

STUDY GUIDE 2021

God's Kingdom

LUKE 17-24

God's Kingdom in the Gospel of Luke

st bart's
TRAINING CENTRE

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GOD'S KINGDOM

Luke 17-Acts 1

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INTRODUCTION

Once, on being 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, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." Luke 17:2-21

The coming of the Kingdom of God is glorious good news! In chapter 17 of Luke, as Jesus turns towards Jerusalem with a trajectory of the cross, he's asked when will the long-awaited reign of God - the Kingdom of God - arrive? How will they possibly know? How can they make sure they don't miss it?! Yet ironically, as they ask the question, they fail to see that not only is God's King standing right before them, but Jesus has been demonstrating God's Kingdom everywhere he goes. In Jesus, God's Kingdom has burst into the world, is proven victorious through the cross, and will reach its culmination when Jesus returns to reign forever.

The Gospel of Luke recounts the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection with a clear goal in mind: that the Good News would go to the ends of the earth. That's demonstrated first in Luke's Gospel, with the Good News going out from Galilee to Jerusalem, and then second in Acts (part II of Luke's writing) as we witness the same Good News going out from Jerusalem to Rome.

In our study from Luke 17, the outward movement of the Gospel is evident as Jesus approaches Jerusalem - the city which sits at the very heart of the life and faith of the Jewish people. It will also be the place in which God's long-awaited King will make a way for all to be saved through his death and resurrection.

In the lead up to Easter, we're exploring the nature of God's Kingdom, the King at the centre of it, how we can be part of it, and the role that we have to play as we await his return.

How to Use this Study Guide

This study guide is intended to be used every day from February 17 right up to Easter Day (April 4). As you read through Luke 18 - Acts 1, it will take you from Jesus' approach to Jerusalem, through his conflict with the religious leaders, and finally, to his arrest, trial, death, and resurrection. This time leading up to Easter, traditionally known as "Lent", is a period of repentance to help us more meaningfully to celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection. This guide is designed to help us make those preparations more intentionally.

The guide can be used as part of your daily rhythm in this way:

- **Monday to Saturday:** Each day there is a Bible reading (usually from Luke) along with a brief reflection and some questions to ponder. A short prayer is provided to help guide you to prayerfully offer up everything that you've been studying that day. If you have any other questions that you would love to ask the author of the daily reflection, then we would love to hear from you. You can identify the author for the day by the initials at the end of each daily reflection as either AL (Adam Lowe adam@stbarts.com.au), MC (Michael Calder michael@stbarts.com.au), or DR (Daniel Rouhead daniel@stbarts.com.au).
- **Sundays:** Each Sunday you are encouraged to connect with your local church and reflect upon a key point from the studies that week *especially in light of what it means to be follower of the crucified, risen, and returning Lord Jesus*. We've provided a few reflection points for your consideration. The corresponding sermon will also be made available on our website (stbarts.com.au/sermons).
- **LEGO Family Devotional Guide:** St Bart's Kids have produced a separate LEGO Devotional Guide (it is amazing!) that covers the entire series. Each week has a LEGO build connected to the Bible reading in focus, along with an appropriate prayer. If you would like any assistance with these, please contact Bettrys Lowe (bettrys@stbarts.com.au). You can download the LEGO Devotional Guide here: <https://bit.ly/3jQHtEM>

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Additional Resources

If you would like to access other helpful resources relating to this series and guide, please visit: www.stbarts.com.au/godskingdom

WEEK 1: KINGDOM ENTRY

LUKE 18:1-17

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17 (DAY 1)

READ Luke 18:1-8

Reflection

Having just responded to a question about the *coming of the Kingdom of God*, Jesus not only told the Pharisees that the King has arrived, but he warned the disciples that he must be rejected before he returns to judge. Before the Kingdom comes in full when Jesus returns, there awaits a time of suffering for him and challenge for the disciples. No doubt with that in mind, Jesus now teaches the disciples through two parables about the desired shape of their prayer life (we'll look at the second parable tomorrow).

In the first parable of *the persistent widow*, Jesus tells the disciples to be persistent in their prayer, especially in their cries for justice. God welcomes our pleas! How amazing that our God is not disinterested in our lives or the concerns of our world, but invites us to cry out to him! But of course, crying out to God is not merely an existential exercise to bring momentary relief, but a faithful expression of our trust in the Lord as the one who will bring ultimate justice. That of course, is the point of the unjust judge. The judge in the parable is truly atrocious and nothing like that expected by God of human judges. This judge executes his duty not with a sense of responsibility to reflect God's justice but is only motivated by his own comfort. The unjust judge responds to the persistent widow not out of a sincere desire for justice, but only so that she would stop annoying him! How amazing that our God is nothing like that. Crying out to God neither builds spiritual muscle nor strong-arms God, but reflects our earnest trust that God will indeed bring complete justice. The evidence for that is seen on the cross as justice and mercy come flooding together in Jesus' death. As we pray, we should pour out our hearts to God, confident that he will be just, but also being patient in his timing. AL

Questions

1. What is on your heart to cry out to God for his justice?
2. How can the way you pray demonstrate trust in God's timing and that he will indeed bring about true justice?

Prayer

Gracious Father, thank you that you are both just and merciful. Please help us consistently run to you and express our trust in you. Please help us to be patient in prayer and sincere in our cries. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18 (DAY 2)

READ Luke 18:9-14

Reflection

In this second parable on prayer, Jesus teaches the disciples how they can approach God with confidence. The key question in mind is: on what basis do you come to the King? Through your own merit like that of the Pharisee? Or seeking mercy like that of the tax collector?

Note that with a distorted view of his own goodness, the Pharisee comes before God because he thinks he's earned it. Not only is this a deluded view of self, *for no one can be proved good enough by their own efforts*, but it also distorts his view of others, looking down on them and thinking that he is better.

Approaching God on the basis of our own merit is a futile endeavour, leading to an endless treadmill of performance and a life of constantly comparing ourselves to others. This is not the way to live and in a surprising turn of events, it's the tax collector who shows us the right way to come to God.

Tax collectors were despised in Jesus' day, they had a reputation for being cheats and traitors, so it's clear that they have little basis on their own to come before God. Aware that he is a sinner, the tax collector comes before God, not because of his merit, but seeking God's mercy. The tax collector - with a right view of his self before God - is the one who is sent away justified! This is amazing news! We can approach God with confidence, not because of how good we are, or how we look in comparison to others, but by trusting in God's goodness and mercy through Jesus. It's because Jesus has died for our sins that we can be confident when we humbly cry out for mercy to God, in sorrow for our sin, then it is forgiveness that we will receive. AL

Questions

1. On what basis can we approach God with confidence?
2. Are you ever tempted to compare yourself to others? How does this parable challenge us to abandon fruitless comparisons?
3. What do you think it looks like to humbly come before God each day?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that we can approach you confidently to seek your mercy. Please expose any self-righteousness in us. Please help us to humbly acknowledge our sin and confidently trust in your Son. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19 (DAY 3)

READ Psalm 51:1-19

Reflection

In the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (the 'BCP'), verses of Psalm 51 appear at the very opening of daily morning prayer. Whenever I read them, they're often a stark and sober reminder of the depth of my sin and my desperate need for God. The Psalm - when you read it in its fullness - provides such a helpful pattern as it begins with a cry for God's mercy in relation to his unfailing love and great compassion. It continues, not seeking that God would ignore our wrong, but that he would 'blot out' our transgressions and 'wash' away our sin!

The Psalmist (David) is brutally honest, acknowledging the reality of his sin (having committed adultery with Bathsheba) and also that his sin is against God himself. David knows that God desires him to be faithful. David knows that what he has done is wrong. David knows that God is judge. David knows that his sin is not just one isolated incident, but also a much deeper problem. Yet David runs to God, desiring that God would wash him clean, cleansing him with hyssop, like a filthy garment that is made white. What is the extent to which David desires to be made clean? That God (verse 10), would create a pure heart in him, renew a steadfast (faithful) spirit within him, and that David would continue to know God's presence! What an ask! But phenomenally because of Jesus, that's precisely what has been made possible.

Whilst there is no doubt that what David did was wrong, we should all be confronted by the reality that we too fall short of what God desires of us. The question is not if we have sinned, but whether we are willing to recognise it and go to the only one who can offer forgiveness. For when we go, we find not one who is without compassion or love, not one who is willing to turn a blind eye, but the one whose love is so great that he would even go to the cross to make our forgiveness possible. AL

Questions

1. Is there anything that you need to take to God in confession today?
2. What are the ways in which you desire for God to remake your heart?

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, thank you that we can run to you in confession and be assured of forgiveness through Christ. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20 (DAY 4)

READ Luke 18:15-17

Reflection

As Jesus continues to teach how we can approach God and his Kingdom, things take some surprising turns! Jesus has already announced that the King has come, that we can approach God through his mercy, and now, that what God requires of us is to trust in him like a child.

