

The Luke Daily Study Guide

Week 5

Monday, March 26th

Luke 15

1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

8 "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

13 "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' 20 So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

25 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

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31 " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "

Points of Interest:

- 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them'—are you, like me, starting to feel like the Pharisees and teachers are a broken record? Their tune hasn't really changed since their earliest interactions with Jesus. Over and over again, they comment on the fact that he is eating with sinners and doing what's unlawful on the Sabbath as if it's a complete surprise, even though it's exactly what he's been doing all along.
- 'one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them'—Doesn't everybody look for lost things? Maybe you wouldn't look for a dropped penny: it's not that valuable. You might not look for someone else's wallet: it's not yours. But you'd definitely look for your own wallet: it's yours, and it's valuable. Likewise, Jesus eats with these people because they belong to him and they're valuable.
- 'Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine'— it might occur to you that, according to the logic above, the ninety-nine sheep are ninety-times more valuable than the lost one. Why would a shepherd abandon the whole valuable herd for the sake of the lost one? I think the idea here is that there's safety in the herd. The ninety-nine serve as some protection for one another, but the one is defenseless. The shepherd isn't abandoning the ninety-nine; he is temporarily leaving the ninety-nine to bring the one back into the safety of the herd.
- 'he joyfully puts it on his shoulders'—the shepherd isn't angry or annoyed at the lost sheep. He doesn't scold it. He's simply glad that the sheep is safe and has been found.
- 'she calls her friends and neighbors together'—imagine the relief and excitement at recovering a large amount of lost money. The woman simply has to share her good news with her friends.
- 'Rejoice with me'—her friends celebrate with her. That's the immediate and natural response when a friend finds something they'd lost. By implication, since the Pharisees and teachers are muttering instead of celebrating, they are not friends of Jesus. It's not Jesus who is acting strangely here—you always celebrate when you find something you've lost. It's the Pharisees who are being rude and unfriendly.
- 'Father, give me my share of the estate'—inheritances usually don't come until after your parents are dead, but this son wants to hurry up the process. He's essentially saying, 'Look, Dad, can we go ahead and act as if you were already dead?' Amazingly, his father agrees to his request.
- 'He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating'—this is definitely hitting bottom: a good Jewish boy wouldn't have even eaten pig, but he wishes he could eat with pigs.
- 'my father's hired servants have food to spare'—he thought it would be better to have his father's money than to be his father's child; it turns out that having his father's money isn't even as good as being his father's servant.
- 'But the father said . . . this son of mine was dead and is alive again'—the son's speech was supposed to end with, 'make me like one of your hired servants,' but before he can finish, his father interrupts to call him his son.
- 'because he has him back safe and sound'—the father is not at all concerned about whether the younger son deserves to be welcomed back. He throws a party, not because his child has done something worthy of a party, but because he is happy:

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because someone he has worried about is safe and because someone he has missed has returned.

- 'refused to go in'—in these three stories (the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost child), Jesus establishes a clear pattern: 1) something valuable is lost; 2) the lost thing is found; 3) the finder celebrates; 4) the finder invites friends and neighbors into the celebration. Here the pattern is broken. We determined earlier that, because they aren't celebrating with Jesus, the Pharisees and teachers aren't Jesus' friends. Now, we see who they are: they are the angry older child.
- 'his father went out and pleaded with him'—the father goes out in search of this missing son, just like he ran out to welcome the other one when he came home.
- 'I've been slaving for you'—both children think of their relationship with their father as slavery. The younger son runs away from his father's repressive regime, and then decides he'd be better off in slavery to his father than to anyone else. But the father doesn't think of him as a slave at all; he thinks of him as his child. He first gives him an inheritance (even a bit earlier than usual); then welcomes him home as a son, rather than hiring him as a servant.

The older son stays with the father, but only out of a different strategy, not a different attitude. He takes the tack of the dutiful slave, patiently bearing with all of his father's requirements—but resenting it the whole time. I get the sense that he too wishes his father were dead; he just isn't bold enough to say it, like his brother was.

- 'this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes'—the older child seems simultaneously disgusted by and envious of his brother. He doesn't recognize what the younger child—through painful trial and error—has just figured out: his older brother had it better all along.
- 'you never gave me even a young goat'—I get the strong sense that if the older son had ever asked for one, his father would have been happy to give him that young goat, or much more. After all, he gave the younger son a third of his fortune because he asked. The father seems genuinely confused by the older son's bitterness: 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.' As far as the father knew, he was giving his older child the best: relationship with him, and the chance to work together to build up the older child's inheritance. He thought it's what his child wanted too, but all along the child was secretly bitter and resentful.

