
Day 311- November 7

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)

The Perea Ministry

Readings: *Luke 13:22-35; 14:1-35; 15:1-32; 16:1-31; 17:20-35, 37; 18:1-14; 20:1-16*

Reflections:

- Jesus now spends a bit of time in the region where John the Baptizer gathered a following. Herod ruled the Perea province as well as Galilee. Jesus is still intentionally making his way towards his final confrontation with the religious leaders in Jerusalem.
- Number to be saved: Jesus makes it clear that entering into his kingdom and eternal life is not a broad, open door. His movement is a minority movement. This would have been shocking to the Israelites as they expected they would be set because of their nationality. Jesus goes even further to say that the many who will be there will be Gentiles and not primarily the Jews. In this way, the first will be last and the last will be first. God is constantly bringing people at the back of the line to the front.
- Jesus warned about Herod: Pharisees apparently want Jesus to leave their region and so they say Herod wants to kill him. Jesus is not intimidated. He has a mission and he is not diverging from it. Jesus then slams the Pharisees again by stating that he can't die in Perea under Herod because no prophet is killed outside of Jerusalem. It will be religious leaders, not Herod, who will take Jesus' life.
- Lament over Jerusalem: Jesus is filled with grief over the rebellion of the religious leaders and Jerusalem. He uses the image of a mother hen and how he wanted to gather them into loving community. We see here that we don't need to hate and vilify religious leaders. Jesus mourns the judgment that falls on those who reject his way of grace, reconciliation and peace. Christ-followers as well need to always train their hearts towards grace, even to the most religious opponents.
- Man healed of dropsy: Jesus again has a meal with a Pharisee (we see again his inclusive, relational posture) and heals a man on the Sabbath. Again he challenges them to let go of their religious obsessions and focus on God's heart and helping those in need.
- Parable of the place of honor: Jesus reminds us in this story to willingly embrace positions of humility and service and to allow God to honor us in his time and his way. Jesus teaches us

to actively reject our own ego need to be a part of inner power circles and have places or positions of power or importance. We are to be servants from first to last.

- Urging unselfishness: Jesus takes it one step further. When you throw a party, invite the poor, marginalized, outcasts, and physically (or mentally) challenged. Don't just serve out of a place of humility and other-centeredness, but also devote yourself relationally to those in need. Welcome them as your friends into your homes and parties. This is maybe the toughest to do as many of the marginalized are excluded from community because they are difficult to be around. When we think of marginalized people we should remember the elderly, those in prison, and any other socially-segregated or ostracized group.
- Parable of the great banquet: Jesus then tells the story about how God is essentially doing the same thing. He is throwing a huge party. Virtually all the people he invited first (the spiritually rich Israelites) made up excuses and were too distracted with their own agendas to enter into the party. So God then gathered in all the marginalized and needy and let them enjoy his feast. There was so much room even the Gentiles were welcomed in as people from far and wide came to experience God's party. Who is on the outside looking in? The religiously obsessed.
- Cost of discipleship: Large crowds are still following Jesus and so he reminds them of the cost of being his disciple. You have to make Jesus so much your first love and loyalty that by comparison it is as if you hate your own family, parents, spouse, children or siblings, even your own life. There can be no contest. You need to think this through carefully and consider the high cost of following Jesus. You are basically losing everything.
- Parable of salt: Jesus returns to the image of salt. It is impossible for salt to lose its saltiness. If what you think is salt loses its saltiness then it was never really salt to begin with. It is just dirt to be thrown out because it is good for nothing. Here we see a warning again against the failure of the religious to live God's truth. They didn't lose God's truth. They were never changed from the inside out by his truth. It is not about what you do but ultimately who you are on the inside. Substance not appearance is what really matters.
- Parable of lost sheep: Jesus gets grief from the religious leaders because he is having meals and making friends with tax collectors and sinners. The story of the lost sheep and the owner that celebrates finding the sheep shows us God's heart for restoration and reconciliation. God loves to see people far from him be restored to friendship with him. God is proactive in coming to find us when are far from him. Isn't that amazing? That is the meaning of the story of Jesus.
- Parable of the lost coin: Take two on the story of the lost sheep.
- Parable of the lost son: Here is the expanded story of God's heart for all people. This is actually the story of a gracious father and his two sons. There are ultimately two fundamental problems with the human heart, both rooted in our self-centeredness. First there is self-indulgence where we take all of the good things God gives us and we spend them on ourselves to our own destruction. This is moral sin. Second there is self-saving

where we try to rescue ourselves by doing everything right and achieving our own self-righteousness even as we look down our noses at those who fail to meet our standards. This is religious sin. The younger son in this story symbolizes the first problem with the human heart. This problem comes with the hope that as we continually self-indulge at some point our world comes crashing down, we find ourselves in a heap of pain, and we come to our senses. This is like the addict who finally gets help because they have virtually destroyed their lives. The older brother in the story symbolizes the second problem, our self-saving nature. The story ends with the father pleading with the son to leave his self-righteousness and anger. We're left not knowing if the son will come to his senses. Both sons at one point are far from God. The younger one is in the brothel of self-indulgence. The older in the fields of his own self-righteousness. Both need the lavish grace of the father that reaches out to them in their failure and sin. Both parts of our hearts (and we all have both parts) need to come to our senses, leave behind our self-indulging and self-saving sins and enter into the party of God's grace and restored relationship. You see we need to realize that we are God's children, God is always with us, everything God has is ours in Christ and from this place of significance, security and abundance we can celebrate God's love of seeing people restored to him.