It's important to note that in the Greco-Roman world, there was a general disregard for children, abortion was legal, and infanticide was a commonly accepted practice. Children were seen of little utility and therefore of little worth. Thus when the children approach Jesus, many could have viewed this as a waste of his time. But not Jesus! When the disciples rebuke the children for coming to Jesus, it's the disciples who end up being rebuked for daring to keep the children away! Not only does Jesus welcome the children, but he tells the disciples that they could learn something from the kids: that they should come to God in the same way that children are utterly dependent on their parents. Does that mean we are to come to God in some sort of naive way? Certainly not. But it does mean that recognising the gap between us and God is even greater than that between child and parent, that we need to express an utter dependence on Jesus in our relative powerlessness.

We come to God not by anything that we do, but solely, completely, on what Jesus has done for us. Just like little children, God is calling us - in the recognition of our sin and that there is nothing that we can do to earn forgiveness - to put our trust in him alone. Without depending on Jesus, we have no place in his Kingdom. AL

Questions

1. How are you dependent on Jesus in your life?
2. What do you think it looks like to receive the Kingdom of God like a child?
3. What are the ways in which you are tempted to be self-reliant?

Prayer

Gracious God, please help us to be utterly dependent on you. May we come to you in great humility, trusting in your goodness and mercy. May we grow in our trust and may that be evident in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

WEEK 2: KINGDOM BARRIERS

LUKE 18:18-30

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22 (DAY 5)

READ Luke 18:18-19

Reflection

This week we focus on the encounter between Jesus and the rich young ruler. We know very little about this man. The title of 'ruler' indicated that he held a position of importance – he may have been the ruler of a synagogue, a magistrate or a member of the Sanhedrin. He was very wealthy and, from the parallel account in Matthew, we know he was young.

He called Jesus, "good teacher". This was, in fact, a very unusual way to address a rabbi because it implied being without sin and complete goodness. God alone was called good. It is difficult to know if this title was said with respect or a condescending tone – did he know who Jesus really was?

He asked a very important question. He wanted to know what he must do to inherit eternal life; in other words, what he must do to enter the Kingdom of God. This question demonstrated that this man, like all people by nature, had an orientation towards earning eternal life. He wanted to know what good work or noble deed he should do to inherit eternal life.

Jesus replies with another question. The ruler asked about doing good deeds, but he didn't really know about goodness. Jesus did not deny that he is good, but points to God's goodness. Spurgeon argued that the argument was clear: "either Jesus was good, or the young ruler should not have called him good; but, as there is none good but God, Jesus who is good must be God." Is the rich young ruler really prepared to receive the answer from Jesus? DR

Questions

1. Why is it so tempting to think we can earn our way into heaven?
2. Do you think this young man knows who Jesus is?
3. Do you believe that Jesus is good? How can you be sure?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that Jesus is good and speaks the words of eternal life. When we are tempted to try to earn our way into the Kingdom of God, help us to place our trust in the one from whom all goodness flows. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23 (DAY 6)

READ Luke 18:20-21

Reflection

Jesus continued by reminding the young ruler of the commandments. In particular, Jesus pointed out the commandments which concern how people should relate with others – how we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. Respect for relationships, respect for life, respect for property, respect for the truth and respect for our parents are important values – but do they really lead to eternal life?

It is telling that Jesus doesn't mention the first four commandments, those concerning humanity's relationship with God; in particular, the commandment to have no other god (no idols) before Yahweh, the God of Israel. Jesus doesn't challenge his relationship with God just yet.

The man appeared confident in his reply. He declared that he had kept all these commandments since he was a child. It is hard to believe that this is completely true. No matter how good we think we are, we all slip up, whether it be in thought, word or deed.

His answer also indicated that he didn't understand the purpose of the law. The law was given not to save the Israelites by revealing the Kingdom's standard of behaviour, but rather to expose their sin and their need for God's salvation. Just as it is tempting to earn our way into the Kingdom, we can also be tempted to believe in and rely on ourselves, our goodness and our strength. DR

Questions

1. Why does Jesus only mention five of the Ten Commandments?
2. Do you think the young ruler is telling the truth?
3. Would the young ruler inherit eternal life if he had kept these commandments?

Prayer

Gracious Lord, we thank you that you gave the Law to the Israelites to point them to you, the only one who saves. Help us to be honest about our sin so that we don't rely on our own goodness but rely completely on your grace and mercy. In Christ's name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24 (DAY 7)

READ Luke 18:22-23

Reflection

Jesus now spoke directly to the rich young ruler. The young man had revealed what he thought about Jesus, what he thought about himself and what he thought about goodness. He doesn't understand who Jesus is, he's not completely honest about himself, and he doesn't fully comprehend what goodness is. Jesus was forced to answer his original question rather bluntly.

Jesus pointed out that, while the young man thinks he is good, there is something lacking and he has something which is the cause of that. Jesus told him that he must sell everything that he has and give those proceeds to the poor. Only then, would he have "treasure in heaven". Only then, would he inherit the eternal life that he so greatly desires.

It is important to note that this instruction is given in a singular form. This instruction is for this man only. His wealth and possessions have formed a barrier between him and God. His wealth had become an idol which was more important to him than God. We know that because, in the end, he chose his wealth over his relationship with God. He departs Jesus deeply saddened because he was so wealthy.

This is not a general instruction to all Christians – we don't have to sell everything we have when we become a Christian. The principle, though, applies to all Christians. When we place idols before God, be it wealth, career, prestige or career, this draws us away from God and his Kingdom. DR

Questions

1. What does the rich young ruler lack? What is the cause of this?
2. Why can wealth be such a powerful barrier between us and God?
3. What are the things which can be a barrier between you and God?

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you that you continually seek us out and draw us closer to you. Help us to identify when we choose or allow other things in our life to come before you. By your Holy Spirit, help us to set them aside and put your first. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25 (DAY 8)

READ Ecclesiastes 2:9-11

Reflection

Today, we turn to Ecclesiastes for another perspective on building a life on money, possessions and personal power – and how that can separate people from God. Ecclesiastes shows us the futility and foolishness of a life lived without an eternal perspective – a life lived outside God's kingdom.

Solomon's greatness was undisputed and unrivalled – even his wisdom never left him. It might seem from these verses that he lived a life devoted only to the pursuit of pleasure, but he was intelligent after all. He looked for legitimate pleasures in life such as the satisfaction one derives from the accomplishments of hard work. But, when he looked objectively at all he had achieved, he concluded that it was all meaningless – it was meaningless because it didn't last. There was no enduring, eternal sense of meaning to life lived for these earthly pleasures and accomplishments.

The pursuit of knowledge, pleasure and wealth fails in two ways. Firstly, these things draw people away from God as they become the focus of their time and energy and the source of their meaning and significance. Secondly, they fail to truly satisfy because they are temporary and never truly satisfy our deepest needs. Apart from God, there is a sense of dissatisfaction and almost uselessness irrespective of how successful a person may be.

We could easily substitute the young man in our story. He devoted himself to his work and to the accumulation of wealth and prestige. When he is asked to examine his achievements and his relationship with God, what will be more important? DR

Questions

1. What does your heart take delight in?
2. Why is it so tempting to find satisfaction and meaning through our work?
3. How do you bring true and last meaning to your work?

Prayer

Almighty God, help us to be good stewards of all that you give us. Help us to avoid the distractions of wealth and possessions, and help us to understand that they do not satisfy nor sustain us. Help us to seek you and your will for us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26 (DAY 9)

READ Luke 18:24-27

Reflection

As Jesus watched the man walk away, he didn't change the demands of discipleship. He did use the man's sorrow as an occasion to teach his disciples and all who would hear. Jesus explained how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God – wealth was, and remains, a barrier to entering the Kingdom of God. Jesus does not want all wealthy people to give up their wealth, but the lesson about the danger of money becoming an idol applies to us today. We might try to excuse ourselves from what Jesus said here because we don't consider ourselves rich. If we are honest, many of us are richer than this young ruler. The instruction might not apply to us, but the lesson certainly does.

How hard is it? Jesus uses a humorous illustration to emphasise his point. I find it difficult enough to feed cotton thread through the eye of a needle – there is no way that a camel could fit through. Those who were listening to Jesus thought that it was impossible for the rich to enter God's kingdom. From a human perspective, the rich were viewed as blessed with good things, their lives were seen as easier on so many levels – if they were not able to enter the kingdom, then no-one else could either.

Jesus gives hope to his audience – “what is impossible for humanity is possible with God”. We cannot earn our way into the kingdom of God, and attempting to do so will only increase the distance between us and God. Only God can achieve this. DR

Questions

1. Do you agree that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God?
2. What are the “riches” in your life which could be a barrier between you and God's kingdom?
3. How does God make it possible for humanity to enter the kingdom of God irrespective of their wealth?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that what is impossible for us, is possible with you in Christ. Help us to recognise the riches you offer us in Christ so that we don't walk away from you, clinging to our own riches. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27 (DAY 10)

READ Luke 18:28-30

Reflection

The disciples had been watching silently as this encounter unfolded. They must have been thinking about the answer Jesus gave to the rich young ruler. They must have wondered if they had they done enough to enter the kingdom of God. Peter was the one to verbalise this, exclaiming that they had done exactly what he had required of the young man. They had left jobs, family, friends, homes, security and wealth [to varying degrees] to become disciples of Jesus.

Jesus replied by telling them both the cost and reward of entering God's kingdom. Putting God first in our lives, loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and body and following Jesus as the Lord of our life, comes at a cost. It means putting aside those things which we either value more or depend on more than God. It might be money, career, family, possessions or just ourselves.

