

Pressing Into God's Kingdom
Luke 16:13-4-18

Today, as we open these precious scriptures and begin to study them, I again marvel at how often, as I read these words that I can easily pass right on by, without notice, some of the most special gems of truth that our Lord would have us to know. And I believe that I have done that on earlier occasions with some of these words that we'll study today here in this passage, especially these words given to us here in Luke chapter 16, verse 16.

Recall that the Lord Jesus had been teaching the Scribes and the Pharisees and also His disciples about the need for moral character and integrity in all their matters of daily life. And especially the need to maintain Godly integrity in the way that they managed and used money, the worldly mammon, financial matters that are such a big part of daily life.

And here in today's passage we see the response by the religious leaders, and then also the response from the Lord Jesus. Listen and then let's consider these words carefully. Luke chapter 16, beginning in verse 14,

¹⁴ Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him (the Lord Jesus).

¹⁵ And He (Jesus) said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

¹⁶ The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.

¹⁷ And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

¹⁸ Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from *her* husband commits adultery.
(Luke 16:14-18)

As I read and I study such words as these I need to always remind myself of what Jesus said here in verse 15, that He, the Lord Jesus, was very different from other people, both those of that day, and also very different from us now, from you and me. That yes, Jesus was a man, but He was also ever and always God. And just as He was saying here, He, Jesus, as God, always knew every thought that took place within the hearts and minds of the people around Him. Listen again to verse 15,

¹⁵ And He (the Lord Jesus) said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15)

Jesus was able to know each of those men's hearts, the things that were so important and so "highly esteemed" by them. And He really wanted them, the Scribes and the Pharisees, to realize that their hearts were corrupt, filled with sinful desires, that most all of the belief system that they had adopted was very wrong and was "an abomination in the sight of God" .

And so, here, in verses 16, 17 and 18, Jesus said to them,

¹⁶ The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.

¹⁷ And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

¹⁸ Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from *her* husband commits adultery. (Luke 16:16-18)

Folks, there is so much that is being said within these words. Secret wisdom that is being revealed.

Here in these words, Jesus wanted these men to know that there was something new and different taking place and that they were missing out on it. That God was now instituting a whole new protocol, the "gospel of the kingdom of God". And that the "kingdom of God" had now come to the earth. And from that moment forward all things were going to be different.

And even further, Jesus was saying in these words that within this new gospel would be such a powerful "drawing" that people would not just desire to enter into God's Kingdom, they would actually experience such a strong sense of urgency, they would "press", even try to "force their way into" it.

And folks, I confess that those words spurred some thoughts to take place within my imagination. Remembering in another place that Jesus had said that "no one can come to me except My Father draw them", I thought, this is exactly what Jesus was speaking about in these words. And not just for those people then in Jesus' day, but also for people now in our day.

And that brought about some thoughts to my mind that I'd like to share with you, thoughts that are meandering yes, but please bear with me for a few moments.

My thoughts began with an age-old question that has plagued the hearts and minds of Christians and non-Christians alike throughout the generations. A question that is often used by those who want to argue about the veracity of God, the question that asks, "If God is so good and so merciful, what is to happen to the innocent natives in the jungles of Africa, or the sweet innocent little old Chinese woman in the rice patties of China who have never heard of the name of Jesus. What happens to them when they die? Do they go to heaven or do they go to hell?"

And I must tell you straight away as we begin this study, that no, I won't have a quick and easy answer for that question. I too have pondered that dilemma much of my own Christian life.

But I do believe that these words of our passage might have some part of the answer to those questions. That as the Kingdom of God came to this earth through the arrival of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit was and would always be an integral part of that Kingdom. And that the strong mysterious "drawing" that would cause people to want to "press into" His Kingdom was now present all throughout the world.

And yes, God's Holy Spirit and His mysterious "drawing" of people into the Kingdom of God has been taking place all throughout time. We know that from reading about people like Abraham, who though just a pagan living within a pagan country in what is now the country of Iraq, would suddenly, be "mysteriously drawn" to decide to turn from his pagan ways and follow after God.

And much the same was true for many other people spoken about in these scriptures, unbelievers, suddenly becoming believers and then following after God.

And the same can easily be done through the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit within the lives of that native in Africa and the Chinese woman in China. He, the Holy Spirit can minister to their spirit giving the understanding that they need so

that they would be “mysteriously drawn” to turn and press into the kingdom of God and receive Christ for themselves.

And may I give one further thought about that special moment when the Holy Spirit reveals Himself to that native in Africa and the Chinese woman in China. We know from human history that many, many will not turn to Christ, but I am confident that every soul will have been given the opportunity to make that choice. That truth is made plain to us in scriptures such as those given in Romans chapter 1. Listen carefully, verse 19,

¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)

Did you note those last words carefully, that everyone is “without excuse”, “without excuse”.

