



# Reflections on Luke

Don Merritt

## Introduction

I'm really not sure what to call this; is it a book, a Bible study, a devotional, a small group study, a commentary? To be honest, it isn't quite any of those things, yet it has aspects of all three. It's hardly long enough to be a book; it isn't complete enough to be a commentary. It's not quite a devotional, but it could be used for devotions. It's not quite a Bible study, but it could easily be used for that, too. If you're creative, it could also be used to teach a class, but it isn't in a proper format to be curriculum.

One thing differs here from the first two collections I have released. For this collection, I have not included discussion questions, but anyone could make up their own for use in a discussion or class setting.

This little "document" is freely given to you. By all means, feel free to share it with others for free. Please do not use any of this for commercial purposes! Make use of whatever helps you grow in your relationship with our Lord and anything here that isn't helpful, by all means set it aside. Helping other believers in their walk with Christ is my only purpose here!

All blessings to you in Christ!

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# Chapter 1

## A Brief Introduction

*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*

Luke 1:1-4

Luke opens with a formal introduction in the best ancient Greek style, and certainly along with Acts, Luke is written in the most elegant formal Greek, standing out from all other New Testament writings. As he says in his introduction, it is organized along the formal lines of a Greek historian, and in that sense compares favorably to any of the ancient Greek historical texts.

The most important thing for us to take from the introduction is the reason Luke is writing this book; it was so the reader would be certain about the things they were taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, and in this there is a bit of apologetic in Luke's writing that differs somewhat from the other Gospel authors. The idea of being "certain" about the things of God is not really a modern idea for in our times we prefer to say that one cannot ever be entirely certain about anything other than science. Of course science has found certainty in a great many things which were wrong, although we don't like to talk about that. If we were to be entirely honest with ourselves, we would have to acknowledge that science sometimes continues to be certain about things which aren't quite right today, especially when politics enters the picture.

In any case, Luke wants his readers to be certain, we will be reading, and I hope that our level of certainty will have increased greatly by the time we are finished.

## ***The Birth of John is Foretold***

Luke 1:5-25

Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were old and well beyond child bearing; they had no children and no hope of ever having children. He was a priest at the Temple, and she was something of a disgrace for being barren. On a certain day, Zechariah was chosen by lot, as was the custom, to enter the Holy Place to burn the incense to God. This of course was the twice daily ritual following the sacrifice for the atonement of sins. It is important to this story for us to understand that the casting of lots was done to enable God to choose which priest was to enter the Holy Place, thus Zechariah's selection would have been understood as God's choice, and no accident.

While in the Holy Place, Zechariah was startled by the angel of the Lord who came to bring him some very unexpected good news: Elizabeth would conceive a child in her old age.

Does this remind you of someone?

This would be no ordinary child, for he would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before being born, which was the special favor of God in a time when there was no generally available indwelling of the Spirit. He would prepare the way for the Lord Himself with the spirit of Elijah, the great prophet of old. In the process, he would bring many people back to the righteous ways of the Lord.

Zechariah was to call the boy John.

If you were in Zechariah's sandals, what would be your reaction? Maybe you'd be overjoyed, or shocked, or terrified, or very proud... or skeptical! Zechariah wanted to know how he could be sure this news was true, a fairly human concern, I'd have to say. It would appear that the angel wasn't all that impressed with such a reaction, however. He identified himself as Gabriel who served in the presence of God, and informed Zechariah that he would be mute until the miraculous (there's really no other word for it) birth was completed.

Well, Zechariah asked for a sign, and he got one... right?

Meanwhile, the people outside praying were wondering what had happened to Zechariah; he'd been inside far too long. When he emerged from the Temple, they could tell he had experienced some kind of vision, but he couldn't tell them anything about it. He returned home and his wife became pregnant; the Lord had taken away her disgrace and she went into seclusion for her term. Yet soon another angelic visit would take place...

### ***Mary has a Visitor***

Luke 1:26-38

Six months after Elizabeth became pregnant; the angel Gabriel pays a visit to Mary in Nazareth: *"Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

Have you ever read legal notices in the newspaper? Years ago I read some just to see what they were all about and I couldn't believe that so many of them began, "Greetings from the State of Nevada, you have been sued."

"Greetings" indeed!

Mary's reaction to the greetings Gabriel brought her was a bit similar: What kind of greetings would these be, am I in trouble?

In one sense, maybe she was in "trouble" for she was to become pregnant before she was married to Joseph, her betrothed. Yet this would be no ordinary pregnancy, for God Himself would be the Father of her child, and her conception would be from the Holy Spirit who would

“come upon” her. Her son would be named Jesus, and would be known as the Son of the Most High, sitting in the throne of David forever and ever, ruling God’s people in glory; He would be the Savior of the World. In the process of telling her all of this, he also mentioned that Elizabeth had conceived in her old age and was already in her sixth month of pregnancy; Mary marveled at this. It should also be noted that she received the news a little better than poor old Zechariah, for she said: *“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”* What amazing faith!