Jesus encouraged the disciples by telling them that what they had given up did not compare in the slightest to what they would gain in God's kingdom, now and in the future, when Jesus returns. In God's kingdom, we are brought together into a new family with countless brothers and sisters in Christ. All that we do and all that we have is given real meaning when we offer ourselves to the service of God's kingdom.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the Christian life will be easy or automatically successful by human standards. The account in Mark mentions that the Christian life will be marked by persecution. The disciples, and us today, are reassured that when we enter God's kingdom, it is for eternity. DR

Questions

1. How did Peter compare himself to the rich young ruler?
2. How do you compare yourself to the rich young ruler?
3. What have you given up and what have you gained in God's kingdom?

Prayer

Gracious Father, we thank you that you sent Jesus to lead us back into your kingdom. Sustain us and help us to put aside the things which separate us from you and the things we trust instead of you. Help us to see the riches of your kingdom which we experience now and for all eternity. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28

This Sunday the sermon will focus on the topic of “Kingdom Barriers” as we look more closely at Luke 18:18-30.

You can listen to the sermon, access small group questions, and explore other related resources for each week at our website (stbarts.com.au/sermons).

Questions

1. Why does Jesus say that no one is good by God alone?
2. Do you think that there is anything in your life that you're tempted to elevate in importance above God?
3. Why is Jesus' promise of the future important as we lay down our lives for him today?

WEEK 3: KINGDOM SIGHT

LUKE 18:31-43

MONDAY, MARCH 1 (DAY 11)

READ Luke 18:31-34

Reflection

The time of Jesus' arrest, 'trial', and death is drawing closer. However, as is increasingly evident, the disciples still do not understand the horror that Jesus must face in order that we can be saved. And so, *on their way up to Jerusalem*, Jesus takes the twelve aside and again predicts his death and resurrection.

The disciples don't understand - the meaning of what Jesus is saying to them is 'hidden' from them. This doesn't necessarily mean that they were somehow being prevented from understanding by God, but more likely that they were blinded by their expectations of what God's King would do. It's hard to know what exactly they were expecting, but it's clear that they must have been expecting Jesus to overturn the Romans in some way. Whether or not their hearts are too hard to hear what Jesus is saying, or that they're simply in denial of what Jesus has been warning them about, the disciples have failed to understand and will be completely shocked by what they are soon to witness. As events unfold, crushed by unmet expectations, they will disown Jesus, flee from the scene, and hide.

Are we ashamed by the crucified Jesus? Do we recognise the absolute necessity that he had to die for us? Sometimes we can think that we are better than the disciples, but it's especially in those moments that we must remember that we're just as sinful and fragile as they were. What we ultimately need can only be made possible through Jesus and that's precisely what Jesus has achieved. AL

Questions

1. Why was it necessary for Jesus to suffer and die?
2. Why do you think the disciples struggled to really understand what Jesus was warning them would happen?
3. In what way can you be deaf to what God is saying?

Prayer

Saving God, we thank you so much for Jesus' resolve to go to the cross and save us even at great cost. Please help us to recognise the extent of what Jesus has done for us, that we may look to him *with thanks* and be saved. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 2 (DAY 12)

READ Isaiah 52:13-15

Reflection

Just as Jesus had indicated in Luke 18:31, the death that he would have to endure had not only been predicted centuries earlier but was the very fulfilment of that which was written by the prophets. That means that Jesus' death was not an accident nor a failure, but part of God's glorious rescue plan for the world.

In fact, as evidenced in Psalm 52:13-15, the degree to which Jesus' death fulfils the prophets is extraordinary! As the psalmist tells of the Lord's servant being lifted up, we see that fulfilment in his appearance (i.e., "disfigured"), people's reactions (that they were "appalled"), the purpose of his death (i.e., that it would be through his death that people would be "sprinkled", that is cleansed from their sin), and even the reception of the good news (i.e., that they will see and come to understand). There can be no doubt that Jesus' death (and of course his resurrection, too) is the result of his obedience to God's unfolding salvation plan for the world. That of course would not become clear to the disciples until they witnessed Jesus' resurrection, but we can delight in that news today!

Whilst at first glance the suffering *and* glory of the servant seem something of a paradox or a contradiction in terms, we can be confident that there is no contradiction at all. How so? Because it is in God's mercy that Jesus would be exalted on the cross in order sin and death could be defeated. Jesus' death was victory and his resurrection is vindication. Whilst we, of course, look upon Jesus' death with great sorrow because it was our sin that put him there, we also can be full of thanks that it is because of Jesus' death that we can be set free. AL

Questions

1. How does the very nature of Jesus' death being foretold centuries earlier, give us confidence in God's rescue plan for the world?
2. What was the purpose of Jesus' death?
3. Take some time today to give thanks for Jesus' obedience and willingness to go to the cross for each and every one of us.

Prayer

Lord, how we thank you that it was always your plan to rescue us even at great cost to yourself. Please help us to grow in confidence in the Good News, turn in repentance to your Son, and share this Gospel with the world. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3 (DAY 13)

READ Isaiah 53:1-5

Reflection

Today we once again take the opportunity to reflect on some of the key ways in which Jesus' death fulfils that foretold by prophets centuries earlier, especially that concerning the *suffering servant*. Psalm 53 is just one of many psalms which speak of God's suffering servant through whom salvation will come. In just the first five verses alone, we note several important things about the nature of the long-awaited Messiah for God's people.

First (verse 1), we witness that the message of the Messiah is good news! Second (verse 2), that the Messiah's beginnings would be humble - there would be nothing particularly royal in his upbringing or in his appearance. Third (verse 3), that ultimately the Messiah would be rejected and despised by humankind. Fourth (verse 4), that the Messiah would not suffer for his sins but for the sins of others. Fifth (verse 5), that it would be *through his suffering*, that we would be saved. How incredible that in just these five verses alone, that so much of the identity of Jesus, the reception he received, the shape of his death, and the purpose of his suffering are succinctly foreshadowed! This should cause us to not only have great confidence in the faithfulness of God but also in the critical nature of Jesus' saving work on the cross.

Take some time out today to give thanks to God for his faithfulness, especially that it's through Jesus that God's promises are fulfilled. AL

Questions

1. What aspects of Jesus' life and death are foreshadowed in Psalm 53?
2. If you had to summarise the circumstances and purpose of Jesus' death to someone who had never heard about it, what would you say?
3. How does the faithfulness of God make you want to live differently?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for your faithfulness and your saving purposes in Jesus that were foreshadowed through the prophets. Please help me to respond to your faithfulness by putting my trust in you and reflecting your obedience in my life. Please help me - in the power of your Spirit - to live obediently every day on every frontline. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 4 (DAY 14)

READ Luke 18:35-43

Reflection

So far in the Gospel of Luke, all sorts of surprising people seem to understand who Jesus is. Now, as Jesus approaches Jericho, it's a blind man who demonstrates great trust in Jesus by calling out to him for mercy. Note that it must have been a persistent cry (just like the story of the widow), for even when he is rebuked and told to be quiet, he keeps on shouting out to Jesus!

Significantly, as the blind man cries out he's using a title ('Son of David') which implies that Jesus is the Messiah. How did the blind man know? Had he heard about what Jesus had been saying and doing? We simply don't know, however, what's evident is that whilst the blind man might be physically blind, he has demonstrated a clear vision of who Jesus is. Even more, by healing the man, it's implied that Jesus is accepting the title which has been attributed to him. Note that when Jesus, healing the man (in response to his request to see), says "your faith has healed you," it's not about the strength of the man's faith, but who he is expressing faith in. The blind man recognised who Jesus is, and accordingly chose to put his trust in him.

Whilst there's no doubt that there was physical healing that day, we should also take heed that blindness is not only a physical condition endured by some but a spiritual condition susceptible to all. True vision is seeing Jesus clearly and coming to put our trust in him as Lord. AL

Questions

1. Do you think you're ever in danger of being spiritually blind? How might you pray for help from God?
2. Why is having true vision of Jesus so necessary?
3. Are we ever in danger of failing to recognise Jesus for who he truly is?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please help us - in the power of your Spirit and in conviction of your Word - to see who Jesus is clearly! May we be so compelled by a clear vision of Jesus, that we accordingly put our trust in him alone. Where there are areas of our lives in which we are spiritually blind, please help us to see clearly. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 5 (DAY 15)

READ Ephesians 1:15-19

Reflection

Having 'Kingdom Sight' begins first with having clear sight of Jesus. In fact, as Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, one of his great desires (and accordingly great prayers for them!) is that the eyes of their hearts may be opened in order that they would grow in their understanding of the hope in Jesus to which they are called. It's a great prayer and one that we should not just be praying for ourselves, but continuously for one another. We should also be praying for opportunities to share and show the Good News about who Jesus is. Time-and-time again, research in Australia shows us that most people don't actually know much about who Jesus is. What an amazing opportunity we have to let people know wherever he has placed us on our frontlines.

But of course, we should not just be praying that people would come to *understand* who Jesus, *but that their hearts would be prepared to receive that Good News and put their trust in him*. When it comes to putting trust in Jesus, it's also the condition of our heart that matters.

