another parable to show the heart of God towards the spiritually weak and poor. He said, a certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. As was the custom, the second invitation went out to tell them that everything was ready. But they all alike began to make excuses. The first had bought a field, had to go and see it, and could not come. The second had bought 5 oxen, and was on his way to try them out, and could not come; and another said, he had got married and could not come. In v 21-22, the master became angry and sent his servant to *“Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.”* But there was still room left, so he sent his servant to go out into the roads and country lanes and *“make them come in, so that my house will be full.”*

We know that none of those weak excuses given should have kept

them from accepting the invitation to the banquet. And the story ends with a serious note, that for those who were first invited and made excuses, there would be no second chance. *"I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet."* (v24) This parable shows that the first invited guests were the Jews, God's chosen people, many of whom made excuses to God's invitation. So he sent it wider to the non-Jews. But we also see here God's free grace and mercy in the Gospel of Jesus, and also his heart for the poor, crippled, blind and lame. And he is also exposing the general excuses people make, when confronted with the Gospel. We are all spiritually needy, and yet many people are still pre-occupied with their own lives. In Revelation 3:17 God spoke to the church in Laodicea, *"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' but you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."* The problem is that, like the Laodiceans, many think that they do not need anything. God sees our spiritual poverty, and offers us gracious, undeserving salvation – the banquet with all the bountiful provision for all our needs. It is the table of feasting in the kingdom of God, and the invitation is for everyone.

God's heart is for all people in need, whether it is physical, material or spiritual need. His promise of great feasting and blessing is on offer to all. And we who have tasted his salvation are his hands and feet, as part of the body of Christ, to reach out and bless those less fortunate than ourselves. We should love them and invite them to the banquet in the kingdom of God, because once we ourselves were spiritually poor, blind, and crippled and lame, and we received his provision. So for everyone, the feast will satisfy every hunger and meet every need.

If you have not yet come, the invite is out, the doors are still open, come and eat. Both Psalm 107:9 and Luke 2:53 tell us, *"He fills the hungry with good things."* Jesus paid for it, the feast is ready, *"Come!"* And if you have already been feasting, go out and invite others. Reach out with love to those in need, to those who can never repay you. Invite them into your homes and share his love and blessing. Jesus said, *"You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

God bless you until next year, when we will resume our Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke Chapter 15

We are still studying the book of Luke and in Chapter 14 last year, we spoke about showing kindness to the poor and needy. We said the invitation was for everyone to come to the banqueting feast of salvation and to share in the goodness Jesus provided for us. And if we have already come into his kingdom, we are encouraged to share this good news with all we meet.

Today we want to look at Chapter 15 and the 3 parables that have the same theme, namely God seeking those who are lost, and the joy in heaven when one sinner is found. Luke 19:10 says, *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”* That was Jesus goal and his reason for coming to die for us. God takes the initiative to seek out the one who is lost. In verse 3 the Pharisees were offended and said, *“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”*

But let's look at the first parable where Jesus tells about someone who has 100 sheep and he loses one of them. He leaves the 99 and goes after the lost sheep until he finds it. And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. He calls his friends and neighbours together to rejoice with him - maybe with a party of music and dancing. Jesus said, *“In the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent.”* (v7)

The second parable is about a woman with 10 coins who loses one. She lights a lamp and sweeps the house and searches carefully until she finds it. She also calls her friends and neighbours to rejoice with her. Again Jesus says how *“there is more rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents”.* (v10)

I love the way in both these stories, it says that he searches, “*until he finds it.*” God wants his lost sheep and won't give up on them. Maybe you have been praying for someone you love, to find Jesus, but there seems to be no change. Don't give up, they will be found and there will be great rejoicing in heaven.

And then the last parable is about the lost son. I am going to read it to you in a paraphrased modernised version, “*Word on the Street*”, by Rob Lacey, to give you a humorous picture of the story in Luke 15:11-31.

This family factory owner guy has two sons. The kid brother gets it into his skull that he's had enough. He goes to his dad, and as much as wishes the old man dead: “I want my half of the inheritance.” The dad almost has a heart attack from the shock, but he sits down, does the sum, sells some shares and hands over half the family assets.

The son doesn't even hang around to hear his dad's top ten tips for survival. He legs it. Within weeks he's off to foreign climes, spending the nights filling the glasses of the designer set with his liquid assets. He has such a great time he can't remember any of it the next day. 'Course, the money goes down the toilet. So do the “friends” when they realise he's broke. So he surfs around and finds a site called, www.worstjobsposs.com. He scrolls through the search results and ends up cleaning out the pigsties – not such a great career move, since he still counts himself Jewish.

He's there with his shovel, scratching away, and suddenly a light bulb goes on just above his head: What am I doing? The worst job in the old man's empire is like jetter-setter status compared to this. If I'd had any food in my stomach, I'd be throwing up. I'll hitch-hike home. Work on a speech –

something like “you don't have to think of me as family, but please, give me a job.”

After a long hot trip, he turns the corner into his old street. His dad sees him and runs out into the street in his slippers, throws his arms around him, lifts him up and spins him around. And the noise! The whole street hears it to. Sooo embarrassing!

The son starts his speech, but the dad cuts in, telling his assistant to arrange the biggest street party ever: “My son was virtually dead, and he's come back. He was lost and now he's turned up. Let's party!”

Don't you just love a happy ending? Me too. Sorry, not this time! See, there's still the big-brother issue. He's coming home from work, he turns the same corner and thinks he's in a scene from an old musical: dancing, music, tables right up the middle of the street and everyone having a fantastic time. He calls over one of the waiters and asks, “We just won the lottery, or what?” The employee answers, “Better than that, sir: your brother's back, and your dad's blown the whole entertainment budget on the party!

That's the trigger. He loses it. Furious, he walks off, kicking lampposts, ranting and swearing. His dad catches up with him but he has to fend off words he'd never heard before from his eldest: “I've slogged my guts out. Slaving over your accounts. Doing exactly what you told me to do - I've not even taken sick time when I fancied a day down at the beach – and did you ever, ever throw a party for me and my mates? No! But when this waster comes crawling back, oh yes, he gets the full treatment. Well, thanks for nothing!

“Son,” his dad says, grabbing him by the shoulder and eye-balling him, “You're around all the time, and I love it. What's mine is yours. But how could I not throw a party – as far as I knew, your brother was dead! Now he's alive. He could've been anywhere, and now he's here, with us. Come, join the party.”

