

A Study of Luke's Gospel
Week Twenty-Five
Luke 17:20-18:20

Day One

20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." 22 Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. 23 Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. 24 For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. 25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

v. 20 – The Jews believed that the Messiah would come to establish the throne of David to rule over the Jews and subjugate and even destroy the Gentiles. In fact, the reverse was true. Jesus came to destroy the established Jewish infrastructure and rule gloriously over the Gentiles. It is so important that we not imposed our agendas on God—what we think or hope God will do. That is how you avoid disappointment in serving the Lord. You keep your expectations in Him and not in anything that you think or have figured out “should” happen.

Have you ever been disappointed in the Lord? Are you disappointed now? If so, it is probably because you thought the Lord was going to do something that didn't happen, or you thought something would never happen that God allowed. The lesson is to keep your expectations in Him and allow God to be God—to rule as Sovereign over the affairs of men.

v. 21 – The Jews were looking for an external kingdom with all the trappings—capital city, throne, human king, and king's court. But Jesus told them that the kingdom of God was an internal one, not an external one. That is why I stay out of politics for the most part. I vote as a citizen, but I am wary of anyone who tries to take God and put Him into His political party or view. God wants to rule, but He rules in you and through that extends His rule to what you do. If I were a politician, I would allow God to rule in me and then my influence and decisions would help express God's will of justice, peace and equity through me. Does this make sense? Do you agree or disagree?

vs. 22&23 – In the future, the disciples would long to see Jesus again or at least God's kingdom established in a visible sense. I don't think we can interpret this verse without reading Matthew 24:1-28, where Jesus was clearly talking about the fall of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 AD. At that time, there were many who claimed to be the Messiah who was going to deliver the Jews from the Roman troops that had surrounded the city. No help came and Jerusalem was destroyed. But Josephus, the Jewish historian, reported that not one Christian lost life in the fall of Jerusalem because they fled, having

taken Jesus warnings seriously that the Kingdom was not to be a literal one, making Jerusalem impregnable to the Romans. The Christians knew that their Kingdom wasn't a visible one, and they were not fooled by false Messiah claims.

v. 24 – I'm not sure what this verse means. Lightning is quick, terrifying, seen only for a moment and powerful. In context, it would appear that this is a reference to the fall of Jerusalem and the Jewish system, which went on for another 40 years after Jesus, but then fell swiftly, never to return to its former glory. When God withdrew His hand from the stiff-necked Jews, their fall was quick and complete. In essence, lightning struck them.

v. 25 – Before any of this could happen, the Jews had to reject Jesus and His mission. They repudiated what He stood for and rejected His claims as King and God. His suffering and death was the ultimate rejection. Their rejection of Jesus set in motion their ultimate fall, which was swift, even though God gave them many more years to repent and return.

Day Two

26 "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. 27 People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. 29 But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. 30 "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. 32 Remember Lot's wife! 33 Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. 34 I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. 35 Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." 37 "Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

vs. 26-37 – Many people interpret Jesus' comments in this passage as reference to the end of the age when Jesus will return. I don't believe that is what He was referring to here. My sense is that the "days of the Son of Man" refer to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The earlier context of these remarks is about the end of the Jewish system as it revolved around the Temple and not the return of the Lord. I think these comments continue that discussion.

Too many people are preoccupied with end time matters. I never give any thought to them, nor do I spend any time in theological wrangling over what amounts to pure speculation about the return of the Lord. All I know is that we must be busy doing the Lord's work no matter when He returns. I'm intrigued by men who have become millionaires from writing and selling fiction about what the end will be like. While I am

glad they are prospering, I regret that their approach to Scripture is perhaps more fictional than their writings.

If you want to know where I stand on “the end,” read my Revelation studies. The message of Revelation is that every movement that has raised up or ever will raise up against God has been and will be defeated. I have said that every “ism” becomes a “wasm” in the presence of God. The Lord reigns supremely and sovereignly. Period.

Notice that Jesus referred to three Old Testament events: the flood, Sodom’s destruction, and Lot’s wife. Jesus mentioned them as historical facts, not myths or old wives’ tales. If Jesus believed in the literal interpretation of events in the Old Testament, you and I would be wise to do the same. All three events were cataclysmic, happening suddenly, although not without warning. Yet the inhabitants chose to ignore the warnings and those unprepared were destroyed.

This shows another side of Jesus’ appeal to the Jews. While He reached out in love and miraculous power, He also made ominous predictions of judgment that should have put “the fear of God” on the listeners. But the Jews were so confident that judgment couldn’t come to them because they were God’s people that they scoffed and ignored Jesus—everyone except His followers. As stated earlier, not one believer lost life in the fall of Jerusalem, for when they saw the Roman armies surrounding the city, they fled.

