

A graphic featuring a city skyline at night, inverted so it appears to be hanging from the top of the frame. The skyline is reflected in a layer of clouds below. The text 'THE UPSIDE-DOWN KINGDOM' is overlaid in large, white, bold letters with a green outline.

# THE UPSIDE-DOWN KINGDOM

LUKE 13-18

**Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian Church**  
*[ashfieldpresbyterian.org.au](http://ashfieldpresbyterian.org.au)*

## Introduction:

These studies are designed to complement the sermons at Church. Most Home Groups use them in the week **before** the Bible Talk, and find that this helps to prepare them to hear the talk. Hopefully, any unanswered questions will also be addressed.

The studies will work just as well for personal study. Perhaps you could find two or three short times during the week to work through each passage and set of questions.

## Luke 12:41-13:9: Coming Back, Ready or Not!

**Read Luke 12:35-59.**

1. In v35-48 Jesus is talking about being prepared. List the ways in which Jesus instructs his hearers to be prepared.
2. What does it mean for us to be prepared? (Be specific).
3. What are the benefits of being prepared? What are the consequences for being lax?
4. How will the division Christ brings be seen in this life? How will the division be seen in the next?
5. Why does Jesus go from talking of interpreting the signs of the times to making amends with your accuser?

Is he talking about earthly things or spiritual things?

6. Share specific ways in which you can grow in your preparedness as we await Jesus' return.
7. In what ways can our church as a whole become more watchful/prepared?

**Read Luke 13:1-9**

8. In this passage Jesus speaks about two events that were fresh in the memory of the people around him. What is Jesus' perspective on both these events? What is the warning?
9. How does the parable of the fig tree fit into this passage?
10. In what ways are you bearing fruit?

## Prayer Points

# **Luke 13:10-35: Who's In and Who's Out?**

## **Read Luke 13:10-21**

1. What was the objection of the synagogue leader against Jesus healing the woman?

What does this display about the synagogue ruler's understanding of being right with God?

How does Jesus challenge this understanding?

How could it be seen as most appropriate that the woman was healed on the Sabbath?

2. What attributes of the kingdom of God is Jesus teaching in the parable of the mustard seed and the leaven?

What does this passage teach us about faith?

## **Read Luke 13:22-35.**

3. What does Jesus say about the way to the Kingdom of God?

4. What may have motivated the person (13:23) to ask if only a few people were going to be saved?

5. How do you "make every effort" (13:24) to enter the narrow door? Is it just about trying hard?

6. What is the point of 13:31-35? (Does "Jerusalem" connect this section with the one before?)

## **Prayer Points**

# Luke 14: Kingdom Commitment

## Read Luke 14

1. From 14:1-14, against what attitude of the Pharisees did Jesus speak the parable?

What was the point of the parable?

What does this have to do with making every effort to enter through the narrow door (13:24)?

2. From 14:15-24, who are the ones who will be in the kingdom?

Is this more a story about the guests, or the host? What is the main point?

3. What are the characteristics of those who are on the narrow road that leads to the kingdom?

How are these characteristics formative and visible in your life?

4. What does Jesus teach about the cost of following him in this section?

5. Is counting the cost only something you do before you become a Christian, or an ongoing decision to be made?

Give an example of a practical decision you made that involved counting the cost of being a disciple.

6. Can salt that loses its saltiness be called salt anymore (14:34-35)?

Can one who claims to follow Jesus and yet does not have any of the characteristics truly be classed as a follower of Jesus?

How do these two verses fit in with the whole section? Are they a good conclusion/ summary?

7. How have you been challenged by this passage?

## Prayer Points

# 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