

The Compass

Week 13

OT Readings – Deuteronomy 5:1-20:20

NT Readings – Luke 7:11-9:50

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- Watch for the intermixed reference to God's *past* faithfulness and the people's *present* and *future* need to live responsively to Him as they enter and live in the land. Their specific responsibilities are detailed throughout Deuteronomy.
- Israel's response to God is never shown to be one of legal, external obligation to the law; rather a relational, from the heart, response to a Personal God. (6:5f. 10:12-11:1. 11:13, 22. 13:3-4. etc.)¹
- One of God's goals in giving the law is to provide truth toward developing a culture that reflects God. This truth was to be passed on to future generations. It was to be *internalized*, a right way of thinking leading to a right way of living. (6:5-9)
- God's desire in all this was "their good always." (6:24)

New Testament

- Powerful examples of the kingdom coming through Jesus' life and ministry included healing, deliverance from the demonic, power over nature, and power over death itself.
- The "transfiguration" puts Jesus on par with two greats of Israel's history, Moses and Elijah, who represent "law and prophet" and thus show that Jesus ministry is the continuation and culmination of God's previous historical purpose.² (9:28-36)
- Jesus assigns the twelve to go and "proclaim the kingdom of God" which means doing the things they had seen Him do – heal, deliver, etc. (9:1-6) The seventy-two will do the same mission in Luke 10. Acts will show that this mission is now ours, today. Are we seeing it?

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Luke 7:36-50. The story is poignant. The woman, likely well-known for her immoral lifestyle, covers His feet with a mixture of tears and precious perfume,³ wipes His feet with her hair and kisses His feet. These actions are culturally audacious to say the least; she crosses nearly every boundary of propriety. But she cannot help it – she has been forgiven!

Do we really understand forgiveness? Do we know the God who so freely gives it? And the power it has to set free and transform? Some see God as a cosmic bean counter meticulously adding up all of our sins, waiting with pleasure the opportunity to punish us. Yet nothing could be farther from Biblical truth.⁴ God is wonderfully forgiving, merciful beyond just, gracious beyond comprehension.

Why is it that we are so very casual, so "ho-hum" about forgiveness? Have we sat in church too long and now we simply take it all for granted? Then we need to revisit our sin, its horrendousness, its painfulness, its destructiveness. And we need to revisit the cross and understand again the love and *longing to forgive* that nailed Him there. You see when we understand forgiveness; it has the power to transform us, no matter who we are, where we've come from or what we have done.⁵

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

Deut. 10:12-16. Rule keeping and legalism always remains a danger. If we entertain legalism in our lives, it will turn us into a Pharisee who cannot see past his attitude of judgment to understand the heart of God. (Luke 7:39)

Is obedience important? Absolutely. But *why* should we obey? Simply put, because obedience is “the only reasonable response to a love relationship.” When we know God, love God, and trust God then it becomes easy to obey Him, a pleasure, something we seek after.

In fact, we become “obeyers” without a second thought. We don’t need to “check” the list of rules everyday to make sure we are on track. We don’t see God and our relationship with Him *through* our rule-bound obedience; rather, we just see God and because of our shared life and love, we respond positively to Him by doing His will in our lives.

How do *you* see obedience? Is it a chore, an obligation, a way to earn favor, a way to insure a place in heaven? For the God-lover, it’s hardly given a second thought; it’s natural, just part of trusting. I know that I’m not good enough and smart enough to run my own life. But I know someone who is; and what’s more He loves me and knows better how to take care of me than I could ever hope to do for myself. Who wouldn’t want to obey Him?

Difficult Question of the Week

Luke 8:26-39. Q. How should we understand all these stories about demons?

Some interpreters have had difficulty with the miraculous accounts in the Bible, including stories of the demonic and deliverance, “We now understand the human psyche and can diagnose mental illnesses. Best to interpret these ‘demon possessions’ in a more modern and scientific way.” While the account of the Gerasene demoniac might seem an extreme case, demonization is not out of the ordinary in the NT or for that matter in our 21st century world.⁶ The problem for us lies more with our anti-supernatural Western worldview than any need to “re-categorize” the demonic accounts in the NT.⁷

While the Biblical materials on Satan and demons are limited and does not answer all of our questions, the Bible clearly sees Satan and the demonic as *real*. Once we acknowledge the reality of these personal agents who work against God’s purposes in the world, we should avoid two extremes: fascination with them or fear of them. God in Christ is victorious over all realms (Eph. 1:18-23. Col. 2:15) and power is given to His people (Luke 10:17-19) to wage warfare in the cosmic conflict. Our posture should be this, “Aware of the demonic, in AWE of God.”

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¹ This puts away any idea that the relationship between God and Israel was *primarily* legal; obedience was a response to covenant relationship. The relational covenant is established before the specifics of obedience are detailed. (Ex. 19:1-8) There is continuity with NT in that love is the basis for our obedient response. (Jn. 14:15)

² Jesus talks of His “departure.” The word used here is the same as used in the Greek NT (LXX) for the Exodus deliverance from Egypt. As in the former OT Exodus, Jesus’ work in Jerusalem will bring about a great “liberation from bondage.” (Joel Green, *Luke*, NICNT, 382.)

³ Perfume of this kind was very expensive. It could even represent a “savings account” of sorts; it was never used casually. Her extravagant expression shows her extravagant gratitude and love, she understood forgiveness.

⁴ Our view of the cross and atonement comes into play with any discussion of forgiveness. The “penal substitution” theory of the atonement requires every sin to be punished and accounted for; therefore Jesus must be “punished” by God and only *then* can God be merciful. In my view, nothing could be farther from the truth. If there is payment, then there cannot be forgiveness; yet the Bible *always* says that God *forgives* us. (Eph. 1:7. Col. 1:13-14. Etc.) Forgiveness is to release *without* retribution, to wipe the slate clean *without* the need to pay for anything or pay anyone. If we have difficulty with this idea, perhaps it is because we do not share God’s heart of mercy and willingness to release others. We feel “someone must pay” and demand *satisfaction*. God does not! This is the testimony of the Bible. Want to think on this more? Consider reading the little book by Gordon Olson, *The Kindness of God Our Savior*.

⁵ Charles Spurgeon was a well-known 19th century preacher. He grew up a good kid with no gross sin in his life. But he knew he was not right with God. He went through a season where he saw for the first time the seriousness of his own sin and the incredible mercy of God on the cross. He described it this way, “Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Savior. He who has stood before His God, convicted and condemned, and with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live to the honor of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed.” (quoted in Brown, *High Voltage Christianity*, 76.)

⁶ Other places in our world are very aware of the supernatural realm. Demons are part and parcel of daily life for many; animism (the belief that spiritual forces are involved in every arena of life) is the prevailing worldview in many cultures.

⁷ This is not to discount mental illness or disorder. We are a full-orbed physical-spiritual-mental being. However, when evaluating situations, we must consider the *possibility* of some level of demonization and approach things accordingly to see persons set free.