And this answer folks gives me the most peace of mind. Our God, as He is revealed to me in these scriptures and as He is revealed to me through just my looking at the heavens and the earth that He has created, has a sure and certain plan for everyone who will have ever existed on this earth. And whether His message of redemption and salvation is brought to us by a powerful prophet like John the Baptist or an evangelist like Billy Graham, or it come simply and solely through a mysterious “drawing” from the Holy Spirit, we will each have the same opportunity to know about His great plan of salvation. And as these words here in the Book of Romans plainly tell us, “we will certainly be without excuse”. “We will be without excuse”!

But folks, most of all, I can know it all to be true because He daily reveals Himself to me personally, in all the common ordinary matters of my daily life, His loving watchcare over me and my family, His daily provision for our needs. He so graciously makes me to know with a certainty that yes I have a place with Him in His eternal plan.

And while no, I can’t know how or when He will reveal Himself to all the other people of this world, I can trust that He really does also have a plan for them, all those other people, that native in Africa and the Chinese woman in China.

Another question . . . how can I be so confident that all of those things will take place? I confess to you that I don't have an answer that will satisfy you or anyone else. And that's because the relationship that each of us has with God is intimately personal and individual to each one of us.

These scriptures are clear. While yes, God can and does have special relationships with whole groups of people, as He does with the nation of Israel, His plans and His purposes are still intensely intimate with each individual person.

I'm reminded of that when I read in these scriptures about the very different relationship He chose to have with Issac and the one He had with Ishmael. And also, the eternal choice He made between Jacob and Esau. And especially, such intimate relationships as we can see that He had with King David. And on and on.

Again, these scriptures are clear. God's relationship with each person that we learn about in these scriptures is ever and always individual and intimately personal. And from that we can know that the same is true for us. His relationship with each one of us will also be personal and individual and intimate.

And again, as we think back about that native in the jungles of Africa, or the sweet little old Chinese woman in the rice patties of China, that though they will have no knowledge of the Laws and the teaching of the prophets, we can know that God will be faithful to reveal Himself to them. And they will have an opportunity to make a choice, a choice to believe in Him and to receive Him or else to reject Him. And they will then be without excuse.

May I say again that God's relationship, His plan and His purpose for all those other people is just as real and just as true and just as intimate for them as it is for you and me. Without question, God has an eternal plan for each one of them, just as He does for you and for me.

And let's take a step further and ask, "how can we know that for sure?" It's because above all else, we know from these scriptures that our God is Holy. And because He is Holy, we can know, with a certainty that He will deal with each and every person rightly, in a righteous and holy way. His holiness demands that of Him. God cannot "NOT be holy".

And yes, God is also "Sovereign", sovereign over all of His creation, absolutely sovereign. I emphasize the word sovereign because many of our Christian brethren believe that He withhold some of His sovereignty. But dear Christian, you will not find that within these scriptures. No, God is sovereign, absolutely sovereign in and over every person and every matter and every choice in existence.

And He cannot simply ignore some of the people He has created, or ignore the things they have done. His holiness demands that each soul that has ever existed be treated with the same love and same compassion as He would show to you and to me.

Why am I able to say that? It's because the attributes of God are not just parceled out, some here, some there. His attributes are absolute and are fully shown to everyone at every moment, in every circumstance of our daily lives. All of His attributes.

He is one hundred percent love to every individual. He is also one hundred percent Holy and one hundred percent Just. And He exercises each of those attributes in every circumstance with every person.

What that means is that though God really does love us with an intimate love, He must also always remain Holy, "Holy"! Holy in every circumstance and in every matter that takes place. And because God is Holy, His holiness requires that He also be "Just", absolutely "Just", meaning that He cannot allow us to be the sinful people we so often want to be. His holiness is so absolute that He cannot allow for even one wrong, one sin to go unpunished.

But thanks be to God, He has another attribute that is the answer to all these many needs I've been mentioning here. And that attribute is "Grace". Grace! That loving attribute by which God is able to make decisions and make choices that supersede and go beyond our usual understanding about the laws of God.

Through the attribute of "Grace", God is able to reach into the heart and into the mind of every soul that exists on the earth. And yes again, even that native in the jungles of Africa, and that sweet little old Chinese woman in the rice patties of China.

And folks, even to you and to me. And He can bring about changes within our souls, changes like those spoken about in our scripture passage, changes that can cause us to want to “press into”, even to want to “storm” the gates of the Kingdom of God, changes that will bring about our salvation from all those many sins that pervade our lives.