Soon, she would pay Elizabeth a little visit...

### ***Mary Sees Elizabeth***

*At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”*

Luke 1:39-45

In a scene reminiscent of 1 Samuel 1-2, Mary arrives at the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth and as the text tells us, two interesting things happen when she enters the house. First, the unborn John the Baptist leaps for joy upon hearing her voice, and then his mother Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. You will recall that the angel had told Elizabeth that her son would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born, and this has been borne out; now Elizabeth herself utters a more or less prophetic message.

Elizabeth became the first human to ever proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

If nothing else, we see in this scene that Elizabeth, in spite of her joy at conceiving a child in her old age, and in spite of being joyous at the important role her son would play in redemption history, that she was fully aware that Mary was carrying the greater of the two, and that as a result, Mary was the more blessed.

What does this tell us some 2,000 years later?

It tells us that this child whose birth we are celebrating now, was no ordinary child, that he was God incarnate. It tells us that this child was/is the One who would change everything and that this change would be for all time. It tells us that in our celebrations, the birth of this child is not to be treated as an afterthought or an “oh by the way” kind of thing, for it is well and truly The Point.

Everything else is fluff.

### **Mary's Song**

*And Mary said:*

*"My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.  
His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.  
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors."*

Luke 1:46-55

May this be our song; may this be our prayer.

I doubt that I need to say more.

### **Zechariah's Song**

Luke 1:67-80

At some point after Mary's song, it was Zechariah's turn. His was a prophetic song and though it was primarily about his son, it also included elemental references to the Messiah he would serve...

*And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,*

*because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.” (1:76-79)*

Notice in these verses the clear reference to his son John who came to fulfill the prophecy of old and “prepare the way of the Lord”. Of particular interest is the ending, Zechariah’s mention of the “tender mercy” of God and the way he uses the example of the rising sun each day as an example of God’s mercy. Where would we be if the sun stopped rising?

As we continue reading it becomes abundantly clear that Zechariah isn’t talking about the literal sun, rather he is referring to God’s Son, coming to shine the light of His presence in a dark world that teeters on the edge of destruction. God’s Son will light the path so that we might avoid falling into disaster and be redeemed by God to find the path of peace.

This is a powerful and gripping image, reminiscent of the prophets of centuries before, and one that should light our hearts still today, for it has come to pass, and we who follow Jesus Christ have received its incredible blessing.

With this, Luke has set the stage for the arrival of God’s Son, but this arrival will have an unusual kind of glory...

## Chapter 2

### *Jesus IS Born*

Luke 2:1-21

In due course the time came for Mary to give birth to her son; they named him Jesus, just as the angel had told them. There really is no point in my retelling of the story since it is quite possibly the most familiar story in the entire Scriptures for Christian and non-Christian alike. Even so, there are a couple of things I'd like to mention here...

First, you'll notice that Luke's account begins with a call by Caesar Augustus for a census to be taken throughout the Empire. Augustus was the most powerful man in the world, and he ruled the mighty Roman Empire as a military dictator. As the adopted son of Julius Caesar, who had been assassinated in 44 BC, he was his heir and became the first Emperor of Rome in 27 BC and ruled until his death in 14 AD. Augustus was not his name; he had been born Gaius Octavian— Augustus was actually his self-given title and means "majestic". He arranged for himself to be declared divine, and all of the people of the Empire were required to worship him...

So he demanded a census be taken so that he could be sure his treasury was collecting the full amount of tax from the people, and thus, Mary and Joseph were required to travel to Bethlehem to be counted... and so that the prophecies of old would be fulfilled. I mention all of this because in Luke's account, the greatest and most powerful man of all, the ruler of the greatest Empire, the one who would dare to claim divinity and demand worship, became nothing more than a footnote in the story of the birth of a "nobody", a poor carpenter's son by all appearances, in a nowhere little town on the edge of the Empire... *who just happened to be God Incarnate.*

Who says God doesn't have a sense of humor!

The child was born in a manger, just about the last place anyone would want their child to be born. The announcement of His birth wasn't made to princes or nobles; it was made to a group of shepherds out in the fields at night. Shepherds, because of the nature of their work were considered to be at the very lowest rung of the social ladder, and as Jewish shepherds, there was little they could do to avoid being ceremonially unclean every day of their lives, and yet God announces the birth of His Son to them. Thus, unclean shepherds were the very first to worship the Son of God.