This wasn’t the first time in their history that the Jews put their confidence in their ethnic and religious history instead of in obedience. They did the same in the days of Jeremiah and refused to believe that their fall was imminent. They saw God as their good luck charm that wouldn’t let anything bad happen. Jesus’ peers were guilty of the same mistake.

Christians can have the same attitude, believing that they are somehow a privileged group that doesn’t have to exercise radical obedience. I hope you are not guilty of that error. Don’t mistake God’s kindness for acceptance or approval:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare (2 Peter 3:9-10).

Day Three

18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

v. 1 – Today’s study will only cover one verse, something I haven’t done in any previous study. As I have written on many occasions, parables are stories that were told to teach

one lesson. In most cases, unless Jesus interpreted the details, we are better off not trying to attach meaning to the details. We should just find out what the lesson is.

In the case of this parable, Luke tells us the lesson up front: We ought always to pray and not give up. Now let me ask you a question, dear reader. Why would the Lord tell us a story with the lesson that we shouldn't give up in prayer unless there was a tendency for us to stop praying? That means that, at times, the answer to our prayer may tarry and we can give up praying about that particular issue. This parable was told to reverse that tendency.

Have you given up in prayer? I don't mean to imply that you have stopped praying. But it is possible to be praying for everything except the item for which you have abandoned hope. Perhaps today is the day that the Lord will restore hope and you can add that item back on your prayer list.

And by the way, how much time are you spending in prayer? Now please don't go set a goal to pray an hour a day if you've only been averaging 10 minutes. That seldom works and only leads to frustration and discouragement. But if you're praying 10 minutes, can you increase to 15 minutes? If you're praying 30 minutes, how about increasing it to 35 or 40 minutes?

Prayer had a vital role in the life of the early church.

They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (Acts 1:14).

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42-43).

Paul urged his readers to give themselves to prayer:

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful (Colossians 4:2).

Why not take some time today to study a bit more of what the New Testament has to say about prayer and then set some new prayer goals and objectives?

Day Four

2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' 4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" 6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them

off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

vs. 1-6 – The lesson of this parable is to pray and not give up. It is not a story about God's love for widows of the hard hearts of judges. It is a story about prayer.

It seems that that the picture that is painted here is of someone who is shameless in their constant appeals to a superior authority who can help them. This woman pestered the judge and he finally gave in. Of course, that is not how God is. He doesn't finally give in because He is tired of hearing from you. As you seek Him, He builds something in you that enables you to face future trials. He teaches you about faith, perseverance and trust and you appreciate the answer to your prayers more when you have worked and waited.

I think at times God delays so that we don't easily slip into an attitude that God is there to serve us quickly and at all times. Have you ever prayed for something fervently, only to look back and realize how selfish the request was? Weren't you happy then that God didn't answer, or He answered by saying "no?" But then there are other things that truly matter, vital spiritual issues and true spiritual riches that are worth pursuing and giving your life for. For those things, you must persevere in faith.

vs. 7&8 – There is one word in these two verses that I struggle with, and that word is "quickly." I have learned that God's definition of quickly and mine are entirely different. I may think that quickly involves two weeks; God may be thinking two years. I may be thinking two years; God may be thinking 20 years. The key here is to align my definition with God's and then to keep on praying.

Jesus asked a good question at the end of the parable: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Let's personalize this question. If the Son of Man came today, would He find faith in your home? In your church? In the area of the church in which you serve? In your business? In you?

How would He determine whether there was faith? One way would be whether you are praying for something without giving up because that is the lesson of this parable.

Yesterday we talked about increasing your time in prayer. Today, why not take a look at your prayer list (I assume you have one—if not, why not compose one now). What items need to be reinstated that were there previously? Have you given up about something that needs to find its way back into your prayer life today? If so, write it down and keep on praying.

Day Five

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

prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

v. 9 – Once again we learn of the parable’s intended lesson before we read the parable. When someone “looks down” on someone else, they feel they are in a superior position. This leads to arrogance, pride and an air of condescension whenever the person deals with people below. That is how the Pharisees and many of the other Jews related to Gentiles and people whom they considered “sinners.” I see some in the Christian community with the same attitude when they deal with people of another political party, homosexuals and other groups that offend them.

A couple of good verses to remember are:

Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar (Psalm 138:6).

But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:10).