As you serve God on your various frontlines this week (take a moment to name them), how can you help people to see Jesus more clearly? As a witness for Jesus, is there anything in your behaviour (e.g., how you speak, act, or treat people) that might be hindering people from seeing clearly who Jesus is? AL

Questions

1. Who are the people whom you are praying to see Jesus clearly?
2. Do you think that there is anything in your heart that gets in the way of knowing Jesus better or taking a step closer to him?
3. How can you be growing in your clarity of who Jesus is? (Try to think of some practical ways to grow in your sight of Jesus.)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please open the eyes of my heart that I might see the hope to which you have called us in Jesus. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 6 (DAY 16)

READ Acts 3:1-10

Reflection

In many ways, it was just another typical day. Peter and John were headed up to the temple at the usual time to pray. A lame man (who was unable to walk), as was his daily practice, was also being carried to the gate of the temple to ask for help. But something amazing was about to happen! For upon hearing the request for help, Peter and John didn't simply slip by but looked straight at the man for his attention! They didn't have any money to offer, but they had something much greater to give! Prayer. And so boldly, by the authority of Jesus and not their own, they prayed that the lame man would walk. And instantly, we're told, the man's feet and ankles became strong, and the man was healed! And his reaction? To praise God! Why? Because it was by God's authority that the Apostles prayed and it was by God's power that the man was healed!

This was not just another typical day! How amazing that Peter and John stopped. How amazing that they were willing to be shaped by Kingdom priorities! How amazing that they prayed in God's strength and not their own. How amazing that God answered their prayer in such a way. How amazing that the lame man could recognise with such a clarity exactly what had happened and who was behind it all. And how amazing that the man continued to praise God, with his praise becoming a witness to all who were present.

What a great joy it is when God interrupts our agenda - even the best ones - with opportunities to trust in him and give him praise. May we live with such Kingdom sight that we not only see who Jesus is clearly, but that we may also see how he sets the priorities for us every day on all of our frontlines. AL

Questions

1. Why does it matter by whose authority the disciples prayed?
2. Do we still praise God when our prayers are answered in unexpected ways?
3. How do you seek out God's Kingdom agenda every single day?

Prayer

Almighty Lord, we thank you that you do answer prayers in accordance with your good purposes. Please help us to trust in your authority and not our own. Please help our lives to be characterised by praise so that many might be pointed to you and your saving grace. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 7

This Sunday the sermon will focus on the topic of "Kingdom Sight" as we look more closely at Luke 18:31-43.

You can listen to the sermon, access small group questions, and explore other related resources for each week at our website (stbarts.com.au/sermons).

Questions

1. Why would the idea of Jesus dying on a cross have been so difficult for the disciples to hear and accept?

2. What helps you most to see Jesus more clearly?

3. Who are you praying for this year to see Jesus clearly and become a passionate follower of him?

WEEK 4: FORGIVING KING

LUKE 19:1-10

MONDAY, MARCH 8 (DAY 17)

READ Luke 19:1-2

Reflection

Poor Zacchaeus has had a bit of a bad wrap in history. If you've been in Christian circles a while, you've probably heard the song which begins, "Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he!" Over this week, we're going to be looking afresh at this story which is more than just a nice Sunday school song, but an amazing display of Jesus' compassion and forgiveness for then the most outcast in society. We'll also see the response of one who has been forgiven.

Now we are told that this man, apart from being short, was not just a tax collector but a *chief* tax collector. Tax collectors at that time were often Jewish people who worked for the Roman authorities collecting money. The Roman governor would set a certain amount that he was to receive, but then the tax collector could charge however much they wanted without regulation or any repercussions from the authorities. Whatever more they charged, they could keep!

However, there were social repercussions. Firstly, they were seen as betraying the Jewish nation because they worked for the Romans. Secondly, they were seen as betraying the people because they charged over and above the set amount. As a result of this, they were outcast from society. There was no chance or opportunity for redemption. They were disdained, hated as despicable and greedy people. But as we'll see throughout this week, this won't stop Jesus talking to him, relating to him, or even visiting his house! And we'll also see that no one, not even a tax collector, is beyond forgiveness and reconciliation with God. MC

Questions

1. What have you heard or been taught about this incident between Jesus and Zacchaeus?
2. What was the status of the tax collectors in Jewish society in the first century?
3. Who are the people who are the outcasts in society today?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you that you have come to us in Jesus and that no one is beyond your forgiveness and compassion. Help us to recognise this and see how we can love those on the fringes of our day today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 9 (DAY 18)

READ Luke 19:3-4

Reflection

These days when a celebrity comes to town or to a city, news of it spreads like wildfire. We often get helicopter shots of the place that they are staying on breakfast TV, if they're shooting a movie we might see pictures of them walking onto the set, or we might hear of people's interactions with them on the local news radio. Now, the news about Jesus got around quickly and it certainly got around to Zacchaeus! Zacchaeus is really quite intrigued about who this Jesus person is. He wanted to see him, wanted to catch a glimpse of him but as we know, he couldn't because he was short.

Now, we aren't told exactly why Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus. Perhaps he had heard about Jesus' compassion for the outsider, perhaps he had heard about other tax collectors who had come to Jesus, or perhaps he was looking for the salvation that Jesus' offered. We're not sure, but we do know that he was motivated. He was so motivated that he went and climbed up a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. I'm not particularly adventurous, so it would take a whole lot of reasons for me to climb a tree but Zacchaeus was willing to physically expend himself and also look like a bit of a goose to see Jesus.

Jesus must have really meant something to Zacchaeus. Even before meeting him, even before hearing him preach, Jesus must have had some kind of impact that made him seek him above all else. I wonder if you can remember the first time you heard about Jesus or the first time you really sought out Jesus. Remember the passion, the zeal, the questions, and the relief? Sometimes, we can overcomplicate things and forget what meeting Jesus is really like. But let's take Zacchaeus' lead and seek Jesus intently and intentionally afresh. MC

Questions

1. What inhibited Zacchaeus from seeing Jesus? What did he do to overcome this blockage?
2. What can inhibit you from seeing Jesus? How could you, with God's help, overcome this inhibition?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to seek Jesus all the days of our lives. Please refresh us, renew us, and guide us in the hope of Jesus day by day. In his name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10 (DAY 19)

READ Luke 19:5-7

Reflection

Zacchaeus doesn't go unnoticed by Jesus. He may have wanted to be inconspicuous and unnoticed by the crowds but Jesus sees him. And then Jesus does something quite radical. He doesn't just acknowledge Zacchaeus or comment on how strange it is of him to climb a tree, no, Jesus invites himself over to Zacchaeus' house! He tells him to come down from the tree with haste, to come down quickly and says that he *must* come to his house.

Uninvited guests are one thing but how incredible would it be to have Jesus come to your house! Zacchaeus thinks the same thing and welcomed Jesus gladly. He has sought out Jesus and now has welcomed Jesus in. Now, remember who this is. This is a tax collector, an outsider, someone who the Jewish people and leaders didn't like, and Jesus invites himself over to his house. Jesus doesn't just go and have a chat with Zacchaeus or invite Zacchaeus for a quick coffee and catch up but he goes to his house. And this doesn't go unnoticed by others.

Notice in verse 7 that everyone there saw it and they grumbled. Why? Because this is controversial! They thought that Jesus was supposed to be on their 'side' and condemn all those who work for the Romans, the last type of person that he should be relating to were the tax collectors, but he does. Jesus doesn't fit anyone's expectations. Jesus doesn't conform to any societal norms. Jesus does the will of the Father and that is to seek and to save the lost. If that means inviting himself over to their house and others complaining, so be it. If that means being rejected and dying the most shameful death on our behalf, so be it. He is the forgiving King. MC

Questions

1. What is Jesus' action when seeing Zacchaeus? Why was this so controversial?
2. What do we learn about the character of Jesus in this section?

Prayer

Lord God, thank you for the compassion and love of Jesus for everyone. Help us to have the same love of Jesus for all, that others may come to know you and come to repentance and faith because of our witness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 11 (DAY 20)

READ Luke 19:8-10

Reflection

The reaction of Zacchaeus in today's reading is quite astonishing! His response to meeting Jesus is to acknowledge him as Lord and repent. I would have really loved to have been a fly on the wall at this dinner table. I'd love to know what they were talking about and what was going through Zacchaeus' mind. Unfortunately, we aren't given this information! All that we are told is that upon meeting Jesus, Zacchaeus had a total change in life.

At the table, he suddenly gets up and calls Jesus 'Lord'. He acknowledges that Jesus is now going to have some rule over his life. He must have had some acknowledgement of his sin and realisation that Jesus is someone worth living for. Secondly, he proclaims that he is going to give to the poor and give back four times as much to everyone he has cheated. This is an incredible act of repentance! He isn't doing this to earn salvation or to earn righteousness but as a response to having salvation from Jesus. We see that in verse 9, Jesus pronounces that salvation has come to his house and that Zacchaeus is indeed part of God's people and no longer outcast. Zacchaeus may have only wanted a glimpse of Jesus when he climbed that tree, but now he is receiving so much more. He receives Jesus and receives forgiveness which leads to his repentance. And this is exactly why Jesus came.

