

March 28: Luke 12-13

Luke 12

Vs 1-12, Given that chapter 11 ended with the Pharisees' new policy concerning Jesus (that they would actively stalk him to try to entrap him), it's not surprising that in this next chapter Jesus begins teaching his disciples about what to do in times of trial and persecution. Jesus anticipates his own persecution, and that of his disciples' before it happens, and gives them these words as comfort and strength to endure those times. Far worse than a broken body is a broken spirit. Persecution is an inevitability as a follower of Christ, but what Jesus instructs his disciples on is the appropriate response to it. Yeast is a corrupting influence, concealed at first amidst all of the flour, but evident later. Jesus defines yeast as hypocrisy. The inner disposition of people will inevitably emerge as external behavior. Rather than fearing (being afraid of) temporal "authorities", the only one truly worthy of our fear (reverence) is God, the final judge. However, God's character is such (lovingly keeping watchful eye on even the sparrows), that we have no need to fear (be terrified of) God.

Hell is Gehenna, the trash dump of Jerusalem, which Jesus used as an illustration of final judgment. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (the unforgiveable sin) refers to committing apostasy in times of persecution. God is not absent in times of persecution, but rather fundamentally present, with the Holy Spirit giving us the very words to speak in that moment.

Vs. 13-34, Worry over and striving for wealth leads to immoral behavior (like breaking family relationships over dividing inheritance). Jesus shares the parable of the man who built larger barns for his stuff to illustrate what is truly important in life –storing up treasures in heaven, striving for the kingdom of heaven. There is nothing wrong with wealth in and of itself, but rather the way we think about and relate to our wealth that is often problematic. Our hearts and minds should be consumed by God, and God's mission in the world, rather than what's in our bank account or worrying about tomorrow. Faith is trusting that God will provide for our needs, as God provides for the ravens and the lilies. We are Christ's flock, and God loves us and wants to give us the good gift of the kingdom. Giving alms helps put us in rightful relationship with our money –money is a tool to be used for the kingdom, not an end unto itself.

Vs. 35-59, Jesus urges us to stay ready for his return. Peter asks if this teaching is just for the disciples or for everyone. The answer is YES. However, Jesus teaches them with a disturbing parable (describing some true scenarios of the system of slavery of his time) that discipleship comes with a greater degree of responsibility and expectation of faithful and vigilant behavior. Those who are just coming to faith in Jesus will not be held to the same standard as those who should have known they were expecting the master's return. The Baptism Jesus speaks about in verse 50 is his death on the cross, he says that he is under incredible stress until "it is completed." What a human thing to say! Jesus is frustrated by the hypocrisy of the

people who can predict the weather and judge what is right, but who miss the “signs of the time” to repent and watch for the Messiah. The division that Jesus speaks about is another example of what happens during times of persecution. Some people take the world’s side, and others take Christ’s side. This division occurs even within families.

Luke 13

Vs 1-21, This passage begins with two stories of tragedy. The people who told them to Jesus followed the conventional theological thinking of his time, namely, that those who were victims of tragedy must have sinned in some extraordinary way to deserve their suffering. Jesus immediately dismisses this line of thinking. They were not great sinners, they did nothing to earn their suffering. But, these deaths are an example of the fragile nature of human life, and therefore, a reminder that we should all repent (turn our hearts and lives toward God) as soon as possible, so that we can live the spiritually whole (fruit-bearing) life God intends for us. Jesus uses the parable of the fig tree to further illustrate his point. The parables are not always one to one descriptions of God and Jesus, etc. God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) is our gardener who advocates on our behalf and nourishes us, and believes in our potential. The landowner could be death, it could be the world, it could be any number of characters. Parables are fictional stories that convey theological truths, but they are not facts. The theological truth in this parable is that God is a God of grace, who gives us what we need to thrive –even and especially when we can’t do it on our own.

Jesus continues to advocate for the sick, and continues to perform the “forbidden work” of healing on the Sabbath, because it is the right thing to do, while teaching the Pharisees and the crowds in traditional rabbinic form about how the crippled woman was of far greater value to God than livestock, who are allowed through an exception in the law to be untied on the Sabbath. The crowd rejoices at this good news!

Vs. 22- 35, Jesus urges the crowd to “strive to enter through the narrow door” in other words “be disciplined” (discipleship is hard work). Jesus wants an intimate relationship with us, not a surface-level acquaintanceship. The kingdom of God will contain all of the saints who have gone before, from all around the world.

The Pharisees come to warn Jesus to keep him safe. Jesus isn’t concerned for his safety, because he knows he’s headed toward Jerusalem where he will be killed. Herod has already executed John the Baptist, so this is a very real threat that he faces. He refers to Herod as a “fox” which meant more like “weasel” in Jesus’ day. “The third day” refers to the resurrection –the day when his work of earthly ministry and death on the cross will be completed. Jesus then laments about the rejection God’s prophets have faced in Jerusalem, as well as the rejection he will face in Jerusalem. The worst thing for Jesus, the thing he truly laments, is not that he will be killed, but that the citizens of Jerusalem (whom he loves and desires to gather like a mother hen gathers her chicks) rejects his love.