This may be written in a funny way, but it shows the wonderful love of the Father who has been waiting for his reprobate son's return. The Father celebrates his return with rejoicing, as we saw in the first 2 parables. And he even loves the sulky older son, too.

In these stories you see the heart of God, wanting and waiting for lost sinners to come to him and to receive his love and mercy. He is not an angry Heavenly Father. Jesus carried all the wrath of God for your sins on the cross. Now He wants to receive you, and wants to have fellowship with you, and wants to enjoy a relationship with you.

The father did not expect his son to do anything to make HIMSELF ready to re-enter his house. In the full version, He commanded his servants to bring a new robe, a ring, sandals for his feet, and to slaughter the fatted calf. It is the father's rich robe that was given to replace the old, dirty, pig-smelling clothes of the son. It is His robe of righteousness. And the sandals show the son's restored position, not as a servant, but as a son of honour. And the ring with the family seal means restored authority as a son. The slaughtered fatted calf, means there was the shedding of blood for a covenant to be sealed, and the celebratory meal is prepared. The lost son, is now found; the dead son, is now alive.

So, when we come to the Father, we also are received unconditionally, just as we are. With merciful arms Father God still embraces us, he still kisses us with a kiss of forgiveness and grace. We need not try to improve ourselves so that God will accept and like us. We come just as we are.

Do you perhaps feel lost this morning, alone and confused, not knowing which way to go? You feel trapped and in the dark, maybe full of fear. Won't you come home to your heavenly Father who is waiting to embrace you and forgive you, and to celebrate your return? He has been waiting and searching for you.

Pray this prayer with me, *“Heavenly Father, I have sinned against you. Forgive me. Take away my sins. Give me your righteousness, and make me a son. Thank you for finding me today. I want to remain in your house of blessing and life forever. Amen.”*

God bless you until next week when we continue our *Lessons from Luke*.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 16

Last week we spoke about the 3 parables of being lost and found in Luke 15. We saw the Father's heart of forgiveness for the lost son who came back home, although he had wasted his inheritance. The Father embraced him, gave him a ring, sandals, a new robe and a feast to celebrate his return. Today the invitation is for anyone who realises they are lost and wants forgiveness for his sin - Father is waiting.

Today we study chapter 16 and see how money can affect a man's future and ultimately one's destiny, depending how it is used. In verses 10-13 Jesus says that money is the measuring stick of one's character. *"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much."* Sadly today, many people are never promoted because of their lack of honesty in small matters. It may be that a pen here or a few rand there are stolen, or the telephone is used for private use on the company's account. These may seem minor issues, but God sees in secret; and unfaithfulness in small matters will keep one from being trusted with bigger ones. And the opposite is also true.

Jesus goes on to say in verse 11-12, *"So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"* God will promote and reward us for honesty in handling other people's finances; and then He will be able to trust us with spiritual responsibility, its says, and even give us our own property. The last part of v15 says, *"for God knows your hearts."* Money is the test where we fail or pass. Many people may get away with gross corruption or theft, but know that according to this verse, they forfeit true riches.

In other words, you can choose your own promotion in life, and your choices will effect your future destiny.

Then we read in v13 that, *“No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”* If you serve God with your whole heart, you come under his control, and if you serve money with your whole heart, you come under its control. Also in v15 Jesus says, *“What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.”* Do we concern ourselves with what people see as valuable, or rather concern ourselves with what God sees as valuable.

Jesus told a story, about a rich man and Lazarus. The rich man had very fine clothes and lived in luxury every day, but he ignored a poor man, Lazarus, who was sick and hungry at his gate. It says Lazarus longed to eat what fell from his table. Even the rich man's dogs must have been fed, and they licked Lazarus' sores. It was a sad sight. But the time came when both these men died.

Lazarus was carried by angels to Abraham's side in heaven and the rich man went to hell where it says, *“he was in torment.”* There he could see Abraham with Lazarus by his side and he called out to Abraham to send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue, because he was in agony in the fire. But Abraham reminded him of the good things he had in his lifetime, whereas Lazarus received bad things. Abraham said Lazarus was now comforted in heaven, while he was in agony. He said, *“And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.”* (v26)

He then begged Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's

house to warn his brothers so they would not also come to that place of torment. But Abraham replied that they had Moses and the prophets. The rich man said, *“If someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.”* But Abraham replied, *“If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”* (v31)

This very graphic story tells us many things about the final destinations of heaven and hell, and the choices people make in this life. There is enough evidence in Scripture to show us that hell is a real place of torment and judgement. Today not many preachers like to mention hell, but rather want to emphasise heaven. But Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else in the Bible, and we cannot merely think that it is a spiritual description of simply being separated from God. That in itself would be bad enough. Jesus says in Matt 5:22, *“Anyone who says, “You fool!” will be in danger of the **fire** of hell.”* Also in Matt 5:29 and 30, *“If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”* In Matt 18:9 he repeats this same thought, *“It is better to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the **fire** of hell.”* He said to the Pharisees, *“You snakes, You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?”* Also in 2 Pet 2:4 it says, *“God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgement.”* And of course there are many Scriptures also about *“the lake of fire”*. Rev 20:13-15 says, *“Each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”*

This rich man did not go to hell **because** he had wealth, but because his selfish concern was only for himself in this temporary life. His wealth and riches were his only focus, with seemingly no thought for God and his eternal future destiny. He had had what he

chose for himself: fine clothes, and daily feasting, and did not so much as give Lazarus his crumbs. How then could he expect Lazarus now to help him? But we see here that he had a rude awakening in the torment of hell fire. He was judged, and his riches were left behind.

Lazarus, though poor and needy, was evidently a servant of God, as the angels took him to Abraham's side where he found comfort and joy. Lazarus had found eternal riches which would never perish or fade away.

When the rich man showed concern for his brothers, Abraham said that the writings of Moses and the Prophets were available to show them the way. If they did not heed that, then not even Jesus' rising from the dead would convince them either. Now we, too, have the writings of the Scriptures to show us the same way to heaven, through Jesus, who rose from the dead to save us.