Some common worldly views of Jesus may say that he just came to show us a better way or to show good morals. While these are important, that isn't why he came! Jesus tells us that he came to seek and save the lost. He came to seek and save people like Zacchaeus, he came to seek and save people like the thief on the cross, and he came to seek and save people like you and me. Like Zacchaeus, our response should be repentance and faith. MC

Questions

1. What is Zacchaeus' response to Jesus?
2. Why did Jesus come? What should our response be to him?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you that you didn't leave us in our sin but that you came to seek and to save people like us. Keep us from self-reliance, help us to say no to ungodliness, and help us to live our lives to your praise and glory. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 12 (DAY 21)

READ Psalm 32:1-5

Reflection

If you've known me for any amount of time, you'd know that I'm not really an expert on gardening. I can keep fake plants alive and that's about it. When we were moving to Noosa, I had to do a bit of gardening. We had put in a large garden box and so I had to fill it with a gravel base and then soil on top of that. Let me tell you, that was a day of really heavy lifting wheelbarrows and buckets and when I emptied them and took off the load, it was a great relief! This Psalm reminds us that carrying around our sin and not bringing them before God is like carrying a heavy bucket of gravel and soil around!

The psalm begins with proclaiming how great or blessed it is for the one who has had their sins forgiven. In some translations, they use the word 'joyful' here. How joyful it is to be forgiven. Then, the psalmist lays out what the opposite is like. If we don't bring our sins to God it's like having aches and pains all day long, it's like dragging a heavy backpack around, it's like going for a walk in North Queensland in the middle of summer in the heat and humidity! Having sin that is kept secret even before God (not that it is a secret to God anyway!) is not a good idea. It only leads to further guilt and tremendous shame.

However, we can come to God. Verse 5 is such great news for us. We can come to God and acknowledge our failures, confess our sins, and we can be confident that he will forgive them. We can have this confidence because of Jesus. He came to seek and save the lost, he came to bring forgiveness and he secured it in his death on the cross and rising to new life. And so we can join in with the joy of the psalmist and the joy of Zacchaeus for, "blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven". MC

Questions

1. What does it mean to be 'blessed'?
2. Have you experienced the heavy load of sin before? How did you react?
3. How can we have relief from this heavy load?

Prayer

Loving Lord, I am sorry for my sin. I have left undone what I ought to have done and I have done what I have ought not to have done. Please forgive me. Thank you for the assurance of forgiveness through Jesus. In his name, Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 13 (DAY 22)

READ Psalm 32:6-11

Reflection

There is a great amount of joy that comes with being forgiven. How great it is to be free of guilt and shame! And there is also an imperative and that is to continue to seek and live for the Lord. If the first half of the Psalm is about the joy of the forgiven, this second half is about the life of the forgiven.

Being a Christian and being one who has been forgiven, means that we aren't left to our own devices but we can call on the name of the Lord and seek him. As we do so, this doesn't necessarily mean that life will all be easy with health and wealth but it does mean that in the mess of a broken world we can cry out and trust in the one who is in control. We can hide and take refuge in the knowledge that God is good, God is trustworthy, God is loving, and that all things work to the good of those who trust in him. Things in this life may take away our health, our money, our independence, and even our very lives, but nothing can take away the sure certainty of eternal life with him.

As well as trusting in the Lord, we are also called to obey him. In verse 8 the language switches to as if God was speaking. The best way to live is how he has designed us to and he is watching over us. This doesn't mean that God has got us on CCTV ready to whack us back into line when we do the wrong thing but it means that God is lovingly looking out for us. Like a parent lovingly and carefully watching a child swim, God is watching us. So there's no point in being stubborn and not living his way. It only leads to more hardship and tricky situations. Zacchaeus recognised this and repented and began living for God. He truly repented! Our call is to follow his example, to continually day by day confess our sins and commit afresh to turning away from them and turning to live for Jesus and rejoice in the Lord. MC

Questions

1. How are you regularly crying out to and seeking out God?
2. Where in your life is it difficult to obey God? Who could you ask to help?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to pray to you, to hide in you, to rest in you. Help us to obey you. Thank you that we can come to you in repentance and may your Spirit be at work in us, transforming us to obey you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

WEEK 5: RETURNING KING

LUKE 19:11-27

MONDAY, MARCH 15 (DAY 23)

READ Luke 19:11-13

Reflection

As Jesus draws ever-closer to Jerusalem and the tension mounts, there are two questions now in focus: (a) Will Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem precipitate a sudden coming of God's Kingdom? (b) How should people respond to the arrival of the King? We'll look at the second question in more detail over the coming days, but the answer to the first question is clear: No! In fact, that's the point and the purpose of the beginning of the parable that Jesus shares in this section.

Many people thought that the arrival of the Messiah would signal a final reckoning of God's Kingdom. Some people thought (and hoped!) that this would be the moment when the Romans were evicted and God's Messiah would take up his rule and reign. However, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was not to take up some earthly rule but to be enthroned on the cross. This would have been a shock to many, but Jesus assures them that he will be coming back again. He will indeed receive the Kingdom through his decisive victory on the cross, but it won't be until later when he returns when we will see that Kingdom come in full.

So what are Jesus' followers meant to do between his departure and return? Jesus' story makes it abundantly clear! We are to devote our lives, using our gifts, times, and resources, for the purposes of building God's Kingdom. The servants in the parable are not given a huge amount, but they are given enormous scope on how to use those gifts. Likewise, regardless of how much or little we think we have, the key is using whatever we have for God's purposes in recognition that we will need to give an account when our King returns. AL

Questions

1. What were people expecting of Jesus as he arrived in Jerusalem?
2. What gifts do you think that God has entrusted to you?
3. How do you see your gifts at work for the purposes of God's Kingdom?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you so much that Jesus went to the cross for us, rose from the dead, and is coming back again! Please help us to be aware of the gifts that you have entrusted us, motivated to use those gifts for your Kingdom purposes, and mindful that we will need to give an account when you return. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 16 (DAY 24)

READ Luke 19:14-15

Reflection

Around the time of Jesus, there had been many rulers or local 'kings' who were detested by the people. One such ruler, Archelaus, had been left the title king of Judea when his Father - Herod the Great - had died and his empire was divided up amongst his sons. Archelaus was detested for good reason, including that he had massacred 3,000 people at the first Passover after his accession. Not wanting Archelaus as their leader, the people sent representatives (just like in the parable) to request that he would not be made their king. However, history tells us that Archelaus was still made the ruler (although not conferred the title 'king') and he returned to the region.

So how does this relate to Jesus? Well, clearly not in the *quality* of kingship - for Jesus is the perfect and good king - but that even though many would reject Jesus, rebel against him, and resist his rule, that he is indeed the rightful ruler and nothing can interfere with his kingship. How we respond to Jesus has no bearing on the reality of who he is, it only changes our relationship to him!

Jesus has rightly been appointed the King of Kings and will return one day soon. How we receive and welcome him matters. AL

Questions

1. What were the different ways in which people responded to Jesus?
2. Does the way that people receive Jesus change who he is?
3. How is Jesus a good and ultimate king? What gives us confidence about putting our trust in him and living our lives for him?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you that Jesus is indeed the King of Kings! Please help us to joyfully receive and recognise him for who he truly is. In the power of your Spirit, please convict us of any areas in our lives in which we resist Jesus' rule and reign. Help us to live for him, point to him, and rejoice in him. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17 (DAY 25)

READ Luke 19:16-19

Reflection

Having entrusted his servants with some money, the king (having received his title) now returns home and asks for an account. The report: the first two have put what was entrusted to them to work, whilst the third servant hid the money and did nothing with it at all. The result: the king praises the first two servants for their faithfulness and rewards them by sharing his rule over other cities (we'll look at the third servant and the judgment that falls on him in more detail tomorrow). Note that the rewards are disproportionate to the relatively small amount that had been entrusted to the servants and a generous response relating to the obedience that they had demonstrated to their master.

As we await Jesus' return - at which point we will be called to account - how he longs for us to obediently *put to work* the gifts, time, and resources that he has entrusted us! So often we can fall into three traps: thinking that we have been entrusted with little, forgetting that what has been entrusted is ultimately God's, and/or reluctant to take a risk and let go of our gifts. It's notable that even though the first two servants yielded phenomenal gains, they both attribute the master's gifts as the cause for the growth! It's such a great demonstration of humility! Knowing that the master would return (at any time) to call them to account on the investment of *his* gifts entrusted to them, they never sought to use them for their own purposes, but only in obedience to what the owner had requested of them. With the same clarity of vision - that all that we have has been entrusted to us by the returning King - so we should be motivated to direct our whole lives for the purposes of the King and his Kingdom. AL

Questions

1. How can we be clear that this is not about 'making more money'?
2. What are the gifts, time, and resources that God has entrusted to you? What do you think it looks like to use them according to God's purposes?
3. Ask a Christian friend how they see Kingdom fruit being yielded in your life.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that you have entrusted us with so much for your Kingdom purposes! Please help us to recognise that all we have is yours, that you are returning to call us to account, and that you long for us to use our lives to yield Kingdom fruit that will last forever. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 18 (DAY 26)

READ Luke 19:20-23

Reflection

Whilst yesterday we witnessed the great praise and reward to the obedient servants who faithfully *put to work* what had been entrusted to them, today we witness the judgment that falls on the servant who failed to put to work what had been entrusted to him. In fact, we note that the servant - knowing full well that they would be judged - did not even put the money on deposit, but hid it away where it could not earn anything. As we read this, we're meant to understand that this is not merely an action of someone who is risk-averse, but someone who is directly disobeying their master. The servant was only concerned for himself, neither trusting nor sharing in his master's intentions.

