

Study Four

On the Way to Jerusalem II

Study Five



Luke 12.13-14.35

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Study Three

12. How does the urgency of Jesus' call translate into the detail of our modern life?

Prayer Points

Study One

Study One

Luke 12.13-34

First Things First

The Parable of The Rich Fool—Luke 12.13-21

Remember, the announcement of the kingdom from Jesus' lips commands absolute urgency. This urgency is such that it not only shapes the lives of those who hear for judgment or salvation, but it also shaped the self-understanding of Jesus' own mission.

In the parable of "The Rich Fool", the situation that brings about Jesus' telling the parable Jesus' rejects a role that is being foisted upon him questioner.

1. What is the situation that brings about the telling of the parable?

2. What role does Jesus reject in v14?

Read Exodus 2.11-14.

3. How does this shed light on the role that Jesus is rejecting?

4. What role did God eventually give to Moses?

5. How different was that role to the one he was carving out for himself in Egypt in Ex 2.14?

Jesus' words to the man seem to be overly harsh, "Watch out, be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

6. How is this response bound up with Jesus' self-perceived role, his understanding of what he has come to do, and the response that needs to be made to that?

7. List five types of greed.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

8. In the space below, write down the types of greed other people in your group had that you didn't.

9. What is the essential quality of all greed?

10. In the space below, rewrite the parable in a modern-day context.

Read vv28-30

Herod the Great was a great builder—some have accused him of an edifice complex. Part of his building project was to build towers along the walls of Jerusalem. These towers were built for more than just protection, they were built for glory and beauty. A half-finished tower would bring shame upon the builder.

Read vv31-32

Herod the Great had been made king by Marc Antony and was his loyal ally. When Marc Antony and Cleopatra were defeated at the battle of Actium by Octavian, who became Caesar Augustus, Herod went to meet with Octavian because he realised he was unable to win against the power of Rome, and so sought peace.

"I am defeated with Antony, and with his fall, I lay aside my crown. I have come to you, placing my hope of safety in my unblemished character, and believing that you will wish to know not whose friend, but what sort of friend I have been." (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, book 1, p79, Penguin Classics)

8. How does what Jesus says in v33 make sense of these two mini parables?

Read v34-35

Salt, in the Ancient Near East, was not the salt that we have. It was often full of impurities, and especially salt from the Dead Sea, contained a great deal of other elements that could mean that, while it looked like salt, it didn't taste like it.

9. How can the followers of Jesus preserve their saltiness?

10. What is the danger of losing saltiness?

11. In a paragraph, summarise the main thrust of this passage.

3. What seven things must a disciple of Jesus hate?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

4. What is surprising about the last item Jesus mentions, and how does it put the others in context?

5. Is Jesus really calling us to hate people?

6. If not, what is he saying?

In the first century, if someone carried a cross it meant they were as good as dead—they had already been condemned and it was only a matter of time. When people are about to die they find that imminent death gives them a new perspective on what's important.

7. What is Jesus saying about what is important in v27?

11. Would the person be considered by the world as wise or foolish?

12. What did the man think his riches provided him with?

13. What did the man leave out of his calculations?

14. How does v21 describe what is essentially wrong with greed?

15. Was the farmer wrong in having a good crop? How could he have avoided the sin of greed?

Do Not Worry—Luke 12.22-35

Jesus' instructions about not worrying need to be read in the light of the coming crisis of his death and resurrection. This doesn't mean that it has no relevance to us, but rather that we need to be guarded in how we apply it. Jesus is encouraging the disciples to be like the rich fool, who didn't need to worry about what he would eat or what he would wear, but for a different reason.

16. What was that reason?

17. What examples did Jesus give of God's care for his creation?

18. Instead of setting their hearts on food and clothing, what did the disciples need to focus on?

19. How is vv32-34 like v21 in the parable of the rich fool?

20. If the man who came to Jesus asking for him to be arbiter and judge between him and his brother understood something of what the kingdom of God was about, what might he do with his brother and the property?

