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*Confronting Jesus on the Road to Jerusalem*

*Studies from Luke 13-19*

# Confronting Jesus On the Road to Jerusalem

## Introduction

Maybe for you, Jesus is an easy going, comforting guy whose main aim in life was to be nice... a kind of first century Dali Lama with a ready smile and an easy manner. While no doubt some people who met him found him to be like that, Jesus was often much more confronting. He was challenging, calling for astonishing commitment. He was radical, calling for an absolute change of values. He was provocative, and direct with his scathing assessment of the status quo.

Last time we were in Luke's gospel (back in 2007 – see the [mpc.org.au](http://mpc.org.au) archive for full sermons and studies), Jesus had set out resolutely for Jerusalem (ch9), knowing that opposition and death was waiting for him there. As we follow him on the road the tension grows, with the power-brokers of Israel increasingly at odds with his teaching and his bold critique of all that's wrong with Israel.

Of course, as they reject Jesus, they reject the God they claim to serve, and bring judgment on themselves. As we'll see, Israel's once privileged place in God's plans will be handed over to others.

Luke loves highlighting the reversals Jesus brings. Watch for them as you read. The last will be first, and the first will be last (ch 13), he who exalts himself will be humbled, and the humble will be exalted (ch 14, 18), Lazarus who received bad things in this life will be comforted while the rich man who ignored him will suffer (ch 16) ... but most significantly, Jesus who dies in humiliation, crowned with thorns, is in reality being crowned as the King of God's Kingdom. That's the 'coming of the Kingdom' we will see him speaking of so often – and it's the biggest reversal of all.

As we pick up the threads in Luke 13, Jesus has just warned the hypocritical Pharisees that they need to see the signs of their coming destruction, and make it a priority to get things right with God. "Those 18 who died when the tower fell on them... do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." Then he tells a threatening parable about an unfruitful fig-tree about to face the axe... "I'll dig around it and fertilise it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down." In other words, they need to repent, or they'll perish along with all in Jerusalem when the Romans crush them just a few years later.

Try to remember as you read that Luke is telling this dramatic story of Jesus calling on Israel to repent or face God's coming rejection. The question is, how will they respond to his warnings? That's what we'll find out. But as we do, it's good to ask if we are doing any better. It's easy to point the finger at the mistakes the Pharisees are making while we go down exactly the same track ourselves. Instead of compassion, they have formalized religion. Instead of love, they have rules. Instead of being generous to those in need, they cling to their money, which has mastered them. Jesus highlights the cost of true discipleship. Will you join him on the road?

Phil Campbell

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# Study 1

## Looking for Fruit

### Group Discussion

What do you think it looks like to be 'fruitful' for God?



What kind of qualities and actions do you think please him? What kind of qualities and actions do you think most displease him? Can you imagine a way of getting the two mixed up?

### A Sabbath Healing

It's possible to be very religious, and yet very far from God! **Read Luke 13:10-17**, with the warning of **verse 9** in mind. (Remember, the last section finished with a dramatic warning for Israel – be a fruitful tree, or be chopped down!)

- a) Notice the woman's physical condition. From v15-16, how does Jesus view her situation? (How was this reflected in his words to her in v12?)
- b) What does the action of Jesus tell you about his power and authority – and his priorities?
- c) Is the synagogue ruler being 'fruitful' or not? How does his main concern compare with what Jesus cares about?
- d) Notice where this leaves his opponents ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) and the people ( \_\_\_\_\_ )

## Radical Reversals!

Jesus sees Satan as the one behind the bondage of this 'daughter of Abraham.' He is going head to head with Satan's evil power, and setting people free from their bondage. And yet in the name of 'religion' and 'God's Law', those in authority are siding with Satan! There's a new kingdom on the rise – and they'll have to choose sides. But the new kingdom isn't coming quite how they might have expected. **Read the parables in verse 18 to 20.**

- a) What is Jesus saying about how widely the Kingdom will spread? How do these images help us to understand the nature of the Kingdom?
- b) Are these pictures of the Kingdom "inclusive" or "exclusive"? How would they lead you to answer the question asked in verse 23?

## Read the parable of the narrow, closing door in verses 21 to 30.

- c) How does this parable answer the question "who gets in"? How do you bring this together with the picture of the big tree sheltering all kinds of birds in the previous parable?
- d) What is Jesus saying to his Jewish opponents in the parable of the closing door? What warning should they take from it?
- e) Why is verse 29 ultimately good news for people like us?

## The Coming Collision of Kingdoms

**Read verses 31 to 35.** Jesus is heading to Jerusalem, and Israel's temple. The prophet Malachi spoke about the day of the Lord's visit in the following passage:-

### Malachi 3

<sup>1</sup> "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. <sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. <sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, <sup>4</sup> and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in

former years. <sup>5</sup> **"So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.**

- a) The leaders of Israel expected that when God came to visit, there would be great celebrations and they'd get a pat on the back. But Malachi warned that their expectations would be overturned, because of the way they've treated one another!

List the signs of 'lack of compassion' that Malachi says will bring judgment.

- b) The agenda Jesus has in mind in Luke 13v34-35 is puzzling. Though he's not worried about threats from Herod, what does he see as the future for himself?
- c) What does Jesus see as the future for Jerusalem?
- d) What hint of ultimate reversal do you see in the words "on the third day I will reach my goal"?

### **Learning any Lessons about Fruitfulness?**

Clearly, Jesus is giving up on the idea of finding any fruit in Israel! Jesus is warning Israel (as the prophets have done before him) that their hardness of heart and their lack of compassion – and their rejection of him – is going to lead to their destruction. When others are celebrating in the Kingdom Banquet, the Israelites who thought it was their birthright will look on from outside.

So let's see if the warning is sinking in. **Read Luke 14:1-6.**

- a) What similarities do you see with what we saw on a previous Sabbath day in 13:10f?
- b) "Dropsy" is a debilitating fluid retention condition. How is Jesus describing the man's situation by his comparison with the ox (v5-6)?

- c) What answer do the Pharisees have for the question Jesus asks them? Keeping in mind the warnings Jesus has given between the last Sabbath healing and this one, has there been any softening of hearts?

## **A Kingdom of Compassion**

It's just not good enough! In the name of religion and 'doing things properly', the religious leaders of Israel have extinguished compassion. They think they're pleasing God with their rigidity and rules – but the reality is, they're heading for exclusion from the Kingdom that they assume is theirs! So, as Jesus comes with a foretaste of the restoration that God is offering in the 'Resurrection Kingdom', they harden their hearts against him.

From our point of view, we can be thankful that people like us – from the north, south, east and west – have now been included in the Kingdom. But how tragic if, in the name of religion, we make all the same mistakes.

**Read James 1:27.** What steps can you (as individuals and a group) take towards "pure and faultless religion"? **Start planning now towards your group service activity! Write down any initial ideas below...**

"Do you really stop, look and listen in the middle of your church and neighbourhood? If you do, you will notice a multitude of needs... a student who has had to drop out of uni for lack of funds, elderly folk without family support who need transport, friendship and other aid. Turn in another direction and listen hard. You'll hear single parents, divorced and widowed people struggling financially and emotionally to be "both mother and father" to children. They often don't seem to be all that poor and threadbare to the eye, but a sensitive ear will hear the anguish." Timothy J. Keller, 'Ministries of Mercy'

**Pray together** that God would help us as a church to be **truly religious** – with eyes to see the hurts and needs around us and willing hands to help.