It's the same thing with the Pharisees and God's law. By muttering about Jesus' relationship with the tax collectors and sinners, they're essentially saying, 'Look, we've been following God's law all along. When are we going to get anything out of it?' I think God's answer would be, 'The Law itself is the great thing I was giving you.' The Law was meant to lead them toward a richer relationship with God and a more abundant life. The tax collectors and sinners haven't been getting away with something; they've been missing out on something. The Pharisees and teachers, in theory at least, always had the better life within their grasp; but because they had the mentality of slaves rather than of children, they missed out too.

- 'But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead'—the younger son has been found, but the older son is still lost in a self-imposed slavery. The younger son is in the party, but the older son is sulking outside. The big question, left hanging at the end of the story, is: will the older son join the party? Will he join the family, or remain a slave? It's up to the Pharisees—and to any of us who identify with the older brother—to decide how the story will end.

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Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Who are your 'tax collectors'? That is, is there a group that, in your heart of hearts, you think is hopeless—or, at least, that they should have to do a lot of proving how sorry they are before God would welcome them? I think this passage is saying that those very people belong to God and are valuable to him. All God wants is for them to be safe at home with him. What would it take for you to be happy to see God celebrating them? Ask God to rescue you from muttering, from envy, and from suspicion. Pray that he would give you what you need to step into the party.
- *For your six:* Pray that your six would increase in their knowledge that they are valuable to God and he misses them.
- *For our city:* Pray for the churches of our city. Pray that the people of our churches would know the joy of being God's children. Ask God to protect us from a spirit of slavery.

Tuesday, March 27th

Luke 16:1-18

1 Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2 So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

3 "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg— 4 I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

5 "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

6 " 'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.'

7 "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

" 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied.

"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

8 "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. 9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

10 "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. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

13 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

14 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. 15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.

16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and people are forcing their way into it. 17 It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.

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18 "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Points of Interest:

- 'Give an account of your management'—basically, the owner is giving the manager two weeks to get the books in order.
- 'people will welcome me into their houses'—apparently, his future job prospects are rather meager. He figures his best chance is to get in good with people. Maybe if he's well-liked or people feel like they owe him a favor, they'll let him stay with them.
- 'sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty'—the 'quickly' part makes it clear that this is his idea, not his master's. Maybe people will even think he got fired for helping them out; a little guilt might increase the chances that they'll take him in.
- 'The master commended the dishonest manager'—any indignation he might feel at being cheated is outweighed by how impressed he is with what the manager pulls off. The master fired the manager because he was wasteful, but—once forced to it—he shows just how resourceful he's capable of being. The manager finally figures out how to turn a temporary resource (his access to his master's books) into a lasting benefit. If the manager had shown this shrewdness previously, the owner probably wouldn't have fired him.
- 'use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves'—this advice might seem a bit calculating. I think that's Jesus' point. We can learn something from this worldly, dishonest manager about how to make the best use of our resources. People are more important than money; so use your money for people's sake. Everyone likes to have money spent on them—just as much as they like their bills to be smaller, rather than larger. Our money won't last forever anyway, and people will. Perhaps if we spend our money on people, they'll remember us fondly, and welcome us into eternity. It's a simple calculation, and everybody wins.
- 'who will give you property of your own?'—Jesus presents things opposite to how I tend to think of them. I think I have my own property now, but everything in the kingdom of God will belong to God. Jesus says that right now everything we have is actually God's, but we have a chance of having something of our own in the kingdom of God. If we show ourselves trustworthy with his property now, he'll give us our own property in his kingdom. It's like we're teenagers who want our own car, but our parents are seeing how well we take care of their car first. Jesus has much bigger things in store for us in his kingdom, if we are ready.
- 'No one can serve two masters'—eventually the two masters will make competing demands, and you'll have to choose which one to obey. The two masters here are God and Money. God and Money both offer the same thing—life—but they have contradictory instructions for how to get it. God's instructions are to spend money on people; we've seen that not just in this passage, but throughout Luke's story (6:30 and 11:41, for example). Money's instructions might be the exact opposite: use people to gain money—that at least is what John warned people against in his sermon (3:10-14). As Jesus said earlier, 'Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions' (Luke 12: 15).
- 'sneering at Jesus'—the Pharisees seem to think that Jesus is just making pious excuses for why he is poor. He turns it around on them; they follow Money's instructions, and then try to explain how they are really serving God.
- 'people are forcing their way into it'—I have a little trouble following Jesus' train of thought here, but I think his point is that the Pharisees can sneer all they want because

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there are plenty of other people who are desperate to get into the Kingdom. To use the language of last week's story of the big party (14: 16-24), Jesus is confident that his house will be full.