This Jesus, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas came into this world confounding all of the great people, the smart people, and the "beautiful" people. He continued to confound them throughout His ministry, and still does to this day, for God couldn't care less about the glories of this world; *He is the glory of heaven.*

## ***Jesus is Presented at the Temple***

Luke 2:22-40

The Law of Moses required that a male child be circumcised on the eighth day and so Mary and Joseph left Bethlehem and traveled the few miles to Jerusalem for this purpose. In fact, Luke mentions three ceremonies that were conducted in accordance with the custom of that time: Circumcision for the baby, the purification of his mother, and the baby's dedication to the Lord as their firstborn male child. While it is important to the larger narrative that these ceremonies were completed properly, the real story here is that of Simeon and Anna.

Both were in their old age, both were upright and righteous people, and both were eagerly looking forward to the coming of Messiah and God's deliverance of His people. As Luke tells us, Simeon had received God's promise that he would not die before seeing the Messiah, and that promise is fulfilled here.

Simeon tells Mary and Joseph some interesting things as the Spirit came upon him...

*"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.  
For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel." (2:29-32)*

Mary and Joseph marveled at this, but Simeon wasn't quite finished:

*"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." (2:34b-35)*

It's one thing to hear praise for a newborn, but I would imagine that hearing this was quite a different matter, yet as we know, it came to pass. As this was being said, Anna the prophet was nearby giving thanks to God for the appearance of His Son in Jerusalem.

The scene ends with Mary and Joseph returning to Nazareth with the child, who would grow in strength and wisdom...

Notice that they did not return to Bethlehem as so many stories, pictures and traditions would indicate. Does this surprise you?

If you look back at the story of the Magi in Matthew 2, you will notice that after they met with Herod, the Lord guided them to the *house* where Jesus was, not to the manger where he was born... and Herod calculated from the time the Magi had first seen the sign to the present had had all little boys in Bethlehem murdered who were 2 and under, so it took the Magi quite some time to reach him.

Notice also that when Mary and Joseph were warned that Herod would be on the lookout for the child, they *fled the country*, not Bethlehem, and went to Egypt until Herod died, which wasn't very long after that according to secular history.

That's right dear reader, all of those pictures and plays and carols... are simply wrong.

### ***Jesus Visits the Temple***

Luke 2:41-52

This is the only story we have about Jesus between His infancy and the beginning of His ministry roughly at age 30. Of course there are theories and tales galore, but this is the only reliable record of that period. One thing is clear about young Jesus; He knew who He was.

After the Passover was completed, His family set off for the return trip to Nazareth. It was a large party, and everyone seems to have assumed that 12-year-old Jesus was in the group, but after a day, Mary and Joseph headed back to Jerusalem to find Him; ah yes, 12-year-olds will get into mischief!

After three days they finally found the boy in the Temple sitting with the teachers listening, asking, answering... Everyone there was amazed that such a young boy had so much understanding. Here's the part that's telling:

His mother asked Him: "*Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.*" I would suggest that this would be a reasonable question, one that most mothers would be yelling under the circumstances. Here is Jesus' reply to His mother:

*"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (2:49)*

Oh yes dear reader, Jesus knew who He was; had His poor parents forgotten? Luke tells us they didn't understand what he was saying...

Can't say that I blame them, come to think of it; it couldn't have been easy to be a parent of the Son of God.

All three returned home, and Jesus continued to grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. Mary treasured all of these memories in her heart.

## Chapter 3

### Preparing the Way

Luke 3:1-20

In the first two verses, Luke goes to great pains to let us know that the Word of God came to John in the wilderness in the year 28, but of course the coming of the Word is the most important thing— John's time had come.

Notice in the text that Luke is careful to point out that John was on the scene in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, for this was no fluke; John's mission was one that everyone would recognize. It's sometimes hard for us to remember that in the first century the Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to appear, based upon the prophecies of Daniel who had given them the timeframe for His arrival. John's appearance would have made quite an impact. So there he was, out in the desert, preaching of all things repentance... but the people would flock to Him to hear his preaching, and to receive his baptism of repentance, for they knew that the Messiah would shortly appear, and they wanted to be ready.

Isn't this an interesting contrast to our attitude about repentance today?

Notice the interesting exchanges recorded in 3:7-14: The people were receptive to his message for the most part, asking what they should do. As we see in the next verse, some were even wondering if John himself was the Messiah, but he quickly set them straight:

*John answered them all, "I baptize you with<sup>1</sup> water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them. (3:16-18)*

John's ministry would end at God's appointed time as we see in the last two verses of this section, but not before he has an encounter with Jesus Himself that we'll look at next time. What we need to review is that the early church also would preach a message of repentance that resonated with many people who remembered John's teaching, for John was very popular with the Jewish people, if not the Jewish authorities, for they were not particularly feeling empowered by John's and later Jesus' appearance on the scene; they were much too honest to play the games of the rich and powerful as John demonstrates in the last two verses of this section...

