

Prayers

To God

Thank You Jesus for the glory of Your salvation. We praise You for leading us from darkness to light, for remaking us in Your image, for restoring our humanity, for blessing our daily lives and for being our inspiration as a man. You have done far more for us than we sometimes realise, so we give You our heartfelt praise and worship. AMEN

For myself

What is dominating your thoughts just now, just before you begin your devotions today? Whatever it is, ask the Lord why this is on your mind and listen for what He might say to you about this.

For others

Weekly theme : Pray for those who are troubled in their minds

Do a small bit of research on the internet, and look up diseases such as Alzheimer's or autism (perhaps on Wikipedia or on a medical reference site). As you find out some facts about these diseases, let what you learn stimulate your prayers for people who endure such conditions.

Meditation

Sin persists, as an obstinate and fearsome enemy,
Suggesting, tempting, and drawing us into deception.

We wander slowly from the truth we know,
And find too quickly we have strayed from our God.

We face a task that the Lord requires of us,
And when the devil whispers, 'Why?' it stays undone.

We hold to dire habits rooted in our souls,
And fail to let the Lord deliver us from our daily sins.

We accept culture's vices of sex, of dishonesty ...
And are blind to the Bible's teaching about morality.

We say what we want to people, whenever we like,
And forget the wisdom of careful speech.

Father, save us, and grant us renewed courage,
To reject the devil's temptations, and turn again, to You.

Bible Passage

Luke 12:41-48

⁴¹ Peter said to Jesus,

“Lord, are you directing this parable at us or everyone else?”

⁴² And the Lord said,

“Who then is the faithful and prudent steward given authority by his master over his servants, to give them their food at the right time? ⁴³ How happy is that servant if his master finds him doing this when he returns. ⁴⁴ I tell you truly, he will give him responsibility for all his possessions. ⁴⁵ But if that servant thinks that his master is not yet coming back, and begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and then feasts and gets drunk, ⁴⁶ then the master of that servant will come unannounced and on a day he is not expected, and he will tear him to shreds and put him outside with unbelievers! ⁴⁷ Now, the servant who knows his master’s will, but neither gets ready nor does what is required, will get a severe beating. ⁴⁸ But the one who fails in the same way but did not know what the master wanted will receive a much lighter punishment.

“Much will be required from those who have been given much; and even more will be required from the one who has been entrusted with many things.”

Review

This passage is not well known, and this is probably because it does not contain a straightforward message. Yesterday’s passage gave us a simple message telling God’s people to be alert and ready for Christ’s return (12:36,40), together with the extraordinary and beautiful promise of being served by Christ Himself at a heavenly banquet (12:37)! This passage repeats this theme (12:42,43), but it cautions against laziness (12:45,46) and also warns those who fail to do the master’s work that they will be punished (12:47). Then Jesus gives a tough message at the end of our passage; he says that those who have received much from the Lord will have to answer for it. But there must surely be more for us to find within this passage.

To begin with, the main parable and teaching in our passage comes after Peter asks Jesus about what He had just said, when He spoke to them about being ready for His return (12:39,40). His question, ‘are you directing this parable at us or everyone else’ (12:41) came because he wanted to know whether Jesus was telling them personally to be ready or whether he was telling everyone, in general, to be ready. As we read through the rest of today’s passage, it seems that Jesus answers Peter’s question by making a clear distinction between servants with leadership responsibility and those without (12:42-46). He appears to say to Peter therefore that leaders of God’s people will have special responsibilities, and more will be required of them (12:48). But although this is one clear element of teaching here, there is more, and the very last verse is in reality a very complex saying, and we will need to study it carefully.

Jesus teaches by way of a parable, picking up the same picture he has already painted of a master who has had to leave home for an uncertain period of time (12:35-38 and 42f.). In such circumstances within the first century AD, a householder would appoint a trusted senior servant to be ‘in charge’ during his absence. Clearly, the first duty of such a ‘steward’ would be to keep the rest of the servants in order and cater for them properly. This is what Jesus

means by speaking of the steward giving the servants '*food at the right time*' (12:42), though in reality, the responsibilities of such a steward would probably be more extensive than just organising food.

Jesus' parable goes further, however, and examines the work of the steward and his faithfulness to the instructions of the master. Those who do what is asked of them are promoted, but those who take advantage of their position and fail to reckon on the master's return will be punished and thrown out (12:45,46). Doubtless, people in Jesus' day would have well understood the picture He painted of stewards acting with greed, being drunk and berating those under them.

This is not the only parable of Jesus where servants and stewards appointed by a 'master' sometimes take advantage of their position in the absence of their master. This theme is also found in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23-35), and the parable of the wicked tenants (Matthew 21:33-41, Mark 12:1-12). Together with these other great parables, Jesus' teaching in today's passage consistently tells us that there are consequences to our actions, and God calls on those who follow Him to do the Father's will without fail. Jesus wanted the disciples to grasp the importance of their commission, for they would indeed be judged by their performance; to fail in this or fall into worldly ways would bring disaster (12:47,48).

