



Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian Church
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LUKE 15: LOST & FOUND

The confronting thing about Jesus is that he hangs around with all the wrong people. Instead of coming to spend time with the impressive and the religious and the best and brightest of Israel, Jesus seems to do exactly the opposite.

1. Think back over the past week. Who have you been spending your time with?

Notice the context set by Luke 15:1-2. 'Now the tax collectors and 'sinners ' were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. '

Tax Collectors – while wealthy – were shunned by the Jews because of their co-operation with the Roman empire, which ruled over Israel by force. The term 'Sinners' included all other kinds of disreputable types who clean living Pharisees would do their best to avoid. Jesus did the exact opposite!

2. Look back to Luke 5:27-32. Jesus has already been in trouble for exactly the same thing. What was his response the first time?

Background Briefing

It's that 'reversal thing' again! Remember back in Luke 1? Mary, when she was told she would give birth to God's son, sang a song that summed up everything that Jesus was going to do. Look back at some of her words...

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
53 He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our fathers. '

As we read Luke's gospel we've got to watch out for anyone who's proud in their inmost thoughts!

Lost and Found...

3. Read the two parables from verse 3 to 10. What do the two stories have in common?

4. How is God's character different to that of the Pharisees who are complaining?

Of course, the 'ninety-nine righteous persons' Jesus speaks of are the Pharisees, who in their own minds have nothing to repent of. The reality couldn't be further from the truth, because we know that they're proud in their inmost thoughts! That's the problem with anyone who doesn't think they need to repent!

Think about it...

Do we celebrate the same thing God celebrates?

Are we as a church prepared to leave the ninety-nine in the open country" and look for lost sheep? How can we do this more effectively?

The Lost and Found Sons

Now read the third parable... the story of the lost son. Or is it actually a story of TWO lost sons?

Read from verse 11 to 32.

5. By the end of the story, which of the two sons is alienated from the father?
6. In the context of what's happening in Luke's gospel, who do the two sons represent?
7. What lessons are there for us in the parable?
8. What does genuine repentance look like?
9. What do we learn of God's nature from the parable?

Part of a Bigger Picture

Hundreds of years before Jesus, the prophet Jeremiah looked at a smashed and desolate Israel, with the people scattered far from their land. This was 'the exile' – a crisis in Israel's history that the nation never truly recovered from. Even now in the time of Jesus that there's a population back in the land, they live under harsh foreign rule, and there are still exiled Jewish communities spread all around Asia Minor and beyond.

Read Jeremiah 31:17-20. ('Ephraim' is one of the original tribal names for Israel.)

10. What hope did Jeremiah hold out for Israel's restoration?
11. What similarities can you see Jesus drawing on as he tells the parable of the runaway son?

This great regathering of Israel was foreshadowed as far back as Deuteronomy. When Israel repented, the nation would be restored, and God would „circumcise their hearts“ by pouring out his Spirit on them. In that way he would 'write his law in their hearts' so they could serve him as they should. In summary, Jesus is saying that this great time the prophets had promised had now come. That's what Mary was celebrating in her song. But rather than celebrating the return of their repenting lost and desolate and broken brothers as they should, the Pharisees are complaining. And because of that, they'll be shut out from the celebrations. It's their choice!

Confronting Jesus

The confronting thing about these parables is that Jesus is saying there are only two kinds of people... those who need to humbly repent and be welcomed in to God's celebration, and those who think they don't need to repent... and miss out.

Which kind of people do we most resemble at APC?

Which kind of person are you?

Prayer Points

Pray together as a group that we would be truly humble and repentant, and not „proud in our inmost thoughts“.

LUKE 16: KINGDOM ECONOMICS

1. Why do you like money?
2. Read Luke 16. Who does Jesus begin speaking to? Who is also listening (14)? Who do you think v16-31 is directed to?
3. The parable of the shrewd manager is easy to understand – the difficulty comes in applying it. What is the problem?
4. Where in the context could you show that Jesus is not condoning greed and dishonesty?
5. What is Jesus' application (9)?
6. According to Jesus in verses 10-15, what does our management of money have to do with our standing before God?
7. Can you think of a practical example of how v13 works in the Christian life?
8. Verses 1-15 and 19-31 are linked by the theme of wealth. Verses 16-18 don't seem to be connected to either. Any thoughts on how they fit in?