*But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison. (3:19-20)*

## ***Jesus Comes into View***

Luke 3:21-38

*When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

Luke 3:31-22

In contrast to Matthew's much larger description of Jesus' baptism, Luke moves right to the result of the baptism. Jesus was baptized and prayed, and when He did the heavens opened, the Spirit descended upon Him in *bodily form* the Father spoke, and everyone knew about it: Jesus was the Messiah.

Well, I guess that just about cinches it, don't you agree?

It might be useful for us to be reminded that Luke was writing to a much different audience than Matthew, who was writing to a predominantly Jewish audience. As a result, Matthew gets into the history of Israel, the prophecies concerning the Messiah and so forth, while Luke, writing to a largely Greek audience skips much of the Israel part, and gets right to the result that has affected his readers: Jesus really is the Messiah, God incarnate... Period.

Interestingly, as a first century historian, Luke then gives the genealogy of Jesus, and so we can see that this is the "official" beginning of His story. Again there is a great contrast to Matthew's genealogy, for although Matthew shows us every way possible that Jesus = son of David, Luke simply demonstrates that Jesus inherited the royal kingship of David through adoption by his heir Joseph.

## Chapter 3

### *Jesus in the Wilderness*

Luke 4:1-13

The ministry of Jesus has begun... or has it? He has been baptized by John, the heavens opened, the Spirit descended upon Him in "bodily form" and the Father has spoken; now He has one more hurdle before He begins, He must be tempted.

The Spirit leads Him out into the desert (Wilderness) where He is to fast for 40 days, just as Moses and Elijah have done before. This is the first of several parallels to Israel's past in this section. After 40 days, Jesus is terribly hungry, and in this we see His humanity in full force, after He was proclaimed by His Father to be the Son of God. Taking advantage of the situation, the devil comes onto the stage...

Knowing Jesus' hunger, the devil points to a stone and tells Jesus to turn it into bread to ease His suffering. Of course you'll recall the ruckus among the Israelites in the Wilderness about their lack of food which demonstrated their lack of faith in the God who had so recently rescued them from Egypt in spectacular fashion. Unlike the Israelites, Jesus' faith does not bend at this point, and He replies to the devil with Scripture (4:3-4).

Next in 4:5-8, the devil shows Jesus all of the world's kingdoms and offers them to Jesus, if He will only worship Satan. Is the entire world Satan's to offer? People have debated that for a long time, and it probably doesn't really matter here, for Jesus again quotes Scripture in rejection of the offer. The really interesting aspect of the offer is that it would have brought Jesus to His destiny in a sense, while bypassing the cross, for in being the king of all nations, every knee would bow to Him. Yet in His denial, Jesus has passed another test that the Israelites had failed in the Wilderness, for He refused to bow to another god, while they had not only bowed to other gods, they had actually manufactured gods to bow to.

Then, the devil took Jesus to the highest point of the Temple and invited Him to jump so that the angels of God would have to save Him, and actually quoted Scripture to justify his gambit.

Jesus quoted Scripture in His refusal (4:9-12).

Had Jesus performed this stunt, presumably there would have been many witnesses and He could have jump-started His ministry with a big following; something like you might see on TV today, followed by the toll free number to donate money. Yet Jesus was not about to use His power and position toward His personal ends, for His was a mission as a servant leader, of humility and self-denial, not show business.

Jesus was the real deal, and stands in stark contrast to the Israelites who wanted God to prove Himself over and over in the Wilderness.

In the final verse, Luke tells us that Satan withdrew in favor of a more opportune time, and indeed, we will encounter him again and again in the story. When all of this was completed,

Jesus returned to His home town to kick off His public ministry, no doubt to cheers from His friends and family.

Or not.

### ***Home to Nazareth***

Luke 4:14-30

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Luke 4:18-19

Jesus headed toward home, and on the way He began to teach and news began to spread about His amazing teaching, for the Spirit was upon Him. When He reached His home town of Nazareth, the people wanted to hear what He had to say on the Sabbath. When the day came, He was handed the scroll of Isaiah and He read the verses quoted above. The scene was electric, tension and expectation were in the air...

“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” He spoke some more and the people were amazed. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

Jesus went on to tell them that no prophet is “accepted” in his home town, and reminded them of several instances from Scripture in which prophets did their work elsewhere for this reason.

At this, the people were angered and they tried to throw Jesus off of a cliff; so much for a hometown crowd. Yet Jesus simply strolled through the crowd and went on His way.

You might well think I’m making a stretch here, but I told you we’d see Satan again!

