

The Luke Daily Study Guide

Week 4

Monday, March 19th

Luke 11:1-28

1 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

2 He said to them, "When you pray, say:

" 'Father,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

3 Give us each day our daily bread.

4 Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.' "

5 Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' 7 And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

9 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened.

11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

14 Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. 15 But some of them said, "By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." 16 Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.

17 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. 18 If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. 19 Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 20 But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

21 "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. 22 But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.

23 "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

24 "When an evil spirit comes out of anyone, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' 25 When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. 26 Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first."

27 As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you."

28 He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

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Points of Interest:

- 'Lord, teach us to pray'—his followers have seen Jesus go off alone to pray many times, and they've been invited to accompany him a couple of times now. It's cultivated in them a desire to pray like he prays.
- 'Father'—the prayer starts out very simple and direct, and it's based on an intimate relationship with God. There are no flowery phrases and no flattery of God involved. This prayer comes out of a confidence that the ones praying are privileged children of the one to whom they are praying.
- 'hallowed be your name'—in other words, 'May your name be holy.' *Holy* means, 'set apart.' I don't think this means that God is not holy and we hope he becomes so. It essentially means, 'May you be recognized for how special you really are.' It's an expression of hope that God gets the credit due him, but even more an expression of desire that others hear about the wonderful benefits available to them from this great Father.
- 'Give us each day our daily bread'—a reference to the Israelites when Moses led them through the desert. There was not enough food for all of them; but each day God would send them manna (which, roughly translated, means, 'What the heck?'), a sort of miracle flour out of which they made bread. Jesus is suggesting that we ask God to provide for us everything we need each day, just like he did for the Israelites in the desert. Three things strike me about this request:
 1. God is willing to take care of our needs, even our simply daily ones—I can be tempted to think that God would not want to be bothered by such trivial things as my daily needs, but Jesus recommends that we bring them to God's attention every day;
 2. It's a prayer we have to pray every day—Jesus doesn't say, 'Give us everything we need for the rest of our life,' but, 'Today, give us what we need today,' Faith in God's provision is a day-by-day venture;
 3. It implies that we need something from God every day—according to Jesus, we, like the Israelites in the desert, won't have enough to make it through the day unless God provides. I have to admit that it doesn't always feel that way to me. While there are definitely some days I feel like I won't survive without God's help, much of the time I think I'll do alright on my own. I'm not depending on God to come through every day. Is Jesus over-stating my need? Am I blind to the ways God is in fact mercifully providing for me? Or, am I going hungry without even knowing it? While I think it's entirely probable that God is providing for me all the time in ways I don't notice, I'm most intrigued by that last question: do I spend much of my life unknowingly hungry? It's certainly not true physically; I definitely get plenty to eat every day. But perhaps Jesus isn't only talking about our physical needs in this prayer. Every time Jesus mentions bread in the book of Luke, I can't help but think of the first time it came up, when Jesus said to the devil, 'People do not live on bread alone,' quoting Moses, who goes on to say, 'but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.' While I know this is not true of everyone, I at least have plenty of actual bread each day; but perhaps what I lack is the spiritual sustenance of daily, live-giving words from God.
- 'for we also forgive everyone'—as Jesus said earlier, 'For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you' (Luke 6:38). By forgiving others, we invest in an entire economy of forgiveness.