I want to ask you some straight questions today. Is your money perhaps absorbing your full attentions in this life and closing your eyes to the reality of eternity after you die? There is a heaven and hell. Are you running after making more and more money, using all your energy and time in this pursuit of financial security? What security can your finances give you for your eternal future? We see from this story that it has no power to help you one day. And this life is but a breath compared to eternity. James 1:9 says, *"The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business."*

Jesus died and rose from the dead that we can be saved from hell. Don't ignore his gift of salvation. Choose life; come under His control, and use the blessing of your finances to help spread the Gospel of Jesus to those who have not yet heard. In that way the gift of your wealth can become a blessing to others in need, and you will be investing in eternal riches.

God bless you till next week as we continue our Lessons in Luke.

Lessons from Luke Chapter 17

Last week we looked at chapter 16 and what Jesus said about the handling of money, and how it can become an obsession at the expense of a person's soul. Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus and we discussed the reality of hell and Jesus' teaching about it. He died and rose for all men to be saved from hell and torment.

Today we study chapter 17 and look at what Jesus says about sin, duty and faith. Jesus taught his disciples about sin and warned them not to be a stumbling block to anyone and to cause him to sin. He says, *"It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves."* (v2,3) And then he says, if a brother sins, we are to rebuke him and to forgive him. Now to rebuke does not mean that we point out every sin we see, but to bring to a person's attention something that is disgracing the Name of Jesus, with the purpose of restoring him to God and to others.

And Jesus says, we must forgive a brother who sins against us, even if it is seven times a day. He means that we must always be forgiving others, as that will be our key to freedom. The disciples felt that a lot of faith was needed to believe like that, and they asked, *"Increase our faith."* But Jesus answered, *"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."* (vs 6) Jesus was saying, if we have real faith, then results will follow.

We know that the first step to faith is faith in the blood of Jesus to take away our sins and give us eternal life. If you have been the cause of others stumbling or sinning, turn to

Jesus for forgiveness. Invite Him into your life by His Holy Spirit. And open your heart to forgive those who offended you - maybe with harsh words, or that one who betrayed your trust. You may have said, *"I will never ever forgive him or her."* But today you can believe for a miracle of a forgiving heart towards that person. A mustard-seed faith can cause that rooted tree of bitterness to be cast into the sea. That is also where Jesus says he will cast our sins. Micah 7:19 - *"You will ... hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."* But we must SAY and declare our faith to activate it.

Now let's look at real faith. Leon Morris in his commentary says, *"It is not so much great faith in God that is required, as faith in a great God."* The size of a mustard seed is minute, and the roots of a mulberry tree are known to remain in the earth for 600 years! But a small seed-amount of genuine faith in God and his promises can take root and grow, almost invisibly at first. Then it will begin to spread and become visible, and soon this faith will produce major results that will destroy opposing powers. So that small mustard seed faith is all that we need to remove a very difficult rooted problem.

What are you facing in your life as a challenge at the moment? You may feel that you have no faith to believe God for a miracle, but he has given each one some faith. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus is the *"author and finisher of our faith."* And only a mustard seed size that is alive and growing is necessary. If we draw on His promises in His Word, and the stubborn obstacle in your life will be uprooted. We need to focus on the greatness and power of God and not on the greatness of our problem. Remember, faith only works in the face of the impossible, otherwise faith is not needed. Hebrews 11:1 says, *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for."*

Then Jesus compares faith to service and duty. He says, if one has a servant who ploughed all day and when he comes in from the field his master asks him to prepare and serve him a meal. He need not even thank his servant, as he is unworthy and has only done his duty. I believe the meaning here is that when you work in your own energy, you remain an unworthy servant, and will get no reward for doing your duty. But the realm of faith supersedes working and striving to earn a wage. Faith moves beyond the realm of work and duty, and is always followed by reward.

Now on the way Jesus and his disciples met 10 men with leprosy. At a distance they called out to Jesus for mercy, and he told them to show themselves to the priest. The priest used to act as a sort of Health Inspector to certify that they were cured and no longer needed to isolate themselves from other people.

But Jesus never said, "*You are cured!*" He was putting their faith to the test by asking these men to act on his word, *as though they had been cured*. And as they obeyed his word, so the miracle happened. It says, "*as they went they were cleansed.*" (v14) So often we want to believe for some breakthrough or healing, but we wait for some evidence first, before we venture out to say we have been healed. The Scripture in Rom 10:17 tells us that the God who gives life to the dead, "*calls things that are not as though they were.*"

Many people are afraid that they will be living in denial of their illness or need, if they speak or act opposite to what they see. Or the fear is, that we live in presumption. But there is a big difference between denial and faith – faith is based on holding onto the living promises that God has given you, growing stronger in your confidence in a mighty God. Then we can begin to act or speak as though it were already done, like the 10 men with leprosy, who began walking to the priest, believing they were cleansed even before it happened. So we see that faith is active – it is taking steps, moving forward, and acting on what has been promised. Faith pleases God as Hebrews 11:6 says, "*Without faith it is*

impossible to please God.”

Then only one of them, a Samaritan, returned to thank Jesus for his healing. Apparently the other 9 were so absorbed in their new happiness that they could not spare a thought for the source. Jesus commended this Samaritan and said, *“Rise and go, your faith has made you well.”* According to some commentaries, the meaning here is that he received even more than just his healing – he grew in understanding of God's grace, and received salvation for his soul, as well as a healed body. Faith linked to thankfulness will release even more of God's goodness into your life.

Then we know that we all will face difficult challenges which we feel like running away from. It may be that your child is in trouble and has some addiction and you feel helpless about a solution to this problem. Or have you lost your job and you simply do not know how you will manage to pay your rent. Maybe you have just been diagnosed with HIV or a cancerous tumour and you are devastated. Or a valuable relationship has just been destroyed. This is the time to turn to Jesus and his Word. This is your time to ask Him for a miracle in your life. You can step out like the men with leprosy, get a word from Jesus, and walk in the direction of the word.

Turn to his Word and let your seed-faith root in the Word and grow and bring about that miracle that you would like to see happen in your life. Luke 1:37 says, *“Nothing is impossible with God.”* God honours faith and it is the only way He works miracles in our lives, miracles of forgiveness from our guilt and sin, miracles of changing our hearts to forgive those who almost destroyed our lives, and miracles to remove any obstacle or trouble you may be facing in your life today. Forgive your offender. Take that step of hearing a living Rhema word from God, believe it, and say to the rooted problem to be cast into the sea. Then move in the direction of your answer even before you see immediate results. Give thanks to God for your breakthrough. It is the way to draw even more miracles into your life.

