

A Study of Luke's Gospel
Week Twenty-One
Luke 12:51-13:21

Day One

51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. 52 From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

vs. 51-53 – I don't think this is the intention but the result of Jesus' ministry. Jesus knew that His message and ministry could not make peace or coexist with the spirit of this world. Paul wrote:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:5-8).

There is often division between those who serve the Lord and those who don't, even when they are part of the same family. Jesus understood this reality and tried to prepare His followers for this unfortunate eventuality:

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields- and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

There was even division in Jesus' family over who He was and what He was doing:

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind" (Mark 3:20-21).

But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, 'You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.' For even his own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:2-5).

I hope your family is supportive of your service to God. But if they are not, then I hope, in the midst of the pain, you stay focused and do what God wants you to do.

Day Two

54 He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. 55 And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. 56 Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? 57 "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? 58 As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. 59 I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

vs. 54-56 – Jesus seemed to be rebuking the crowd for not recognizing what He had been sent to do, thus the reality of the ultimate divisions even among families concerning Him and His ministry. It is important to interpret what the Lord is doing in your life at any given time. When I was a pastor, I would always begin my counseling or general sessions with the question, “What is the Lord saying?” I wanted to “force” people to spend some time being aware of what was happening and what lesson the Lord was imparting through it. So I will ask you the same questions: “What is the Lord saying to you right now? What is He doing in your life? What lessons are you learning?” It is critical that you be aware, alert and spiritually sensitive.

v. 57-59 – Jesus then borrowed another example from the daily affairs of His day. He said that if they were dealing with legal issues, they would expedite their successful completion or risk being sent to jail. Now one infinitely more important and powerful than any earthly court had come and the people were lax in their response to Him.

In essence, Jesus was saying that He wasn't someone who had come to entertain the people or to be just another voice among voices vying for their attention. Jesus was God and He was urging the people to take His message seriously. If they did not, they would pay a greater penalty than any earthly judge could impose.

How about you? Do you take Jesus seriously, or is He a casual acquaintance, whose words are considered and evaluated against all the other influences in your life? Or is Jesus the Son of God, commanding your allegiance, worship and absolute obedience? You cannot treat Jesus like some cosmic “sugar daddy” who has come to meet your needs. Are you serving God or are you trying to get God to serve you?

Day Three

13:1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-do

you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

v. 1 – The people wanted to talk to Jesus about current events. It seems that Pilate, who was feuding with Herod until Jesus' crucifixion reconciled them, took an opportunity to kill some Galileans while they were in the Temple area offering sacrifices. The people who told Jesus were probably both shocked that this happened in the Temple. Remember, Jews thought in Jesus' day that good things happened to people who did good and bad things happened to people who did bad. This incident would offend their sense of moral order, for it appeared that a bad thing happened to people who were doing good.

v. 2 – Jesus understood what they were really saying and directed His response to address the issue of whether those whom Pilate killed were worse sinners than the other Galileans. It is so important to understand the culture and "worldview" of the people to whom you minister. This is why many Jews were offended at Jesus, for how could God allow a righteous man to be crucified. His crucifixion "proved" to many that Jesus was a fraud because of their faulty logic stemming from an incorrect premise.

Do you have this same superstition that only good will happen to good people? When something bad happens to someone else, do you wonder if they were is some secret sin or lack of faith on their part? If you do, then you must adjust your concept of reality.

v. 3 – Now Jesus went to the heart of the matter: the people who were bringing Him this news would suffer a similar "fate" unless they repented and followed Him. Jesus was very direct with His people that they needed to follow Him. Therefore, I don't understand anyone who is less firm with Jews today. If Jesus was unequivocal about every Jews need to repent, then why would the modern church be enamored with Judaism and reduce Jesus' righteous demands?