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- 'lead us not into temptation'—we can depend on God not only to forgive us our sins, but to give us the strength to avoid them in the future.
- 'and I have nothing to set before him'—the man in this story is not asking for something for himself. He's asking his friend to give him what he needs to show proper hospitality to another friend.
- 'because of your shameless audacity'—a combination of wanting to shut his friend up and of recognizing the validity of the request eventually get the man up. If someone who's predisposed not to help you can be persuaded through boldness and insistence, how much more is it true of God, who is eager for you to ask for what you need? I think Jesus is hinting, though, that willing as God is to hear our requests, it might take us looking a bit foolish or acting a bit audacious.
- 'everyone who asks receives'—Jesus is particularly talking here of God's eagerness to give us whatever we need to show generosity or hospitality toward someone else.
- 'how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him'—the Holy Spirit also is a good gift that God is always more than willing to give to people who ask.
- 'a demon that was mute'—I think this means that the demon causes muteness in humans, but perhaps the demon himself is also mute. Who knows?
- 'By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demon'—it's unclear exactly who Beelzebul is. It could be another name for the devil, or another high-ranking demon. It seems that it's even possible that they make him up right here on the spot as a plausible explanation for Jesus' success (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* 164). There's also some disagreement about what the name means, but it might mean, 'master of the house,' an interpretation Jesus may be picking up on in his story about the house being plundered (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary* 154). These 'others' who are saying that Jesus is using demonic power to cast out demons are probably the Pharisees and the teachers, since in his answer Jesus refers to the 'others' as having disciples. Whoever they are, they've decided that Jesus does not come from God; but he has obvious spiritual power that has to be explained somehow. They figure: if not from God, it must be from the devil. Other people, perversely, suggest that Jesus perform some miracle to prove that the miracles he has already performed are heavenly, an endless loop Jesus chooses not to engage.
- 'how can his kingdom stand'—Jesus is doing real damage to the devil's kingdom. It makes no sense that he would be doing it with the devil's own power.
- 'when someone stronger attacks'—if the question is, 'How is Jesus able to drive out demons?' here is Jesus' answer: he is stronger than the devil, and has tied him up. Therefore, he can take whatever he wants; and what he wants are the lives of those he who've been under spiritual oppression.
- 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it'—it's true that Mary is blessed. Both the angel Gabriel and Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, exclaimed how blessed she is at the beginning of our story (Luke 1:28, 42). But here Jesus stresses that her blessing is not exclusive; it's available to anyone who, like Mary, takes the word of God seriously. This is the second time Jesus has made a point of saying that his family doesn't possess any special privileges.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Try praying Jesus' prayer aloud today—if possible, with your family or roommates. For some of you, it might be a completely new experience. For others of you, it brings up bad memories of rote prayers you didn't really understand or

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believe. For yet others of you, it's a familiar, meaningful practice already. Regardless of your previous history with the Lord's prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh and lively connection with God as you pray. Take some time to riff off of Jesus' phrases, making the language your own and your requests more specific.

- *For your six:* Are you aware of something that one of your six needs? Ask Jesus to give you what you need to meet that need. Jesus loves to help us love our friends.
- *For our city:* Pray that Jesus' kingdom would grow more and more in our city. Pray for more supernatural healing and provision, more freedom from spiritual oppression, more abundance, more joy, and more connection with God to spread.

Tuesday, March 20th

Luke 11: 29-53

29 As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. 30 For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. 31 The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom; and now one greater than Solomon is here. 32 The people of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now one greater than Jonah is here.

33 "None of you lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead you put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. 34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. 35 See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. 36 Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you." 37 When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. 38 But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.

39 Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. 40 You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

42 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

43 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.

44 "Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it."

45 One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also."

46 Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

47 "Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. 48 So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. 49 Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' 50 Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the

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prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

52 "Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering."

53 When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, 54 waiting to catch him in something he might say.

Points of Interest:

- 'This is a wicked generation'—this is the second time recently that Jesus has talked about the faithlessness of this generation. Last time, it was in response to the disciples' inability to free the demon-possessed boy (Luke 9:41). This time, it's in response to people accusing him of defeating demons with demonic power. Jesus is dismayed by just how difficult it is to help this generation escape from the devil's traps.
- 'none will be given it except the sign of Jonah'—Jonah was an Israelite prophet whom God sent to preach to Nineveh, a powerful enemy city. Jesus is contrasting the Jews of his own day with Jonah's Ninevites. Jesus' listeners are asking for a sign to prove that he is from God; but the people of Nineveh—though they didn't know God, didn't have any reason to respect an Israelite, and were so wicked that God had decided to destroy them—believed Jonah's words without any miracles and immediately declared a fast to show their humility and repentance. If the Ninevites believed Jonah without any signs, why should Jesus—who's actually done very many miraculous signs already—have to continue to do miraculous signs to prove himself to his listeners? They've seen and heard enough already.
- 'The Queen of the South'—this is the fabled Queen of Sheba. Sheba may have been Ethiopia, or it may have been a kingdom in the far south of the Arabian peninsula; either way, it was the farthest known civilization to the south of Israel. The Queen of the South heard that God had blessed Solomon with supernatural wisdom, and she traveled all the way from her own faraway land to hear what Solomon had to say. If this stranger would travel so far to hear Solomon's words, why won't Jesus' fellow Jews—people raised on the Law and Prophets that testify to him—listen to him?
- 'Your eye is the lamp of your body'—this is a confusing image to me, but I think that Jesus is referring to the fact that when they look at him, they see a demon. If they are looking at someone casting out demons by the power of God, but see a demon-possessed madman, there's something very wrong with their eyes (spiritually speaking, that is). With such poor spiritual vision, it will be very difficult for them to ever see well again; because their bad eyes affect everything they see. They are attracted to darkness and repelled by light, making them essentially blind.
- 'Jesus did not first wash before the meal'—this is referring to ceremonial washing for religious purposes. Such washing wasn't required by God in any of the laws of Moses; the Pharisees had developed the idea, under the theory 'Better safe than sorry.' They wanted some extra precautionary measures to insure that neither they nor their food was ritually unclean before eating.
- 'you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup'—the Pharisees spend so much time cleaning their hands that they completely neglect the state of their hearts. It's like polishing the outside of a pot so that you can see your reflection in it, but leaving the inside completely filthy. If the Pharisees are so concerned to show honor to God, why

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wouldn't they clean both inside and out? Or, do they think that God only cares about how things look on the surface?