God bless you till next week as we continue our Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 18

Last week we looked at what Jesus said about sin, duty and faith. He said we are to watch ourselves so we don't cause a brother to sin, and we must always forgive our offenders. Duty does not earn reward, but faith does. Like the 10 men with leprosy, we are to receive a word from God and act on it, believing for a breakthrough. A mustard-seed faith can say to a mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted into the sea, and it shall happen. Join your faith to thankfulness to draw even more miracles into your life.

Today we study chapter 18 and we want to learn more about prayer and the endurance of faith. Jesus starts by telling the story of a widow who kept coming to an uncaring judge in her town. She wanted justice, for her rights were being violated by an enemy. For some time the judge refused, but finally said to himself, that even though he did not fear God or care about men, he would see that she got justice, because the bothering widow would wear him out with her coming. Jesus said, how much more God, who will *“bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”* (v 7,8)

Now this story seems strange for us to compare an unwilling judge with God, who is always more than willing to help us. Jesus is showing the contrast that if an unwilling judge relents to help a widow, how much more can we expect help from a loving God? The widow was in no position to bribe the judge, and she had no protector to put pressure on him. All she came with, was the fact that she knew she deserved justice, and she came with persistence.

Jesus told this story to teach us how to pray with faith and perseverance – “*day and night*”. All of us want instant answers and instant results, but remember, our faith will always be tested. When we pray and see no sign of the answer we long for, it is easy for us to become discouraged.

But, who are the chosen that Jesus is talking about? They are the ones who have received his salvation. So if we have been justified by Jesus' death, we realise that we are chosen, and therefore deserving of a miracle; then we can come boldly. Hebrews also says in 4:16 that since we have Jesus as a high Priest, “*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*”

Because of Jesus we as believers are deserving, and now we must be persistent, like that widow, and “*pray continually*”, as 1 Thess 5:16 teaches. God's delays are for us to be strengthened in our faith and not to give up when the waiting becomes difficult. God's timing though is not always ours and his and our “*quickly*” is also not the same.

We asked you last week what breakthrough you are believing God for in your life or your family? Is it for a marriage partner? Is it for a job? Is it for a healing? Faith does not give up.

Also in this chapter we read of a blind man who was sitting on the road near Jericho, begging. But when he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he called out, “*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*” Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “*Son of David. Have mercy on me!*”

Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. “*What do you want me to do for you?*” “*Lord, I want to see,*”

he replied. Then Jesus said, "*Receive your sight, your faith has healed you.*"

Today we look back at the cross of Jesus, where he died to save and heal us, so we know that Jesus paid the price for healing. And there was even healing before the cross. So what would activate our healing? It is our persistent faith in the victory that Jesus has already accomplished. In the case of the blind man, he was also being discouraged, as people told him to be quiet. If he had listened to those around him, then Jesus may have passed him by. But he grew even stronger in his faith in the face of opposition. Like the widow, his faith was also linked to a persistence asking.

If you are believing for a miracle, there will always be someone sceptical, trying to discourage you in your faith, or mock you, or speak doubts and unbelief into your ears. That is when we must call on Jesus even more strongly, like the blind man. We need to resist the opposing powers of discouragement and doubt. Opposition should not make us weaken, but rather make us stronger in our faith.

In the same chapter Jesus says, the following, "*What is impossible with men, is possible with God.*" He spoke this in the context of the rich man entering the kingdom of heaven, but the truth is the same in the face of any impossibility. God breaks through the impossible, if we keep on crying to him with faith in our hearts. Our impossibility is possible with God - despite the fact that we may be facing resistance from a person who can help us, or people around who tell us to shut up.

And we also face an enemy, like that widow, who will steal justice from us, or anything he can lay his hands on – our marriages, our finances, our health, our children, our jobs. Jesus warned us that the devil comes to kill, steal and

destroy.

We know we have authority against the devil, but we always have to come in total dependence on God, like a child. Also in this chapter we read about the children and babies that were brought to Jesus for him to touch and bless. Again there were those who rebuked the mothers, but Jesus said that the kingdom belongs to such as those children. And he said, *“I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”*

So faith is not demanding, but is a childlike believing and knowing that God our Father is faithful and knows best, and He will come through for us as we trust him. Yes, there still remains a mystery why we don't always see things work out the way we pray.

But still, we will always face, what may seem to be impossible challenges that test our faith. Jesus is telling us to push past the *“unwilling judge”*. Push past those who tell you to keep quiet. Push past the sceptical, who keeps speaking unbelief. Because the Psalmist says, *“Those who trust in him will not be ashamed.”* Our kind and faithful God will not turn his back on us when we believe.

So then, faith is basically an **endurance** test of our trust in God. Are we going to give up believing, or hold on until he comes through for us? Jesus said in Luke 11:9, *“Ask (and it means to keep on asking), seek, (and keep on seeking), knock, (and keep on knocking), and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks (and keeps on asking); receives; he who seeks (and keeps on seeking) finds, and to him who knocks (and keeps on knocking), the door will be opened.”* Let us keep on asking and trusting, like the widow and the blind man, and Jesus promises that God will see that we get our answer and quickly.

He is looking for faith. Vs 8 says, *“When the Son of Man comes, will he find this faith on the earth?”* I want to be one of those who believe in God's goodness and willingness to bless us and grant us our hearts' cries, just as he promised.

God bless you till next week as we continue with our Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 19

Last week we looked at Luke 18 and discussed prayer and the endurance of faith. We saw how the widow persisted in her faith and the unwilling judge relented. Jesus said, how much more is God willing to help us. Also the blind man pushed past the crowd who had told him to be quiet, to get his healing. Our faith will always be tested. We are to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking and knock and keep on knocking for our answer to come.

Today we want to study chapter 19 and look at the different responses of two rich men who met Jesus. The first rich man described in chapter 18 came to Jesus. He asked what he should do to get to heaven. Jesus said he knew the commandments, and the man replied that he had kept them since he was a child. Then Jesus challenged him with the biggest test of his need of God – to sell all he had and to give to the poor; then he would have treasure in heaven. *“Then, come follow me”*, Jesus said. But the man went sadly away, for he was very rich, and Jesus commented that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. Yet he said, *“nothing is impossible with God.”*

The man's wealth gave him power and security. But Jesus touched the basis of his trust in his wealth. Now Jesus does not ask everyone to sell their possessions, but he does tell us to rid ourselves of anything that has become more important to us than God. We can ask ourselves, *“What is the ultimate source of my security?”*

Because money represents power, authority and success, it is often difficult for wealthy people to realise their need and their powerlessness to save themselves. Unless God

reaches down into their lives, they will not come to him.