- 'than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law'—announcing the kingdom of God has replaced preaching the Law and Prophets, but that doesn't mean that the Law has been made obsolete. Really, it's just a change of tense. Until John, the message was, 'Our rescuer will come.' Since Jesus, the message has become, 'Our rescuer has come.' Jesus has come to complete the Law, not overturn it; loving God and loving our neighbors is still the way to find life (10: 27-28). Jesus simply brings new power to make it possible.
- 'Anyone who divorces his wife'—this feels to me like another rather sudden shift of topic. Perhaps this is an example of how Jesus plans to uphold the Law and the Prophets. In the Law, Moses says very little about divorce. He neither specifically promotes it nor prohibits it, but instead assumes its existence and tries to manage it to avoid the worst abuses, such as spurious claims of adultery as grounds for divorce (Deuteronomy 22:13-19 and Deuteronomy 24: 1-3). In the Prophets, God is a bit more forthright: "'I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel, 'and I hate it when people clothe themselves with injustice'" (Malachi 2:16). What God hates about divorce in Malachi is that it provides an easy way to get rid of your wife (in most ancient culture only the man had power of divorce) when you get tired of her. In other books of the Bible (Matthew, Mark, and I Corinthians), Paul and Jesus himself add a few more details and a bit more nuance regarding divorce, allowing for some situations in which divorce may be an appropriate course of action. Both Jesus and Paul make it quite clear, though, that divorce is never God's desire for a marriage and that it should only be entered into with extreme caution in rare circumstances. I think Jesus speaks so strongly against divorce because most of the time divorce is antithetical to the picture of relationships he has been trying to form. Jesus has been promoting relationships characterized by forgiveness, mercy, generosity, and servanthood; but divorce is often characterized by bitterness, judging of others, rejection, and selfishness, from at least one party, if not both. Jesus steers us away from divorce because it is a tempting choice, but there's almost always a better option.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* this passage makes the startling claim that our relationship to money is one of the most powerful determinants in bringing us closer to or farther from the kingdom of God. Money can be a great tool in making friends that will be there to welcome us into heaven; but money also has a very real chance of drawing us away from God to serve it instead. Pray that God would break any negative spiritual power money has in your life, and ask God to give you shrewdness with money. Pray that God would help you to get the best eternal bang for your buck.
- *For your six:* Pray that your six also would have a godly shrewdness with their money. Pray that God would reward them for the generosity they show, and that their generosity would increase.
- *For our city:* Pray for the marriages of our city. Pray that God would bless marriages with abundance, generosity, forgiveness, blessing, and love. Pray against the power the temptation to blame has to undercut marriages. Pray for a particular outpouring of grace on marriages that are in crisis.

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Wednesday, March 28th

Luke 16:19-17:19

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

30 " 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

17:1 Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. 2 It would be better for you to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around your neck than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. 3 So watch yourselves.

"If a brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. 4 Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them."

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

6 He replied, "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.

7 "Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? 8 Won't he rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? 9 Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' "

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

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Points of Interest:

- 'There was a rich man'—Jesus is still speaking in response to the Pharisees' scoffing about not being able to serve God and Money. In yesterday's passage, Jesus told a story in order to recommend generosity to his disciples. In today's, he tells another story to illustrate to the Pharisees what could happen if you don't choose generosity.
- 'dressed in purple and fine linen'—this man is wearing expensive designer clothes.
- 'a beggar named Lazarus'—in reality, the rich playboy's name would be known and the homeless man would be nameless; but in Jesus' story, we know the beggar's name, but not the rich man's.
- 'carried him to Abraham's side'—this is sort of like our pop culture picture of St. Peter welcoming us at the pearly gates.
- 'send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue'—the formerly rich man has moxie. He yells up from hell to heaven to catch Abraham's attention, and he is bold enough to ask Abraham to send someone—in fact, the very person he's ignored his entire life—down to hell to bring him a drink. I don't think he's gotten completely used to his new station in life.
- 'in your lifetime you received your good things'—this rich man gains the whole world, but loses his soul (9:25). Like the dishonest manager, he's been wasteful with his possessions; he doesn't use them to make friends who would welcome him into eternal dwellings (yesterday's passage). He invites only his friends and relatives to his party, not those in need; so, he's already gotten his reward (14:12-14)
- 'a great chasm has been set in place'—Abraham doesn't say that he won't send Lazarus, but that he can't, because a chasm has been put in the way. He doesn't say exactly who put the chasm there. I think a good argument could be made that it is the rich man himself who dug the chasm—when he built the gate that kept Lazarus out. He erected his own barrier between himself and God's kingdom.
- 'They have Moses and the Prophets'—Jesus' words about the importance of loving others are not new. The writings of Moses and the prophets are full of encouragements to love strangers, promises of God's reward for those who do, and warnings of trouble for those who do not. The rich man's relatives cannot reasonably say that they've never been warned.
Jesus clearly has the Pharisees in his sights with this comment. Being such experts in the Law, such students of Moses, they should know very well what God expects. They are exceedingly attentive to such things as exact tithing and exact definitions of work, but they overlook the much more important issue of mercy and generosity toward others.
- 'they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead'—Jesus intrudes a real-life prediction into his story. Being hardened as they are to God's heart, they will not even be convinced by his resurrection.
- 'Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come' —earlier (3:4), Luke described John's preaching as the work of making a straight path so that the Lord could come to people. Now, we have another image of a clear path. Not only is God making his way to people, but people are also making their way toward God. They're bound to trip a few times along the way, but that doesn't make it okay to stick a leg out. Jesus expects his followers to make it easier for people to get to him, not to get in the way. This is in direct contrast to the law experts, who do put barriers in the way of people entering the kingdom of God (11:52).
- 'thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around your neck'—handcuff a twenty-five pound weight to your hand, take a boat a couple of miles out to sea, then dive into the