- Parable of the dishonest manager: Jesus now tells a story to help us see in contrast the wise way to approach investing money to see people come into relationship with God. He tells the story of a corrupt wealthy man and a dishonest manager. The manager is wasting his master's money and then continues to rob him of wealth (at least in his accounting) so that he can hopefully gain some friends (who are also corrupt for going along with this game). His hope is to make some new friends by ripping off his master. Now the master finds this out and is so corrupt in his values himself that he actually respects the guy for being shrewd. In contrast Jesus basically says that we should not be stealing to make friends but rather be radically generous. God actually gives us wealth to give away so that we can make friends in the kingdom. God wants us to be wise with our finances so that we can learn how to generously steward the spiritual riches of the kingdom. Jesus concludes by saying that we can't love God and the pursuit of wealth. We will love and serve one or the other. If you love God, you will use your wealth to reach people for Christ. It is that simple.
- Pharisees scoff at parable: The religious leaders love money and so they sneer at Jesus. Jesus replies that God knows their hearts and doesn't value what people value. Religious leaders often love money because it is associated with expanding their own religious kingdom.
- Substance of law: Jesus pauses to explain in brief again the transition that is happening. The Law and the Prophets were taught up until the time of John the Baptizer. Now Jesus is teaching a whole new way. That doesn't mean the Law is being edited or changed. It's essence is being fulfilled and so it is being made obsolete. Jesus then concludes with one simple observation. By obeying the teaching of the Law around divorce (divorce and remarriage was freely permitted) they were in essence doing the same thing as adultery.

The religious leaders were obsessed with purging adulterous women from their communities but Jesus is saying that by them actually following the Torah they are guilty of the sin they say they hate. So in other words, don't get attached to the Torah. People don't need law, they need grace.

- Rich man and Lazarus: Jesus now tells a story about a self-indulgent rich man and a poorest of the poor man. One is judged and the other blessed after each die. Here in the afterlife the self-indulgent rich man comes to his senses and wants to warn his brothers. Jesus ends the story by saying that even if someone comes back from the dead, they wouldn't believe. The point of this story is not to explain how the afterlife works but rather to simply state that even when Jesus rose from the dead, the self-indulgent, self-saving religious leaders still would not believe in Jesus. They had rejected the evidence found in the prophecies of the Old Testament. They had rejected his miracles. They would reject the evidence of his resurrection. This is the power of religion to blind people to the humble pursuit of truth. What a dangerous choice to make when we choose religion over relationship!
- Coming of the kingdom: A religious leader asks Jesus about how the kingdom comes. Jesus says it doesn't come through careful observance (being attentive to law keeping or ritual following). The kingdom is internal, not external. It is ultimately in our hearts, it is within us. (Note: the Greek in this can also be translated "among you" rather than "within you" which would suggest that the kingdom happens within our relationships. It might be best to see it as both/and rather than either/or.) Jesus then explains how when the Son of Man comes in his day (his day of judgment) that it will be very fast and when people are not expecting it. Like with Noah and Sodom, the righteous are saved and remain and the evil are swept away. Part way through it sounds like Jesus is talking about people running away to be saved. He refers to people not going back to the house for anything. This supports that Jesus is most likely referring to the coming judgment against Jerusalem in 70 CE which is later characterized as the coming of the Son of Man in power by Jesus. So is this probably about being ready to run when Jerusalem is judged rather than being ready for the return of Christ at the end of all time. When one is taken and the other left, is it the righteous taken or the wicked taken? It would appear that it is the wicked that are taken and the righteous that remain based on the Old Testament stories Jesus refers to. The disciples then ask, "Where?" or in other words, "Where will this judgment happen?" Jesus makes it clear that they will find the dead body where the vultures circle. The religious leaders are likely the vultures circling in Jerusalem and the dead body is the dead religious institution that will soon be judged at the coming of the Son of Man.
- Persistent widow: Jesus now tells the story of a persistent widow as a model of relentless faith in seeking God and his justice (setting things right). Jesus concludes this story with a question: When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? Will we remain persistent in belief until the end?
- Pharisee and tax collector: "To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else" is the perfect phrase to describe the older brother part of

our hearts. Jesus tells a story of a proud Pharisee who thinks he is better than others and a humble tax collector who sincerely repents and seeks mercy. God listens to the poor but not the proud. If you exalt yourself, get ready for a fall (like Satan experienced). If you humble yourself, God will lift you up.

- Vineyard and workers: Jesus then tells a story of a vineyard owner who pays his workers all the same wage regardless of how long they worked. Does Israel deserve special privilege because they have journeyed with God longer? If the Gentiles are welcomed in freely later in the process, should Israel be upset that they are not being treated fairly? No on both counts. God is generous and we should be grateful that he blesses and welcomes all people into relationship. There is no pecking order or preferential treatment. We all deserve and share and celebrate the same grace of God. In fact, as those who appear to be last and get first place treatment, this displays the incredible grace of God and in this we can and should celebrate!