21. What real and practical actions can you take to demonstrate that you believe that your life is more than material possessions?

Study Five

Luke 14.25-35

The Cost Of Discipleship

Popularity is dangerous because often it is so fickle. Jesus understood this. The section of this bible study opens with large crowds following Jesus. There must have been a whole bunch of reasons for which people were following Jesus—both good and bad.

1. Write down five reasons.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

2. Note down those other people in your group had that you didn't.

Jesus is laying before those who are following him for popular reasons the unpopular realities of being someone who follows him. The radical nature of Jesus' demands fits the radical nature of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is calling Israel back to a true relationship with her God. In doing this, blessing would spill over to the whole earth. Jesus is calling his disciples to be realistic about the cost that's involved.

When Cortez reached the New World, he burnt the boats. They were out to conquer a new empire and people needed to be single-minded. They needed to say goodbye to the past, to home and family, and to set their face to the task that lay ahead. Jesus is doing exactly the same thing here, but for a better reason—not for a kingdom of gold, but for the kingdom of God.

15. How does this parable fit the whole idea of an upside-down kingdom, and the principle that the first shall be last and the last shall be first?

16. How does the parable fit the pattern that Jesus announces in Luke's second volume, Acts 1.8— "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth"?

17. How can you humble yourself?

18. How does this fit the pattern of following Jesus in Philippians 2.6-11?

Study Two

Luke 12.35-59

It's All In The Timing

There are a number of similarities between the situation of Jeremiah and his ministry and the situation and ministry of Jesus. Israel was experiencing a time when a foreign power, Babylon, was in control of the country. In Jeremiah's context, this was a punishment due to the unfaithfulness of God's people. The Jews of Jeremiah's time thought that nothing could touch them because the temple was in Jerusalem, despite how they behaved towards God. In the end, Jerusalem was destroyed because she would not receive the call to repent with her heart and accept the punishment of Babylonian occupation.

Jesus is only a little way away from Jerusalem, and the message he will bring is very similar to that of Jeremiah. In fact, his whole ministry has been about calling God's people back to heart faithfulness. With his appearance in Jerusalem, the crisis of decision will reach its climax. Given the previous history, the signs are not there that Jerusalem will be ready for the return of God to his temple in the person of the Son of Man.

Read Malachi 3.1

1. How is this a description of Jesus' ministry?

The First Parable—Luke 12.35-40

I suspect that this has less to do with the second coming of Jesus than we are at first likely to suspect. It's not that it doesn't have any relevance. Certainly the whole idea of coming as a thief in the night is picked up by Paul as a way of describing Jesus' second coming (1 Thess 5.2). I think the coming of Jesus to Jerusalem, to his own people, becomes the paradigm of Jesus in the future coming as judge to the whole world. At this stage, what is primarily in view, is Jesus' coming to Jerusalem and the need for the disciples, and in fact everyone (v41), takes on extra significance.

Jesus is about to appear at the capital of God's people and how will he, as God's representative, be received? Will they be ready, with their lamps burning, to receive him? Or will they be caught unawares?

Read Luke 13.31-35 & 19.41-44

There was to be a second chance when the Son of Man appeared at the resurrection. There was an extended time through the ministry of the apostles when he could be received. But disaster did eventually fall upon Jerusalem. She failed to heed the message of judgment and warning, and rejected the Romans as an expression of God's judgment to patiently endure and rather rebelled.

2. How could the leaders of Jerusalem have shown they were ready for the coming of the Son of Man?

The Second Parable—Luke 12.32-48

3. Who are the managers that God has put in charge of Israel at this time?

4. Have these managers managed well or abused their privileges?

5. What is Jesus saying will happen?

Read Luke 20.45-21.4 as an indication of how this was working out in the time of Jesus.