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water and try to swim back to shore: that's a safer choice than taking advantage of someone who is small or weak. Picking on someone smaller than you might look like something you can get away with, but God will weigh in on the side of the vulnerable one. I take the 'little ones' to be people who are just starting out in their journey toward God. Tripping someone is hardly ever as funny as the one sticking his leg out thinks it is, but it would be downright cruel to trip a child who is just learning to walk.

- 'rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them'—the disciples don't need to pretend nothing happened, but they do need to let go of their desire to punish the person who did it.
- 'Increase our faith'—the disciples recognize that what Jesus is asking, while simple in concept, is very hard to do. I think the faith they need is the faith to believe that they won't be taken advantage of, that God will also protect them if they let down their guard and forgive.
- 'we have only done our duty'—this presents an interesting contrast with Jesus' earlier story about the master who does indeed serve dinner to his servants (12:37). I think that what Jesus is addressing here is an attitude of entitlement. God is indeed like a master who serves his servants. That doesn't mean, though, that God somehow owes us his service. God serves us out of his generosity, not because we've done so much for him that it's about time he does something for us. I think this image is referring back to the older child from the story of the two sons (Monday's passage).
- 'They stood at a distance'—the lepers are respectfully keeping their distance, so that no one else will become sick or ritually unclean.
- 'Where are the other nine?'—only the Samaritan returns to thank Jesus. Over the course of Luke's story, Jesus has mentioned several examples of outsiders who respond to God more enthusiastically than God's own people: Naaman the Syrian, who was healed of leprosy by Elisha (4:27); the Queen of the South who came to hear Solomon's wisdom (11:31); even the Roman centurion who showed such great faith in Jesus' healing power (7:9). Meanwhile, Jesus is able to accomplish less in his hometown than anywhere else (4:24), and many people refuse to listen to John because they rely instead on their relation to Abraham (3:8). Jesus goes so far as to leave his own family waiting outside (8:21) to stress the point that what matters is not some special pre-existing relationship with him, but faith and responsiveness to God's work.

In Jesus' day, it was the Jews who might be tempted to rely on the label 'child of Abraham,' as an automatic pass into God's good graces. Today, it's Christians or churchgoers—maybe even religious people of any kind—who could similarly assume they have some sort of automatic 'in' with God. Luke's story makes it abundantly clear that it doesn't matter where you come from or what label you wear. No matter who you are, you can find yourself welcomed into God's party—or left out. It might not be overstating it to say that which way it goes rests almost completely on how grateful you are to receive the invitation.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Imitate the prayer of the disciples. Ask God to give you more faith. Pray particularly that, by faith, God would increase your ability to forgive others. Pray that God would give you the boldness to speak up when you've been wronged, the grace to forgive, and the trust in God that you will not be taken advantage of.

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- *For your six:* Are any of your six sick? Pray that God would heal them. If they do get well, pray that they would recognize God's work in their lives and turn toward him with gratitude.
- *For our city:* Pray for the relationship between the rich and poor of our city. Pray that barriers would be broken down and relationships built. Pray for mutual blessing between the rich and the poor. Ask God to allow our church to play a part in tearing down the barriers between rich and poor. Pray that God would give our church wisdom about whether or not starting a new community development organization would be a helpful contribution toward this goal.

Thursday, March 29th

Luke 17:20-18:14

20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."

22 Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. 23 People will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. 24 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. 25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

26 "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. 27 People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

28 "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. 29 But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

30 "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. 32 Remember Lot's wife! 33 Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. 34 I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. 35-36 Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left."

37 "Where, Lord?" they asked.

He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!' "

6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 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?"

