

Prayer

Lord Jesus, will you come and help us even now, at this very moment in time? Will you forgive us our sins, teach us the truth, and guide us on the right pathways of life? Will You hear our prayers, guide our thoughts and direct our work? We praise You, because You have shown that if we wait upon you with expectancy You will do all these things and more; so come upon us with power and guide our lives today: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Make a conscious decision to give glory to God in everything you do, and see how this affects your prayers and your daily life.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for the carers in your church:** *Pray for those who give all their time to looking after children and the home, whether man or woman*
- *Pray for Egypt, and pray that the people of that land will be able to choose their government free from external or internal pressures*
- *Give thanks to God for the blessing of eternal life, and praise the Lord for His victory over evil.*

Meditation

The beauty of life is variety,
and the endless diversity of what may be found on earth.
God save us from human greed,
and the way it destroys everything that is good in our world.

The wonder of life is love,
and its wondrous link to bearing children, and family life.
God save us from demeaning sex,
and the immense damage it does both to people and society.

The marvel of life is learning,
and the truth that motivates people has incredible potential.
God save us from poor education
and the limits it places on vast numbers of people in the world.

The miracle of life is faith,
and the fact that most people living know that a God must exist.
God save us from blinkered secularism
and its failure to give a moral basis for a life of peace and love!

The expectation of life is the future,
And the awesome destiny Christ offers to each through His love.
God save us from failing to pass on
The amazing truth that Christ waits to greet us in His heaven!

Bible passage - Luke 6:37-49

³⁷ 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be handed over into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

³⁹ Then He told them a parable: 'Can the blind guide the blind? Will not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not greater than the teacher, but everyone will be like the teacher when fully

trained. ⁴¹ Why do you examine the speck in your neighbour's eye, but take no notice of the log in your own eye? ⁴² Or, how can you say to your neighbour, "Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye," when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your neighbour's eye.

⁴³ 'No good tree bears bad fruit, and neither does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, and neither are grapes picked from brambles. ⁴⁵ A good person produces good from the good stored in the heart, and an evil person produces evil from an evil store; for the mouth speaks out of the riches of the heart.

⁴⁶ 'Why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I tell you? ⁴⁷ I tell you that all who hear my words and act on them are like ⁴⁸ a man who builds a house, who digs deeply and lays the foundation on rock; so when a flood comes, the river bursts over the house but cannot shake it, because it has been well built. ⁴⁹ But a man who hears but does nothing is like a man who builds a house on the ground without a foundation; so when the river bursts over it, the house falls down immediately, and its ruin is complete!'

Bible Study

Review

Today's passage of Scripture contains a significant number of Jesus' famous sayings. Here, we read about the '*blind leading the blind*', noticing the '*speck*' in one's own eye, about the tree that bears '*good fruit*' and the tree that bears bad, and lastly, Jesus' famous illustration of building a house on rock, not sand. These are not merely separate items of teaching, they are all part of Jesus' teaching about love. They follow on immediately from what Jesus said previously about practical and effective love, and His teaching that the disciples should practice Godly standards within the Kingdom (6:27-36).

Taken as a whole, our passage today teaches a consistent theme. Whether people do God's will and follow Jesus' teaching or not is a matter of decisions made in the heart not a matter of outward show. Things done, words said and attitudes towards others are all generated inwardly, and no one can hide the fact that actions reveal a person's state of heart.

To begin with, Jesus speaks about judgemental attitudes (6:37, 38). He issues a straight warning to His disciples to refrain from being judgemental for fear of God's own judgement or condemnation, but His higher purpose is to encourage, not put down. The opposite of mean spirited judgementalism is none other than generosity, a fundamental characteristic of God. He promises that those who live a life of generosity will be rewarded similarly. The famous phrase '*the measure you give will be the measure you get back*' can be misunderstood, it is not about equal and just deserts. The 'measure' of God is 'generosity', so those who give generously in this life will receive abundantly in God's Kingdom. This is worth knowing!

People often stand back from Christian faith because they feel superior in their own judgements and are confident they are right. Jesus attacks such attitudes head on by describing them as blind. His illustration is simple, the blind certainly cannot lead the blind. It is dreadful when such attitudes are found amongst God's people, for a true disciple is one who learns; Jesus is the teacher, and a disciple is certainly not '*greater than the teacher*' (6:40). Lastly, Jesus attacks judgemental attitudes in one of his most famous sayings; '*why do you examine the speck in your neighbours eye, but take no notice of the log in your own ...*' (6:41). This saying is memorable because it is so obvious, but it is undoubtedly hard to put this into practice.