Not Peace but Division—Luke 12.49-53

Read Micah 7.1-7

6. How does the whole passage give an indication that the future Jesus is envisaging, when this comes about, is the immediate future of his appearance at Jerusalem?

7. How is Micah 7.7 a reiteration of the call for watchfulness to the disciples?

11. How does Jesus' ministry fit in to the parable?

12. In the Near East there are two invitations: the first one to get ready, the second to say "Come!". The guests on the A-list had already said, "Yes", so what is the basis of their inability?

13. Jesus is announcing that the kingdom of God has come and people need to repent and believe. Does this sound like the first invitation or the second?

14. Who is rejecting the invitation to the kingdom of God in Jesus' ministry, and who is accepting it?

5. What is appropriate about Jesus healing on the Sabbath? (See Leviticus 25.8-55)

6. From the reading of the Leviticus passage regarding the Year of Jubilee—the Sabbath of Sabbaths—who were the people who benefited most from the Jubilee: the rich and powerful or the poor and weak?

7. Where do you think the Pharisees and the teachers of the law put Jesus on the pecking order of holiness?

8. In v7, what does Jesus notice?

The parable that Jesus tells in vv8-11 is not just good and wise advice about what to do at dinner parties. It is dealing with how people value themselves and each other.

9. What is the parable saying about the basis upon which the Pharisees and the teachers of the law are making their judgments?

Read vv12-14

10. What would a Pharisee's basic attitude be to the people identified in v13?

Read vv15-24

At Jesus' mention of the resurrection of the righteous in v14, one of the guests utters a blessing upon the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. This is code, again, for "who's in—who's out". Only the people on the inside, ones like the Pharisees, will be in. Jesus then tells the parable of the banquet and turns the world on its head again. Those who are on the A-list refuse to be part of the banquet so the "certain man" invites the D-list to take their place.

Micah 7.1-7

What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave.

²The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains. All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net.

³Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire—they all conspire together.

⁴The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen has come, the day God visits you. Now is the time of their confusion.

⁵Do not trust a neighbour; put no confidence in a friend. Even with her who lies in your embrace be careful of your words.

⁶For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies are the members of his own household.

⁶But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear

me.

8. What is it about Jesus' ministry that will be contentious so that families divide one against the other?

9. Beside the Micah text, put references to passages in the rest of Luke where there are connections between this passage of Micah and the story of Jesus' immediate ministry. For example, Luke 13.6-9 would fit in with v1.

Interpreting the Times—Luke 12.54-59

10. Jesus' appearance and ministry is an indicator of what is about to happen. What is the only appropriate response that Israel could make?

11. How can we be prepared for when Jesus appears, and what would this passage encourage us to do?

12. How, in particular, does this apply to the leaders of God's people?

Study Four

Luke 14.1-24

A Tale Of Two Dinners

In the ancient world, particularly in the ancient Roman world, everything was determined by rank and status. Rank was determined by birth—Emperor, senator, knight, freed man, or slave. With each rank came a particular set of privileges and/or responsibilities. Along with rank came status, but status was often determined by money and connections. Somebody could be of an old senatorial family and yet be rather poor, whilst a slave could possibly be incredibly rich but have no status.

In the Roman world of the first century, you could work out to the nth degree who was above you, who was below you, and where you fitted within the social order.

There is no doubt that this also played a part in the culture of Jesus' own time, but was complicated by a third criterion: spiritual status. Israel was divided into competing spiritual groups. For some, like the Pharisees, the qualifications were all about purity and obedience to the Law. The Sadducees, or high priestly families, were defined by access to power; and the Essenes, by rejection of the temple,

After you had identified these three groups, there still remained the vast majority of Jews. Defined by the Pharisees as "sinners". These were the great unwashed—those who were not able or willing to be fastidious in the same way in regards to Law-keeping. These were not those who were more easily identified as sinners, such as prostitutes and tax-collectors. They were just the ordinary citizen of Israel.