Even now, Jesus seems to think, cleaning out their heart wouldn't be so difficult—maybe even less difficult than all of the washing they do—just a little bit of generosity to the poor would take care of that greed quite nicely.

- 'you give God a tenth of your mint'—Moses commanded that the first ten percent of the harvest be offered to God as a way of saying thanks. This offering is called 'the tithe.' Along with the Sabbath, the tithe was a favorite of the Pharisees, because it lent itself easily to precise measurement; you could be absolutely certain whether or not you were tithing, at least as far as the Pharisees understood it. Jesus is saying here that the Pharisees go so far as to tithe from the herb plants in their little kitchen gardens.
- 'You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone'—Jesus doesn't criticize them for their scrupulousness in giving God a tenth; it's a good thing that they want to give proper thanks to God. However, it doesn't mix well with the fact that they don't show much concern for the larger things God cares about—or even for showing genuine love toward God himself. It seems like what they love is following the rules.
- 'you are like unmarked graves'—the Pharisees are like zombies. They look alive, but they are really dead. This is an eerie enough image for anyone, but it would have been especially horrifying to the Pharisees. As I mentioned during our discussion of the story of the neighborly Samaritan, according to the Law of Moses, touching a corpse makes a person temporarily ritually unclean. As they were prone to do, the Pharisees took the rule a couple of steps further; to make extra sure that they didn't become unclean they would not allow their shadow to pass over a gravestone. (*Bible Background Commentary* 221). Thus, in calling them unmarked graves, Jesus is saying that they're not just unclean; they're dead, and they're spreading uncleanness to everyone they touch.
- 'you insult us also'—the legal expert is pointing out that, while the Pharisees love following the rules, the legal experts love making those rules up. So, in criticizing the Pharisees, Jesus is indirectly criticizing the teachers and experts as well. It seems like the legal expert thinks that pointing this out might quiet Jesus down, but instead it starts him on a whole new round: 'Don't get me started on you . . .'
- 'it was your ancestors who killed them'—like most of us, the legal experts think of themselves as being good guys. If they had been around during the time of the prophets, they would have listened to them, rather than ignoring them and punishing them like the poor, benighted people of the time did. I do the same thing all the time: I like to think that I wouldn't have supported segregation or stolen land from the natives if I lived a hundred years ago, but the odds are that I actually would have. Jesus is saying that the law experts aren't as different from their ancestors as they like to think they are; in fact, they are about to prove just how similar they are, by killing him.
- 'from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah'—Abel's death at the hand of his jealous brother (Genesis ch. 4) was the first murder in the Jewish Bible, and Zechariah's martyrdom at the hands of an angry mob (2 Chronicles 24:20-22) was the last—the standard order for the books of the Bible was a little different in Jesus' day from today. So, Jesus is saying they have a share in every murder of God's people, from the first to the last. It's just a happy coincidence that in English it works out as going from A to Z.
- 'You yourselves have not entered'—apparently, the experts enjoy teaching the Law of Moses more than doing it. Also, the complexity of their teaching made it more difficult

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for others to follow; so, the net result of all of their attention to the law is that no one was actually performing it.

- 'When Jesus went outside'—I wonder if Jesus left immediately, or if he stayed until dinner was over. I'm imagining a very awkward silence for the rest of the meal.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Ask God to give you good eyes. Pray that you would be able to easily spot and welcome good things God is doing for you. Ask God to help you to see clearly what is good and what is harmful.
- *For your six:* Ask God to give your six good experiences with the Bible. Pray that they would somehow encounter life-giving guidance from the Bible, rather than joyless and oppressive rules.
- *For our city:* Pray for an increase of faith in our city. Ask God to give us the same readiness to hear him and respond to him as Jonah found in Nineveh.

