The Journey to Jerusalem Week 3

15) “Rich towards God”

Read Luke 12:13-21

This parable of the rich fool occurs only in Luke though Jesus often speaks about money as a spiritual danger. It’s impossible to love God if we love money (Mt.5:24; 1 Tim.6:10) and “the deceitfulness of wealth” chokes our response to God’s word (Mk.4:19). This parable vividly illustrates the folly of valuing material things more than we value God.

Disputes over family inheritances are not new and that's the context here (13-14). It leads to a strong warning to “be on your guard against all kinds of greed” (15). Greed (literally covetousness) takes many forms, as the tenth commandment indicates (Ex.20:17). At the heart of it is self-centredness and self-indulgence – the word “I” comes eight times in this story in the Greek.

Money and riches are not evil in themselves. But they're entrusted to us to use for God’s glory and for the welfare of others (Lk.16:10-11; 1 Tim.6:17-19; Mt.6:19-21). Hence the foolishness of living for temporal rather than eternal riches, especially when we remember how fragile and uncertain human life is (16-20). Those who recognise this will “gain a heart of wisdom” and look to live lives that are “rich towards God” (21; Ps.90:3,12).

16) “Do not worry”

Read Luke 12:22-34

In Matthew this section is included in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.6:25-34) where it follows on well from Jesus teaching us to pray, “Our Father in heaven... Give us our daily bread” (Mt.6:9,11). It's just as relevant here, after the parable of the rich fool (Lk.12:13-21) who trusted in riches for his security and his purpose in life.

The command “do not worry” begins with “therefore” (22). This points back to being “rich toward God” (12:21) and tells us that our security has its basis in that. There are more important things in life than food and clothing (23-28). It’s not that they don’t matter but “do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink” (29). Instead, when our heart is set on God and his kingdom then we can trust him for everything else (31,34).

The call to “seek his kingdom” is followed by the promise that “the Father is pleased to give” it (32). His true disciples may be few but we are God’s flock, under his loving care and provision (Ps.77:20; Is.40:11; Jn.10:11; Heb.13:20-21). With this purpose and this promise, our anxiety about money will get replaced with generosity in our use of it, thereby laying up lasting “treasure in heaven” (33; Mt.19:21).
17) “You must be ready”

Read Luke 12:35-48

The previous passages have emphasised that we need to live with an eternal perspective, laying up lasting treasure in heaven (12:20,33). Jesus now goes on to urge his followers to keep that future destiny constantly in mind so that we are not taken by surprise either by the crises of life or by his coming again in glory.

Jesus says a lot about his return (e.g. Mk.13; Mt.24) and some of the content of those chapters is included here by Luke. In each case the main point of this teaching is always the same – we are to be “dressed ready for service” and not caught out by our unawareness of when his coming will be (35-36; cf. Mt.25:1-13). “Therefore keep watch” – we need always to be awake and ready (37-40; Mk.13:33-37).

This is underlined in a further parable which urges “faithful and wise” stewardship of our gifts and calling (41-46; Mt.25:14-30). Those who keep on serving faithfully will be rewarded and blessed (37-38,43-44). But those who give up because they get weary of waiting will find that their faithlessness is costly (45-47). Stewardship is a responsibility and a privilege not to be taken lightly: “From the one who has been given much, much will be required” (48).

18) “Fire on the earth”

Read Luke 12:49-59

John had said that Jesus would “baptise with fire” (Lk.3:16-18). Fire there refers to judgement and that’s the likely meaning here too (49), with the judgement of the cross in mind (Jn.12:31). Jesus knew that he could not avoid the agony of crucifixion, as that was the why he’d come (50; Jn.12:27; Mk.10:38). But the message of the cross is inevitably divisive as not everyone responds to it in the same way (51-53; Mt.10:34-36; 1 Cor.1:23-24).