God is looking for disciples who will do the good works of the Kingdom, but good deeds cannot be done to order. God knows that good deeds come from the heart within, and this is the theme of Jesus' famous saying about fruit borne by trees (6:43-45). Again, the illustration is utterly straightforward, but the things Jesus says about the heart in verse 45 are deeply challenging. The phrase, '*for the mouth speaks out of the riches of the heart*' exposes all human vulnerability, for whether we like it or not, God knows the heart. And as for those who claim to follow Jesus but harbour evil intentions within, their sin is already known.

It is logical therefore that Jesus should conclude His teaching here with a direct attack on those who try to obscure the evil within. This is most obvious in those who claim to accept Jesus by calling Him 'Lord' (6:46), yet do not do His will by doing good. Jesus likens such people to a man who built his house on sand, in comparison to building on the rock of obedient faith. Sometimes, this story is used to illustrate the difference between a believer and a non-believer, but this is wide of the mark. Jesus is clearly talking about those who claim faith, but fail to live accordingly. It would be good if everyone remembered this obvious point.

Lastly, such teaching begs the question, what does God do about those whose hearts are damaged by evil? Does He condemn? This passage of Scripture may seem to suggest that He does, but be careful. I strongly suggest that the general theme of Luke's Gospel is that God does not condemn. Furthermore, when we eventually read to the end of the Gospel, we will find that Jesus offers Himself sacrificially to sinful humanity, so that sinful and evil hearts may be changed through His love. So while reading these early sayings of Jesus, we should not forget the full Gospel.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- The parable of the 'good measure' (6:37,38)
- Blindness amongst the disciples? (6:39-42)
- Where does 'good' come from? (6:43-45)
- Building on rock or sand (6:46-49)

Notes on the text and translation

V38 'a good measure ... will be handed over into your lap'

Other translations:

'a good measure ... will be poured into your lap' (NIV)

'a good measure ... will be put into your lap' (NRSV)

This sounds strange to people today. We do not think of receiving things 'in our lap', except in a comical sense, as if by accident. In ancient times, the 'lap' referred to a part of the garment commonly used for carrying, so the term was obvious.

Secondly, where I have translated '*handed over*', the Greek word is '*give*', which is exactly the same as that found in the previous saying of Jesus, '*give and it will be given to you.*' It is therefore obvious that verse 38 stands together and consists of a saying of Jesus followed by a further explanation. I have translated the crucial verb '*handed over*' because this carries the same idea as '*giving*' found in the Greek. Other translations such as 'poured' or 'put in' do not necessarily convey the same sense.

V45 'for the mouth speaks out of the riches of the heart'

Other translations:

'For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks' (NIV)

'for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks' (NRSV)

What is translated as '*overflow*, or '*abundance*' in most versions, I have translated '*riches*'. The Greek word here is '*perisseumatōs*', which is an adjective describing the excess of something. Of course, the illustration here is that of a treasure store, so it is both best and easiest to translate the word as '*riches*'.

V49 'and its ruin is complete!'

Other translations:

'and the ruin of that house was great' (NAB)

'and great was the ruin of that house' (NRSV)

The Greek text says that the ruin of the house is 'great', but this is a Hebrew way of saying that it was completely ruined, and it is far better to translate the sentence in this way. If it is not, we are left wondering what a 'great' ruin might be, and also whether the sentence means something more than this, when it does not.

Going Deeper

The parable of the 'good measure' (6:37,38)

Here, Jesus seems to be saying to us, 'why do you persist in judging each other, rather than trusting in the love of God and practising His generous love'? With these sayings, Jesus is not condemning the judicial process or the academic process, rather, He is appealing to people to put aside the negativity of judgementalism. He knows that the Father is loving and forgiving, and His example can transform life.

It is important to make these distinctions because Jesus should not be thought of as telling people to stand back from making proper judgements about right and wrong. It is crucial that we exercise our critical faculties in a wide range of life situations, and God has made us all to have enquiring minds, eager to question things and explore boundaries. This is the basis of science and academic enquiry.

Jesus' command to resist from judgementalism is an attack on the closed heart, and on all who would resist the idea that forgiveness is profitable. He teaches that God forgives, and He looks for forgiveness in us (6:37). Of course, forgiveness comes from a generous heart, and perhaps defines a heart that is truly loving.

