

Jesus brings...

LIFEGROUP STUDIES ON LUKE 12

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AN INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 12

Luke, who is described as 'the beloved physician' (Colossians 4:14), was certainly a colleague of the Apostle Paul (see the 'we' passages in Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-16; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16), and wrote in elegant Greek probably around the early 60's AD.

He divided his work into two parts – St Luke's Gospel and Acts of the Apostles – the longest contribution in the New Testament, exceeding the works of Paul and John. The simplest explanation for the two volumes is that their combined length could not fit onto one scroll and had to be written on two. Therefore, Luke and Acts are two parts of one literary unit.

Luke is the only author of the Gospels to explain in advance his research methods and care (he himself was not an eyewitness), and what his story is about (Luke 1:1-4). The purpose is found in 1:4 where he explains that he wants to provide Theophilus with assurance concerning the events surrounding Jesus to build on his prior knowledge. Whether the concern is to persuade Theophilus of the truth of the events or correct some errors isn't exactly clear. Luke clearly regards himself as an historian and his reliability is widely acknowledged by contemporary scholars.

Many commentators have also noted the beauty of this Gospel. Leon Morris writes:

'The writer was obviously a man of culture, with an appreciation of the beautiful, and he certainly could write well. But it is not any or all of these that accounts for the beauty of this writing. Rather it is the way the love of God shines through in parable and saying and story of Jesus.'

Several theological themes are emphasised in Luke's Gospel to name just a few: the fulfilment of Scripture; salvation history; salvation is available for all: Jew and Gentile; the place of the first century disenfranchised: women, children, the poor, tax collectors and sinners; the centrality prayer and the ministry of Holy Spirit.

Luke 12, which will be the focus of our particular five weeks of study, falls in the section where Jesus has set his face resolutely towards Jerusalem (9:51), the city, where the great promised salvation events of history will unfold.

It also follows on from a long section of teaching on the nature and contents of discipleship (see Luke 9:51-11:13) and the rising tension and opposition between Jesus and the Jewish hierarchy (11:14-54). The chapter reveals the incredible popularity of Jesus among the Jewish populace but it's clear the Lord isn't in a popularity contest. Jesus warns and challenges everyone to a faith in God and discipleship, which sits loose to the things of the world and lays hold of the things of eternity. Yet, as we shall discover, it remains a faith, which is committed to faithful ministry in the present. Christians may have a face towards eternity and a deep confidence in God, but it is a faith, which is to be actively lived out: a life of obedience, publicly acknowledging its allegiance to Jesus.

AN INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 12

The Bible Studies will be a spur to evangelise, to give testimony to the gospel of grace we ourselves have embraced, for they will remind us of:

- God's watchful eye over all we do and say.
- The empowering presence of the Holy Spirit for witnessing.
- The challenge to seek God's Kingdom priorities above all things.
- The terrible destiny of those who do not believe.
- That opposition is to be expected.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR LIFEGROUP LEADERS

I recommend the following commentaries:

- William J. Dumbrell, *The New Covenant – The Synoptics in Context: Matthew, Mark and Luke*
- Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*
- Michael Wilcock, *The Saviour of the World (Bible Speaks Today Series)*

STUDY ONE

JESUS BRINGS FREEDOM FROM FEAR

LUKE 12:1-12

The life of discipleship is a call to be set apart from the patterns we find in the world. However, this will at times be costly for the world doesn't always appreciate people, who don't conform and who challenge others to align with God not society. Therefore, we need to hear these warnings and encouragements.

Discussion starter:

What might keep Christians from being willing to identify themselves publicly with Jesus and the Christian church? What keeps you from this?

A. Getting Inside the Text of Luke 12:1-3

Jesus' popularity as a teacher and healer are clear (12:1a) but not everyone is happy with his person and ministry.

1. What prompts Jesus to warn the disciples about 'the yeast of the Pharisees'? 12:1
Read Luke 11:37-54 to learn the context.
2. What does Jesus teach that is designed to discourage hypocrisy in the disciples? 12:2-3

3. By implication what does this teach us about God? cp. Psalm 139:1-6

So what?

- It is often said that the most common criticism of Christians by society is that we're all 'a bunch of hypocrites'. Where do you/we see hypocrisy in our lives?
- How might we respond in a way which is Christ centred, if we hear an unbelieving family member, friend, work colleague, fellow student say '*Christians are just a bunch of hypocrites*'?

B. Getting Inside the Text of Luke 12:4-10:

One of the prompts for hypocrisy can be our fear of peers and so we conform to society. Jesus, clearly aware of these, provides more teaching to steer us away from such a foolish decision.