How we - entrusted with great gifts from God - are to act differently. We're to be like the first two servants, who recognising their gifts were not their own, pursued the intentions of the owner and not necessarily themselves. That's why, when discerning how best to use our gifts, time, and resources - in recognition that they all ultimately come from God and are God's - is to seek out his will by considering how he would like us to put these gifts to work. How would God best have me use the time entrusted to me? What is the best use of the resources I have for God's Kingdom purposes? How can I grow and focus my gifts so that there might be great Gospel fruit for God's Kingdom and not my own empire or achievement?

God is not like the king in the parable who is harsh and unfair, but our God is the just judge who will call us all to account. AL

Questions

1. How do you think God could be leading you to grow or focus your gifts more intently for his Kingdom purposes?
2. Are there any aspects of your gifts, time, or resources that you resist using for God's purposes?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please help us in the power of your Spirit to be obedient in the way that we use our gifts, time, and resources for your glory. Please convict us of any ways in which we hold our gifts close, resisting to use them generously for your purposes. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 19 (DAY 27)

READ Luke 19:24-27

Reflection

In the final part of the parable, it can - at first glance - seem particularly unfair that the money from the disobedient servant is taken from them and given to the one with the most. But remember, that part of the purpose of the parable is to dramatically show the importance of obedience and the need for the disciples to be faithful as they await Jesus' return. This is not some sort of prosperity theology of the rich getting richer, but it is about responding faithfully to how God continues to entrust good gifts to us through obedience. Those who hold onto this life will lose it, whilst those who lay down their lives for Christ's sake will gain everything. Even the smallest gifts that have been entrusted to us must be put to God's Kingdom work. That's why the mina is taken away from the disobedient one and given to the first servant.

The story that Jesus shares then ends with a severe warning in verse 27: that those who reject the king will face dire judgment. That those who have rebelled against the ruler, who have set themselves up in opposition to him, now face judgment by the rightful and reigning king. This is a severe warning by Jesus that how we receive *him* matters. That when we recognise him for the King who he is, we become recipients of the grace and mercy that has been afforded to us through his death and resurrection. But when we reject the king and refuse the grace that he has offered, then we also face the full weight of judgment on our own. AL

Questions

1. What most surprises or confuses you about this part of the parable?
2. Why does our reception of Jesus really matter?
3. How does accepting Jesus as Lord mean that we become recipients of his grace? How does rejecting Jesus mean that we face judgment on our own?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for your phenomenal grace that has been poured out through Jesus' death and resurrection. Please help us to see you for who you really are and submit our lives to you. We especially pray that all people may come to recognise you as Lord. Please help us, on all of our frontlines, to be faithful witnesses to the truth of who Jesus is. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 20 (DAY 28)

READ Acts 3:17-23

Reflection

As we've been reflecting on why our response to Jesus matters, today we dip into the second volume of Luke's writing (i.e., Acts) and, in particular, a poignant part of Peter's famous speech.

In this part of Peter's speech, he provides a clear way of how we can respond to the Good News that he has shared. What was that Good News? That Jesus died for us because we are utterly incapable of saving ourselves. For many, the news that Jesus was the Messiah was still probably difficult news to fathom. For others, it would have been difficult to reconcile their expectations of what the Messiah would do, with the reality of his death on a Roman cross. Yet Peter is clear, that this was actually all part of God's plan for the Messiah. Even if they were ignorant of it, it was the very fulfilment of God's saving plan with the prophets having even foretold it. But whilst they may have failed to recognise who Jesus is in the past, that should not dictate their response to him now! In light of what they have learned, they now have the opportunity to turn to God. The amazing news is that when they do that, when they repent and put their trust in God through Jesus, their 'sins may be wiped out'. How amazing is that! That their sins and our sins can be wiped out simply by turning to Jesus, saying sorry, and making him the Lord of their lives! To reject Jesus is to cut ourselves off from God, but to accept him means forgiveness and life forever with him!

It's easy to think that our sins are unforgivable, but the Good News of Jesus is clear: that because he died for us, *all* of our sins can be wiped out simply by putting our trust in him. AL

Questions

1. What does it mean for you to know that your sins can be 'wiped out' as we repent and put our trust in Jesus?
2. How is your life different because of the security you grasp because of Jesus' death and resurrection?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that Jesus' death and resurrection change everything! Please help us to turn to you, to trust in you, and to receive your gift of salvation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 21

This Sunday the sermon will focus on the topic of “Returning King” as we look more closely at Luke 19:11-27.

You can listen to the sermon, access small group questions, and explore other related resources for each week at our website (stbarts.com.au/sermons).

Questions

1. When we embrace the rule of Jesus, what are the extraordinary blessings that we receive?
2. Spend some time in prayer today giving thanks for the way in which God’s grace is a blessing to you.
3. Pray also for those closest, that they would come to recognise and embrace Jesus as King.

WEEK 6: ARRIVING KING

LUKE 19:28-40

MONDAY, MARCH 22 (DAY 29)

READ Luke 19:28-31

Reflection

In the Jewish religion at that time, Jerusalem was very important. This is where the temple was, where people came to meet with God, and this was where people would come from all across the region for all the various festivals and feasts. It was central!

In Luke's account of Jesus, Jerusalem is very important. After Jesus was born, one of the first things that Mary and Joseph did was to bring him to Jerusalem to dedicate him to the Lord. When Jesus was young, Luke records that they went to the temple every year for the Passover Festival and one year leaving Jesus behind. Jesus then said that he had to be in his Father's house. Then after beginning his ministry around Nazareth, in chapter 9 we see that Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem. From then on throughout the book, Jesus sets his face to the city. And now, it's time for Jesus to enter. The King of the Kingdom is entering the city. All of the prophecies are soon to be fulfilled in him.

Jerusalem was the centre of worship but now Jesus is the centre of worship. Jerusalem was the place to meet God, but now we meet God in and through Jesus. Jerusalem is where people came to be cleansed from their sins time after time, but now Jesus is where we find cleansing and expiation of sins once and for all. Jerusalem is where people thought the Messiah would come and overthrow the Roman oppression, but now Jesus has overthrown sin and death. Jerusalem may have been significant, but Jesus is greater. MC

Questions

1. What was the importance of Jerusalem in the Jewish religion?
2. How is Jerusalem important in Luke's Gospel?
3. How does Jesus fulfil the role of Jerusalem and the temple for us?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that you have made a way for us to be in relationship with you not through a place, nor through rituals, but through your Son, Jesus. Keep us from being ritualistic but help us to continue to press into our relationship with you constantly. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 23 (DAY 30)

READ Luke 19:32-35

Reflection

Being a bit of a nerd, I actually enjoy watching the opening procedures of parliament but not the Australian one but the British parliament. Queen Elizabeth gets all dressed up in royal robes and Prince Phillip in his military gear. They both go in a horse-drawn carriage laden with gold from Buckingham Palace down to the houses. They enter in and they sit upon two thrones in the House of Lords. It's a real royal entrance.

In this week's passage, we see a royal entrance but it looks quite different to that of the Windsor's. Jesus is preparing to enter into Jerusalem and instead of putting on robes and going in a carriage, he gets on a young donkey. Instead of leading a charge into wage war on a horse, he comes in on an animal of peace. Moreover, this wasn't just a random selection but a direct fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, "Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Jesus is this king! He is the long-awaited Messiah! But he is a king like no other. He is not driven by pride or ego but by love and compassion. He doesn't come to wage war but to defeat sin and death. He is our King.

We may not notice it but there may be other things in our lives that compete for this kingship in our lives. There may be things that seem more attractive than a king on a donkey. Maybe it's comfort, maybe it's that next holiday, next trip, or that next job promotion. It could be something else! But the appropriate response to having been saved by Jesus is to make him king over all areas of our lives even if it means being uncomfortable, uncertain, or unstable. Because in the midst of this we know that he is with us every step of the way. MC

Questions

1. What is the significance of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey? What does this show us about the character of Jesus?
2. Where do you see competing 'kings' in your life?

Prayer

Loving Lord, thank you for the humility, the gentleness, the love of our King Jesus. Help us to make him Lord and King over every facet of our lives in the knowledge that your ways are greater than ours. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24 (DAY 31)

READ Luke 19:36-38

Reflection

This was Jesus' moment. He was on a donkey as the long-awaited Messiah, he was coming into the centre of the Jewish religion, he was coming to claim his throne. Will the people recognise him for who he is? Well, some do and some don't.

The people who do firstly lay down their cloaks before Jesus. This is a great gesture of preparing and laying the way for Jesus to enter. It recognises who Jesus is and it also indicates the submission and humility of these people towards him. Then, a multitude of people begins praising Jesus 'for all the miracles they had seen.' The miracles were a sign of the kingdom breaking into the world, of things being made right, and also a phenomenal sign of the amazing authority of Jesus. He has authority over sickness, over evil, over the wind and the waves, and even over death. If he has this much authority, then he is worthy of and deserves all our praise and worship! They sing with joy.