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank

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you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Points of Interest:

- 'flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other'—this is another interesting already/not yet moment regarding the kingdom of God. The Pharisees ask, 'When will the kingdom of God come?' and Jesus answers, 'It's already here, but you don't even see it, because it's not a flashy thing.' Then he turns to his disciples and says, 'When my kingdom comes, you'll know it; it'll be as obvious as the biggest fireworks display ever!' Perhaps it's not even worth looking for the complete Technicolor version of Jesus' kingdom unless you first appreciate its subtler form.
- 'you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man'—the full inauguration of the kingdom will take longer than the disciples expect—almost longer than they can bear.
- 'People were eating and drinking, buying and selling'—in other words, ordinary life was going on as usual. The arrival in full of Jesus' kingdom will be a surprise; the day will start out like any other, and then the kingdom will break in suddenly and without warning.
- 'Remember Lot's wife!'—before destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, God warned Abraham's nephew Lot and his family to escape. As they were running away, Lot's wife turned back in regret, and she turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:13). For a kingdom typified by good news for the poor, freedom for prisoners, healing for the sick, and life for the dead, the culmination of Jesus' kingdom is oddly violent. It sounds a lot like a worldwide cataclysm: it will be like a lightning flash that fills the sky; it will be sudden and massively destructive like Noah's flood or the fire that fell from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah. It brings new perspective to Jesus saying, 'I have come to bring fire on the earth' (12:49). Apparently, the kingdom will not arrive without a struggle. There will be one last fight between Jesus and the strong man Satan (11:21-23) for final control. This final unveiling of Jesus and his kingdom makes me think of a nuclear bomb: sudden and immediate destruction. Yet, Jesus also seems to indicate that someone can escape if they act quickly and without hesitation. Doom is not certain.
- 'whoever loses their life will preserve it'—whatever mode of escape Jesus has in mind, it will look more like going into danger than getting out of it. It's notable that Jesus makes special mention of leaving behind possessions. This moment is the ultimate test of whether God or Money is the master: Wealth says, 'Come back for me; you'll need me later'; but God says, 'Run now and don't look back.'
- 'Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather'—to me, this is the most inscrutable sentence in the entire book of Luke. Today's whole passage is a bit difficult to understand, but the rest of it is simple compared to this. I hesitate to even guess what it means, but here goes nothing:
A dead body, lying on the ground, is difficult to see; but vultures, circling in the air, are easy to spot. So, if you want to find a dead body, look for vultures. The vultures will lead you to the body. Likewise, the coming of the Son of Man will

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be hard to spot directly; but there will be signs that point you in the right direction.

The big problem with my interpretation is that, as far as I can tell, Jesus doesn't tell us here what signs to be looking for.

- 'yet because this widow keeps bothering me'—the judge eventually decides that it's easier to grant the woman's request than not. If the widow can outlast the corrupt and callous judge, it is certainly worth it for us to keep praying to God, who is a good father who wants to answer our prayers.
- 'Will he keep putting them off?'—if God is so eager to answer our prayers, why is persistence necessary? Why would he put us off at all? I wonder if the answer has anything to do with the story about the fruitless fig tree (13:7). In this story of the widow and the unjust judge, Jesus is specifically talking about never giving up in praying for him to come again to set everything right. The story of the fruitless fig tree, on the other hand, is about God's willingness to give us every possible chance to make the most of our lives. Perhaps God's eagerness to answer our prayers for his kingdom to come is balanced by his desire to allow us to achieve maximum possible fruitfulness before it does.
- 'I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get'—it's really more of a boast than a prayer.
- 'those who humble themselves will be exalted'—both people get exactly what they ask for. The Pharisee doesn't think he needs anything; so he asks for nothing, and gets it. The tax collector asks for mercy, and he gets it.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Pray that God would rescue you from the temptation to think of yourself as better than others. Particularly if you are a part of a close family, pray that God would give you the grace to enjoy what's special about your family without looking down on others.
- *For your six:* Ask God to loosen any attachment your six might have to their possessions. This passage tells us that the ability to leave behind our possessions without hesitation might very well prove crucial to saving our lives and bringing us into God's kingdom.
- *For our city:* Jesus seems to think it is really an open question whether or not he will find people patiently and faithfully expecting him when he brings his kingdom. Pray that God will come to Boston and Cambridge, and that when he comes he will find faith here.

Friday, March 30th

Luke 18:15-43

15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

18 A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. 20 You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"

21 "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

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22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

23 When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. 24 Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God."

26 Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?"

27 Jesus replied, "What is impossible with human beings is possible with God."

28 Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!"

29 "Truly I tell you," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30 will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."

31 Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. 32 He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; 33 they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."

34 The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

35 As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. 36 When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. 37 They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

38 He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

39 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!"

40 Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, 41 "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, I want to see," he replied.