The key seems to be v16 – people seem to have all sorts of opinions on what it means. I think Jesus is saying that until John, responding to God was not complicated– obey the Law and the Prophets. Since then, responding to the kingdom is about radical change – actively and aggressively seeking the kingdom (being born again Jn 3:3; cutting off your hand Mk 9:47; hating your family Luke 14:26; giving up everything for the pearl Mt 13:44; and here – hating money to serve God Luke 16:13, and taking marriage seriously Luke 16:18). We must take Jesus' teaching seriously – the Law is still in force (16:17). Jesus is asking for everything that we have -- our heart, our allegiance, our obedience, and our willingness to risk all to follow him. Jesus does not mention any comfortable middle ground (16:13), though the timid part of us earnestly would like to find it. This is what it means to force your way into the kingdom.

Jesus reinforces this message in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (19-31). The tough decisions we make here about the kingdom (14) have eternal consequences (11-12).

9. Who looks longingly at whom in THIS life (21)? How does that change in the NEXT life (23)?
10. What warning might the rich man have wanted Lazarus to deliver to his brothers (27-8)?
11. What is Abraham's reply?
12. What does Jesus want the Pharisees to see about the relationship of money in this life and in the life after death?
13. How should these parables affect your present use of money?

Prayer Points:

LUKE 17:1-19: AMAZING GRACE

1. Since you first met Jesus, what disillusionments have you had about him and his way of life?
2. Read Luke 17:1-19. Consider the strong reaction of the disciples in 17:1-5. What has caused this reaction?
3. What does Jesus mean to 'watch yourself' (3)?
4. How do verses 1-3a connect to verses 3b-4?
5. How could you practice verses 3-4 without reinforcing someone's bad behaviour?
6. How does Jesus respond to their request (6-10)? How do verses 7-10 connect?
7. Is Jesus saying in v7-10 that the Christian life is about slavery rather than a relationship? What IS he saying about the Christian life? In practical terms, what does this sort of life look like?
8. In the story of the lepers Jesus seems surprised that only one of the ten returned in gratitude for his healing. Can you see any connection between this story and the verses before it?
9. What is the significance of the returning leper being a Samaritan?
10. What relationship can you see between faith and gratitude in his final words (17:17-19)?
11. How can you incorporate more praise and thanksgiving into your life? What effect might this have on you?
12. For what things can you give thanks and praise?

Prayer Points:

Spend some time reflecting on God's goodness, then thanking and praising him for specific things.

LUKE 17:20-18:8: 'THY KINGDOM COME.'

Jews of Jesus' time were waiting for the kingdom of God to come. Through the OT prophets God had promised that 'the day of the Lord' was coming when He would restore his people and bring justice. See for example Micah 4:1-7; Joel 2:28-3:3; Zephaniah 3: 8-20. Most of them were looking for this to begin with political deliverance from Rome, and the rise of Israel, led by God's Messiah, as a new military force.

Jesus, however, knows that God's plans are somewhat different to that!

