

July 11, 2010

Isaiah 61:1-3 / Matthew 11:11-15 / Acts 14:19-28 / Luke  
16:16-17

### Forcing One's Way Into the Kingdom of God

After 15 verses, and three messages, on the three subsections dealing with Jesus view of wealth and riches (vv. 1-9 / 10-12 / 13-15) this passage seems a bit out of place! Especially when one considers that as soon as it's done Luke immediately returns to the topic of wealth and riches from v. 19 to the end of the chapter.

Other than these 3 short verses which seem to have no connection to what comes before or after, the whole chapter deals with the issue of wealth and riches -- making it seem like Luke simply inserted them there for no apparent reason whatsoever!

In fact, that's precisely what some commentators have suggested!

They just placed them there on a whim. Yet I couldn't disagree more! Because after one studies this passage in its context, they will see it's not only connected to what comes before, it also prepares us for what follows!

It completes what was said in verses 1-15 AND sets the stage for what Jesus will go on to say in verses 19-31 (about Lazarus, the sickly and dying beggar / and the unnamed rich man who had bundles of cash but no compassion whatsoever in his heart).

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And since my contention is that these verses aren't simply "placed there on a whim," it leaves me to explain: How they ARE connected to what comes before / and How they DO act as a bridge to what follows after.

And the answer, I believe, relates to what Jesus has just said (follow me on this!)

Jesus has just finished a section on money which ends by warning people not to serve / highly value / or commit the sin of making an "idol" out of money or worldly wealth -- which is, as He tells us in verse 15, **"detestable in the sight of God."**

It's not money that God detests, but people's idolatrous love affair with it. It's our relentless pursuit of it, obsession with it, service of it or worship of it that makes it an **"abomination in the sight of God."**

To live in the service of money is to adore an idol and worship a false god and thus violate the first two of the 10 Commandments -- making the clarification Jesus gives us in these verses, absolutely necessary!

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Which brings us to the **FIRST** lesson we need to see from today's text! That verses 16-18 serve as a clear reminder that although the Good News of the Kingdom (or God's free grace in Jesus) is now being preached (bidding even the worst of sinners to partake of God's gracious favor), **IT DOES NOT NEGATE WHAT IS SAID IN THE LAW!**

Certain acts, attitudes and behaviors are still forbidden, even in the Gospel dispensation, simply because the OT LAW condemns them!

So what are these verses?

***They are Jesus way of telling us that the Gospel does not make the Moral Law of God in the Old Testament invalid or obsolete, as if it were no longer useful to the Christian in his or her ongoing walk with God.***

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Although it is true that, **"No one is justified by the Law,"** as both Jesus and Paul are quick to tell us, it is equally true that apart from the Law of God (which Jesus says will never disappear!) He would have had no ground for declaring that serving, loving, or highly valuing (that is, idolizing) money is **"detestable in the sight of God."**

The reason He can say it -- and know that no one present could contest it -- is because God declared it in the 10 Commandments! That's how these verses on the Law fit in here!

The basis of Jesus condemnation of the idolatry and worship of money in vv. 13-15 is the "Law of God in the Old Testament" - showing it remains the eternal standard of what is pleasing and detestable in His sight.

I am not justified by obeying the Law, I am justified by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ! Yet despite that Gospel truth, the Law still remains an invaluable help in my pursuit of godliness, by constantly reminding me of what pleases God and what displeases God. (That's why I have a copy of the 10 Commandments hanging on my wall in my office!)

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Though saved by nothing but the sheer grace of God in Christ, the Law still functions to help me grow in godliness by informing me that having other gods before God / or engaging in idolatry in my heart / or taking God's name in vain are completely unacceptable behaviors for the Christian, whose only valid response to them, is to repent of them!

It's God's Law that reminds me that to dishonor my parents (by my words or deeds) / or to commit murder / or commit adultery / or steal / or lie / or covet what others have, displeases and dishonors the God who has been so kind as to graciously save me, even though I deserved nothing but condemnation!

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Which brings us to our **SECOND** lesson. When we realize all that, we realize that these verses fit into the context perfectly! Because what they do is assure us (at just the right time in the progression of this chapter) that even though the Good News of the Kingdom, preached since John the Baptist, proclaims that salvation is by nothing but the sheer grace and unmerited mercy of God that comes through Christ, it does not negate the usefulness of the Law!

It's God's Law that thankfully keeps us from falling into the moral chaos of the ethical relativism all around us, which declares there are no moral absolutes -- nothing that is definitively right for all people or definitively wrong for all people, but simply differing religious and cultural preferences!

And let me say this very clearly: You can't believe that and grow in godliness!

In fact, when one considers what Paul says about all the commandments being ***"summed up in this one rule: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"*** it helps us to see that we can't even know what love truly is apart from the Law of God!

It's the "Law of God" that keeps "love" from becoming some vague sentimental feeling or anything anyone wants it to be! Because it's the Law that tells me that "love" won't allow me to covet what others own / or cheat on my spouse / or steal from my neighbor / or lie on a courtroom stand (even if it is to my own hurt) / or murder another human being!

No Christian can ever justify those things in the name of love, because love, rightly understood, would refuse to do them! All the commands can be summed up in this one rule: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

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So, again, what are these verses? A reminder from Jesus Himself that the Good News of the Kingdom has not made the Law of God "null and void." It still serves a function in the Church (and will until Jesus returns), for as He says, ***"It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear, than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law."***

The New Testament does not make the Old Testament unnecessary, for if it did, we would have no grounds whatsoever for calling people to

repent when they do things contrary to it (as Jesus had just done in verses 1-15, and will continue to do in verses 19-31).

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That's why these verses appear in this place! If the Law is obsolete and has been entirely negated by the Gospel of the Kingdom, then no one would have any justification whatsoever for encouraging people to embrace one behavior and repent of another.