Now the other rich man we look at today is Zacchaeus in chapter 19:1-10. He was one of the most influential Jews in the Roman tax-collecting business. When Jesus entered Jericho, Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowds. So he ran ahead and climbed into a sycamore tree beside the road to watch from there. Jesus came by, looked up and said, *“Come down, immediately, I must stay at your house today.”* Zacchaeus came down and welcomed him gladly. The people muttered because Jesus went to eat with a 'sinner'. But Jesus did not judge him. He loved him and went to his home.

Again Jesus' presence challenged Zacchaeus about what he was building his life on. And of his own he declared there and then that he would give half of his possessions to the poor, and those he cheated he would pay back four times the amount. Then Jesus said, *“Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”* (v10)

It is interesting to contrast these two men, who both had the same choices, when they came face to face with Jesus. His presence challenged their lifestyle, and their value system, namely money and the power it offered them. The first man was not prepared to part with his wealth, as it gave him position and power. But the second man, Zacchaeus, willingly and publicly stepped away from the false security that his wealth offered him. The first man saw himself as religious and good, and thought he qualified for heaven, but Zacchaeus realised that he did not meet up to God's requirement for heaven. His physical stature was a picture of his spiritual state – he fell short of God's standard of righteousness.

The visit of Jesus to his home changed him completely – all that he held precious, now lost its attraction and he reached out to what Jesus offered – eternal life. Nothing was worth that, not all the money in the world. He would give away half of what he owned and repay anyone he'd cheated. His very lifestyle changed right around. Where before he grabbed and stole, now he gave and repaid and shared.

Zacchaeus demonstrated inward change by outward behaviour. For us, too, it is not enough to follow Jesus in our head or heart alone. We need to show our changed life by changed behaviour. Has your faith resulted in action? What changes do you need to make? Jesus said we must bear the fruit of repentance. Have you stepped away from relying on a false security? Maybe a relationship with someone you are not married to, is the most important value to you right now. But Jesus wants to give you true life and wants to change your lifestyle.

Romans 13:12 tells us, *“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.”*

Like Zacchaeus, making restitution to those you have harmed or cheated, is a wonderful way of showing others that Jesus has changed you on the inside. Maybe you could say to someone you have hurt, *“I am sorry. I would like to bless you with this gift.”* Those words and a few actions can speak volumes of the powerful Holy Spirit that has changed your life and behaviour. I am sure that many of those whom Zacchaeus had cheated and then repaid four times, must have marvelled at his transformation. And they in turn also desired to find the same freedom in Jesus. I don't think Zacchaeus went back to cheating when collecting taxes again. Or maybe he found a different job altogether.

Ask the Lord if He wants you to make amends to someone whom you have cheated or hurt. It may bring them to the same Jesus, or plant seeds of hunger for forgiveness of their own sins. We

obviously can never repay everyone we have offended in life. But if the Holy Spirit shows you someone specifically in your heart, pray for courage to act like Zacchaeus. It is a wonderful testimony of the grace and love of Jesus and will definitely touch their hearts.

In this chapter we then read about Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He rode on a donkey and the people spread their cloaks on the road before him. The whole crowd began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: *"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest."*

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd told Jesus to rebuke his disciples, but he said, *"If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."* And as Jesus approached Jerusalem and he saw the city, he wept over it, because the people in that city were rejecting the truth. He wept because they were going to be judged, he said, *"because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you."* (v 44)

For the first rich man, that interaction with Jesus could have turned his life around, but he walked away from it, unchanged. Zacchaeus on the other hand, grabbed the opportunity and allowed Jesus to change his whole life. Many in Jerusalem missed the time of Jesus' coming and faced judgement as a result. Today Jesus is passing by your life, as you listen to these words. Do you recognise the time of his coming to you? Will you remain unchanged and walk away and miss this opportunity to receive his salvation, or will you receive him into your life and home and then show the world how Jesus has changed you? Don't let it be said of you one day, *"You did not recognise the time of God's coming to you."*

Reach out to him now and invite him into your heart. Be prepared to let go of things which you have been depending on. Nothing can be compared to the eternal life and joy and peace you receive from Jesus. Then, like Zacchaeus, let your life show others that you are no longer the same. Pray with me as we close, *"Jesus, I recognise that you are coming to me today. Give me your salvation and eternal life. Invade my life and my home. Change me from the inside out. Thank you for your Holy Spirit who comes to live in me. Amen."* God bless you till next week as we continue with our Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke Chapter 20

Last week we looked at the responses of the rich man and Zacchaeus when they met Jesus. The rich man walked away unchanged, but Zacchaeus grabbed the opportunity and had his whole life turned around. Jesus also wept over Jerusalem, because the people did not recognise the time of his coming and would face judgement as a result. We said Jesus is waiting for your response to receive him and to allow him to transform your life.

Today, in chapter 20 we see how Jesus' authority was repeatedly questioned by religious people, and Jesus' response to them. One day as he was preaching the good news, the chief priests and teachers asked him by what authority he was doing the things he did. Jesus knew that they wanted to trap him, and accuse him of blasphemy, so he turned the question on them to expose their motives. He asked them if John's baptism was from men or from heaven, because John had testified that Jesus was the Messiah.

The leaders realised that the people there would stone them if they said John's baptism was from men and if they said, from God, why then had they not received his message, nor believed in Jesus? So they lied and said that they did not know. Jesus answered, *“Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”*

Even today we find people questioning the authority of Jesus, and that of his followers. And their motive, too, is always to discredit Jesus. And we notice in this chapter their fear of men, not their fear of God.