I love Israel; I have been there five times. I love the Jewish people, but the message to them is the same as to any other ethnic group: repent and be saved. This doesn't mean that God doesn't love them and that He won't fulfill His promises He made to Abraham and the other patriarchs. But Paul, himself a Jew, wrote:

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God (Romans 2:28-29).

vs. 4&5 – Jesus went on to interpret another current event. (This shows me that Jesus came not just to interpret the past but also the present. How "up" on current events are you? Do you use them as a teaching tool?) A tower had fallen on some innocent bystanders who were killed. Was this because they were worse sinners than others? Absolutely not! Jesus was direct and forceful: Unless those listening turned to Him, they would likewise perish, suddenly and without hope.

I cannot emphasize enough the critical need for a missionary to understand the culture in which they are working. Jesus became a Jew, completely submerged in the language, culture and mores of His day. He lived among the Jews so He could effectively reach the Jews. This became a model for others to follow, not that everyone had to become a Jew, but to see that they were missionaries to the society in which they were born. Of course, then there is the model of Paul, who became a missionary to a culture outside of the culture He was born into. This helps us understand what Paul wrote:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

To whom are you a slave? What group has the Lord given you with which to identify and minister? Do you know?

Day Four

6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

vs. 6-9 – Jesus told this parable in the context of the lesson He was teaching in verses 1-5. Israel is often portrayed as a fruitful or unfruitful fig tree. I am sure that the crowd recognized the analogy. God was patiently waiting for fruit to come from His “tree.” We don’t know if the owner found any fruit the next year, but that isn’t important. The lesson is that God is patient with the lack of repentance and fruit from Israel, but His patience will not last forever! When His patience is exhausted, then judgment occurs. Jesus was urging His listeners not to be lulled into a false sense of security just because bad things were happening to others and not to them. This wasn’t necessarily an indication of anyone’s righteousness, but rather of God’s abundant, but not endless, patience.

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? (Romans 2:4).

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life (1 Timothy 1:16).

Don't mistake God's patience for approval. He expects and demands repentance from everyone.

Day Five

10 On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

vs. 10&11 – Jesus was teaching, yet this woman caught His attention. It would have been hard not to notice her, for she was bent over and could not make herself upright. She had been in this condition for 18 years and no one could help her. Yet there she was in the synagogue, with her humiliating infirmity evident to everyone. Luke informed us that an evil spirit was the cause of her problem. Some medical conditions are spiritual and not natural.

The spirit weighed down this woman so that she could not even look up to heaven. She was in a desperate condition.

v. 12 – The woman did not approach Jesus; He called her forward. She had learned to live with her condition, carrying on a normal life where possible. This brought her to the synagogue on the Sabbath, probably not knowing that Jesus would be there. She was listening to Him teach and suddenly He called her forward. Now she was the object of everyone's attention, but I suppose she was accustomed to that as children and crowds gawked at her wherever she went. But this was not to be another humiliating experience for her. This time, God sought her out and set her free!

This is certainly an indication of everyone's spiritual condition. We were oppressed by the devil, unable to face or respond to heaven. Then Jesus called us out and set us free!

v. 13 – First Jesus spoke to the woman and declared that she was free from her infirmity. But then He went one step further: He laid His hands on her. He identified with her condition, and touched her, not fearing becoming unclean. What was the result? She straightened up and praised God! Her 18-year ordeal was over! Jesus had come to her synagogue near where she lived and set her free.

Is there some situation under which you have labored or suffered for a number of years. This story should encourage you that God is aware of it. You don't have to go find Him for help, He can find you. And He may meet with you at a time that you don't expect, even doing something you have done regularly for a long time. This woman didn't

rebuke Jesus for waiting so long to heal her. Rather she went on her way praising God! She did not upbraid God for His insensitivity, but praised Him for His grace and mercy that had set her free. Lord, may I be like this woman—grateful for what you have done, when you have done it. Amen.

Day Six

14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." 15 The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" 17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

v. 14 – Religion and legalism can be mean. The woman was set free from her infirmity after 18 years of suffering, and the synagogue ruler was indignant. Can you imagine? The woman's spiritual leader was upset with her, the people and Jesus! I don't think the woman even knew why Jesus had called her forward and then she was healed. What was she supposed to do—give it back? Did they even have meetings that she could attend in order to be healed on other days? I doubt it.