Wednesday, March 21st

Luke 12: 1-21

1 Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 3 What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

4 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. 6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. 7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

8 "I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. 9 But whoever publicly disowns me will be disowned before the angels of God. 10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

11 "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

14 Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

16 And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

18 "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'

20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

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21 "This is how it will be with those who store up things for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Points of Interest:

- 'began to speak first to his disciples'—again, like at the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49), Jesus is addressing his disciples, but he's speaking in front of the entire crowd. Apparently, he wants the whole crowd to know that he expects his disciples to behave differently from what he's seen from the Pharisees.
- 'the yeast of the Pharisees'—a very small amount of yeast affects an entire batch of dough. Sadly, the thing the Pharisees add which affects the entire environment, is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is living by a set of rules different from the one you teach. It's more than just failure to live up to your principles; it's possible to fail sincerely. Hypocrisy takes it a step further: it's purposefully setting up a standard for others you don't expect to keep yourself, or treating your own failure more lightly than the failures of others, or pretending you are living up to standards you are not. Jesus warns his followers to be vigilant about hypocrisy. If they let even a little in, it will affect their entire lives.
- 'What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight'—Jesus has spoken before about the fact that things he is keeping secret will eventually be known, but apparently it's not just Jesus' secrets that will be uncovered. It's in the nature of secrets to come out, and that includes the dirty little secrets of the Pharisees or of the disciples if they succumb to the temptation of hypocrisy. I don't think Jesus is talking about punishment here. I think he's just stating a plain fact: hypocrisy has a tendency to be found out; and when it is, people love to talk about it.
- 'who kill the body and after that can do no more'—this reminds me of what Jesus said yesterday about cleaning the outside but leaving the inside dirty. Just like it's possible to clean the body without affecting the soul, it's also possible to kill the body without affecting the soul. And just like the inside of a cup is more important than the outside, the soul is more important than the body.
- 'you are worth more than many sparrows'—Jesus is saying that while God has the authority to throw people in hell, that doesn't mean that he's hoping he gets the chance. God values life, even the life of a sparrow and all the more the lives of human beings. Fortunately, the one who has the power to do us real damage wants to do us good instead.
- 'anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven'—I think that Jesus is referring back to Monday's passage when the Pharisees accused Jesus of defeating demons with demonic power. Blasphemy is saying that something holy is evil, which is exactly what the Pharisees did: they called the Holy Spirit (by whose power Jesus was casting out demons) the prince of demons. I don't think Jesus is being spiteful by saying that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit leads to unforgiveness; I think that once again he's stating the simply truth of the matter. If someone thinks the Holy Spirit is the devil, they won't welcome the Holy Spirit into their lives. But as John told us in his sermon (Luke 3:15-17) the Savior has come precisely to bring the Holy Spirit to people; it's by being baptized in the Holy Spirit that we are freed from our sins. So, by refusing the Holy Spirit, they are refusing the power to be rescued.
- 'When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities'—it is not just Jesus who will have trouble with the authorities. His followers will follow him into trouble.

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- 'the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say'—another form of daily bread. Jesus doesn't give them the words now; instead, the Holy Spirit will give them the words when they need them.
- 'tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me'—according to the law set up by Moses, the older brother would receive twice as large an inheritance as the rest (Deuteronomy 21: 17). It's unclear whether this man is saying that his brother hasn't giving him his share at all, or he's hoping that Jesus would say that the inheritance should be divided equally. In any case, Jesus is not interested in getting involved.
- 'Be on your guard against all kinds of greed'—it could be tempting for this man to think, 'Once I receive my inheritance, I'll be all set.' But that's a distraction from what matters most: there's a lot more to life than possessions.
- 'I have no place to store my crops'—Jesus exaggerates to the point of ridiculousness. This man is so rich that his big problem is he has nowhere to put all his wealth.
- 'And I'll say to myself'—this man is a bit self-involved. He's actually talking to himself about what he's going to say to himself later.
- 'eat, drink and be merry'—this phrase has become somewhat well-known, as a sort of cheer for partying, but in context it's tragic: it's the last thing the man says before dying. He doesn't actually get the chance to be merry. It's like dying on the eve of retirement; he's been working his whole life toward this moment, but he doesn't get a chance to enjoy it.
'Eat, drink, and be merry,' is probably a reference to the biblical book of Ecclesiastes, in which Solomon comes—at least temporarily—to the cynical conclusion that the most a human being can expect out of life is to eat, drink, and be proud of their work (2:24 and 3:13); the less fortunate still have to work, but they don't get a chance to enjoy it. So, this man is saying, 'I won!' just before he keels over.
- 'Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'—this whole story is an illustration of what Jesus said earlier: 'What good is it for you to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit your very self?' (Luke 9:25).

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Ask God to save you from hypocrisy. Pray for the faith to be honest, sincere, genuine, and fair as you apply the truth to your own life.
- *For your six:* Pray that your six would begin to know how valuable they are to God.
- *For our city:* Pray that God would break the power of greed in our city. Pray that people would not be fooled into thinking that acquiring things is the way to the good life.

