

12. Luke 11:37 - 13:17



Aspects of discipleship

3. A disciple is called to mediate God's word (continued)

e. Lamentation over those who refuse to listen to God's Word

Luke 11:37-38 (Mark 7:1-2, 5-6)

While he was speaking, a Pharisee invited him to dine with him; so he went in and took his place at the table. The Pharisee was amazed to see that he did not first wash before dinner.

Luke 11:39-41 (Matthew 23:25-26)

Then the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you.

Luke 11:42-44 (Matthew 23:23, 6-7, 27)

“But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others.

Woe to you Pharisees! For you love to have the seat of honour in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realising it.”

Lamentation over those who refuse to listen to God's Word

Luke 11:45-48 (Matthew 23:29-32)

One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us too."

And he said, "Woe also to you lawyers! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them.

Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your ancestors killed. So you are witnesses and approve of the deeds of your ancestors; for they killed them, and you build their tombs.

Luke 11:49-52 (Matthew 23:34-36,13)

Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' so that this generation may be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:20-22), who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be charged against this generation.

Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering."

Luke 11:53-54

When he went outside, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile toward him and to cross-examine him about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

Jesus laments the fact that the lawyers present themselves as interpreters of tradition and teachers of the people but they fail to heed the very word they are committed to study and teach. In so doing they have ‘taken away the key of knowledge’, thus preventing others from entering into the real meaning of God’s revelation. They act like this in regard to the words of the prophets. They are now doing it in regard to Jesus. Christian prophets and apostles can expect the same treatment (compare 6:22-23).

f. Disciples are to fear the attitudes of the Pharisees

Luke 12:1-3 (Matthew 10:26-27)

Meanwhile, when the crowd gathered by the thousands, so that they trampled on one another, he began to speak first to his disciples, “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy. (see Mark 8:15)

Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known (see Mark 4:22). Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops.

As Paul reminds the Corinthians, when the Lord comes he will: ‘bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart’ (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Disciples are to fear the attitudes of the Pharisees, not their opposition

Luke 12:4-5 (Matthew 10:28)

I tell you, my friends (φίλοις: only time Jesus addresses his disciples as 'friends' in Luke), do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell.

Yes, I tell you, fear him!

[only time in Luke; also Mark 9:42-48; 6x in Matthew]

The word 'hell' translates the Greek *gehenna* which itself is a transliteration of the Hebrew *ge-hinnom*, the valley of Ben-Hinnom (see Joshua 18:16). This valley forms the southern boundary of Jerusalem and it was here that certain inhabitants of the city sacrificed children to the god Molech in an effort to placate the god and save the city (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6). This was in the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem (587BC). Jeremiah was horrified at their action and cursed the valley (see Jeremiah 7:32-33).

Luke 12:5-7 (Matthew 10:29-30)

Yes, I tell you: Fear him.

When the Hebrew Scriptures speak of 'fear' in relation to God they are sometimes speaking of fear. At other times they are speaking of a sense of awe at God's majesty and a fear of anything that can separate us from God's creative and forgiving love. Everything about Jesus tells us how mistaken we are when we make God an object of dread.

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Thus says the Lord. ... Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine ... For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour ... Do not fear, for I am with you' (Isaiah 43:1-5).

What are we to believe concerning Hell?

‘To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from God for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called “hell”.’ (Catechism of the Catholic Church n.1033).

1. It is not part of our faith that there is anyone in hell.
2. We are told not to judge.
3. Nothing, not even sin, can stop God loving which is offered unconditionally.
4. God’s love is offered unconditionally. However it does not take away freedom and is received conditional on our welcoming of it.
5. Jesus warns us that it matters that we open our hearts to God’s love and repent. If we stubbornly and persistently reject love we create our own hell here, and death does not negate our rejection.

Romans 2:3-11

‘Do you imagine you will escape the judgment of God? Do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realise that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will repay according to each one’s deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.’

Luke 12:8-9 (Matthew 10:32-33)

And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.

2 Timothy 2:11-13

‘The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he will also deny us;

if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.’

Our choices have effects that we cannot pretend away. If we change, of course we are welcomed back. God is love and will never revoke love.

Luke 12:10-12 (Matthew 10:19-20)

‘Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven (see Mark 3:29).

When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say.’ (Mark 13:11)

Peter writes: ‘If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you’ (1 Peter 4:14).

Having spoken of the central place of love in the life of a disciple (10:25-42), and so of prayer (11:1-13), and of the need to remain open to the healing and light that come from God's word (11:14 - 12:12), Luke moves now to focus on what it is that should be most precious to a disciple. As we shall see, it is communion with Jesus. This is experienced now, but only imperfectly. Luke directs our longing towards the hour when we shall experience full communion with our Lord.

4. The true treasure of a disciple

a. A warning against avarice Luke 12:13-15

Firstly, he establishes the point that material possessions cannot fulfil the longing that is in our hearts. The anecdote opens with a cry for justice – a cry, however, which is self-centred. Jesus' reply, as we have come to expect, approaches the problem from a perspective which invites the man to repentance. Jesus is not there as an arbitrator (literally, 'one who divides'), but as a reconciler (literally, 'one who unites'). He warns the man, and anyone else who is listening, not to focus on possessions if they really want life.