In order to illustrate this, Jesus pictures a wonderful scene. His words '*a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be handed over into your lap ...*' call to mind an ancient market in which goods were sold on a stall such as grain. If a market stall holder wished to make maximum profit from a sale, then he would simply pour the grain into a standard measure. Nothing could be wrong with that, because the standard measure existed to stop all forms of cheating in measuring out goods.

Imagine the scene therefore if a stallholder was faced with someone known, perhaps a family member or friend to whom he wished to be generous. You can always get more grain in a measure by pressing it down and shaking it hard, you can try this any time with sugar or oats in a cup! Lastly, in order to be really generous, a stall holder could top up the measure by pouring into it until the grain was heaped up and at the point of pouring over, or as Jesus says '*running over!*' This indeed is the picture of God's generosity, handed over '*into the lap!*'

Again, we are not used to the idea of something being handed over into the lap. But in ancient days, a large cloak did not have pockets as might be sewn today. The folds of the cloth in a cloak were used to hold and carry belongings, and the word translated 'lap' in this passage refers to a fold of cloth in the lap, that is, just where something would be put if given to someone to take away.

Blindness amongst the disciples? (6:39-42)

The whole of this section, from verse 39 to 42 is about blindness. Jesus offers the advice '*can the blind lead the blind?*' as a taster for what He says next, and without making it clear who He means. He does not accuse the Pharisees of being blind, rather, it is in Matthew's Gospel alone that we read of Jesus accusing the Pharisees of being 'blind guides' (Matt 23:16f.). The blind here in Luke's Gospel are described in the examples that follow (6:40-42), the first of which is challenging, and the second of which seems obvious

To begin with, Jesus issues a challenging call to His disciples to respect the fact that they are all learners under His authority (6:40); '*A disciple is not greater than the teacher, but everyone will be like the teacher when fully trained.*' This brief saying is overlooked too often, because it reveals an important truth. Whilst on this earth, it is common for a student to exceed the learning and status of a teacher. Indeed, many a teacher would be glad to accept that their value in society is precisely to enable the next generation to exceed the limitations of the previous one.

We cannot however, afford to think in this way about Jesus, our Teacher. Jesus' saying here informs us that those who have been fully trained in the things of God will only be 'like' the teacher; no one can surpass Christ or replace Him. He is unique. At times during the past two thousand years, God's people have concluded that they have learned all there is to know about God and have ended up on the path of heresy. Something like this has happened in the study of theology over the last century in the West. At such times, it is wise to turn to this passage and remember that Jesus is always our Teacher, and as the world changes rapidly, there is always more to learn.

This is where the illustration about the 'speck in the eye' is most helpful (6:41-42). It is a challenge to all God's people to be very careful about their opinions of their own judgements. Some respond to this scripture by standing back from making criticism of others, in effect, never saying '*friend, let me take out the speck in your eye.*' In truth, the important part of the illustration is Jesus' injunction for His disciples to '*take the log out of your own eye*' (6:42). He means by this, that His disciples must remove the blindness of judgemental attitudes towards others, including any assumption of being personally 'right'.

Where does 'good' come from? (6:43-45)

The next few verses will form the basis for much of Jesus' later teaching. He identifies the human heart, or the inner being as the source of someone's real feelings and attitudes. We might think this is obvious, but all too often, people will try and excuse themselves today by saying that they are as they are because of genetics, or perhaps the result of parenting. There is a degree of truth in these assertions, but Jesus starts from the understanding that all people are conscious of their own inner feelings and therefore responsible in some degree for their actions. He is speaking about the responsibilities of humanity in general, not psychoanalysing people and their problems! We should not assume that everything that happens to us and everything we do should be worked over by a therapist!

The idea of a good tree bearing good fruit and a bad tree bearing bad fruit is fairly straightforward, as is the idea that someone who has a good heart is someone who does good, and vice-versa. One of the interesting features of this passage is Jesus' comment, '*the mouth speaks out the riches of the heart*' (6:45). With these words, Jesus lays the foundation built upon by James in his letter. When speaking about the damage done to the fellowship of the church in the first century by gossip, he says:

So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. (James 3:5-6)

We may all agree on the dangers of the mouth when speaking out evil, but the true question raised by this saying is this. Who does Jesus describe as evil? To a large extent, the answer is found in the last part of our passage.

Building on rock or sand (6:46-49)

In verse 46, Jesus says, '*why do you call me "Lord, Lord"?*' It is strange to hear these words from Jesus because here, right at the beginning of His Ministry, people were only just beginning to describe Him as 'Lord'. See, for example, the leper (5:12), and Simon Peter after the catch of fish at the side of Lake Galilee (5:8). The Pharisees were beginning to rebel at the idea that Jesus might be the Messiah, and were seeking ways to deal with Him (6:11), so it is doubtful that any of them were calling Him 'Lord'!