Thursday, March 22nd

Luke 12:22-48

22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! 25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? 26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

27 "Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! 29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. 30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and

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your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

35 "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. 37 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. 38 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. 39 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. 40 You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

41 Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?"

42 The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? 43 It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. 44 Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. 46 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

47 "The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. "

Points of Interest:

- 'Therefore I tell you'—this teaching follows directly on yesterday's. Seeing as the amazingly successful businessman from Jesus' story yesterday couldn't guarantee happiness for himself, what should we do? Work as hard as we possibly can, because that's the only way we'll have any chance? Give up, because we have no hope? The lesson Jesus draws from the story is that we shouldn't allow ourselves to get preoccupied with the question of whether or not we will have enough. The best thing we can do is not worry. In this passage, Jesus assembles a very impressive list of good reasons not to worry:
 - Life is more than food'—if all we do is live to work and work to live, we're not really getting anything out of life. Even for those of us who are not actually wondering where our next meal will come from, it's easy to slip into survival mode, when the biggest goal for our week is just getting through it. Jesus is saying, 'What's the point of a life lived that way?' Our sights need to be set higher, or life's not worth living.
 - 'they have no storeroom or barn'—in contrast to the rich fool from the story Jesus told yesterday, the ravens don't save up for the future, but they seem to get along just fine. Worrying isn't necessary.

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- 'Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?'—worrying does no good. We might feel as if, by worrying, we are taking our problems seriously; but actually, we're doing no practical good.
- 'not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these'—this is humbling. Solomon, the most fabulously wealthy man they could imagine, was not quite able to match the splendor of a flower. He'd lose in a beauty contest with grass. Even huge success with maximum effort doesn't get us very far.
- 'your Father knows that you need them'—we have a rich and powerful father who wants to give us good gifts. There's no need for us to worry. Do trust fund kids worry about whether they'll have enough clothes or enough food to eat? Our father will take care of us.
- 'seek his kingdom'—we have more important things to pay attention to than mere survival. It's God's strong rooting interest, not just to take care of our basic needs, but to give us his abundant and joyful kingdom. We can be so confident about this that, not only do we not need to worry, but we can afford to give to others freely.
- 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'—our heart follows our treasure, rather than our treasure following our heart. Someone recently suggested to me a pretty compelling way to interpret this verse: you can tell where your heart is by looking at what you spend your money on. That has the ring of truth to me—and it's very challenging.
- 'like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet'—while the master is out partying, the servants stay at home to make sure that the lights are on and the fire is warm for the master when he returns.
- 'he will dress himself to serve'—this is a strange turn of events. The master wants the servants to stay up and alert not so that they can serve him when he returns, but so that he can serve them. He puts on his butler uniform and throws them a little party. If they don't stay awake, they'll miss out.
- 'at what hour the thief was coming'—a sudden change of metaphor. This image of the thief in the night reminds me of Jesus' analogy from Monday of overcoming the strong man to plunder his house. Jesus changes scene: in one scene, he is the master of the house and we are the servants; in the other, the devil is the owner of the house, and Jesus is the thief. The very same event—Jesus' coming—is looked at very differently, depending on your perspective. For those who are faithfully waiting (like Simeon and Anna from earlier in our story), Jesus' coming is the wonderful return of a generous master bearing gifts. For the greedy and the oppressive, of whom the devil himself is the leader and primary example, it's a catastrophe.
Jesus has yet to explain exactly what he's referring to when he talks of his coming: hasn't he already come? Or is there some future arrival? Is he referring to both simultaneously? In the context of this particular teaching, it seems like one thing we can learn is that God's provision for people who seek his kingdom will come at an unexpected time in unexpected ways. Those who wait well and are on the lookout for it will be amply rewarded. Those who get tired of waiting and try to meet their needs by taking advantage of other people . . . well, it will be a bit awkward for them when God's help arrives.
- 'From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded'—this is the answer to Peter's question. Peter asks, 'Are you talking to us, or to everyone?' and Jesus answers, 'Yes.' This is a truth that applies to everyone, but to differing degrees, depending on how well you know the master and what he expects.

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Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Let's say for a minute that what we spend money on indicates where our heart will be. If that were the case, what would your recent purchases tell you about your heart? Does it feel true that you've invested some of your heart in the things you've recently bought? If so (and it may not be), how do you feel about that? Where would you like your heart to be? How could you use money to help point your heart in that direction?
- *For your six:* Pray that Jesus would free your six from the power of worry.
- *For our city:* Pray that Jesus' coming would be good news to our city. Pray that when he offers gifts to our city, we would be ready and on the lookout to accept those gifts. Pray that we would not miss one opportunity to experience God's excellent service.

