

April 18: Luke 18-19

Chapter 18

Vs 1-27, Jesus follows up his rather scary lesson about “the day of the Son of Man” by urging the people to pray always and not lose heart. Jesus tells them the parable of the persistent widow to illustrate the power that persistence has over the unrighteous judges of this world (the judge eventually gets tired of her nagging, and is somewhat afraid that she will end up slapping him in the face), so how much more readily will God –who is a righteous and gracious judge- receive and act on our prayers. God has special concern for the justice issues of this earth, he is most particularly on the side of those who face oppression and injustice, and will fight for them. THAT is the whole point of the day of the Lord, that this judge who has observed all of the hatred and injustice of our world, one day will pass sentence on those who victimize their vulnerable neighbors.

Beginning in vs. 9, Jesus offers another parable to illustrate the kind of prayer that is acceptable to God. God does not want us to view our neighbors with contempt, but rather to be humble and view ourselves as sinners just the same as our neighbors. Our piety counts for nothing if we don't genuinely love our neighbors. The tax collector's prayer is very similar to what Orthodox Christians pray repeatedly as “the Jesus Prayer”: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Jesus then welcomes the children to himself, yet another vulnerable, oppressed portion of the population. In Jesus' day the child mortality rate was so high that children were not regarded with respect and love like they are today, but rather only viewed as valuable once they made it out of childhood. Jesus welcomes and values even these little ones whom the world rejects, and urges his disciples to adopt a childlike trust in the kingdom of God.

Beginning in vs 18, Jesus challenges a rich ruler on his relationship to his wealth. The wealth itself is not the problem, but the ruler's attachment to it. Jesus kind of makes a pun, saying that the one thing that the rich man lacks is his ability to leave his wealth and follow Jesus in obedience. Jesus urges faith in God's ability to bring us into the kingdom of God, in spite of our weaknesses and limitations.

Vs. 28-43, Peter then seeks to justify himself and the other apostles, pointing out that they have already done what the rich ruler seemed unable to do, the “between the lines” comment Peter is insinuating is: “so then what do we get for our A+ discipleship?” Jesus assured them that all of the sacrifices they have made for the kingdom of God will be worth it in the end, that their faithfulness will bear fruit physically and spiritually.

Jesus then shares with his disciples the final Passion Prediction of Luke because they are about to reach their destination, Jerusalem. Jesus says that everything that he will endure at the hands of those who reject and hate him will be a fulfillment of what the prophets wrote (and certainly what Jesus endured shares many similarities to the suffering servant song in Isaiah). Unfortunately, the disciples did not understand what Jesus was talking about (yet again).

The blind man names Jesus as “Son of David,” a royal title pointing to him as Messiah. Jesus restores his sight, fulfilling his mission of “bringing sight to the blind,” the man's response to this miraculous healing is to glorify God (correct response) and follow Jesus.

Chapter 19

Vs. 1-27, Zacchaeus displays unusual faith in climbing a tree, wanting to see Jesus. Jesus invited himself over to Zacchaeus' house as an example of Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost. Jesus sought him out, from up a sycamore tree, much like the shepherd seeks out that 1 lost sheep. Everyone around him grumbled because they all knew he was a crook, his neighbors didn't really want him to be found and saved, but Jesus did. Inspired by Jesus, Zacchaeus freely offered to do the righteous thing by giving half to the poor (the law only requires 10%), and paying back those whom he wronged fourfold (the law requires paying it back in full plus adding 1/5 for restitution). Zacchaeus offers us an excellent example of what genuine repentance looks like in the kingdom of God.

Jesus next tells a parable to address their misconceptions that the kingdom of God would appear immediately, and the danger that Jerusalem poses for Jesus as he enters Jerusalem as a royal figure. This parable is extremely similar to the parable of the talents from Matthew 25. The pound is not a great value (perhaps \$20 each), but the point is that they were entrusted to the slaves to invest wisely. This parable illustrates how rulers of his time behaved toward their slaves. This parable functions not only as a rallying call for faithful discipleship and stewardship, but also as a final warning to Jesus' enemies, to those who actively try to thwart the saving activity of God in the world.

Vs. 28-48, Bethany and Bethphage are the towns closest to Jerusalem (just a couple of miles away). Jesus now begins his triumphal entry, riding on a colt just as described by the prophet Zechariah 9:9. "The Lord needs it" is the language of royal and military requisition privilege. The crowd gave Jesus the royal treatment, laying their cloaks on the ground, and praising God for all of the deeds of power they witnessed from Jesus. The Pharisees were concerned with Jesus allowing his disciples to make acclamations of a royal nature about him. Jerusalem at Passover was extremely volatile, and they didn't want any trouble from the Romans. Passover is the great celebration of liberation! It's very good news to a people who are living under Roman occupation, it's likely to incite rebellion, which Rome will certainly crush with great violence.

Instead of keeping a low profile, Jesus goes to the Temple and makes a prophetic statement about the destruction of the Temple (the worst thing anyone could have imagined happening, the thing that did, in fact, happen when the Romans destroyed it in 70CE in response to Jewish rebellion). The gospel writers see the destruction of the temple as divine response to Jerusalem's rejection of Jesus. We must tread carefully when reading these texts, as they have been used in anti-semitic ways through history. The reality is that Rome was just as complicit (if not more so) in Jesus' death than the Jewish religious authorities. While yes they were plotting to find ways to get rid of Jesus, they had absolutely no authority to carry out executions without Rome.