42 Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." 43 Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

Points of Interest:

- 'anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it'—rather than stopping the children, they should learn something from them. These children know something that adults tend to forget about how to receive a gift. I can't help but think of the story of the two lost sons, who try to receive their inheritance like slaves rather than like children. How exactly do little children receive gifts? A couple of things I've noticed that might be relevant here are that children are shameless and they're trusting. Children don't spend too much time worrying about whether they are worthy of a gift or whether they've earned it; if they like it, they take it, gleefully. They also don't tend to be suspicious of the giver; they don't look for tricks or catches, but take the gift at face value.
- 'Let the little children come to me'—earlier, Jesus told the disciples that the way to be the greatest was to welcome a little child (9:46-48). He doesn't want to pass up this opportunity for greatness. The disciples still have something to learn about greatness.
- 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'—this is the exact same question as the expert in the law asked earlier (10: 25). Now, though, in light of receiving the kingdom like a child, the question strikes me as a little odd. It occurs to me that you usually don't do

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anything for an inheritance; if you're the child of the person who owns it, it's simply given to you.

- 'Why do you call me good?'—I think Jesus objects to being called good because he suspects that the man is saying it flippantly, not because he thinks it doesn't apply.
- 'You know the commandments'—just like he did with the legal expert, Jesus refers the man to the Law. In fact, Jesus quotes the Ten Commandments—or, rather, five of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are the famous summary of the Law given by God to Moses on two stone tablets. Five of the commandments had to do with relating to God and five of them with relating to one another. It's often imagined that each set of five had its own tablet: a God tablet and a neighbor tablet. [Incidentally, the two commandments the law expert recited to Jesus (10:27)—love God and love your neighbor—serve as pretty good encapsulations of the two tablets]. The five commandments Jesus quotes here are from the second tablet, the neighbor tablet.
- 'All these I have kept since I was a boy'—this man is far ahead of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Most of the Pharisees and teachers focused on the minutia of the Law, rather than its heart. Our expert from chapter 10 focused on the essence of the Law, but he resisted doing it. This ruler both recognized what was important and did it. He's actually well on his way to eternal life. As Jesus told the legal expert: 'Do this, and you will live' (10:28).
- 'You still lack one thing'—he's not all the way there, though. Perhaps what he's missing is the first tablet. He's missing a loving relationship with God. To inherit eternal life, you have to be a child of the one who owns eternal life.
- 'Sell everything you have'—'You cannot serve both God and Money' (16:13). Jesus is calling him to separate himself totally from money and put his trust completely in God instead.
- 'he became very sad'—'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (12:34). We don't know what the man ultimately chooses, but it's clear that at this point wealth has at least some of his heart. His money makes it harder for him to truly choose God.
- 'Who then can be saved?'—it might be that they assume that rich people are more loved by God, or it might be that they are impressed by how faithful this ruler is and are dismayed that even he can't quite make it. Thankfully, we're not reliant upon our own efforts, but on the favor of a very powerful God.
- 'many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life'—'Give, and it will be given to you' (6:38). When we give to others, God gives to us; and he gives much better gifts than we do. The Twelve and the Seventy-Two have already gotten glimpses of how this supernatural life of abundance works. They were each sent out with absolutely nothing, but everywhere they went they had a place to stay and food to eat (9:1-9, 10:1-24).
- 'The disciples did not understand any of this'—Jesus keeps sowing this seed, but so far it hasn't ever taken root. Though hearing, they don't understand (8:10).
- 'rebuked him and told him to be quiet'—they rebuke this blind man, just like the disciples rebuked the children. This reminds me of Jesus' warning about causing little ones to stumble on their way to him (17:2). The blind man does not let himself be stopped, though. He's persistent in asking, and his request is heard.
- 'received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God'—this blind man knows how to accept a gift.

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Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Pray that God would increase your ability to love him and to love your neighbors. Are you better at one of them than the other? Maybe you could ask your family members, housemates, or friends which one they see best in you. Thank God for your strength in that area, and then ask him for help in strengthening your weak hand. Look for opportunities today to practice the one you're weaker at.
- *For your six:* Pray that your six would increase in their childlikeness. Pray particularly that they would be good gift-receivers.
- *For our city:* Today, bring the children of our city to God in prayer. Ask God to bless our children and give them good gifts.

Saturday, March 31st

Luke 19:1-27

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

11 While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. 12 He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. 13 So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'

14 "But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

15 "He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

16 "The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.'

17 " 'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

18 "The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.'

19 "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

20 "Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. 21 I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.'

22 "His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? 23 Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'

24 "Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.'

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25 " 'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!'

26 "He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 27 But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.'"