Friday, March 23rd

Luke 12:49-13:17

49 "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! 51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. 52 From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

54 He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. 55 And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. 56 Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?"

57 "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? 58 As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way, or your adversary may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. 59 I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'"

8 " 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "

10 On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

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15 The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

Points of Interest:

- 'I have come to bring fire on the earth'— this talk of fire and baptism reminds me of John's preaching about Jesus: 'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Luke 3: 16). Jesus has come to bring the fire of the Holy Spirit to the earth. Introducing fire to a civilization makes all sorts of things possible that were unheard of before: warmth in the cold, light at night, cooked food, and the ability to shape metal, for instance. Jesus is bringing about a similar revolution, by making actual connection with a powerful, living God widely available for the first time in human history. Of course, fire can be dangerous and destructive as well. Invading armies would use fire to burn down conquered cities, for example. In the Bible, God is often associated with fire in both its liberating and its destructive aspects. For instance, when God led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, he took the form of a pillar of fire which went ahead of them through the wilderness to the Promised Land; but God also sent fire from heaven to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness. Like fire, the Holy Spirit is powerful, but not entirely safe. It's dangerous to ignore the Holy Spirit or take him for granted; but, treated with respect, he can bring great benefits to your life.
- 'I have a baptism to undergo'—before Jesus can baptize us with the Holy Spirit, he must experience a baptism. I believe this is an oblique reference to his death: he is going to be immersed in suffering and death.
- 'what constraint I am under'—Jesus has spoken much about bringing freedom to others. We learn here that he is not entirely free himself to do what he would like—set the Holy Spirit loose upon the earth. Somehow, his suffering and death, rather than constraining him, will free him from his current limitations.
- 'Do you think I came to bring peace on earth?'—this is a bit confusing, since angelic choirs did in fact sing at his birth that through him God was bringing 'peace to those on whom his favor rests' (Luke 2:14). And, to take it a step further, when Jesus himself sent his followers out to proclaim his good news, he instructed them to say to their listeners, 'Peace to this house' (Luke 10:5). So, it does indeed seem that Jesus came to bring peace. Nonetheless, as we've seen, Jesus' offer of peace seems to provoke strong reactions: positive ones from those who are being freed and blessed with peace and negative ones from people who refuse peace or resent the way Jesus brings it. As we've also seen, Jesus is not too concerned with smoothing over these differences. He has something of a take-it-or-leave-it attitude about himself and the good news he brings: 'I'm bringing peace, whether you like it or not.' Many people don't.
- 'you don't know how to interpret this present time'—the miracles he has done are just as clear a sign of the coming of God's kingdom as clouds are of rain. If they know to grab an umbrella when they see clouds, how have they missed that they should turn toward God when they see supernatural indicators that he has come close?
- 'try hard to be reconciled on the way'—If you know you will be found guilty in court, you try to plea bargain before your court date. Jesus is recommending that they do the same thing regarding their sins: ask for forgiveness now, before it is too late.

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- ‘when the tower in Siloam fell on them’—these people may have died dramatically and suddenly, but their sensational deaths don’t fundamentally matter. What matters is not how they died, but whether or not they were ready for death. While not everyone’s death makes the news, the sober truth is that we do all, in fact, die; and for us too, the important thing is to be ready for that moment.
- ‘leave it alone for one more year’—it’s not as if the owner of the vineyard doesn’t care about getting fruit from his trees. He’s not lenient; he’s patient. He’s willing to give the tree every chance to bear fruit before cutting it down. Likewise, God is looking for fruit from us, namely loving God and loving our neighbors. If we haven’t yet been punished for our lack of love, it’s not because God doesn’t care; it’s because he’s giving us as much an opportunity as possible to recalibrate and grow in love.
- ‘So come and be healed on those days’—the synagogue leader goes beyond accusing Jesus of working on the Sabbath, and accuses the woman he healed of breaking the Sabbath. It’s hard to see what work she is doing; it doesn’t even seem like she goes as far as asking for healing. All she does is straighten up and praise God. Perhaps the man is afraid to criticize Jesus—who’s been a little sharp with his critics recently—so he bullies the woman instead.
- ‘Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey’—here’s a great example of hypocrisy: they’re willing to make an exception for the sake of the well-being of their livestock, but not for the health of this woman.
- ‘whom Satan has kept bound’—perhaps the synagogue leader is harsh with the woman because he thinks her sickness is some sort of punishment for her sins; she deserves what she’s gotten, and she can wait one more day to be healed. Jesus, however, looks at her not as a perpetrator but as a victim, held prisoner by the devil.
- ‘his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted’—as opposed to the experts of the law, who make the law an impossible burden, Jesus actually makes the path to a good life from God more attainable.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Spend a moment today thanking God for his patience with you. Thank him for the fact that he is rooting for you to succeed. And ask him if there is some particular sign of growth he is looking for from you. Ask for his help in that area.
- *For your six:* Pray that the Holy Spirit, would introduce your six to a life more wonderful than they ever thought possible. Pray that they would experience a genuine connection with a real, active, powerful, and loving God.
- *For our city:* Pray for the people of our city who die today. Ask God to give them peace, and pray that in some way—whether their death is expected or a surprise—they will have the chance to prepare themselves to move on with grace and trust.