### ***Driving out Demons***

Luke 4:31-37

After the incident in Nazareth, Jesus moved on to Capernaum where once again people were amazed by His teaching. Luke gives us the reason for their amazement; it was the authority with which He taught. Of course many teachers teach authoritatively, but Jesus seems to have had an extra ingredient in His teaching, for all four gospel writers tell us that it was His authority that so amazed people. Apparently, being the Son of God is something that has a way of coming out

without ever being mentioned, for it brings forth the authority of God, for who is a greater authority on the Word of God than the Living Word Himself?

On one occasion there was a man who was possessed by demons. The demons knew at once who Jesus was, and we know that from what they shouted through the stricken man:

*“Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” (4:34)*

Jesus simply commanded that they come out of the man, and they immediately complied with His command, amazing the people even more than before. More importantly, the man was once again made spiritually whole through the words that came from His mouth; the Living Word in action. As His followers, we must come to recognize that it is the Living Word in us, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that gives us our strength, not our cleverness and not our human strength, but God’s alone.

As one might expect, the news of this incident spread quickly throughout the region: What else could this Jesus do?

## ***Healing***

Luke 4:38-44

In these verses we see Jesus healing people of sickness and driving out more demons. The demons it seems all knew who He was, yet Jesus really wasn’t going to rely on the testimony of the agents of Hell to spread the good news; He ordered them to keep quiet. Even when He retreated to a solitary place, the people found Him and tried to persuade Him to remain with them, but Jesus couldn’t do that, for He had come to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God all over

Let’s just keep this short and sweet: When Jesus preached the good news of the Kingdom of God, what happened?

First, people were amazed at the authority with which He spoke about it. Second, people were healed both of their illnesses and their spiritual oppression, both of which are things that came about as a result of Man’s falling away from fellowship with God. Third, Jesus gave practical confirmation of His authority; that it had indeed come from God. Yet there is another element in all of this, an apocalyptic element. Jesus demonstrated in physical terms what would soon happen in eternal terms after He had dealt with the sin of humanity and restored fellowship between Man and God, and if memory serves me, Luke also wrote a volume in which he told that story.

## Chapter 5

### *Calling Disciples*

Luke 5:1-11

Luke's account of the calling of Peter, James and John as disciples differs in many ways from the accounts of Matthew and Mark; I'll let others speculate on the reasons for this and try to focus on what I see as the really instructive part of Luke's account. Please read these verses, if you haven't already, and let's talk...

OK, now that you have refreshed your recollection of this account, did you notice Peter's reaction when Jesus caused his nets to be so overloaded with fish?

*When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (5:8)*

Doesn't that remind you of Isaiah the prophet?

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:*

*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory."*

*At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.*

*"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."*

Isaiah 6:1-5

This is from the passage that describes the call of Isaiah to prophesy to the people; do you see the similarity in his response to that of Peter when he saw how amazing and holy Jesus was, that He knew just where to cast their nets for a record catch? Isaiah was accepted for service and went without hesitation:

*Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."*

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"*

*And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:6-8)*

Like Isaiah, Peter was horrified at his unworthiness to be in the presence of the Son of God, yet in Luke 5:10 Jesus reassured him, and they dropped everything and followed Him without hesitation. You might also take a look at the call of Moses in Exodus 3 and Gideon in Judges 6.

It would be quite normal for any of us to realize that we are neither qualified nor worthy to serve our Lord; we are all sinners after all. Yet none of the “greats” of Scripture were any more perfect than you or I, and when reassured, they followed God’s call. Each of us knows that our sin has been taken away by the blood of Christ, and each of us has every right to seek His loving arms... and each of us has received His call to follow Him. Will we follow the example of Peter, James and John?

### ***Another Healing***

*While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”*

*Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him.*

*Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”*

*Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

Luke 5:12-16

Once again Jesus heals someone, this time He heals a leper. Of note in this account is the fact that the man showed tremendous faith when he met Jesus; notice he showed no doubts about whether or not Jesus could heal him. Note also that Jesus healed the man by touching him, a rather big “no-no” for to touch a leper would make you unclean.

Jesus didn’t seem to care about that. Yet He did care that the man present himself to the priests so that they could perform the necessary rites to make him clean in the eyes of the Law... but he wasn’t to mention Jesus.

Naturally the word got out and Jesus’ fame spread even further.

With His fame spreading, we might note that Jesus didn’t call a press conference or hold a rally. Instead He went into seclusion to pray. That speaks volumes, don’t you think?