Points of Interest:

- 'he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy'—if tax collectors are like gangsters, Zacchaeus is a mob boss.
- 'Zacchaeus, come down'—this is apparently the first time they've ever met, but Jesus knows Zacchaeus' name. He is noticed, known, and welcomed.
- 'I must stay at your house today'—the 'must' reminds me of the father of the lost son saying, 'we had to celebrate . . . '(15:32). Another lost son has been found. When something lost is found, you can't help but throw a party.
- 'All the people saw this and began to mutter'—this time it's not just the Pharisees and teachers, but all the people, who mutter. Perhaps Zacchaeus is so notorious that it's a bigger scandal than before, or maybe Judeans are more sensitive to this kind of impropriety than Galileans.
- 'Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor'—Zacchaeus recognizes his need to repent. He recalibrates himself from serving Money to serving God. It's interesting to me that Zacchaeus understands immediately that following Jesus calls for a radically different approach to money. Somehow, money seems to have a lot less of a grip on this chief tax collector than it does on the Pharisees or even on the rich ruler from yesterday's passage.
- 'if I have cheated anybody'—it's unlikely that he would have gotten as rich as he has without cheating. So, it's frankly surprising to me that he would even have enough money left to pay people back fourfold, seeing as he's already promised to give away half of his wealth. I may be wrong, but I don't think Zacchaeus will have much money left by the time he's done. Zacchaeus is simultaneously plea bargaining with his adversaries before he gets to the judge (12:58) and making friends who will welcome him into eternal dwellings (16:9). He knows how to be shrewd with worldly wealth.
- 'people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once'—Jesus has been making his way very deliberately toward Jerusalem for quite some time now; and Jerusalem, being David's capital, would be the natural capital for the Messiah as well. So, people have gained the reasonable impression that Jerusalem is the finish line: as soon as he gets there, Jesus will unveil the kingdom of God. While it is, to a great degree, the climax of Jesus' earthly career, it's really only the beginning for his followers. It will be a while before the kingdom of God is fully established, and the disciples have a lot of work to do in the meantime.
- 'went to a distant country to have himself appointed king'—this story is 'ripped from the headlines.' The kings of Roman satellite kingdoms would have to have their kingships confirmed by Rome. Just like in this story, Herod Archelaus—the brother of the Herod who arrested John—had to travel to Rome to have his authority confirmed, and he had a delegation sent to contest his rule. Jesus too is going away—to heaven—to have his kingship confirmed by God.
- 'gave them ten minas'—this would be about three months' wages for an average laborer—let's call it in the neighborhood of eight or ten thousand dollars. It would probably seem like quite a substantial amount to the servants, but would only represent a very small proportion of the nobleman's wealth.

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- 'your mina has earned ten more'—this first servant makes a thousand percent return on his investment. These are amazing, unreal profits. He certainly does put the money to work.
- 'take charge of ten cities'—the ten minas were just a test. The nobleman was about to become a king, and he wanted to know who he could trust to help him rule his kingdom: 'Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much' (16:10).

This story presents us with the amazing idea that this entire life is just a test. Jesus is going away to be made a king. Everything we have is something Jesus has given us to put to work until he returns. In the next life, Jesus will give us authority in his kingdom proportional to the profits we are able to make for him in this one. Life as we know it is just the practice round. Eternal life in the kingdom of God is the real thing. But that doesn't mean that this life doesn't matter: how we do in practice has a big effect on what position we play in the big game.

- 'I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth'—he was told to put the money to work, but instead he wraps it up and keeps it in a safe place. This third servant is not at all a shrewd manager. He tries to play it safe, seemingly because he's afraid of what the nobleman would do to him if he lost the money. By setting his sights on not losing the money, he completely wastes it. I get the feeling that the nobleman would have been far more pleased with a servant who invested the money and lost it than with someone who didn't even try. In fact, I don't think it's incidental that in the way Jesus tells the story, no one who actually tries to put the money to work loses money; to try is to win.
- 'You knew, did you, that I am a hard man'—actually, he doesn't seem like a hard man at all. He gives the servants his own money to invest, and then he lets them keep the profits—besides giving them charge over cities. That's the exact opposite of taking out what you did not put in. The king is pointing out, though, that the third servant's actions aren't even consistent with his own mistake ideas of the king: if the king expects to reap where he didn't sow, why wouldn't the servant at least have invested the mina in the bank, where it would be utterly safe and yet make interest? Either the third servant is exceedingly fearful, or he's lazy, or he is ashamed to be associated with the nobleman because some of the citizens don't want him to be king.
- 'he already has ten'—letting the third servant keep the mina would do no good to anyone. It would only serve to cause the third servant more worry, without bringing anyone any profit. Meanwhile, the first servant has shown that he is willing and able to put the mina to good use. Why wouldn't the king put the mina into his hands?
- 'bring them here and kill them in front of me'—they've made it clear that they don't want him to be king, but his kingship is inevitable. This is the only way to give them what they want.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Pray that God would give you the boldness and savvy of the first two servants. Ask God to help you do good business with what he's given you, and pray for good eternal profits from your investments.
- *For your six:* Pray that the Holy Spirit would be at work in the consciences of your six. Pray that God would be guiding them toward areas of their life that need recalibration, and that he would give them the willingness and the ability to make the necessary course corrections. Pray that God would give them joy as they make those choices.
- *For our city:* Pray for God's mercy on our city. Pray that Cambridge and Boston would be places that welcome Jesus' kingship, rather than resisting it.