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Jesus said to him, "Man, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" He said to them, "See to it! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Luke 12:16-21

Then Jesus told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’”

So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

There is a nice play on words in the Greek text: the land is producing abundantly (12:16, εὐφόρῳ), and the rich man looks forward to the euphoria of a life of merriment (12:19, εὐφροαίνω). He is described, however, as a fool (12:20, ἄφρων).

b. Our real treasure comes from God

Luke 12:22-23 (Matthew 6:25)

He said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not **worry** about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

While living responsibly, we are not to ‘worry’ - the word recurs four times in this passage. We first met the word when Jesus spoke about those who are: ‘choked by the worries and riches and pleasures of life’ (8:14). This was the problem with Martha who was: ‘worried and distracted by many things’ (10:41).

Peter writes: ‘Cast all your worries on God, because he cares for you’ (1 Peter 5:7). We find the same message in the Letter to the Hebrews: ‘Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you’ (Hebrews 13:5).

Luke 12:24-28 (Matthew 6:26-30)

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you – you of little faith!

Faith does not protect us from the injustices and sufferings of life or from the horrible consequences of sin - our own sin or the sin of others. It does, however, give us a way of coping with them so that they do not destroy our heart or prevent us from loving. Faith opens us to the grace and love of God who never leaves or forsakes us.

Luke 12:29-34 (Matthew 6:31-33, 19-21)

Do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's **good pleasure** to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

God's 'good pleasure' (εὐδόκῃω) was announced by the angels who at the birth of Jesus praised God for the peace that was to be enjoyed by those who were the objects of God's good pleasure (Luke 2:14, eudokia), a good pleasure lavished especially upon Jesus, his Son, in whom he was 'well pleased' (Luke 3:22, eudokeô).

c. Watching and waiting for the coming of the Lord

Luke 12:35-38

Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. **Blessed** are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and **serve** (διακονεω) them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, **blessed** are those slaves.

‘Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me’ (Revelation 3:20).

George Herbert

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack

From my first entrance in,

Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning if I lack'd anything.

"A guest," I answer'd, "worthy to be here";

Love said, "You shall be he."

"I, the unkind, the ungrateful? ah my dear, I cannot look on thee."

Love took my hand and smiling did reply,

"Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them; let my shame

Go where it doth deserve."

"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"

"My dear, then I will serve."

"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."

So I did sit and eat.

Luke 12:39-40 (Matthew 24:43-44)

Know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.

You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Jesus is inviting his disciples to the wedding banquet. This is what our hearts really desire. We must let nothing distract us. This is what it means to be vigilant: watching for his presence and listening for his word. Every coming of the Lord is a moment of judgment, a moment of liberation, an hour of the ‘Son of Man’.

Luke 12:41-46 (Matthew 24:45-51)

Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for **us** or for **everyone?**” And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and prudent **manager** whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? **Blessed and happy** is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and if he begins to beat the other slaves, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the unfaithful.

Luke 12:47-48

That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating.

From **everyone** to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted (Peter's **'us'**), even more will be demanded.

5. The time of God's judgment is now (12:49 – 13:35)

a: Bringing fire to the earth 12:49-53

Luke 12:49

‘I have come to cast **fire** upon the earth
and how I wish it were blazing already.’

‘He will baptise with the Holy Spirit and **fire**’ (Luke 3:16)

Teilhard de Chardin 1934

‘Some day,
after harnessing space, the winds, the tides and gravitation,

We will harness for God the energies of Love.

And then,

And then, for the second time in the history of the world,
we will have discovered **fire**.’

Luke 12:50

I have a baptism with which to be baptised,
and what stress I am under until it is completed!

In the preceding section (12:13-48), Luke focused our attention on that for which our hearts most long. Here he assures us that it is being offered now. John the Baptist promised that the more powerful one who was coming after him would 'baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire' (Luke 3:16). This is the fire of God's judgment, a judgment of love that purifies us so that we can enjoy that communion with God for which we are made and for which we long.

We must decide Luke 12:51-53 (Matthew 10:34-36)

Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?

No, I tell you, but rather division!

From now on five in one household will be divided,
three against two and two against three; they will be divided:
father against son and son against father,
mother against daughter and daughter against mother,
mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” (see Micah 7:6)

Jesus' words about division in the family come from the prophet Micah 7:6. Of course Jesus came to bring peace (Luke 1:79; 2:14; 7:50; 8:48). Has he not told his disciples to offer peace to those to whom their mission takes them (Luke 10:5-6)? His peace, however, comes with the two-edged sword that issues from the mouth of Jesus (Revelation 1:16), the 'sword of the Spirit which is the word of God' (Ephesians 6:17; see also Hebrews 4:12-13).

b: Disciples need to interpret the present time 12:54-59

Luke 12:54-57 (Matthew 16:2-3)

‘Jesus also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘There’s going to be a thunderstorm’; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens.

You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

“And why do you not judge rightly?

Luke 12:58-59 (Matthew 5:25-26)

Thus, when you go with your accuser before a magistrate, on the way make an effort to settle the case, or you may be dragged before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer throw you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”

c. The summons now to repentance

Luke 13:1-5

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you **repent**, you will all perish as they did.

Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them – do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you **repent**, you will all perish just as they did.”

d: We are given this time in order that we might repent

Luke 13:6-9

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’

He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

Is Luke still hoping that official Judaism will heed Jesus’ word, and accept him as God’s Messiah the one through whom we are to receive the salvation which God is offering?

e. God's judgment is a liberating one.

Luke 13:10-13

He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. Just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight.



When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

The synagogue official is interpreting the law in such a way as to exemplify the complaint made by Jesus against the lawyers: ‘You load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them’ (Luke 11:46).

Luke 13:14-17

But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.”

But **the Lord** answered him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?”

When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.