### ***The Beginning of Conflict***

Luke 5:17-26

Since Jesus' departure from Nazareth, things had been going pretty well; He met with universal acclaim, He has been begged to remain in villages, and many have come out to hear His teaching and see His healing, but just as we saw in Nazareth, things were about to change. In this section, Luke begins a series of five stories in which conflict develops between Jesus and various Jewish officials; this parallels the events in Mark chapter 2. We begin here with the very familiar story of the paralyzed man who was brought by friends to the house where Jesus was teaching. The crowd was so large that they couldn't squeeze into the house, so the men carried their friend to the roof and lowered him into the room where Jesus was. Impressed with their faith, Jesus told the man his sins were forgiven, something that shocked the Pharisees and teachers of the law in the room.

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus asked them which would be easier for Him to do, to tell the man his sins were forgiven, or to tell him to get up and walk... So, He told the paralyzed man to get up, take his mat and go home, which is exactly what the man did, right in front of everyone. Jesus explained why He did this: "I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." (5:24)

God was glorified, everyone was amazed, many gave praise to God... and the seeds of discord were sown, for the Jewish leaders had something to accuse Jesus of: Blasphemy. To be sure, we will see this word again.

### ***Another Disciple; More Conflict***

*After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.*

*Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"*

*Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

Luke 5:27-32

Tax collectors were probably the least popular of all in the Jewish social structure of the first century, for they were considered to be both thieves and traitors. They were considered thieves because they earned their very substantial livings by collecting more tax than was actually due. They were considered traitors because the tax they collected was for the Roman Government which was the foreign force that occupied Jewish territory, ruling by force of arms.

Everyone hated the tax collectors.

Jesus called Levi (Matthew) to be a disciple, and Levi followed Him without hesitation, giving up a massive business in the process: Astounding for a crook. What did Levi do next? He throws a big party for Jesus!

Let's look at this from the point of view of the Pharisees: Seeing all of this, what are you going to think? If we are honest, we'd probably think the same thing they did; what was Jesus doing?!

In His reply to their question, Jesus shows a priority system that was more or less foreign to the Jews, for He had come to save these people, not to condemn them as everyone else did. That approach didn't go over very well with the Pharisees of Jesus' time, and frankly, it doesn't go over very well with the Pharisees of our time either.

While we are looking at the passage, there is another little tidbit we shouldn't overlook. Levi left his booth, went home and threw Jesus a party, inviting all of his sinner friends to attend... and they showed up. Notice that nobody had time to get their life in order before coming to Jesus. Levi was now a disciple of Jesus, but had he gotten his act together yet?

Don't answer too quickly... for I think the answer is probably something like 'kinda sorta but not really'. Yes, he walked away from his booth, so there might be repentance in play to a certain degree, then he throws a party and invites his old pals which could be said to be carrying on his old lifestyle— or is this Levi hoping that Jesus will save them too? Forget for a moment that you know how the story ends, whether or not Levi returned all he had stolen; at this point he hasn't.

For me this story reinforces the notion that we do not need to get our life "together" before we come to Jesus, for who can truly get it all together *without* Jesus?

It's something to think about don't you agree?

### ***The Pharisees Have a Question***

*They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."*

*Jesus answered, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."*

*He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'"*

Luke 5:33-39

After Jesus attends Levi's big bash, the question about fasting arises. The Pharisees fast twice a week, so righteous and wonderful are they... and they make sure everybody knows about it.

John's disciples fasted also, and let's face it, fasting was a big cultural thing for the Jews of that day. Of course the Law only required fasting once per year. Fasting was associated with mourning; mourning for sin or loss. It was also used in times of special devotion.

Jesus and His disciples didn't do any extra fasting, and Jesus tells them in His answer exactly why that was: The Bridegroom was in their midst; this is a time to rejoice!

He uses a couple of little parables to expand His thinking, about a torn garment and new wine. A new garment is not intended to be a patch of the old, for with a new garment, who needs the old? Jesus is the new garment.

If you have new wine, you don't put it into an old wineskin, because it will ruin the old wineskin as it ferments. When new wine comes along, everyone will say the old is better anyway, since most wine drinkers prefer a more mature wine to a young one. Funny thing, when the new wine (change) comes along, everyone prefers the old as you know if you've ever tried to change anything. Yet Jesus is the new wine, for with His coming, the Old passed away.

I'm willing to guess that this reply didn't go over all that well with the old guard.

### ***Bonus Subject: The Pharisees***

The Pharisees were the largest group of "teachers of the Law" in the first century which is to say that they were teachers of the Law, but not all teachers of the Law were Pharisee. There were several other groups, most notably the Sadducees. These sects each represented a somewhat different theological tradition within Judaism, and I suppose it would be fair to compare them to modern day denominations in the sense that all were Jewish, but they taught things somewhat differently.