1. Who is Jesus telling us to fear and why? 12:4-5

STUDY ONE

2. Having provided a somewhat disturbing warning in 12:4-5 how does Jesus bring balance to our understanding of God's person in 12:6-7?

What about us?

- How might the teaching of Luke 12:4-7 assist us to be on our 'guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy'?

3. What encouragement and warning does Jesus provide to his disciples and therefore all Christians in 12:8-9?

4. 12:10 is one of the 'difficult New Testament texts' to understand and has been the cause of unsettling some believers. What is the difference between a word spoken against the Son of Man (Jesus) and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

5. What might be the cause of this distinction and 'the unpardonable sin*'? [Hint: See Matthew 12:33-36 and Mark 3:30 to assist in answering this question.]

***Note:** Leon Morris states that the unpardonable nature of the sin has to do not with mere words but the set of a person's whole life. People, who call good evil: They call the Spirit's work, Satan's work, and therefore they lack a sense of sin. Therefore, while God's capacity to forgive remains, they have no capacity to repent and believe. It is this continuing attitude that is the ultimate sin.

What about us?

- Where do you get opportunities to acknowledge your relationship with Jesus publicly? Do you take them? Could you say more?
- What could your group do to assist each member to be more courageous in witness?

C. Getting Inside the Text of Luke 12:11-12

Jesus anticipates that disciples will encounter opposition. So he provides rich encouragement to remove our concerns about this.

1. Where does Jesus say the opposition will come from? 12:11a
2. Why does Jesus say there is no cause to worry about what we will say? 12:12; see also Luke 11:13; 24:45-49 and Acts 1:8.

STUDY ONE

What about us?

- Have we claimed this promise and learnt to rely on the Spirit in witnessing contexts where we cannot know what we'll be asked? If not, why not? If you have, share your experiences with the group?

Close in Prayer

STUDY TWO

JESUS BRINGS PERSPECTIVE

LUKE 12:13-21

Hypocrisy isn't the only challenge to living as true disciples the world has many other dangerous attitudes believers need to avoid as the following incident reveals.

Structure:

12:13-14 | The Interruption and Initial Response

12:15 | The Essential Message 1

12:16-20 | The Reinforcing Story

12:21 | The Essential Message 2

Getting Inside the Text

Read the passage through aloud and ask someone to count how many times the words *I*, *I'll*, *my*, and *myself* appear in 12:17-19. Note down the number.

1. What was the essence of the interruption from the crowd? 12:13
2. What do you think Jesus' first words of reply indicate about Jesus' attitude to such matters? 12:14

3. What do you think Jesus' second response reveals both about the dangerous condition of the man's heart and the nature of greed? 12:14

So what?

- Where does greed, the desire for abundant possessions surface in your life?
4. In the story Jesus tells of someone, who appears to be a sensible entrepreneur, who is missing what? 12:16-19

So What?

- Where might we observe some contemporary parallel stories today?
5. Who has the last say on this man's life and what does his assessment of the entrepreneur's life teach us about the right attitude towards greed and prosperity? 12:20

STUDY TWO

6. What is the general principle for life that Jesus draws from this story? 12:21

So what?

- In a society that has so many material distractions and which keeps telling us 'we deserve everything', what can we practically do to be 'rich toward God'?

Close in prayer

STUDY THREE

JESUS BRINGS RIGHT PRIORITIES

LUKE 12:22-34

Icebreaker Discussion

Make a list of the things people in our society either pursue or worry about obtaining. Don't forget to include the things you find yourself seeking and being anxious about.

Structure:

12:22-23 | The challenge not to worry

12:24-28 | Lessons from God's creation

12:29-31 | Seeking the kingdom, not the stomach

12:32-34 | Setting the heart correctly

Getting Inside the Text

Rather than worrying about establishing one's own future (Luke 12:13-21) Jesus goes on to strongly challenge disciples to place their future, as well as their present, in God's care.

1. What is the fundamental difference between the entrepreneur who builds his bigger barns in 12:13-21 and the description of the faithful disciple in 12:22-34?

So what?

- How does your life demonstrate it is God focused both privately and publicly?

2. According to this passage why should disciples not be worrywarts? 12:22-32

3. How can knowing that God is the creator and sustainer of creation assist the believer in negotiating life?

So What?

- Below is a quote from the Christian poet Mary Oliver. What do you think of her 'Instructions' and do you see any connections with them and Jesus' nature illustrations from this passage?

"Instructions for living a life.
Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it."

- Share any experiences you have had of learning spiritual, 'God' lessons from creation.

4. According to this passage what are the marks of a faithful disciple? 12:22-34

STUDY THREE

So what?