1. Read Luke 17:20-18:8. To whom is Jesus talking in this section (17:20, 22; 18:1)?
2. Can you see any connection of theme between the two sections?
3. For the Pharisees, what emphasis about the kingdom of God does Jesus make (17:20-21)? Why?
4. In v21 'within you' could also be translated 'among you'. What does Jesus say about when, how and where the kingdom of God is?
5. Jesus turns his attention to his disciples (22). What does he mean by 'one of the days of the Son of Man' (23)?
6. Jesus is talking about a time after his suffering and rejection when his appearing will be like the lightning that lights up the sky from one end to the other (24). What is Jesus saying about himself here? How does this answer the Pharisees' question?
7. He uses two examples of warning in the Old Testament (26-29). Why were those people unprepared for God's judgment (See Gen 7; 19)? What point is he making about the days of the Son of Man (30-37)?
8. Is the disciples question in v37 different from that of the Pharisees in v20?
9. Jesus' reply is a common proverb. What is his point? Can you see any deeper meaning in it? What might he be saying about coming events?
10. To encourage his disciples to persist in praying Jesus draws a portrait of a certain judge as a contrast to God. In what ways is God different from the judge (18:6-8)?
11. How does v8 fit into the parable?
12. The whole context of this parable, then, is about Jesus' return. What might this mean about how God might answer our prayer for justice? Is this parable about praying for things other than justice?

Prayer Points:

LUKE 18:9-30: WHAT ENTERING THE KINGDOM IS NOT ABOUT

This section draws a series of contrasts between attitudes that are acceptable in God's upside-down kingdom, and those that aren't.

1. Read 18:9-30. Why does Jesus tell the parable (18:9-14)?
2. How would the conclusion of this parable have turned common wisdom on its head?
3. Both men address 'God.' But how do their prayers reveal different concepts of God and their relation to him?
4. Why do you think the Pharisee acted this way? The tax collector?
5. How much of the Pharisee is there in you? Tax collector?
6. How did the disciples feel about parents bringing their babies to Jesus? Why might they try to stop them? How might they have felt when the rich ruler showed such interest in joining the team?
7. What does it mean to receive the kingdom like a little child?
8. How does this connect to the previous parable?
9. What does the rich ruler's question (18) imply about his view of eternal life?
10. What is the point of Jesus' response? Why does he only quote some of the commandments? Which ones does he leave out (Ex 20:1-17)?
11. How does the man respond? What does Jesus say (21-22)?
12. Is Jesus saying everyone should sell all they have (22)?
13. Since wealth was commonly considered a sign of God's blessing, what was the problem for the disciples (26)?
14. What is the way into the upside-down kingdom (27-30)? How do the children (15-17) reflect this attitude better than the rich man? What about the tax collector?
15. Have you experienced anything of the principle of v29-30?

Prayer Points

LUKE 18:31-19:27: SEEING THE SAVIOUR

This section begins Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem (continues it, really – see Luke 9:51). Jerusalem is King David's city, the centre of power. Jesus goes there with suffering and death on his mind, but his followers see a different sort of king who will bring in a different sort of kingdom on the end of a sword (see 19:11).

Read Luke 18:31-43.

1. In Luke 18:31-34 Jesus' fourth prediction to the Twelve about his coming violent death again meets with lack of understanding. Their presuppositions about riches and their political agenda (19:11) deafen them to Jesus' intent. Is there anything hidden about what Jesus explained to them? How is their ignorance described?
2. Then in 18:35-45 Luke introduces us to someone who can see Jesus, even though he's blind. What do we learn about him from this story? His faith? His intensity? Who did he think Jesus was? Anything significant in the title he uses to address Jesus?
3. In terms of understanding Jesus' mission, how does the blind man compare to the disciples?
4. If Jesus asked you, 'What do you want me to do for you?' what would you answer?
5. Read 19:1-10. What impresses you about Zacchaeus?
6. What was it about Zacchaeus that caused Jesus to single him out? Why do you think Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus' house? What do you think they talked about over dinner?
7. What do the people think of Zacchaeus?
8. How does Zacchaeus' response to Jesus compare to another rich man in 18:23? Who is the only One capable of producing such a change (18:27)?
9. What is Jesus saying about Zacchaeus in v9? About himself in v10?
10. Read 19:11-27. What is the context for this parable? Who do you think is listening in (11)? Why does Jesus tell the parable?

11. In what ways is Jesus similar and dissimilar to the man of noble birth?

12. How do the subjects regard him? What happens to them? They are mentioned only at the beginning and the end (vv. 14, 27). Whom does Jesus intend them to represent? How does he smash the false hopes of this group?