Jesus went on to tell them a story of a man who planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a

time. At the harvest he sent a servant to the tenants to give him some of the fruit, but the servant was beaten up and sent away empty-handed. The same happened with two more servants. Then the owner said that he would send his son, whom he loved, perhaps they would respect him. But the tenants decided to kill him so the inheritance could be theirs. Jesus said that therefore the owner would come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

So Jesus saw Himself as making God's last appeal to those Jewish leaders. Systematically they had rejected God's messengers, and now, not a prophet, but the Son of God, was among them and they faced the most critical decision of their lives. This also showed them that Jesus knew of their plot to kill him. From the parable, we see that the privileges of the Jews would be given to the Gentiles, because many of the Jews were rejecting the Messiah. But they replied, "*May this never be!*"

Jesus then asked them about the Scripture in Psalm 118:22, "*The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.*" Jesus was saying that, though men might reject Him, He is accepted by God, and God's purposes will be fulfilled. He went on to say, "*Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.*" (v18). The meaning here is that there is no difference between those who ignore Jesus Christ, because they don't understand him, and those who refuse to believe in him. All who stumble over Jesus, the Cornerstone, will face judgement in the end. This imagery comes from Isaiah 8:14, "*And he will become a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured.*" Those words spoken many years before were

being fulfilled. And today many still stumble over the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, sent from God.

In 1 Peter 2 we read more about Jesus, *“the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him.”* It goes on to say that we, his followers, are also like living stones, and are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. 1 Peter 2:6-8 is quoting Isaiah 28:16, *“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone’ and ‘A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’”* Peter says they stumble because they disobey the message, but he says, *“we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into this wonderful light.”*

Luke 20 goes on to say that these chief priests looked for a way to arrest Jesus, but again they were afraid of the people. They then sent spies to catch Jesus in something he said, so they could hand him over to the Roman governor. The spies questioned Jesus about paying taxes, knowing that everyone hated paying taxes to the Romans. Jesus would then be seen as a traitor, or as a rebel against Caesar. But Jesus saw through their duplicity and asked for a coin, and then he asked whose portrait was on it. “Ceasar's” they replied. He said, *“Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.”* He was saying that we have legitimate obligations to both God and the government. But when the 2 authorities conflict, our duty is to God who always comes first. So again Jesus avoided their trap with a brilliant answer, which silenced them.

Then the Sadducees, who believed there was no resurrection, tried to discredit him with another question. They told a story of a woman who had married 7 brothers consecutively after each had died, and then she died childless. They asked, whose wife would she be at the resurrection? Jesus based his answer on the writings

of Moses. He said, *“Those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord, ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”* (v38)

Jesus simply meant that we must not think of heaven as an extension of life as we now know it. Our relationships in this life will be different from what we are used to on earth. But Jesus proved that the resurrection will take place and his followers are called, *“children of the resurrection.”* We know that soon after this time, Jesus conquered death by rising from the dead himself, and 1 Corinthians 15 says we will also finally be raised from the dead and taken into heaven. Verse 23 says, *“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep ... in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then when he comes, those who belong to him.”* That is our hope if a loved one in the Lord has passed away. We shall be reunited in glory as our natural body will be raised a spiritual body. (v 44) Our God is the God of the living.

To sum up then, like in the days of Jesus, so today, many people try to discredit Jesus' authority. As he faced opposition from religious people who tried to destroy him, so we will face rejection. Those who ignore him or reject Him will ultimately be crushed by the Cornerstone, that they have rejected. We, who belong to him, are like living stones built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. Jesus is the anchor point, the Cornerstone, who is precious to God and precious to us.

As you are listening today, maybe you have not yet believed that Jesus truly is the Messiah sent from God. I invite you to consider and believe in Him, the precious Cornerstone. If you trust in him you will never be put to shame. Ask him to forgive your sins and you will escape the judgement to come. Then, you, too, will be one of God's children and be called a child of the resurrection. God bless you till next week as we study some Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke

Chapter 21

Last week we studied Luke 20 and discussed Jesus, the precious Cornerstone, and the judgement facing those who reject or ignore him. We, who belong to him, are like living stones built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. Jesus also said that God's children are called children of the resurrection and we invited you to put your trust in him as your Messiah.

Today we look at Chapter 21 and the signs of the end of the age and the warnings Jesus gave concerning those days. When the disciples were admiring the beauty of the temple, Jesus said that it would be completely destroyed, and that is exactly what happened in AD 70, when a Roman army burned down Jerusalem. He began to tell them of what will happen in the end times before his return. There are many other places in the Bible discussing the last days, but we will only look at this section in Luke.

First Jesus says, *“Watch out that you are not deceived,”* for many will come in his name claiming, *‘I am he’*. In chapter 17 Jesus says, when he returns, his power and presence will be evident to everyone. No one will need to spread the message because all will see for themselves. Vs 23 in that chapter tells us that life will be going on as usual on the day Jesus comes back. There will be no prior warning. People will be busy about their everyday tasks, many indifferent to the things of God. They will be as surprised by his return as the people in Noah's day were by the flood, or the people in Lot's day by the destruction of Sodom. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building when the disasters happened. We don't know the day or the hour of Jesus' return, but we do know he is coming back.

Chapter 21:34 says, *“and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.”* And 17:24 says, *“for the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.”* Vs 34 goes on, *“I tell you, on that night two people will be in bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.”* It means there will be separation between those who are for the Son of man and those whose lives show that they are against Him. It is clear here that Jesus will return to fetch his own.

Jesus continues in 21:9, *“When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”* He says, *“Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.”* We know that we are in these very end times, as we hear of nations fighting each other, and many natural disasters following at close intervals. There have been tsunami's and earthquakes and floods and famines across the globe in recent months, as signs of the shaking of things before the end.

In the last days Jesus said, there will also be persecution and imprisonment of his followers, and they will be brought before kings and governors. He said, *“It will be all on account of my name.”* We know that soon after Jesus predicted it, even then persecution of God's people began to take place, as Luke recorded in the Book of Acts. But the early church thrived despite intense persecution. And we also know that there has been increasing persecution of the church in areas of the world in the past few decades and it is happening even today. Jesus said that it will result in our being witnesses; and we are not to worry beforehand how to

defend ourselves, as he would give us words of wisdom. Jesus said that some of his followers will even be betrayed by their own family members and friends. Today in the West we still find that Christianity is tolerated, but increasingly there are places where great opposition is shown to God's people, because of Jesus. We, who are still able to serve God openly, can pray for the persecuted church in countries like Russia, Eastern Europe, China, the Middle East and some African nations. But he promises that the Holy Spirit will remain with us to comfort us, and protect us. This will give us the courage and hope to stand firm for Christ through any difficult situations we may face.

