**Luke 13-15 – True discipleship**

*13:1-5: the fate that awaits all who do not repent*

Rather than expressing His sympathy for those who perished in such awful ways, Jesus warns His hearers that they will have the same fate if they do not repent. We all need to accept that we are evil and deserving of such a fate, our only hope being repentance that leads to salvation. The theme of repentance is an important one for Luke. It was introduced in the speech of John the Baptist’s speech in 3:7-8a, “He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.”

*13:6-9: Parable of warning of the need to repent*

This parable is a warning to all, but especially to the contemporary Judeans, that if we do not repent and produce the fruit of repentance (3:8), we will be cut down, like a fruitless fruit tree. This is also reminiscent of John’s speech in 3:9, “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

*13:10-17: Jesus releases a woman from the bonds of Satan*

This story is full of terms of “release.” Vs 12: “Woman, you are released from your illness.” Vs 15: “Hypocrites, does not each one of you release (‘untie’) his ox or donkey on the Sabbath… .” Vs 16: “this woman whom Satan has bound… was it not necessary for her to be released from her bondage?” The language points back to Jesus’ inaugural speech (4:18), “He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives.” The miracles of Jesus are not just demonstrations of His power and compassion, but also of the establishment of His Kingdom in which we may enjoy release from our bonds.

*13:18-21 Parables of the growth of the Kingdom*

These parables both emphasis the seemingly miraculous growth of the Kingdom from the smallest of beginnings to something that will spread and support life. The miracle of healing one woman is just the beginning.

*13:22-30: Salvation is not assured for the many*

Jesus doesn’t really answer the question about whether few will be saved. But he warns His hearers to strive for entry through the small door. At some point the door will be closed, and many will claim the right of entry based on their history with Jesus – they spent time with Him and listened to Him teach. He has a 3-fold answer:

* I don’t know where you are from
* Go away, you evil-doers
* Their fate will be wailing and gnashing of teeth

Again we have the unpleasant reminder that we are evil and unworthy of Him. He does not need to fill the Kingdom with anyone; it will be filled from those whom we don’t expect; and it will not be filled with those whom we do expect.

*13:31-35: Jesus is bound for rejection in Jerusalem*

As if in a retort to Jesus’ “Depart from me, you evil-doers,” some pharisees advise Jesus to depart from there because Herod is after Him. It’s not clear what “fox” is meant to imply, except that it was not exactly a compliment. The 3 days journey to Jerusalem, where Jesus must die, is a subtle reminder of the 3 days in the tomb. Jesus makes what seems to be a final, mournful appeal to the city to allow Him to take them into His protection (implied into His Kingdom), but they are unwilling.

The result is that their “house” (the temple is now called “your” house, not “God’s” house) is to be “forsaken” and left “to you.” This is an allusion to Jeremiah 22:3-5

Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. For if you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their servants and their people. But if you will not obey these words, I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that *this house shall become a desolation*.

The people of Jerusalem could have welcomed Jesus as their King forever, but because they rejected Him and His Kingdom, their house was fated to be abandoned once again, as when the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, invaded and destroyed the city in 586 bc. These words amount to Jesus’ prophetic proclamation of God’s judgment against the city that He chose.

He will not return to the city until they welcome Him as one who comes in the name of the Lord. Although the crowds that followed Jesus did shout “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Luke 19:38), those shouts were meaningless for Luke because they did not represent the city’s reception of Jesus as their King on His terms. Only when Jerusalem recognizes Jesus as their King in full recognition of the Kingdom of God which Jesus has been proclaiming (not the political Kingdom that they were hoping for) would they see their savior.

*14:1-6: another healing as release for the captives*

Jesus is again invited to a Pharisee’s house for dinner. As in Ch. 13, Jesus defends healing on the Sabbath because if one can help an animal on the Sabbath (unbind in ch 13 or pull out of a pit here), surely one is permitted to do the same for a human being. After healing the man, Jesus “sent him away” (literally, “released him”). Again healing is a sign of release and the sign of the arrival of God’s Kingdom.

*14:7-24: Dinner etiquette for guests and hosts*

Take the humble position so that you can be exalted and honored. Do not seek the best seat from which you can only be removed and humbled. Do not invite your relatives, friends, or wealthy neighbors. The whole point of throwing a lavish dinner party is to impress your guests, demonstrate your place in the social hierarchy, and be invited to their dinner parties in return. Jesus advises that we should “invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” in order to be repaid by God alone. This would be a grave insult to the those of social rank would are to be snubbed with no invitation in favor of those who are of no social standing whatsoever. What would it mean for us to take this seriously?

The parable of the host who was snubbed by his guests is meaningful on two levels. By its placement immediately after Jesus’ advice about who to invite, it is an extension of the advice to reach out to the poor and socially insignificant and bring them into your banquets. But it also is a parable about God’s invitation to join the heavenly feast in His Kingdom: we must accept his invitation, but also come when called or we will be shut out and replaced by those whose only qualification is that they came when called.

*14:25-35: the demands of true discipleship*

To follow Jesus is to prefer Him (and His Kingdom) to family and even life itself. To “bear ones cross” is to submit to death. The call to abandon family for Jesus’ sake (as Jesus did in 8:19-21 and for the reward promised in 18:28-30) is a fitting follow-on to His advice to invite the poor rather than family and friends to ones banquets. Doing so might turn the family against you.

Following Jesus means calculating whether you can pay the price (which may include loss of family or loss of life). If you can’t pay the price, then don’t bother. The comparison of a king going into battle is interesting. Does it mean that we need to realize that we can’t win if we go up against Jesus, so we should reconcile to him (through repentance and faith)? If we are useless disciples (like saltless salt), we are good for nothing. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” is an appeal to pay attention and accept what we would rather ignore.

*15:1-10: Jesus explains His predilection for associating with sinners*

A shepherd who loses a sheep or a woman who loses a coin will focus only on finding the lost item until found, and then will rejoice with all his or her friends. This is a little harsh for those of us who may not think we are among the lost. He really doesn’t care that much about us. To fully realize His love, we must take our rightful place among the lost.

*15:11-32: the parable of the lost and found son*

There is a lot built into this parable, but the main point is stated in the last line – “But I *had* to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.” As those who remain loyal, we may feel a little miffed at His focus on the lost; we need to get over it and join Him in his single-minded search for those who are lost.