For this reason, the accusation of hypocrisy, levelled at the Pharisees elsewhere, is not levelled at them here. Hypocrisy is something that God's people must watch out for. Therefore, if the Christian seeks to build a house upon a rock, then this teaching suggests that the rock is the love of God and to build upon it means to emulate it and practice it throughout life.

Certainly, I have heard a number of sermons on the 'house on a rock', but few, if any, have sought to understand this passage sufficiently to bring out this point. The illustration is simple enough and it does not need us to live in the Middle East to understand the power of water to wash away houses built upon sand. Neither should those who feel that their faith is secure assume that they are necessarily on a 'rock'. Unfortunately, Jesus' command to practice the good deeds of God mean that for those who do not do this, their house is already being undermined!

Application

A number of important matters are mentioned within this passage of Scripture. The first of these, is forgiveness (6:37). It is very easy to speak about forgiveness, but it is very hard to be forgiving. Many people retain the idea that some things are too awful to forgive, or that they would be compromised if they were to forgive a sin committed against them. Certainly, people express the opinion that forgiveness is equivalent to condoning sin. Such attitudes, whilst understandable, are not godly, and there is no excuse for them within the Christian church. On the one hand, Jesus teaches us clearly that God's people must forgive, and elsewhere in the Gospels, He teaches that forgiveness must be infinite, At least '*seventy times seven times*' (Matthew 18:21,22). On the other hand, Jesus demonstrates powerful forgiveness on the cross by forgiving the sins of all who believe in Him. Surely, no Christian can entertain the idea of refusing to forgive, when their relationship with God is based solely upon the personal forgiveness of Christ.

Throughout this passage of Scripture, there is a common thread of teaching against the evils of self-righteousness. Unfortunately, self-righteousness demonstrates itself within people in a number of insidious ways. Some will have a natural tendency to believe that they are right in most circumstances, and with all love and charity from their point of view, they will seek to correct others around them. Unfortunately, such generosity of opinion can prove to be inadvertently offensive. Most people find it difficult when others within the Church seek to assist by giving the benefit of their 'correct' views. And in the home, relationships can be compromised when one party or other makes a continual assumption about being 'right'. Jesus' teaching here is a salutary warning to everyone to be careful. Satan will use the opportunity if we allow ourselves the smallest self-righteousness.

All God's people are called to build upon 'rock'. As I have already pointed out, it is not merely Christians who build on rock, it is those who according to Jesus, do God's will (6:47). He is not saying that people are saved through good works, He is saying that in the Kingdom of God, those who have faith in Him are expected to do God's will. Neither does this mean that God is not understanding and loving towards those who fail, providing all means of support to assist frail humanity. But He will not stand back from placing this before His people who are called to do good, and so demonstrate both Him and His love within this world.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In what ways is it possible to become too judgemental, especially within the life of the church?
2. Do you believe it is possible to be fully trained, as Jesus suggests in verse 40?
3. Can we know whether we are 'good', within the heart, and how can we help each other if we come to the conclusion that there is 'bad' within the heart?
4. How can God's people build upon a rock? What must be done to fulfil Jesus' teaching in verses 48 to 49.

Personal comments by author

The teaching of this passage of Scripture is challenging. It certainly reminds me to stand back from being judgemental and self-righteous. How easy it is to fall into the traps laid by Satan, who seeks to ensnare Christians through these things. To some extent, I find the illustration of building a house upon a rock helpful. The idea of building is organic, and reminds me that my discipleship is built-up step-by-step. Building upon a rock is a slow process, and I must continually work at it.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *This whole passage of Scripture is a matter of self examination. Take any of Jesus' sayings within this passage, and meditate upon it over a period of time. In the course of everyday life, let Christ reveal those parts of your life that perhaps do not measure up to the high calling of this teaching.*
- *Pray for the church of God, and all those disciples who honestly seek to follow the Lord, and demonstrate a way of life that is consistent with Jesus' teaching and honouring to God. If possible, pray about this with someone else.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Your love for Your people never ends. We can be overcome by the apparently high standards that are placed upon us by discipleship, but send us your Holy Spirit now, so that we do not succumb to this trouble. Lift up our hearts and place within us a spirit of praise, so that we may be content to do Your will both in small things and great. AMEN