Jesus said in v 17, *“All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.”* He is not saying that believers will not be harmed or even killed during the persecutions, rather that none will suffer spiritual or eternal loss. You may die on earth, but you will be saved for eternal life. We can become scared that we might face this kind of trouble in the future, but Jesus keeps assuring us not to be afraid, but to trust him. He will give us grace to handle those difficult times if and when we face them.

Jesus goes on warning about the fate of Jerusalem and its repeated destruction. He says, *“Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”* We know of the attacks on Jerusalem even today. Psalm 122 tells us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and promises blessing for those who love Jerusalem.

Vs 25 says there will be signs in the sun, moon and stars, and *“On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea (which seems to speak of tsunami's). Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be*

shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Jesus then told the parable of the fig tree and all the trees. *"When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near."* vs 31

Then in vs 34 Jesus told the disciples to be careful not be weighed down by the sinfulness of the world and the anxieties of life. He urged them to have an attitude that flees worldly sins and to concentrate on the service of God. And in vs 36 he told them to watch and pray that they may be able to escape all that was about to happen and that they may be able to stand before the Son of Man. Matthew 24 also gives this same warning, to keep watch and to be ready as we do not know on what day our Lord will come.

So this we know: Jesus is coming again and all will see him come in power. No one knows when he will come, and people will be totally surprised, when he comes. The signs of turmoil and natural disasters in the world, even in the sun, moon and stars will tell us the time is near. Jesus clearly warns his followers to be careful not to get sucked into the world system of temptation and worries. And he also tells us to watch and pray, so we will be ready and busy about his business when he comes. These signs of the end times are to warn us to be prepared for his coming. We need not fear, but we can look forward to the final coming of Jesus to take us as his own to be with him in eternal glory.

Jesus said in John 14:1-3, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* Although there will be some shakings, we know the final era for his followers will be in the presence of God for ever. That is what we look forward to and live for. Halleluyah!
God bless you till next week as we study the Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke Chapter 22

Last week we discussed what Jesus said about the end times in Luke 21. Jesus said he is coming again in power and all will see him, although many will be unprepared. The signs of turmoil and natural disasters in the world, even in the sun, moon and stars will tell us that the time is near. We as his followers are warned not to get sucked into the world system of temptations and worries. We are told to watch and pray, so we will be ready when he comes to take us to be with him in glory.

Today we study chapter 22 where we read about the Last Supper and how Judas, Peter and Jesus each faced their hour of temptation. Jesus knew his time had come and he arranged for Peter and John to prepare for the Passover in the upper room of a friend. There Jesus said, *“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”* (vs16) At this Passover meal however, was that there was no lamb offering, as Jesus was to be that sacrifice.

But let's look briefly at the significance of the Last Supper. Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, *“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”* In John 6:51 Jesus had said, *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”* Also vs 53 *“... for my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”* He goes on *“...the one who feeds on me will live because of me ... and he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”* (v 57,58)

Jesus likened himself to bread made from grain, which was

crushed, that went through the fire of affliction and then was broken for us, to receive everlasting life. So whatever our need may be today, the body of Jesus is the bread to meet that need. Is your need today for salvation, for healing, or for financial provision? Do you need love or comfort? By faith take and eat, and know that your needs are met in Jesus. That is why his body was broken for you.

Then he said, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.*" (V20). No longer is the blood of goats and bulls now needed in the Mosaic covenant, but the blood of Jesus sealed this new covenant, once and for all. The blood of Jesus has great power to save and protects us.

1 John 1:7 says that "*the blood of Jesus, (God's) Son, purifies us from all sin.*" His blood also redeemed us (bought us back from the enemy). It reconciles us to God. The blood also cleanses our consciences. Hebrews 9:14 says, "*How much more then, will the blood of Christ cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God.*" The blood of Jesus also gives access into the holiest dwelling place in the presence of God. It is a weapon against the devil, it is our victory. This was all given in the cup of the new covenant.

The new covenant in a nut-shell, is a promise of God's grace, that we no longer are condemned by the law, nor need to earn His favour, but by faith we can receive eternal life in Jesus. Hebrews 8:8-12, quotes from Jeremiah 31:31-34, which says, "*I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ... declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts for I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*" In this covenant our guilt and sin is taken away and we receive God's free gift of righteousness by faith.

But continuing in Luke 22 we see how Jesus faced his test in the Garden of Gethsemane. And we also see how Judas was tempted to betray Jesus; and how Peter was tempted to deny Jesus. All three faced a test, or were tempted by the devil. How did they each face their temptation? Jesus knew that his mission was to die on the cross and become sin, so that man could become the righteousness of God. He could have turned away from the cross in that hour.

How did Jesus face his most trying hour? Luke says, he went out as usual to the Mount of Olives and he said to the disciples in v40, "*Pray that you will not fall into temptation.*" He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "*Father, if you are willing take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done.*" When he had surrendered his will to God, an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. It says, "*And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. And again he said, 'Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.'*" We already know the end of the story. Jesus was betrayed by Judas. Then Jesus was arrested and was also disowned by Peter. In the trial before the chief priests, Jesus faced mockery and beating and finally a crucifixion death. God's will was done.

How did Peter face his test? At the Last Supper Jesus told Peter, "*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*" Peter promised his loyalty, but Jesus said that before the cock crowed, Peter would deny him 3 times that very night. After Jesus was arrested and taken into the house of the high priest, Peter followed at a distance and sat down around a fire together with those who watched the arrest of Jesus. He was confronted by a servant girl and two others who said that he was one of Jesus' followers, but 3 times he replied that he did not even know Jesus, nor knew what they were talking about! The cock crowed and Jesus turned and looked straight at

Peter. He then remembered Jesus' words, went outside and wept bitterly. But Peter did not turn away completely, for he still gathered with the other disciples and was one of the first to visit the empty tomb. Jesus reinstated Peter in John 21 when he got him to say three times, that he loved Jesus; and he asked Peter to feed and take care of his sheep. Peter was restored to fellowship with Jesus.

