The Journey to Jerusalem

(5) The view from beyond  Luke 16:19-31; Psalm 126

1. The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)
This story illustrates what Jesus has taught earlier in the chapter: “Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings” (9). This is followed by further comment about “worldly wealth” (11-13). The Pharisees, “who loved money” (14) are typical of the rich and privileged man in this story who has no care for those who are poor and insignificant. After death, we will all see things different (cf. Mk.10:31; James 2:5).

This view from beyond isn’t literal but uses Jewish imagery to convey some core truths about the after-life: Heaven is a place of bliss and gain. Hell is a place of anguish and loss. A great gulf is fixed between them. And there will be a reversal of earth’s fortunes based on very different values. The problem isn’t being rich (cf. Abraham Gen.13:2) – but this man didn’t use his riches rightly. In contrast, the beggar had no earthly helper, but his name (Lazarus means helped by God) points to his faith that his name was written in heaven (Lk.10:20). Both men provide the eternal perspective which calls us to live justly and by faith.

2. When tears turn to joy (Psalm 126)
The Jews’ return from exile was a cause of great joy (cf. Ps.137:1-6), a wonderful restoration of their fortunes (1-3). It’s an image that brings to mind the joy and glory of heaven, after the struggles and sorrows of this life (Rev.19:7; 21:1-4; 1 Pet.1:4-6). But that’s not yet the full story here for their great deliverance was followed by great troubles.

So the rest of the psalm looks to God for further restoration (4-6). They need God’s sudden help, just as he alone brings rain to the barren Negev desert. But they realise too that the joys of harvest are hard-won and long-awaited (James 5:7-8). It’s “a picture of toil crowned at last with blessing, rather than the bare mercy of homecoming” (Kidner). We reap what we sow, and those who do "not become weary in doing good" will reap an eternal harvest (Gal.6:7-10; Lk.12:33-34).

Discussion 1 – The rich man and Lazarus
From this parable consider how God wishes us to treat one another, especially in areas where people have needs. How will he evaluate the stewardship of our lives?

Scripture as a whole makes clear that God’s evaluation of our lives is not based on good works – but he has shown us what he expects of us and how we can do it. How can we live this out in practice?

Discussion 2 – When tears turn to joy
How does your hope of heaven encourage and strengthen you in the struggles and trials of this life?

What does it mean to “sow in tears” (5) and what makes that difficult?

How can we avoid becoming “weary in doing good” (Gal.6:9)?

Reflection:
What has particularly struck you out of today’s study and discussion?

How might that help you to be a better follower of Jesus?

Throughout this coming week, reflect further on these thoughts and continue the journey through Luke’s Gospel with these daily readings:

Thurs 26  Fri 27  Sat 28  Sun 29  Mon 30  Tues 31  Wed 1

If you have internet access, you can read a daily short blog with comment on these verses www.skeltonbrotton.wixsite.com/christians