It's the Law that assures us that some things (such as idolizing money in v. 15) are still "detestable in the sight of God" and will be judged by Him!

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The Law also explains why Jesus can remind us (at this particular point) about seriousness of divorce and committing adultery / and will go on next week to warn us about what happens when we refuse to use our wealth to "love our neighbor" (at least the less fortunate ones)!

***Everything Jesus HAS SAID (in vv. 1-15) and WILL GO ON TO SAY (in vv. 19-31), hinges upon the continuing role which the "the Law of God" plays, despite the fact that the New Testament era has begun, and "the good news of the kingdom has been preached since John (the Baptist)."***

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Which brings us to the **LAST** lesson we must consider from this text: What Jesus means when He says in regard to the kingdom of God -- ***"Everyone is forcing his way into it."*** Or literally, ***"Everyone is being pressed or forced into it."***

And what's the answer? It's NOT that people need to work hard to get in / or fight with a reluctant God to get in! Rather, what He means is that people are being pressed to enter into it without delay by an earnest, urgent, commanding and divine invitation mixed with an ultimatum!

You see, contrary to common opinion, Jesus did NOT simply preach grace! I can't stress that enough! He preached grace in light of the impending and unavoidable judgment of God that will one day come upon all who live on the earth!

In fact, it's the message of God's coming judgment that made the Gospel such Good News! It was grace preached in light of the coming judgment

that gave Jesus message its appeal / and sense of power / and its heart-tugging sense of urgency that pressed people to see the need to force their way into the kingdom of His grace while there was still time!

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And we can know that, because in the passage that Jesus claimed as being a prophecy that was fulfilled in Him, it says (listen carefully, for it describes what both His ministry and His message would be!):

***"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon Me, for He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners" (and listen - here's the essence of the message Jesus preached!) "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor AND the day of vengeance of our God..."***

Or as we could legitimately paraphrase it: ***"To proclaim the time or era of the Lord's grace and favor IN LIGHT OF the impending Day of Judgment."*** And obviously the word "year" does not refer one calendar year (or 365 days) but the entire Church age or Gospel era (!) -- which has now been going on for nearly 2000 years!

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You see, the reason Jesus message sounded so good and made those early listeners press, force or struggle to make it into the kingdom, was because He was offering free grace and unconditional pardon and unmerited favor ("the time of His favor") / **NOT APART FROM** but **IN**

**LIGHT OF** the inescapable Day of Judgment declared throughout "the Law and the Prophets" (or the entire Old Testament)!

His message (by His very own testimony!) was, ***"Come! Through Me God is ushering in the time of His favor! A special season of grace where anyone, regardless of how sinful they've been, can come and receive His acceptance and pardon freely!"***

It was: ***"COME AND AVAIL YOURSELF OF HIS GRACE NOW! Because a day is coming when the offer of His grace will be revoked / and the axe will fall / and His wrath will be poured out as never before! So don't wait!"***

And they didn't! For as we are told in verse 16b: ***"The kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it!"*** You can just see people by the "pressing" (like a crowd at a concert when the gates open) to get in while the year of God's favor or the window of grace remained open!

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 It's similar to what some Latin governments have done in regard to guerilla fighters. They send out notice of a presidential proclamation offering a window of grace and amnesty and full pardon to any rebel soldier who will simply come and lay down their weapons.

They are offered total amnesty for all their crimes, with the added declaration that on a certain day, at a certain time, that window of opportunity will close, and the offer of amnesty and free grace will be revoked!

And ALL who have failed by that time to avail themselves of the pardon that could have been theirs will suffer the wrath of the government forces who will mount an all out military campaign to defeat them once and for all.

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You see, grace makes no sense at all if people fail to understand they deserve just the opposite! / The hand of mercy (which reaches down to help people in mortal danger) is not seen as mercy if people fail to understand they're about to perish!

In fact, the message that "*God will forgive and accept you*" is seen as little more than an "optional mental health tip" (which one can take or leave without much consequence at all) if they fail to see its offered in light of the impending Day of judgment!

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I can't emphasize that enough! The Christian message is **NOT** simply "Come to Jesus so you can enjoy a better quality of life."

The Christian message is: "Turn to Jesus in this limited period of grace, because if you don't, you will die in your sins and have to stand before God on the Day of Judgment with no advocate, and dressed in nothing but your own imperfection, sin and uncleanness - and thus have to suffer the wrath of God (which you could have been saved or rescued from through faith in Christ)."

That, my friends, is why everyone was "***forcing their way into the kingdom!***" They understood that grace was being offered to them in this time of God's favor, and giving them the unspeakable privilege of partaking of the amnesty and pardon and mercy and shelter from God's wrath offered to all who will place their trust in Christ, who as Paul tells us in I Thess 1:10, "***saves us from the wrath to come.***"

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**SO LET ME END BY SAYING THIS:** I would be untrue to GOD and TO YOU and TO THIS TEXT if I were to end this message without urging every-one here - if you have not yet come to Christ - to do so now! / To trust in Him now!

Unpopular as it is to say it in our day, I tell you today, there will be a Day of Judgment, or as Isaiah puts it, "***the day of the vengeance of our God!***"

And nothing will stop it from happening! / God declared it in the Old Testament / Jesus affirmed it in the New / and it comes inescapably closer every day!

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**Yet the Good News of the Gospel is this:**

We still live in "The time of God's favor." The gracious door of opportunity is still open!

So run through it now! / Press through it now! / For one day (either the day that you die / or the Day Jesus returns) that door will close and the day of God's wrath will begin.

MAKE SURE that before it does, you have run to Jesus for refuge; the ONLY ONE is able to save you from the wrath to come.