In the Gospels, the Pharisees are cast in a rather negative role as self-righteous, money loving, power hungry hypocrites, and while Jesus commented on these things often enough, we should probably recognize that not all Pharisees were quite so corrupted.

The main distinction between the Pharisees and other groups of scholars in those days was the singular devotion of the sect to keeping and maintaining the Law of Moses. Their devotion to keeping it was so great that in order to avoid even coming close to breaking the Law, they developed an oral law containing over two thousand additional rules to be memorized, and as a practical matter, annotated into the Law, so as not to even come close to a violation. Thus, since keeping the Sabbath was rather vague in the Law itself (you shall not work on the Sabbath), they came up with hundreds of additional rules so as to define anything that might be interpreted as "work". As you know, this is the area into which Jesus boldly strode and conflict resulted several times.

Another example that comes up in Acts is their rule about only giving 30 lashes in punishment where the Law actually allowed 40. The Pharisees believed that rather than accidentally

breaking the Law if there was a miscount, taking 10 lashes away from the maximum; they could be safe from making a mistake.

In addition to their study of the Law, the Pharisees also were serious scholars of the rest of the Old Testament. For this reason, they ran into serious conflict with the Sadducees who only accepted the Torah (Law) and not the rest (Talmud) of the OT. Thus, the Pharisees believed in a spiritual realm and a resurrection of the dead, which the Sadducees rejected.

## Chapter 6

### ***Lord of the Sabbath***

Luke 6:1-11

This passage contains two stories of events occurring on the Sabbath which result in conflict to point where the Pharisees begin to plot against Jesus. In the first one (6:1-5) the disciples were eating grain they had plucked along their way, prompting some Pharisees to ask why they were violating the law of the Sabbath. Remember that the Pharisees have constructed hundreds of oral regulations to define “work” for the Sabbath and in their very strict construction of the term, plucking a bit of grain from a plant was work, while walking for miles was not.

Jesus in His reply to their question reminded them of an incident in which David violated their laws to feed his men from consecrated bread that could only be eaten by priests, with the very clear implication that God didn’t view the Law quite so strictly as they did, declaring that He was “Lord of the Sabbath” indicating to them that He was qualified to decide what was really permissible independent of their oral traditions. Naturally, the Pharisees weren’t amused.

In the second part of the passage (6:6 ff.) Jesus is speaking in the synagogue on another Sabbath and a man was present with a “withered” hand. The Pharisees in attendance, who had just about had their fill of Jesus, were waiting attentively to see if He would heal the man on the Sabbath so they could make an issue of it. Knowing this, Jesus invited the man to stand up front in view of everyone, and posed a legal question: “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?” (6:9)

Jesus told the man to stretch out his hand, and lo and behold it was restored. The Pharisees were furious, but what could they say? All Jesus did was ask the man to hold his hand!

The plotting began then and there; they had to do something to this Jesus guy, for He wasn’t going along with their program.

### ***Bonus Subject: The Son of Man***

We’ve already seen that Jesus will often refer to Himself as “the Son of Man”, a rather interesting little title. In fact, it is the title He uses for Himself more than any other; it is even more interesting to note that this title is used only once in all of the rest of the New Testament in Acts 7:56: “Look,” he (Stephen) said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (cf. Luke 22:69).

For the ancient Hebrew, phrases like “son of so and so” might often be used to say “someone who is like so and so,” Yet when Jesus uses the term, He isn’t saying that He is like some random man, or even like some other person; so what is He up to?

The thing I find really interesting about the term is that it has just enough in it that over time a person who “has ears to hear” is likely to figure out whom or what Jesus is referring to, and those who don’t will always remain clueless. In this respect, I suppose one could say that “Son of Man” is a bit of a parable; for it is certainly a riddle.

Yet it isn’t an impossible riddle.

If we do some digging, we will find a clue in Daniel 7:13-14:

*In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

It seems highly likely that Jesus used this cryptic reference to identify Himself as the messianic figure from Daniel 7, something that only those with discernment and a willing heart would notice. His opponents, those who either knew, or with reasonable diligence should have known His identity from the very beginning possessed neither of these attributes. This is all the more troubling since of all people, they were the ones who knew these Scriptures so well; such is the condition of this world.

### **Choosing the Twelve**

*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*

Luke 6:12-16

When Jesus is faced with a major decision, He goes off by Himself to pray, often for an extended period of time; we might want to take note of this. In these verses Luke begins a new section that is centered around the 12. It’s interesting for us to see that Jesus chose them from among many “disciples” who were in His presence at this point in His ministry, something we often overlook in the story of His ministry.

There were Twelve who would play a special role in the development of the early Church. They would represent the 12 Tribes of Israel, even though in Jesus’ day there were no longer 12 Tribes, but only 2 and ½ (Judah, Benjamin and half of Levi). In doing this, Jesus confirmed His messianic role as the one who would reunite Israel in His Kingdom, but what no one seems to have understood at this point is that Israel would be united in a form never before seen, alongside the Gentiles.