They sing 'blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord'. This a phrase that we can see in some of the Psalms. These Psalms were chanted throughout some of the festivals and this line is seen specifically in Psalm 118 where it addresses the king approaching the temple. The crowd recognised Jesus from what he had done and for who he is. Then this leads to further praise and thanksgiving to God. They gave all the glory to God for when one truly recognises Jesus for who he is, it can only end up in overflowing praise and thanksgiving. MC

Questions

1. What is the response of the crowds? What do they recognise about Jesus?
2. When we recognise and see Jesus clearly for who he is, what should our response be both in our lives and how we live on our frontlines?

Prayer

Loving Lord, thank you for the authority and the kingship of Jesus. Help us to constantly recognise Jesus for who he is and to live a life of praise and thanksgiving for all your good gifts to us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 25 (DAY 32)

READ Luke 19:39-40

Reflection

So the disciples and the crowds recognise who Jesus is as the Messiah and as the king. However, they aren't the only people in the account here. There were people who didn't recognise him as king and these were the Pharisees. These were the teachers of the law, people who would have known the Psalms and the prophecies of Zechariah and much more! However, their hearts were hard and they didn't see Jesus for who he is.

In verse 39, we see that some of the Pharisees told Jesus not as a suggestion but almost as a command to rebuke his disciples. And this isn't simply telling them to be quiet but to reprimand them and to disapprove of their actions! What an incredible thing for them to suggest! These teachers did not receive Jesus, did not recognise Jesus, and were plotting against Jesus. Now, in some regards, this was politically sensible. The Romans pretty much allowed the Jews to do what they wanted as long as they paid their taxes and kept the peace. The arrival of a different king and an unsettled crowd isn't all that peaceful and so that could have been why they asked Jesus to rebuke his disciples. But this is really all about their material and physical comfort. For if they worshipped Jesus it may have been uncomfortable for a time physically, it would involve some humility, but they would have been secure for eternity spiritually. But they didn't.

Jesus' response to the incredible command of the Pharisees is also incredible. He says that if the crowds were to be silent, then the physical stones would cry out in praise. Was Jesus being literal? That's beside the point. The point is that all of creation has been leading up to this moment of the King coming in and all creation was designed to point to him and recognise him as Lord and Saviour. But his kingship will be like no other. People may have laid down their cloaks before him, but he will lay down his life on their behalf. MC

Questions

1. Who are you praying for to recognise Jesus as King? How could you live your life in such a way that it points to his kingship?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the authority and kingship of Jesus. We are sorry for when we don't see this. Help us to submit to you in every area even if it means being uncomfortable or enduring hardship. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 26 (DAY 33)

READ Psalm 118:19-29

Reflection

This psalm begins with praise and thanksgiving. Verse 1 urges the reader to “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his love endures forever”. This phrase is repeated four times in the following four verses. God’s love endures forever! No matter what happens in our lifetime, no matter what people may do to us, nothing can take away God’s love for us. We can take refuge in him, we can gain strength from him, we can proclaim his salvation day after day, we can submit to him in everything. How can we be sure and certain of this? Because of and through Jesus.

God has laid out a plan for salvation through Jesus and we can follow him and enter into these gates of righteousness, we can be right with God! Even though Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees and was eventually put to death because of them, this didn’t stop his plan. In fact, it was all part of his plan. Verse 22 says, ‘the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.’ Jesus was rejected but is now the source of our salvation. His death means we are free from sin. His resurrection means that we have eternal life secured for us. So then, he is now the way that we are to orientate our lives to, everything is now to rest on him, rely on him, and draw on and from him. He is the one who came in the name of the Lord because he himself is the Lord! And so the appropriate response is to give thanks and praise the Lord for his love endures forever. MC

Questions

1. What gives us certainty of the faithful love of God which endures forever?
2. How does this love shape the way we live our lives?
3. Who could we share the good news of this love with today?

Prayer

Loving Lord, thank you for your amazing love for us which you have shown to us in so many different ways. Thank you for the goodness of creation, for every breath that we breathe, for every moment here on earth. We especially thank you for your love poured out in us through Jesus. Give us confidence and certainty of this love always. We pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 27 (DAY 34)

READ Luke 19:41-44

Reflection

Jesus has just drawn near to the city and people were praising him and proclaiming him as King. It's a phenomenal picture and would have been such a joyous occasion for those who had been faithfully waiting for the coming of the Messiah. However, instead of rejoicing, Jesus laments. He weeps and expresses his sorrow aloud. He knows that this city, that his chosen people were going to reject him. Jesus has an immense amount of love for this city and the people of Israel just like a parent has for their child. God has seen them throughout the ages coming to him, rejecting him, submitting to his punishment, and then return to him time after time again. He has been there for his people, he has raised up judges, prophets and kings but they didn't fit their hearts on him. Now he has sent them his one and only son. In him, they can find peace, but they won't. They won't turn to him and so he weeps.

Moreover, he weeps because he knows what will happen to these people. He knows that in just 40 years time or so it will all be gone. The people inside the walls will be trapped, experience hunger and famine, weep and wail, and then the Romans will come and enter killing women, children, and men on every street, every corner. And so Jesus weeps. This is Jesus' heart for all who reject him. This is Jesus' heart for the unbeliever. He has humbled himself to this earth, he has died and rose again for them, he has given every opportunity for them to have peace with God, so how sad it is when someone doesn't turn and repent when hearing the good news.

In his commentary on Matthew, 20th-century bishop JC Ryle writes, "There is nothing wanting on God's part for the salvation of sinners' souls: no one will ever be able to say at last that it was God's fault if he is not saved. The Father is ready to love and receive; the Son is ready to pardon and cleanse guilt away; the Spirit is ready to sanctify and renew...One thing only is needful, and that is, the sinner must be ready and willing himself." MC

Questions

1. How have you responded to the Gospel?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank and praise you for Jesus and for the salvation that is found in him. Soften our hearts and make our lives more like Jesus. Amen.

WEEK 7: RISEN KING

LUKE 22-24

MONDAY, MARCH 29 (DAY 35)

READ Luke 22:14-22

Reflection

In the past two chapters of Luke, Jesus has been questioned by the religious leaders, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes. The result of his answers was that not one of them was able to accuse him of any wrongdoing, and they weren't going to arrest him because all the crowds loved him! Arresting him would create a riot! Then, Jesus taught about the destruction of Jerusalem that was going to come in around 70AD and then he taught about the return of the Son of Man. However, the leaders were still determined to arrest and kill Jesus and Judas has agreed to betray Jesus for some cash. And today, it comes time for the Passover meal.

The Passover meal was the meal where the Jewish nation celebrated and remembered their rescue from Egypt, and the gracious provision of God to spare the firstborn Son for those households that sacrificed and ate the lamb. This had been happening ever since the days of Moses, for thousands of years! But this Passover was going to be like none other. Jesus takes a cup and says that he won't drink again of it until the kingdom of God comes.

He takes bread, breaks it and says that it is his body. Then he takes a cup and says that it is the new covenant in his blood. In short, he makes the meal all about him because he is the ultimate fulfillment of the Passover. Instead of rescue from the angel of death going over the land, we need rescue from sin and death. Instead of a lamb dying in our place, Jesus is going to die in our place. So now whenever we have this meal, we celebrate and remember God's gracious provision of Jesus. Innocent, yet broken on our behalf, and raised securing a new promise of life with him for eternity. MC

Questions

1. What was the Passover meant to represent or help the Israelites remember?
2. How does Jesus fulfil the Passover? What can help us remember our great rescue?

Prayer

Lord God, thank you for the provision of Jesus who died in our place and rose again. Help us every time we come to the Lord's Supper to remember this afresh and be renewed by the hope of the Gospel. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 30 (DAY 36)

READ Luke 22:24-30

Reflection

After a meal like none other, the disciples start having a dispute like none other. It is really quite remarkable that even after Jesus has been with them for so long and told them about his death that this argument comes up. They begin to argue among themselves about who is going to be the greatest! However, Jesus puts an end to that conversation quickly and turns the definition of 'the greatest' right on its head.

The pagan lords, rulers, and kings really had an overwhelming pride. They may have done good things but only to receive honour and be praised by other people. They loved the names people called them such as 'Lord' or 'Your Grace'. That was the common perception of what it meant to be great! But Jesus says that followers of him are to have nothing to do with such things. The way to greatness is to be like the least, the youngest. The one who rules or is in leadership should be the one who serves.

General knowledge and common sense will inform us that the one who is at the dinner table is the one who is greater. If you've watched any shows like Downton Abbey you'll know this almost instinctively! But Jesus doesn't just tell his disciples that it isn't to be like this anymore but Jesus is going to demonstrate it fully and comprehensively. He is the one who came down to earth from heaven, in order to live among human beings, and ultimately to die for us to serve us. He is the one who truly serves. And so then if we want to be great, then we are called to follow his example. MC

Questions

1. Right here in Australia now, what do we consider to be the traits of one who is great?
2. What is Jesus' standard of greatness? How has he demonstrated this?
3. How could you follow his example?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the way in which you have served us through Jesus. Please keep us from pride and keep us from seeking human greatness, but help us to look for ways in which to serve others. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31 (DAY 37)

READ Luke 22:39-46

Reflection

Every week in church and maybe more often than that for some, we pray the Lord's Prayer and in it we pray, 'your will be done'. We can rattle this off without thinking about what it really means. Here, Jesus knows exactly what it means.