But may I pause here and say that the great “Grace” that God shows to us is not just one of those privileged abilities of His great authority and sovereignty and power. No, not at all! No, God can’t just “wave His great Hand” and wipe away our sins. Not at all! And that needs to be clearly understood.

Remember that God is Holy! And His Holiness places the same requirements on Him as it does with us, you and me. Sin is sin and sin is wrong and is deserving of all the punishment that sin requires. Recall the verse in the Book of Romans that tells us that the “wages of sin is death”. And that is true, always true.

And so then, this attribute of “Grace” within our God that is so precious and so needful by us must come at a price. And that price was “the death, the burial and the resurrection” of the Lord Jesus. It took His sacrifice, His suffering, His crucifixion, His death, His burial and His resurrection to pay the full and complete debt that each of us owed for our sin. It was Grace, God’s Grace that did it all.

And praise be to the Lord our God for Grace!

And praise be to God that as Jesus was resurrected and ascended into Heaven, He gave us His Holy Spirit to carry His Grace on forward into the lives of people like you and me. And yes, again, to minister to the heart and the soul of those natives in the jungles of Africa, and that little old Chinese woman in the rice patties of China, revealing God and His precious grace to them.

And for us today, it is the blessed presence of the Holy Spirit that draws us to the Lord Jesus and causes us to “press into the kingdom of God”, to want with all our heart to have what the Lord Jesus has to offer us within His kingdom. Verse 16,

¹⁶The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. (Luke 16:16)

Now, before we close our study for today, we need also to consider these next words from our Lord, verses 17 and 18,

17 . . . it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

18 Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from *her* husband commits adultery. (Luke 16:17-18)

Two thoughts . . . Verse 14 tells us that these religious leaders, the Scribes and the Pharisees were lovers of money. But folks, the desires that those men had developed for the mammon of this world really did not change or do away with the laws that God had given about envy and covetousness and greed. Those laws would ever and always remain absolute.

And the same was true for the laws that governed marriage. Just because men of the Jewish faith would grow unhappy with the wife they had married or if they enjoyed their lustful desires for someone else's wife, that would not justify their trying to change the laws of God to meet their personal desires.

Not at all! Not at all! It was so very important for those men of that day, and also for us in our day to understand that nothing will justify the doing away with the "laws of God". And folks we must understand that neither the precious words of the gospel nor the precious Grace of our Lord Jesus is intended to nullify or do away with the laws of God, not even one jot or tittle of it.

Many, of our Christian brethren of today are confused about that. And it is easy to be confused, because in many ways it can look as if the "law of God" is just Old Testament stuff that we don't use anymore.

But these words of verse 17 make it so very, very clear,

17 . . . it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail. (Luke 16:17)

Folks, please do realize that those words are absolutely emphatic. Not only the words of the law will remain and be in effect for all of time and eternity, but also even the jots and tittles that give those words emphasis. And even and especially the thoughts and meanings behind each of the words of the law will remain exactly as they are forever.

That is why each one of us, those Scribes and those Pharisees then and you and me now need the precious provision of "Grace" that the Lord Jesus provides to

us. The Law demands that we pay the due penalty for our sin, but the Lord Jesus and His "Grace" provides the mercy that we need. And again, thanks be to God for His loving "Grace".

We, you and I, must not get caught up in the same kind of wrongful thinking as did the Scribes and the Pharisees, believing that it is by the keeping of rules and the trying hard to be good will get us into God's kingdom. Those are good and right things to do, but the "pressing into" the kingdom of God spoken about here is done through the "Great Grace" of the Lord Jesus ministered to us by the "drawing" of the Holy Spirit. And then, by the mysterious faith that comes about within your and my heart, "faith and our surrender to Christ".

The gospel and the Kingdom of God truly is our answer, our only answer. Whether it be in regard to money or it be in matters of our marriage or any other matter of life. The gospel of the Lord Jesus and our "pressing into the kingdom of God" is the only path for us to take. And we need to get on about it.

As we close our study for today, may I ask again that we consider those words very carefully. The powerful "drawing" of the Holy Spirit is ever and always at work within the hearts of each of us who have Christ as our Savior. And that "drawing" invites each of us to be drawn deeper and deeper into our "love relationship with the Lord Jesus". And that is what each of us ought to do. We ought to allow ourselves to abandon our often conservative and reserved response to the wonderful love of the Lord Jesus and to respond back to Him with the same enthusiastic and excited love that He shows to us. Think about it folks.

These words as we close,

³⁷ "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.
(Matthew 22:37-38)

Pray with me.