It is this "who's in—who's out" attitude that forms the background of this tale of two dinners, for status, rank and spiritual standing reached its most delicate 'outworkings' at banquets. Jesus' teaching at this point was scandalous culturally, but, more importantly, was a pointer to what God was doing in his ministry.

1. Why do you think Jesus was being carefully watched?

2. Why did Jesus ask the Pharisees and the experts in the law if it was lawful to heal in the Sabbath?

3. Why do you think the Pharisees and experts in the law remained silent?

4. What does Jesus' question in v5 reveal about their attitude?

19. What echoes in v35 are there of Luke 11.24-26?

Repentance is often something that we find repellent. Admitting that we're wrong is often something to which we need to be dragged kicking and screaming. Repentance—heart-felt repentance—is the prerequisite to being gathered to God.

Give some thought this week to how you might joyfully repent...

Study Three

Luke 12.54-13.35

What's The Time, Mr Wolf?

Timing isn't only important when it comes to good humour—it's also important if we are going to live well. Not being aware of the urgency of a situation will always bring with it disastrous consequences. I remember speaking to a man who was potentially on his death bed about the need to get right with God. For me, I felt that this was a fairly momentous conversation. What surprised me was how indifferent he was. He had no sense of timing.

Jesus' words in the last part of Luke 12 and Luke 13 are all about the crisis of decision that has come upon Israel.

1. In vv57-59, what does Jesus say this present time in Israel's story is most appropriate for? What is the urgent need?

Repent or Perish—Luke 13.1-9

Read Luke 13.1-5. There was a terrible event that some people thought called for a comment from Jesus. Pilate, the Roman governor, had killed some Galileans whilst they were making sacrifices. The question of whether the Galileans were worse sinners is, to some extent, an attempt at deflecting the urgency of Jesus' ministry. It also carries with it a none too subtle criticism of Jesus, for he too is a Galilean, and those in Jerusalem and Judea thought that they were superior to their country cousins.

2. How does Jesus turn the table on the questioners and focus attention on Jerusalem and their response to his coming ministry?

Read Luke 13.6-9. The leadership of Israel is represented by the unfruitful fig tree.

3. What is this saying about God's expectations of Israel, and what indicators are there that the 'looking for fruit' is the ministry of Jesus?

4. What is ironic about the pronouncement that if Israel does not produce fruit it will be cut down, given what happens to Jesus in Jerusalem?

A Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath—Luke 13.10-17

5. How does this story continue the theme of timing?

6. Could Jesus have healed the woman on some other day?

7. Was there something appropriate about healing the woman on a Sabbath day?

8. How was the synagogue ruler a hypocrite, according to Jesus?

9. How is the logic of the synagogue ruler the opposite to God's attitude expressed in Luke 12.24?

10. What was the response of the people who saw Jesus dealing with his opponents in this way?

11. Is there a connection between the fig tree being fertilised and Jesus putting crap on his opponents?

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast—Luke 13.18-21

Jesus gives two short parables that are really more like sayings. They describe the kingdom of God in surprising ways. This fits in with the idea of the thief in the night—the kingdom coming in a way people don't expect.

12. In the first parable, what is the surprising feature of kingdom?

In the second parable, it might not be so obvious what is surprising, but yeast in the bible often has a negative connotation.

13. How might this be related to the negative attitude to Jesus expressed by the synagogue ruler?

The Narrow Door—Luke 13.22-30

14. How might the question, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" be related to the two previous parables?

15. How does v29 answer that question?

16. What action is Jesus telling his listeners to make?

Jesus' Sorrow For Jerusalem—Luke 13.31-35

This section is also about timing and Jesus' sense that, as he nears Jerusalem, the opposition represented by Herod and others will reach its climax.

17. Why does Jesus think he will die in Jerusalem?

18. What is Jesus' ministry of calling people to repentance intended to produce?