Saturday, March 24th

Luke 13:18-34

18 Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches."

20 Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? 21 It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

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22 Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, 24 "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 25 Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'

"But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'

26 "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'

27 "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'

28 "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. 29 People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. 30 Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

31 At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

32 He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' 33 In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

34 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 35 Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Points of Interest:

- 'It is like a mustard seed'—the mustard seed is the smallest seed commonly known to Jesus and his contemporaries, but it grows into quite a large plant. This illustration reminds me of a common description of the kingdom of God: it is both already and not yet. On the one hand, Jesus said in his sermon in Nazareth, 'Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:21), more or less proclaiming that with his coming the kingdom of God had also finally arrived—the kingdom of God is already here. On the other hand, Jesus instructed us in his teaching on prayer (Monday's passage) to pray that the kingdom would come, as if it has not yet arrived. This little parable offers the key to understanding that paradox. We already have the kingdom of God, but only in seed form. Even the seed is pretty good; the seeds of the kingdom Jesus has been spreading bring tremendous amounts of healing, freedom, forgiveness, and abundance to the lives where they are planted. But what we've seen so far is insignificant in comparison to what the kingdom of God will be like when it grows to full-size.
- 'Make every effort to enter through the narrow door'—I get the picture here of Indiana Jones reaching back for his hat as he slides underneath the descending door. The door of salvation is narrow, but in time, not in space. It's not so much that the door to God's kingdom is so tight that only a few really skinny people can squeeze through; it's that eventually the door will be closed and locked, and no one will then be able to get through. Anyone who takes the opportunity while it's there will be able to enter into the kingdom.

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- 'People will come from east and west and north and south'—the fact that even people who partied with Jesus won't be able to make their way in when the door is closed makes the kingdom of God feel very exclusive. But that's not really the case: it will be filled to capacity with people from all over the place, but perhaps not the people Jesus' listeners would expect. People coming from all directions reminds me of the Queen of the South and the Ninevites from Tuesday's passage.
- 'Herod wants to kill you'—it's a little strange that some Pharisees would pass along this warning. It could be that there's a group of Pharisees that's more sympathetic to Jesus. I find myself a little suspicious, though. Last time we heard about Herod, he was trying to get a chance to hear Jesus, not to kill him. Meanwhile, the Pharisees themselves have shown a great deal of animosity toward Jesus. I wonder if they're looking at these rumors of death threats (whether they're accurate or not) as a perfect way to get rid of this nuisance; maybe they hope he'll run off into hiding in the desert.
- 'Go tell that fox'—as far as we know, calling someone a fox in Jesus' culture didn't carry the connotation of cleverness (nor of being good-looking, for that matter). It more or less meant 'untrustworthy,' as in 'there's a fox in the henhouse' (*Bible Background Commentary* 228).
- 'on the third day I will reach my goal'—another oblique reference to his death and resurrection, but he's also just saying: 'I'm going, I'm going.' He's already on his way out of Herod's reach.
- 'surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem'—while the Pharisees are warning him to avoid death by running away from Herod, Jesus is knowingly heading straight for death in Jerusalem: 'If I only make it to Jerusalem, they'll certainly kill me there; they reject all the people God sends to them.'
- 'you were not willing'—Jesus has a maternal instinct toward the people of Jerusalem. He desperately wants to care for them, even despite the fact that Jerusalem has rejected so many of God's messengers. It's not animosity on Jesus' part but rejection on Jerusalem's part that keeps him from being able to show them the love he wants to.
- 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'—Jesus is quoting Psalm 118, which is a song of thanksgiving for God's rescue of his people. Jesus seems to be saying that, despite the fact that they are currently unwilling to receive his care and that they will in fact kill him, there will indeed come a time when they will welcome him and accept his help.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Has God placed any opportunities in front of you recently? That opportunity won't be there forever; at some point the door will close. What do you need from God to walk through that door?
- *For your six:* Pray for whatever seeds of God's kingdom there are in the lives of your six. Pray that those seeds would keep growing until they've brought an unimaginable amount of joy, peace, and abundance into their lives.
- *For our city:* Pray that people would come to God in great numbers from unexpected directions.