13. What happens to each of the servants? The reward of the first two (representative) servants is simple. But the king's dialogue with the third servant is detailed. With this emphasis, what point is Jesus making (keep in mind v. 11)?

14. What is the point of the parable? How does the king's conclusion (26-27) speak to the initial misconception?

Prayer Points

LUKE 19:28-21:4: RECOGNISING THE UPSIDE-DOWN KING

1. Read 19:28-48. Jesus is approaching Jerusalem. What do his preparations (28-36) say about the message he wants to send about himself?
2. What were the people expecting Jesus to do when he reached Jerusalem (19:11; and Zech 9:9)? How do they respond as Jesus approaches (35-40)?
3. How does this difference in expectation help explain Jesus' words and emotions in 41-44?
4. How do 45-48 relate to his concern for Jerusalem?
5. What dark note does the chapter end on? Their attempts are seen in the next chapter.

Read 20:1-21:4. Most of us are not quick to think on our feet, and certainly not as quick and sharp as Jesus. In these verses we see him taking on four distinct authority groups as each mounts attacks on him.

6. By the end of the debate on Jesus' authority, what has each side achieved (20:1-8)?
7. By parable and commentary Jesus pronounces final judgment on the leaders (20:9-18). How do they respond?
8. How does this parable connect with their view of Jesus' authority in the previous section?
9. How do they fare in their next attempt to trap him (20-26)? What principle does Jesus' give about a Christian's loyalty?
10. The Sadducees accepted only the first five Old Testament books, which they (wrongly) presumed said nothing about life after death. What, therefore, do they expect their hypothetical story to do to belief in the resurrection (20:27-47)?

11. Again Jesus points to wrong assumptions behind their question. What error does he identify in their view of life after death (vv. 34-36)?

12. How does Jesus go on the attack against his opponents in 41-44?

13. What conclusion does he reach about his opponents' motives and methods (20:45-21:4)? Is his assessment of the widow more about commendation of the widow, or condemnation of the teachers?

14. Is the whole tone of 19:28-21:4 positive or negative? Is there ANYONE who recognises the upside-down king?

Prayer Points:

LUKE 21:5-38: SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Luke 21 is often seen as a confusing passage full of scary sounding stuff. Sometimes, it's taken to be all about the end of the world as we know it. But these words Jesus spoke to his disciples were more likely about the end of their world as they knew it. We've already heard Jesus foreshadow the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the 'promised land' of Israel. He's said it with tears in his eyes - the city that rejects God's visitation to them is going to be rejected by God (Lk 19:41-44). And it's all going to happen in a terrible way within the space of a generation. When you read Luke 21 in that context, it seems to make good sense - but the descriptions here are louder and more vivid.

Read Luke 21:5-38

Getting Oriented...

1. What does Jesus think of the beautiful temple?
2. What specific two questions do the disciples ask in verse 7?

FIRST QUESTION:

SECOND QUESTION:

THE ANSWER TO QUESTION 1 (VERSE 32):

We're going to try to understand how Jesus answers exactly those questions. The answer to the first question is clear... within their lifetime. (The temple was actually destroyed by the Romans in AD70, and only the 'wailing wall,' which was part of the foundations, remained.) With that in mind, we need to read the way Jesus describes the 'signs of the end of Israel' in a way that makes sense.

Sometimes, he uses vivid 'apocalyptic language. (That's what we're doing when we talk about EARTH SHATTERING EVENTS. The earth doesn't necessarily shatter, but our personal world is shaken!) But most of the descriptions are a straightforward account of exactly what happens to his disciples over the next 40 years. You can read about it in the Book of Acts.

The Signs of the End

3. List some of the 'signs' that will tell the disciples that Jerusalem is about to be destroyed...
 - a) verse 8
 - b) verse 9
 - c) verse 10
 - d) verse 11
 - e) verse 12-16
 - f) verse 20
4. Peter and John were among the disciples listening to Jesus. What happens to them in Acts 4:1-12 and Acts 12:1-2.
5. What opportunity does Jesus promise that opposition will create?