The issue of the Sabbath and how it should be "kept" has only recently subsided. I have often said that whoever believed in a literal Sabbath wasn't in the ministry, for Sunday is workday for a pastor and other church staff.

v. 15 – Jesus correctly identified and "called out" the man's hypocrisy. It was customary to water the donkey on the Sabbath, but "illegal" to heal a woman. That's absurd! That's the problem with legalism; it looks for rules by which God can be served, but the rules actually work against serving God. The rules only serve to feed man's need to feel like he can control and understand God.

v. 16 – I wonder how Jesus knew that the woman had been bound for 18 years. Perhaps He asked her or perhaps He knew about her previously. At any rate, notice the dialogue that was occurring in the synagogue. The synagogue was a place of interactive worship, where people asked questions and heard teaching from visiting rabbis.

I am trying to incorporate more questions into my own teaching, even when I am in a church on Sunday. Too often people go home and haven't grasped what was being said. What's the use of working hard on a message and the people not understand? The message given isn't for the benefit of the speaker but the listeners. So why shouldn't I do whatever necessary to make sure that the people benefit?

What would happen in your church this Sunday if you stood up and asked a question while the pastor was speaking? The ushers would escort you to your car! But I am convinced that this needs to take place more often.

v. 17 – It was common that the people were delighted with Jesus’ ministry, but the leaders were not. The people had a better understanding of what God was doing, but the leaders were trying to protect God, well, from Jesus!. That is why leaders need to listen to the people who are following them. It isn’t about the people, it’s about the Holy Spirit who is working in the lives of each person. The Spirit is free to work through whomever He chooses and it may not always be the leader:

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:19-21).

I am wary of any leader who believes that he or she is more spiritual than anyone else. This attitude leads to a mentality that the leader should be honored and obeyed. I believe in honor and obedience, but some leaders today have taken it too far. That is why I have studied, taught on and written about servant leadership. Servant leadership must balance honor and obedience or else the leader will begin to think that he or she deserves the honor.

Day Seven

18 Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." 20 Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? 21 It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

v. 18 – Jesus then returned to His primary ministry theme—the kingdom of God. Jesus did not come to build the synagogue or Judaism. He came to preach the Kingdom. Recently I have been speaking about the Kingdom. I have said if you preach the Kingdom, the result is the Church, for the King directs people to be part of His church. But when you preach the Church without the Kingdom, you receive religion. That is just what happened when Jesus healed the woman bent over—the religious synagogue ruler, zealous for Judaism but not the Kingdom—was offended. The ruler was more interested in building and protecting the synagogue than he was in advancing God’s kingdom.

So now Jesus turned the conversation to the Kingdom. As usual, Jesus used analogies from everyday life to help His listeners understand His lesson.

v. 19 – We know from other parables that a mustard seed is among the smallest of seeds. Yet when mature, it becomes a large bush or tree. This is how the Kingdom of God is; it

starts out small but ends up “owning” all the space around it. What does this tell us about the Kingdom?

1. Our ability to respond to God’s rule grows over time.
2. God’s Kingdom is subtle, not overbearing or harsh.
3. God is interested in steady growth, not quick fixes or fads.
4. If it doesn’t grow or last, then it isn’t the kingdom of God.
5. The Kingdom is powerful and can take care of itself if given proper attention.

Can you think of any other things to add to this list? Feel free to do so.

vs. 20&21 – First Jesus used an analogy from nature; then He used one from the kitchen. The Kingdom is like yeast. It only takes a little but the power of yeast then permeates and affects the whole lump of dough. Once yeast is introduced, it will create a chemical reaction that cannot be stopped. Our job is to preach and “introduce” the Kingdom; God can do the rest. But if I “leaven” people with church yeast—join my church, it’s the best, our doctrine is the purest, our outreach the most aggressive—then that leaven will also spread, just like Judaism did. But that leaven is harsh and works against the Kingdom.

Ultimately, I must work to put people in right relationship with God and His kingdom. From that, they will become part of a church. If I do it the other way around, I will reap trouble. Does this make sense? What are you more committed to? God’s kingdom or God’s church? Don’t answer too quickly.