Do you need to humble yourself today, especially where another person or persons are concerned?

vs. 10-13 – Jesus then told the story of the publican and the Pharisee. This must have shocked the Jews, for they considered tax gatherers the scum of their society. Jesus portrayed the tax gatherer as one who related to God and was accepted by God for his humility and contriteness. Once we see that Jesus knew how to construct and tell a good story that made His intended point.

v. 14 – Jesus wasn’t endorsing the publican’s career choice, but He did indicate that this man went home justified and the Pharisee did not. The Pharisee didn’t see that he had any sins so he did not ask for any forgiveness.

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives (1 John 1:10).

Yet the publican was justified. Some once told me how to remember what justified means. Justified means “just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned.” The publican’s sins were wiped away because of his humility; he saw his need for God. The Pharisee saw no need,

although he had need, so he went home feeling justified but it was only a feeling of confidence in his own righteousness.

Jesus said that if you humble yourself, you will be exalted. You do what you can do—humble yourself—and then God will do what He can do—exalt you. But if you don't humble yourself, then you run the risk of God humiliating you in hopes that you will humble yourself and turn to Him. There is one more verse in this context that I try to remember:

The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor (Proverbs 15:33).

Day Six

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

v. 15 – The disciples were serving as ushers for Jesus. Instead of finding ways for Jesus to have access to the people, they were looking for ways to keep the people away, especially the babies! Not only did they try to keep the people away, they verbally abused the people for even trying to get close. Modern disciples are still guilty of this from time to time. We try to contrive ways to keep Jesus all for ourselves, rather than sharing Him with others who could receive a blessing from His touch.

People were eager for their children to receive a blessing from Jesus' touch. There is still a blessing when the Master touches anyone, but often they must touch Him through you and me. Are people eager to touch you or to have their children touch you? When they do, do they receive a blessing or some spiritual benefit? Make it your goal to come in contact with as many people today. When they do, don't put up any barriers but let them receive the love of Jesus through you.

v. 16 – In a sense, Jesus rebuked the disciples, for He countermanded their orders and called the children to Himself. Jesus once again used a natural setting to impart a spiritual truth—He was always “on duty,” always teaching. And He said that we must be like children to enter and enjoy God's kingdom. What did He mean?

1. We must recognize that we are always children and God is our Father.
2. We are dependent upon God.
3. We should never lose our sense of wonder for God.
4. Children know they are vulnerable; we should have the same awareness, putting our trust in God.

Can you think of any other child-like traits that would make us eligible for God's kingdom?

v. 17 – Jesus made a blanket statement that no one can enter God's kingdom unless like a child. An arrogant adult sees no need for God. "I can do it myself" is their motto. I have often been intrigued by the pseudo-Bible verse that states, "God helps those who help themselves." This is the exact opposite of what Jesus said here. Jesus said, "God helps those who can't help themselves."

Another aspect of being a child is being told what to do and when to do it. The same is true in God's kingdom. He is the King and we are His loyal subjects. We obey His commands, just like children obey their parents. If that offends you, then you cannot enter or enjoy God's kingdom.

Day Seven

18 A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good-except God alone. 20 You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" 21 "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

v. 18 – Mark reported that this man came running up to Jesus and threw himself at Jesus' feet, such was the urgency of his question and the humility of his heart. The man then asked up the most important question anyone can ask? There are many who are concerned for spiritual things and the eternal state of their soul. But not everyone is willing to submit to the answers that God provides. This man started well, but he didn't finish well.

v. 19 – While it is not clear whether this is a good translation of what Jesus said, we shall look at what is translated here. Jesus was probing the nature of the man's revelation—what he knew about Jesus and how he knew it. I think of what Jesus said to Peter:

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:17-18).

Perhaps Jesus was checking to see if this man came out of an intellectual interest or if the Father was stirring and dealing with his heart. Was this man coming because he saw that Jesus was God or from some other motive?

v. 20 – Jesus must have seen that this man was coming from a zealous religious position and not one from a deep conviction given by God through the Holy Spirit. He answered the man to follow the commandments that every Jew would know from childhood. Yet Jesus didn't answer the man's question, for keeping the commandments wasn't enough to gain eternal life. It appears that Jesus gave the man an evasive answer based on the

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nature of the man's interest and inquiry. In a way you and I determine how God will respond to us:

To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty (Psalm 18:25-27).

I have to assume that Jesus read this man and proceeded to respond to this man according to the nature of his inquiry.

How is God relating and responding to you lately? Reading, Psalm 18 above, how are you figuring into that process? If God is distant, are you? I leave you with one last passage as we finish this week's study:

Come near to God and he will come near to you (James 4:8).

How can you apply this to your walk with God today?