The saying about interpreting the times (54-56) is linked in Matthew with a request for Jesus to give “a sign from heaven” and followed by a further mention of “the sign of Jonah” – a reference to his death and resurrection (Mt.12:39; 16:1-4; Lk.11:29). It’s hypocritical to focus on superficialities of the weather whilst ignoring the storm-clouds hanging over the nation and not recognising how directly relevant Jesus is to that (Lk.13:34-35; 19:44; 21:20-24).

So Jesus urges them to judge the situation aright (57). Just as people try hard to resolve human disputes prior to judicial involvement (58-59; Mt.5:25-26) so they (and we) should respond to the coming of Jesus by urgently making peace with God (2 Cor.5:20-6:2).
19) “Repent or perish”


The popular understanding of individual suffering was that it must be directly due to some sin in that person’s life. The book of Job had long since refuted this idea but it lingered on in people’s thinking and that’s the perception which Jesus addresses here (1-5). The same view is seen in the question about a man born blind (Jn.9:1-3). In both instances Jesus insists that such thinking is both wrong and misleading. Rather, such incidents are the consequences for all people of living in a fallen world (Gen.3:17-19). Jesus came in order to reverse the effects of the fall and bring about “the renewal of all things” (Mt.19:28; Rom.8:19-21). So for sufferers and non-sufferers alike, the same urgent response is needed: “Repent, or you too will all perish” (3,5; Mk.1:15).

God doesn’t want us to perish. In love he sent Jesus so that “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn.3:16). The parable of the fruitless fig-tree shows his patient longing for “everyone to come to repentance”, but the day of judgement must eventually take place (6-9; 2 Pet.3:9-11). Human tragedy is one of the signs of the times which calls us to get right with God (12:56).

20) “The Kingdom of God is like...”

Read Luke 13:10-21

This isn’t the first time that the matter of Jesus healing on the Sabbath has caused contention with the Jewish authorities (10-14; Lk.6:1-11). In those earlier incidents Jesus declared that he is Lord of the Sabbath (6:5) and that the Sabbath is a day for doing good (6:9). In fact it’s the intended purpose of the Sabbath which Jesus is fulfilling here (Mk.2:27).

So it’s absurd to object to that because of religious rules, and hypocritical too as there’d be no objection to looking after animals on the Sabbath day (15). How much more then must “a daughter of Abraham” be set free from Satan’s evil affliction (16). This miracle is yet another example of God’s kingdom breaking into Satan’s kingdom (Lk.11:20). Such action – not the narrowness of rule-keeping – is what the kingdom of God is like.

Next Luke intentionally includes two short parables about the inevitability of the growth and triumph of God’s kingdom (18-21; Mt.13:31-33; Mk.4:30-32). They are illustrations of what has just happened, showing what the kingdom of God is like. It may not seem like a big deal (except to the woman!) but by one action at a time, however small, God’s kingdom is built (1 Cor.15:58).
21) “The last will be first”


Luke continues to use the framework of Jesus journeying to Jerusalem (22). Most Jews believed that as God’s chosen people they were sure to be saved (23; 3:7-8). But God’s way is a narrow way which must be entered “through the narrow gate” (24: Mt.7:13-14). That takes “effort” and the broad gate is more appealing. So Jesus urges people to enter the kingdom while they can, before the door is closed (25-27; Mt.7:23; 25:10-12).

For when he returns in glory those who sit down at the kingdom feast will include Gentiles from all over the world but many religious Jews will find themselves locked out (28-29; Mt.8:11; Ls.45:6; Rev.19:9). It will be a day of surprises, when “first” and “last” will be reversed and faithful discipleship rewarded (30; Mk.10:28-31).

Jerusalem is not just Jesus’s destination – it’s his destiny, the place of his appointed death when his work is done (31-33; 9:22). His lament over the city shows that he “often” went there, and reveals his heartfelt grief over the desolation that will result from their rejection of him (34-35; 19:41-44; Mt.23:37-39). Only when he comes in glory will they recognise him, but by then it will be too late (Rev.1:7).