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Sunday, April 1st

Luke 19:28-47

28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 30 "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.' "

32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

34 They replied, "The Lord needs it."

35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will come on you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

Jesus at the Temple

45 When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling.

46 "It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.' "

47 Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. 48 Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.

Points of Interest:

- 'Bethphage and Bethany'—these are the suburbs of Jerusalem. Jesus has finally made it to his destination.
- 'you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden'—just like the story of Jesus' birth, the story of his death is dense with allusion to Old Testament prophecy.

We find this colt in the prophecy of Zechariah:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,
righteous and having salvation

lowly and riding on a donkey

on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9)

During war, a king would ride a horse. The fact that Jesus comes on a donkey symbolizes either that he is coming in peace or that he has already won the war.

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- 'people spread their cloaks on the road'—practically, this would reduce the amount of dust thrown up as they travel over the dirt road. Symbolically, it communicates that even the hooves of Jesus' donkey are too precious to touch the road. Only the very most wealthy and important people would have carpets. The people make a carpet for Jesus out of their coats, and they even let his donkey walk on it.
- 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!'—this is from Psalm 118 (verse 26). They are welcoming Jesus as God's representative. In fact, caught up in the exuberance of the moment, they may be calling Jesus God himself:
 You are my God, and I will praise you;
 you are my God, and I will exalt you.
 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
 his love endures forever (Psalm 118:28-29).
- 'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'—this is not just a great day for Jerusalem. It has heavenly significance.
- 'rebuke your disciples!'—the disciples are either welcoming Jesus as a conquering hero (which would be unpopular with the Romans) or worshipping him (which would be blasphemous in the eyes of the Pharisees). It's inappropriate and should be stopped—unless Jesus is a conquering hero, God, or both. Jesus responds that to stop the disciples would do no good. This is a situation that so much calls for praise that if the disciples were to be quiet, inanimate objects would start to speak.
- 'he wept over it'—Jesus is about to be killed in Jerusalem, but he looks on Jerusalem with pity and compassion, rather than anger. His mind isn't on his own death, but on the destruction of Jerusalem, which he foresees. Jerusalem will be destroyed in a war between the Jews and the Romans in 70 AD—about 40 years after Jesus' death, and maybe 10 years after Luke's writing. We'll talk more about the impending destruction of Jerusalem next week.
- 'My house will be a house of prayer'—Jesus refers here to Isaiah 56:7: 'for my house will be called/a house of prayer for all nations.' What Jesus expects to see when he gets to the temple is prayer, but instead he finds shopping. The temple was always intended to be a place where people from all around the world would come to find God and have their prayers answered (2 Chronicles 6:32-34), but it's fallen far short of its promise. The temple was a series of ever smaller and more restrictive courts; the largest court was the Court of the Nations, where all people were welcome; inside of that was the Court of Women, where all Jews were welcome; inside of that was the Court of Israel, for Jewish men; and inside of that were the Holy Place and the Holiest Place, where only priests could go. These merchants probably set up shop in the Court of Nations, meaning that the only place non-Jews were allowed to go had basically become a store instead of a place of worship.
Not only were non-Jews being robbed of a place to pray, but Jews were being robbed of money. What was being sold in the temple courts were animals for temple sacrifices. This started as a service to people who had traveled from far away, to make it easier for them to make their sacrifices. But the temple merchants were given monopolies, and thus charged exorbitant prices, sort of like for hot dogs at the ballpark. Thus, what was meant to be a house of prayer had become 'a den of robbers' (another quote from a prophet, Jeremiah 7:11).
- 'the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people'—we've seen the teachers of the law before, but the chief priests are fairly new to our story. The chief priests are in charge of the temple, as the teachers of the law are in charge of the synagogues. Thus, between them, they control the two major institutions of

The Luke Daily Study Guide

Week 5

Jewish society and religion. We've seen already the numerous run-ins between Jesus and the teachers over how to interpret the Law. Now, he has stepped on the toes—and cut into the profits—of the chief priests by driving the merchants out of the temple. So, the chief priests and the teachers join together to try to get rid of Jesus. For the time being, though, they're daunted by Jesus' overwhelming popularity.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Today, for Palm Sunday (John mentions that the crowds save palm branches as they sing), push the limits of the exuberance of your worship. Particularly if you tend to be a bit more staid, step out and do something that might make someone say, 'That's a little much, isn't it?'
- *For your six:* Pray that your six would find a hospitable place to meet with God. Consider inviting them to church for Easter Sunday, and pray that they would accept the invitation. Pray that, if they do come, our church would be a place where they feel like they belong and where they are able to connect with God.
- *For our city:* Today begins Holy Week, the week between Palm Sunday and Easter. Ask God that during this week, there would be a buzz about Jesus in our city. Pray that the usual greater attention Jesus gets would create opportunities for more people to hear his words and be drawn to him.