How did Judas face his hour of testing? At the Passover the chief priests were looking for a way to get rid of Jesus, and it says, "*Satan entered Judas.*" He so opened himself up to the devil that his will was taken over by the enemy. Judas discussed with the chief priests how he would betray Jesus for an agreed amount of money. At the Last Supper Jesus still warned the disciples that one of them would betray him. But Judas sold Jesus to the enemy with a kiss. Jesus said to him, "*This is your hour – when darkness reigns.*" We read more of Judas' story in Matt 27:3-5. After Jesus was arrested, he was seized with remorse (not repentance), returned the 30 silver coins and admitted, "*I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood.*" And he went away and hanged himself. He had admitted his sin, but never repented, nor received God's forgiveness for his sin.

How do you face your hour of testing and temptation? No-one can overcome sin in his own strength. But if you have received eternal life through Jesus, you have the power of God in you to resist the enemy and to choose to please God. Romans 6:14 says, "*For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.*" Titus 2:12 says, "*The grace of God teaches you to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age*".

In this New Covenant of grace there is undeserved favour. So we can take and eat the bread of life to meet any need we have. And when we drink of the cup, we remember we are forgiven; we have his protection and victory. God remembers our sins no more, and gives us the power to say "Yes" to God, and "No" to the devil in our hour of temptation. If you have fallen again, turn back to Jesus. And in your next difficult hour of temptation, pray, as Jesus told you to say, "*I choose to do your will.*" He will strengthen you as Jesus was strengthened, and you, too, will taste victory as Jesus did. God bless you till next week when we study the Lessons from Luke.

Lessons from Luke Chapter 23

Last week we studied Luke 22 and looked at the Last Supper. The bread is Jesus' body and the cup is his blood. So we can take and eat the bread of life to meet any need we have. And when we drink of the cup, we remember we are forgiven; we have his protection and victory. In this New Covenant of grace there is undeserved favour and God remembers our sins no more. Judas, Peter and Jesus each faced their hour of temptation. Jesus told us to pray in our time of temptation. By grace we can choose to do God's will as Jesus did and have the power to say "Yes" to God, and "No" to the devil.

In chapter 23 today we read how Jesus was brought on trial before Pilate and Herod and we look at the significance of his death on the cross. Here we read at least 5 times that Jesus was innocent and undeserving of punishment and death. 1) First in vs 4 Pilate says, "*I find no basis for a charge against this man.*" But the chief priests insisted that He was stirring up the people and Jesus was sent to Herod. Herod plied him with many questions, but "*Jesus gave him no answer.*" All the time the religious leaders were strongly accusing him, and the soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Then Herod sent him back to Pilate and that day Herod and Pilate became friends – before this they had been enemies.

2) Pilate again said in vs 14, "*I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death.*" But the people wanted him to release Barabbas, a murderer. Pilate appealed to them again, but they shouted, "*Crucify him! Crucify him!*" 3) For the third time he asked, "*What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for*

the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.” When the people's shouts and demands for Jesus to be crucified prevailed, Pilate decided to grant their demand, and Barabbas was released.

So Jesus was crucified along with 2 other criminals. People stood watching, while the rulers sneered at him to save himself. Soldiers also came and mocked him. One of the criminals hurled insults on him to save himself and them. The second criminal rebuked him, saying that they were getting what their deeds deserved and said, 4) *“But this man has done nothing wrong.”* He asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom. And Jesus answered, *“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”*

Then for 3 hours there was darkness and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus committed his spirit to his Father and died. Then 5) the centurion seeing all this, said, *“Surely this was a righteous man.”* Joseph of Arimathea buried him in a tomb and everything seemed lost.

But the most incredible event had taken place when Jesus died on that cross. Eternal life became possible for man for the first time. If Jesus had not been innocent, his death would have had no power and he would have died for his own wrongs. But because of his righteousness, his death could be reckoned to us; we who actually deserved death. Romans 5 sums it up so well, *“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Although there are numerous aspects to Jesus' death, we will only highlight some here in Luke 23. First we see the

fulfillment of the prophecies made about his death hundreds of years earlier in Isaiah 53. It says, *“He was despised and rejected by men ... we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him... and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer ... he was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.”*

When the curtain that divided the holy place from the Most Holy Place in the temple was torn, something wonderful happened. His death opened for us the way into the place of God's presence. Hebrews 10:19-22 says, *“We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body ...”* Now we can come *“near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith..”* Hebrews 4 also tells us that *“we can now approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* Do you need help today? Are you feeling alone and confused? You can come to God to receive mercy and help. The way is wide open for us, no matter what condition our lives are in. Come and draw near to God.

Jesus died with the criminals and on the cross Jesus cancelled the debt of every sinner, and it was given to the criminal who asked for mercy. That very day he went with Jesus into Paradise. Colossians 2 says, *“When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”*

In v34 Jesus prayed, *“Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”* This shows us his incredible love to grant

forgiveness to the offenders. Grace flowed out from him there on the cross. So we have also been forgiven of our sins. And the amazing thing is that by his Spirit he has given us his nature, to be able to also forgive the undeserving of their cruelty towards us.

Jesus was crucified in weakness and humiliation, but it really was the greatest powerful victory ever won. Col 1:18 says, *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* We are not ashamed of the cross, for the weakness of Jesus became the power for us to live a strong victorious life. Paul said in Galatians 6:14, *“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”*. And Jesus now can sympathise with our weaknesses.

Then Jesus was buried and his burial became a picture for our own faith baptism. Colossians 2:12 says, *“having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead.”*

To put it another way: Jesus chose to die, that we might live and never die. He chose to be beaten that we could be freed from punishment for our sin. He chose to be wounded, so that our wounds could be healed; to be forsaken, that we need never be alone. He chose to be taken captive and nailed to the cross that we could be set free from our captivity. He chose to carry the cross that our burdens could be lifted off us; to forgive, that we could be forgiven. He chose to be cursed on the cross, that our curse could be broken, and we could be blessed. He chose to be mocked, that we might be honoured; to be rejected, that we might be accepted. He chose to be pierced, that we could be made whole; to be judged, that we might be acquitted. He chose to wear the crown of thorns so that we might wear the crown of life. He chose to be have all he owned taken from him, and stripped bare, that we might have full provision and protection. He chose to be shamed so that our shame could be removed. He chose to have darkness descend on him, that we could be brought into the light. He chose to become sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God. He chose to be buried, that we could be raised to newness of life. What a wonderful powerful salvation was bought through the cross.

God bless you until next time when we'll share our final Lesson from Luke.