His time has come and he and the disciples go to the Mount of Olives to pray and this time it will be the last. He tells his disciples to pray that they won't fall into temptation and he tells them to do it again in verse 36. I know that if I was there and was about to see Jesus arrested and killed, I would be tempted to just lose heart, walk away, and give up. But Jesus' command is to pray.

After telling them the first time, Jesus goes around the corner, kneels, and prays. He knows what is ahead of him. He knows that the Father's plan for salvation means he will be humiliated, experience terrible suffering, and experience the wrath of the Father. It's going to be excruciating and so he asks the Father to take the cup away, to take away the wrath and all that is ahead. He's in agony! But his prayer doesn't end there. He ends by saying 'yet not my will, but yours be done'. Jesus submits himself to the Father's will even if it means going ahead with the plan for salvation through the cross. He prayed again through tears, through weakness, and through trouble.

This is what it means to pray and live out 'your will be done'. It means God's will above our comfort, God's will above our money, God's will above our careers, God's will above our best laid out plans, and it could mean God's will above our lives. But why should we follow God's will? Because he is God and because he knows what it is like. Jesus has wrestled with this question, experienced everything we could ever experience and more. Our God is the one who serves us even to death because of his love for us. May his will be done. MC

Questions

1. Where in your life may you not be submitting to the will of the Father?

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, how can we thank you enough for Jesus? Thank you that he submitted to your will even to the point of taking your wrath that we deserved. Help us to seek your will above all else, to live it out, and please expose our hearts for where we aren't submitting to it. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 1 (DAY 38)

READ Luke 22:47-53

Reflection

Jesus' disciples in yesterday's passage were found sleeping and again Jesus told them to continue to pray but then he was interrupted by his betrayer. Judas comes into the scene with a crowd. This was one of the twelve, one of Jesus' closest friends, closest followers but here he is betraying Jesus. He comes to him to kiss him as if greeting him as a friend. The greek word for 'kiss' has the same root as the word 'to love'. Judas' kiss was far from a kiss of love though. But Jesus isn't surprised in the slightest. He is completely in control and knows that this was all to happen. He even questions Judas.

His disciples though don't know what is happening though. They begin to do what any human would do to try and defend their leader. They prepare for a fight. One even cuts off the ear of a servant! So does Jesus go with them and run free and take advantage of the distraction?! Most certainly not. Jesus rejects their violent impulses and even heals the servant of the one who wanted him dead. Even in the midst of his arrest, Jesus has immense love his enemies. Even in the mess of this evening, God's plans are completely and utterly on track.

Jesus then turns to the mob who came to him. He hasn't done anything wrong, he had no plans to overthrow the authorities, and yet they still came to arrest him. Jesus was innocent and this crowd are the ones who are in the wrong. But Jesus submits and tells them that this is their hour. This is the time when the world can do the worst to God, when the world can go with every sinful desire, and do the ultimate act of rejection by putting him to death. But at the very same time, this is the hour that God had in mind since before the foundations of the earth were laid. For when humanity puts Jesus to death, this is when Jesus will take the sin of the world upon himself, drink the cup of God's wrath, and secure us for eternity and snatch us from death's jaws. MC

Questions

1. How is this one of the most tragic but one of the greatest moments in history?

Prayer

Lord God, thank you for the sure and certain promise of forgiveness of sins through Jesus. We are sorry for the times when we reject you and your rule. Please keep us from sin and grant us true repentance. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 2 (DAY 39)

READ Luke 23:44-56

Reflection

In the space of a night and morning, Jesus has been betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, mocked and beaten by the guards, condemned by the Sanhedrin, sent away by Pilot, questioned by Herod, sent back to Pilot, rejected by the crowds in favour of a murderer, handed over by Pilot, and crucified. What is Jesus' response? Verse 34 says, "then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." He forgives them even while he is nailed to the cross, even while they cast lots for his clothes.

Now, the sun is darkened from 12 PM until 3 PM as the light of the world is put to death. The sins of the whole world were put on Jesus on that tree. My sin was put on him, your sin was put on him. The punishment, the burden, and the shame was taken by him. So now having been freed from sin, there is now no barrier between us and God. The curtain that separated the people from the Holy of Holies in the temple was torn. Access to God is now not just for the high priest once a year, but now free for all who turn to Christ! But during the darkness and after the tearing of the curtain, Jesus cried out to God and Jesus died. We can sometimes let this wash over us but let's just look at those words again. Jesus died. The son of God is dead. Our Lord and Saviour dies on our behalf. How incredible is our God!

After he died, Luke records the reactions of different people. The centurion who was responsible for other troops actually praised God and realised that Jesus was innocent. Others who were there went home beating their breasts as a sign of repentance. Then a man named Joseph who was part of the Sanhedrin but didn't agree with Jesus' killing comes and in an act of tenderness, kindness, and possibly worship, takes Jesus' lifeless, bruised, and battered body off the cross and lays him in his tomb. Our only plausible response in view of God's mercy is to lay down our lives as living sacrifices to him. MC

Questions

1. Why was Jesus crucified? What does his death achieve?

Prayer

Loving Father, we are so thankful for Jesus' death on the cross, saving us from sin, and giving us access to you. Help us to never take this for granted. Amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 3 (DAY 40)

READ Luke 24:36-49

Reflection

I wonder if you've ever had a moment when you're just stunned? When words escape you? Well, the disciples here experience exactly that. There were reports of the resurrection from some of the women, Peter had gone into the tomb and only found the linen cloths, and two of the disciples had met Jesus while walking and then eating together. So naturally, the disciples discuss all of these events but as they are speaking, Jesus stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you'. The result? Stunned silence. The disciples thought that he was a ghost but in reality, it was Jesus. He is risen! He didn't stay dead and in fact, Jesus won the victory over death by death itself!

He insists that he is real and not a ghost by pointing out his hands and his feet and by eating real food. He is really alive and this was the plan all along. It was written about him for thousands of years before him. He reigns victorious over sin and death and so now, sins can be forgiven for all who repent and believe in Jesus. This good news was to be firstly preached in Jerusalem and then, as we see in Acts, to the ends of the earth.

This is indeed great news. We can be part of the kingdom, we can have forgiveness, we can have peace, we can have rest, we can have certainty of the future, all because our great King Jesus died and rose again. There is no one else like our God. There is nothing else in this world that can compare to having this sure and certain hope. So let us once again cast ourselves on the mercy and grace of God afresh this Easter. MC

Questions

1. What does the resurrection of Jesus achieve? Why is it so fundamental to our faith?
2. If you were to tell someone about the Gospel in under a minute, what would you say?
3. What could you do this Easter to intentionally see God's mercy afresh?

Prayer

Lord God, you are victorious and you have the authority over all things including death itself. Thank you for the resurrection of Jesus and help us to be continually renewed and refreshed in your good news day by day. Amen.

POSTSCRIPT: EASTER

READ Luke 24:1-12

Jesus' death was not the end! This is the great and glorious news of Christianity that Jesus is alive and that his sacrifice was acceptable and perfect. It is great and glorious news that, through him, death could not be held down: his death broke the power of evil and even death itself.

We live in an amazing age, awaiting the next age that will be brought to completion when Jesus returns. Yet God's Kingdom is already bursting into the world, inaugurated with Jesus' death and resurrection. As his Kingdom bursts in, he's calling people everywhere to respond and follow him. He's calling people to live in readiness for his return, demonstrate the shape of his Kingdom, urgently calling others to repent, and yield fruit for God's purposes. Because Jesus rose from the dead, new life is unfolding in him and for all who trust in him. Sin and death have been defeated and we await their destruction. AL

READ Luke 24:13-35

If there was one conversation that I would have loved to witness, this is one of them! It is an amazing account that captures some of the very first thoughts and reflections of Jesus' followers as the news of his resurrection is just starting to break in. You can imagine, that in light of the reports from the women who witnessed the empty tomb and the risen Lord Jesus, that the others would have been filled with excitement, confusion, and plenty of questions. Contrary to conspiracy theories regarding Jesus' resurrection (e.g., that it was made up later on, or a hoax concocted by the disciples), this account is evidence of the resurrection, not least because of how it highlights that no one was really expecting it. They don't recognise Jesus, partly because they were "kept from recognising him" (cf. v.17), but also because the idea of seeing Jesus again seemed impossible. They had witnessed Jesus' crucifixion - they knew that he had really died. Yet, as they try to make sense of this, they can't help but tell their companion along the road. They're shocked that he hadn't already heard about all of the things that had happened! Such was the gravity of the news!

But as they share the news with their mystery companion, Jesus shocks them by not only rebuking them (cf. v.25) but by unpacking their Scriptures (i.e., 'Moses and all the Prophets') to demonstrate how it all points to him. But what Luke wants us to notice is what happens when they do realise that this is Jesus. As Jesus stays for a meal and breaks bread, all of a sudden, perhaps in the greatest lightbulb moment of their lives, they realise that this is Jesus! They probably not only recall the Last Supper but can now see how it all fits together. Their response? To go and tell the others that this is true! The Lord has risen! AL

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TRAINING CENTRE