The Western Wall, or wailing wall, in Jerusalem

Rejoicing in Rejection

6. Too often, we're afraid of the slightest hint of rejection of ourselves or our message. Jesus says, count opposition as opportunity! Can you think of circumstances where this would be useful advice in your own experience?
7. What does Jesus promise his original disciples? How are these words encouraging today?

Jerusalem Surrounded

8. The fall of Jerusalem will be terrible indeed. Summarise how Jesus describes it in verse 21-24...

Background Briefing:

Let's step forward in time to AD70, and catch a glimpse of how things worked out in reality. The Roman historian Josephus had acted as a mediator for the Romans and, when negotiations failed, witnessed the siege and aftermath. He wrote:

Now as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other work to be done), Titus Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and Temple... it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make a visitor believe Jerusalem had ever been inhabited...

And truly, the very view itself was a melancholy thing; for those places which were adorned with trees and pleasant gardens, were now desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down. Nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judaea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, do anything but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change. For the war had laid all signs of beauty quite waste. Nor had anyone who had known the place before, had come on a sudden to it now, would he have known it again...

Josephus claims that 1,100,000 people were killed during the siege, of which a majority were Jewish. 97,000 were captured and enslaved. Many fled to areas around the Mediterranean. Titus reportedly refused to accept a wreath of victory, as there is 'no merit in vanquishing people forsaken by their own God'.

The Son of Man Coming in a Cloud...

From verse 25 to 28, the language becomes cosmic and catastrophic. There will be 'signs in the sun, moon and stars - the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

9. Draw and label what the disciples will see according to verse 27...

Think about it...

Signs in the sky... a man who travels on a cloud... ring any bells? Maybe it should!

If you're looking for some signs that are going to tell you that it's all over for Jerusalem and not one stone will be left on another, you just need to keep reading the rest of Luke's book... and the sequel. Because that's EXACTLY what's about to unfold.

10. Read Luke 23:44-45. What happens here?

Read Acts 1:9. What's happening here?

Daniel 7:13-14. The 'son of man coming on the clouds' is not coming to earth at this point. He's coming to the throne! What do you think Jesus is claiming for himself when he quotes these words, and when he literally, physically 'ascends' on the clouds?

Daniel long ago promised that 'one like a Son of Man' would 'come on the clouds to the throne room of God' and share his rule forever... a rule over not just Israel, but all the nations. Jesus says, "That's me. And that's going to happen - just up ahead. Keep watching. Keep trusting!"

The implications are bad for the Israel that rejects him, but in the end the kingdom is much bigger than just Israel. It's a kingdom for all the world!

So stick with it and stay tuned...

The prescription is simple. The crisis is coming, but here's what the disciples will have to do...

- Don't be frightened (v9)
- be witnesses to Christ in front of rulers and kings (v13)
- head for the hills when the Romans come (v21)
- Be careful not to be weighed down with drunkenness and cares (v34)
- Be alert for when it happens. (v36)

Because of these warnings from Jesus, while many in Jerusalem stayed to fight the Romans - thinking their city was invincible - the Christians fled, and were largely kept safe. Jerusalem was gone - but the message of Jesus was spreading like wildfire around the world.

The temple is gone. But according to the apostle Paul, now there's a more important temple... and he's building it!

Read 1 Corinthians 3:9-17.

11. What are some implications of the fact that 'we are God's building', and 'you yourselves are God's temple'? (v9,17)

What's the foundation of our building?

What do you think Paul has in mind when he says 'we should be careful of how we build'?

If the building is 'us, built together,' how is it that some are seeking to 'destroy God's temple.'

Paul uses the same metaphor in Ephesians 2, where he reminds us that we Gentiles are also part of God's great building project... 'built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.'

Prayer Points:

Spend some time in prayer, asking that God would help us build one another up in faith, that we would always seek to build on the foundation of Jesus, and that we would be careful not to do anything that 'damages' God's new and final temple!