Sunday, March 25th

Luke 14

1 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2 There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. 3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal

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on the Sabbath or not?" 4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.

5 Then he asked them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?" 6 And they had nothing to say.

7 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8 "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. 11 For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

12 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

15 When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed are those who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

16 Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.

17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

18 "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'

19 "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

20 "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

21 "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

22 " 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'

23 "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. 24 I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.' "

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even life itself—such a person cannot be my disciple. 27 And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? 29 For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, 30 saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

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34 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

Points of Interest:

- 'went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee'—just as he commanded the seventy-two to do when he sent them out, Jesus accepts the hospitality that is offered to him, even though it's being offered by someone who has been working against him.
- 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?'—Jesus knows what they think: they've told him more than once that they don't think it's lawful to heal on the Sabbath. But by asking them the question, he takes the initiative. He puts the Pharisees in the awkward position of having to say aloud, in front of the man, before he is healed, that they don't think he should be healed. That would be a public relations disaster, but they also can't bear to say that it is, in fact, lawful; so they're silent.
- 'will you not immediately pull it out'—Jesus is saying, 'I just figured you'd think it was a great idea to help this person on the Sabbath, since you helped your ox out of trouble last Sabbath.' If they, strict as they are about the Sabbath, wouldn't leave their child—or even their ox—in a well for an extra day, then why should God leave his children in the clutches of Satan, or disease, or sin one day longer than necessary? Jesus continues to reinforce the fact that the Sabbath is not a day to do nothing, but rather a day for God's kingdom, which involves healing and rescuing people.
- 'noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table'—apparently, there's something of an undignified scramble for the best seats. Similar to so many other instances already in our study, Jesus doesn't criticize their desire for honor, but their methods of obtaining it. First of all, it's not really honor if you seize it, rather than having it given to you. Secondly, by trying to seize honor for yourself, you leave open the strong possibility of receiving humiliation instead, if your own sense of your honor is higher than your host's.
- 'invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed'—the very best way to get honor is to honor other people, particularly those who can't return the favor. Then, God himself will honor you: 'Give, and it will be given to you' (Luke 6:38).
- 'Blessed are those who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God'—I think this man is trying to change the subject by saying, 'Why are we even bothering with something a party here on earth anyway? Isn't the really important thing that we're all going to be partying together in heaven?'
- 'they all alike began to make excuses'—it isn't that these people haven't been invited to the party. In fact, they've even accepted the invitation. But, when the time for the party actually comes, they decide there are other things they'd rather be doing.
- 'does not hate father and mother'—this is very strong language, to make his point very clear: even family expectations aren't an acceptable reason to say, 'Maybe later,' to Jesus' invitation. None of the people who refuse to attend the banquet are doing something downright evil instead; the only problem with these other pursuits is that they take priority over the party. Family is a good thing, but family can also make demands that come into conflict with Jesus' invitation. In those cases, you can't please both.

I don't think Jesus is calling for cruelty to or neglect of family here. Following Jesus should actually be a good thing for your family; for example, one of the first things Jesus did after Peter started following him was heal Peter's mother-in-law.

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Nonetheless, Jesus is firm on the fact that he expects following him to be the context for loving your family, rather than pleasing your family being the context in which you follow him.

- ‘those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples’—following Jesus is a life-altering decision. It makes life better, but it has a definite affect on your entire life. Following Jesus can’t just be a side project or something you get to when you have the time.
- ‘if it loses its saltiness’—salt has a distinctive flavor, and that’s what makes it useful. Likewise, following Jesus should make an actual difference in your life. Otherwise, what’s the point?

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* Would you like to be more respected or honored? Don’t be afraid to be honest; Jesus doesn’t seem to think there’s anything wrong with wanting honor. According to him, the best way to get it is to find someone more unnoticed than you and honor them. Who could you show some honor to today?
- *For your six:* In this passage, we get the picture that God is throwing a huge party. He’s inviting everyone he can. All he wants is for that party to be full. Pray that your six would hear of God’s invitation, say yes, and step into the party he has for them.
- *For our city:* Pray that we would be good salt, bringing some of the distinctive—and pleasant—flavor of the kingdom of God into our city. Ask God to give us as a church wisdom about whether or not starting a separate community service organization is the right way to go about being God’s salt in our city.