Today, we tend to recoil from the punishment spoken of by Jesus in this parable (12:47,48); He speaks of the master giving a severe beating to servants who fail to do His will. Today, we do not think it right for anyone to beat another human being, and find it disturbing that Jesus should speak of it as a matter of course, especially when describing how God deals with servants (12:47,48). It is best if we accept that in Jesus' day such things were commonplace, if regrettable, and this is why Jesus speaks of it by way of illustration. The truly difficult part of this is the fact that in this parable the master is God, and it does not sound right to speak of God punishing those who do not do His will. But while we do not like this, the whole Bible speaks of the 'wrath' of God, which comes on those who knowingly ignore Him and go against His will. Ultimately, God's wrath is never meted out unjustly, it is always a consequence of people's choice to reject their Maker.

The last verse of this passage is however quite difficult to fathom. It is logical for Jesus to tell Peter after this parable that more will be expected of those who have been given responsibility. This seems to be the gist of the first half of the saying; '*much will be required from those who have been given much*' (12:48). However, Jesus goes on, and He seems to say the same thing again (indeed, some Bible versions translate the verse in such a way that it appears Jesus simply repeats Himself – see 'going deeper'). However, the language is distinct and different, speaking of '*the one*' from who '*more will be required*' who has been entrusted with '*many things*'. What does Jesus mean?

I am of the opinion that here, Jesus may be speaking of Himself. Verse 48 is then a message to Peter saying that more will indeed be required of him because he has been given a great task for the future. But in addition to this, Jesus says that Peter is to follow in His own footsteps. He is the Messiah, and far more has been required of Him than any other person, He has been entrusted with God's mission to bring salvation into the world, and He will deliver (12:48)! It is not that Jesus is speaking about this in code, it is just that we do not always spot the manners of speech used in those days, and we have to unpack them to get to the root of what was said and also meant. This is what Bible study is all about.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V41 ***'are you directing this parable at us ...?'***

Other translations:

'are you telling this parable to us ...?' (NIV)

'are you telling this parable for us ...?' (NRSV)

As translations, the NIV and the NRSV are technically correct, but the meaning of the text does not come across well in English. The sentence clearly indicates that Peter was asking Jesus whether the parable was not just spoken for their information, but about them. In other words, does the parable describe the disciples specifically or everyone in general.

V42 ***'steward ... servants'***

Other translations:

'manager ... servants' (NIV)

'manager ... slaves' (NRSV)

These two words are 'oikonomos', which refers to a servant placed in charge of a man's household. Such a one was the most trusted servant and had to act on behalf of the master whenever he was away. The second word is 'doulos' meaning 'slave' or 'servant'. Although slavery undoubtedly existed in first century Israel, the picture Jesus paints is far more that of household service rather than slavery as we would understand it.

V46 ***'tear him to shreds and put him outside with unbelievers'***

Other translations:

'cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers' (NIV)

'cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful' (NRSV)

The Greek sentence says plainly *'cut him in pieces'*, but this is obviously a colloquialism because this does not kill the steward, he is then demoted to a place with Gentiles, out of sight of the master. I prefer to translate with the equivalent colloquialism for today, which is to *'tear him to shreds'* though there are other possibilities, such as *'tear him off a strip'*. I have also added the word 'outside' in the next phrase to help the reader gain a better picture of what was meant by the stewards demotion.

V48 ***'even more will be required from the one who has been entrusted with many things.'***

Other translations:

'and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked' (NIV)

'and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded' (NRSV)

This is a difficult sentence to translate, because it is easy to convey the idea that it is merely a repetition of the previous point, that much will be required of those to whom much has been given. However, the key feature of the sentence

is the use of the singular. This is not a general sentence but a special one, picking out 'the one' who has been given a great task. In summary, Jesus tells Peter that just as he must do what God asks of him, Jesus Himself will also do what God has required of the Messiah.

Discipleship

Application

The responsibilities of leadership in church

Behind this passage lies Peter's concern to understand what Jesus is saying, given that Jesus has told the disciples they have a special role of leadership in the early church. It is one of many in Scripture that speak of the responsibilities of leaders under God, something echoed by Paul when he writes to Timothy about the importance of leadership in the church (2 Timothy 2:1f.). Those who are given great tasks in the church will be expected to rise to them because God grants His Holy Spirit to help, bless and enable those He calls. Equally, the consequences of failure can be dramatic, and unthinkable.

The work of the Kingdom

It can be easy for Christians to be so focussed on the truths of salvation by faith alone they forget that God calls His servants to be obedient and effective within the Kingdom. He has a purpose, which is to establish His Kingdom on earth and He is constantly commissioning this work from His servants, here and now. The Bible teaches that whilst we are not saved by our deeds, they are nevertheless important and God calls His people to be obedient and effective. Although our passage here is not well known, it is an important reminder of the fact the God expects a great deal from those He chooses.

Ideas for what to do

- Reflect on the picture Jesus gives; He is the Lord of all the earth, but is absent, and you are a servant with a special task. What does this perspective reveal to you? Pray about this and let the Lord guide you to thinking about your calling in different ways.
- Spend some time in worshipping Jesus, giving thanks to Him for being faithful to the task God gave Him on earth, and winning your salvation.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does the picture of a servant and a master tell us today, when this is not a common feature of life for most people? Are we able to fully understand the parable when it does not reflect our common experience?
2. Do you think that Christians generally believe that God has a special and particular work for them to do? If not, why not?
3. How can we know that we are doing what God requires of us?

Final Prayer

Dear Jesus, bless us as we live our lives from day to day. May we be always happy to do what You have required of us here on earth, and may our worship always be acceptable before Your throne of grace. Renew our hearts in faith and true joy, we pray: **AMEN**