- What does it mean in practical terms for you to “seek God’s kingdom” (12:31)?
5. Jesus provides several motivations for disciples to be generous towards the poor in this passage, but what is the specific motivation he provides in 12:32-34?

So what?

- What does it mean in practical terms to “provide purses...that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail” (12:33)?
- What spiritual disciplines might help Christians today ensure their treasure is fixed in heaven and not on earth?

Close in prayer

STUDY FOUR

JESUS BRINGS A CALL TO BE READY

LUKE 12:35-48

Icebreaker Question

What aspects of your life reveal that you are sitting loose to the temporary things of this world and holding on tight to the permanent, sure things of heaven?

Exegetical Note: The warnings in these verses may in the first incidence refer to a coming crisis where faith will be challenged, such as the Son of Man coming to Jerusalem and the arrest, trial, and crucifixion that ensued. However, this understanding does not exhaust their meaning and there is surely a fuller reference, which looks to the second coming of Jesus.

Structure:

12:35-38 | Faithful waiting for the Master

12:39-40 | The unexpectedness of the coming

12:41-48 | The responsibility of servants to be ready

Getting Inside the Text

Read the passage through and then see if you can see any connections with the passage from last week - Luke 12:22-34.

1. What do you think Jesus' picture of the 'watching servants' in 12:35-38 teaches about the attitude Christians should have today?

So what?

- What might be some practical ways Christians can be watching for our Master Jesus to return?
[Hint: The Apostle Peter, who heard these words on Jesus' lips, provides several answers in his letters. See 1 Peter 4:7-11; 4:17-19; 5:1-11; and 2 Peter 3:10-18.]
2. What encouragements does Jesus provide for being watchful?
 - a. 12:37
 - b. 12:39-40

What about us?

- Why do you think it is so hard for Christians in the West, in particular, to keep the return of Jesus constantly in mind?
- What can we do to counter this situation?

STUDY FOUR

3. How does Jesus' somewhat cryptic reply to Peter's question actually provide an answer?
12:41-48

4. In the table below write down everything you can about the two contrasting actions of the Master's servants. 12:42-46

A Faithful, Wise Manager	An Unfaithful, Foolish Manager

What about us?

- How do you respond to the graphic imagery and consequences of turning aside from the Master's charge?
 - What point is Jesus making?
 - How might your LifeGroup and/or your congregation practically encourage you to remain faithful?
5. For what will the servants of the Master be punished? 12:47
6. What, according to Jesus, determines the weight of punishment for disobedience?

7. What does it mean to be a disciple 'who has been given and entrusted with much'?
12:48b

So what?

- How does the fact that our lives are both observed by and accountable to God make a difference to our life choices and priorities?

STUDY FOUR

- Earlier in Luke 11:2-4 Jesus taught his disciples how to pray using the following words:

*"Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins
against us.
And lead us not into temptation."*

How does this prayer assist us in setting priorities that are aligned with those of our Master, Jesus?

Close in prayer

STUDY FIVE

JESUS BRINGS DIVISIONS

LUKE 12:49-59

Structure:

12:49-53 | Jesus the cause of division

12:54-56 | The Priority of Interpreting God's Seasons

12:57-59 | Seek for Reconciliation Before it's Too Late

Getting Inside the Text

Read the passage through, taking particular note of the issues Jesus' raises, which suggest that his audience have the wrong understanding and/or practice.

Note: 12:49 is somewhat difficult to understand but it becomes clearer when the image of fire is understood in its common way as judgment. Leon Morris goes on to explain that, "Jesus looks forward to the fire of judgment being kindled i.e. at the cross [his baptism], the focus of all his activities."

1. What will be one of the consequences of Jesus' death, his baptism he has to undergo? 12:51

So what?

- Why do you think the cross of Christ is a cause of division?

2. What does 12:52-53 suggest about the nature of the divisions that the gospel of Jesus' cross will lead to?

So what?

- Take time to allow members to share their own personal experience of division and conflict caused by their faith in Jesus and his cross.
3. What causes Jesus to call the crowd hypocrites? 12:54-56

What about us?

- In what areas of our daily life may we contemporary Christians fail to appropriately 'interpret this [our] present time'? 12:56
[Hint: Consider the following areas – entertainment, fashion, materialism, multiculturalism, etc.]

Note: The last paragraph 12:57-59 is almost certainly a cryptic reference to the importance of making one's peace with God.

STUDY FIVE

4. What does Jesus want the crowd to do?
12:57

So What?

- How might we encourage the distracted crowds of our day to take time to consider their relationship with God?
5. What point is Jesus making with his use of the adversary/magistrate illustration?
12:58-59

So What?

- Given people's case against God is hopeless and their destiny without reconciliation with God horrendous what ought to be the Christian's response?

Close in prayer



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