Of course, that would come later.

## ***Jesus Teaches His Followers***

Luke 6:17-46: Introduction

In these 29 verses, Luke tells of teachings that are directly parallel to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Is Luke reporting the same occasion? Are they still on a mountain? Scholars argue over these and other questions, and in all of these years, they haven't settled the issues, so let's not worry too much about them here.

As I wrote back when we covered Matthew's Gospel, the Sermon on the Mount may very well be a summary of Jesus' Kingdom teachings, a compilation of His major themes about what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom, rather than a transcript of one particular event. I would suggest that the same is likely the case with Luke's account in chapter six. Either way, both are content rich to say the least.

Notice that the scene begins with Jesus, who has been up on a mountain in prayer, coming down "with them" (the Twelve) to a level place where lots of people are gathered to hear His teaching. There is "a large crowd of His disciples" as well as many others there. Clearly at this point Jesus had a great many "disciples" (followers) in addition to the Twelve, and had also created a great deal of interest among others who weren't yet "disciples".

Like in Matthew 5, Luke begins the presentation with a list of beatitudes which clearly parallel some of those in Matthew, but Luke only lists four, and with each one, Luke adds a "woe" to match up with them, which is a very interesting distinction between the approaches of the two men. When we studied Matthew, I wrote about each beatitude separately, and here, I propose to do so again, only this time, I'll do so alongside its corresponding woe so we can get the clear picture of each one.

One thing you will notice as we continue through these is that Luke seems to have a bias for the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful and the persecuted. In this, he almost makes it sound as though one must be all of these things in order to enter the Kingdom, and as his narrative continues, we will see two instances where Jesus tells a rich person to liquidate their portfolios. Before we draw this conclusion however, we need to remind ourselves of who He was addressing. Notice the full range and extent of the crowd that Luke mentions in 6:17-19, and then note how these beatitudes begin: "Looking at the disciples, he said" (6:20).

As we've already seen, these are people who have already left everything behind; homes, families, jobs, businesses... Thus it seems, at least to me, more likely that Jesus is trying to encourage them, than stating strict legal requirements for discipleship.

In any case, we are ready to begin our look at His words, and we'll get started next time; see you then!

## **Poor and Rich**

*“Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God. (6:20b)*

*“But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have already received your comfort. (6:24)*

I should begin by mentioning that the word “blessed” means fortunate or joyous, while the word “woe” is used to indicate an approaching disaster in Scripture. Thus in this paradox we can see that the poor who follow Christ are fortunate, joyous, which the rich face disaster.

Looking more closely, we can see the reason for both of these: The poor Luke is speaking of, and remember in 6:20a He is addressing “disciples”, will receive the Kingdom of God, so their eternal future is assured. Yet even now, they receive the blessings of the fullness of Christ in this life; joyous indeed!

The rich, those who have so much, who are not His disciple; what of them?

They will have a problem when the Kingdom comes, for they have placed their hope in their wealth. They might find comfort in the present, but when the time comes, what will their money buy them?

Not a thing.

Is this to say that nobody of means can be saved?

I highly doubt it, even though some will assert that it does. Rather it seems to me that Jesus is continuing here the long pattern of Jewish wisdom which states a general principle or value. In this case, I think we all know that very rich people often have a hard time coming to Christ, simply because they are so comfortable with their own status quo. While this may be true generally, it is not an absolute as we also know. While we're at it, being poor doesn't mean a person is interested in giving their life to Christ, even though a higher percentage of the poor might lean that way than with the rich. The real principle in all of this is that we cannot depend upon earthly wealth to secure our future, particularly our eternal future, and it is better to be poor now and inherit eternity, than to be rich now and miss out.

## **Hunger and Plenty**

*Blessed are you who hunger now,  
for you will be satisfied. (Luke 6:21)*

*Woe to you who are well fed now,  
for you will go hungry. (Luke 6:25)*

Jesus continues His theme here as His remarks to his followers continued. In these two verses He makes a contrast between hunger and plenty. Note that He isn't saying that it's a good thing

to be starving or to lack the necessities of life, but rather that it would be better for a person to lack and have an eternal relationship with God, then to have plenty in this life and perish for eternity. Again, that doesn't mean that we should all starve ourselves as a sort of spiritual stunt, to see if God will step in.

Clearly, there is an element to this that is counter-intuitive for many of us, oriented as we are in modern Western culture to placing a high priority on comfort and ease of living. Materialism as a way of life is not the best thing for us, in spite of all we hear and see around us. Trusting in God is the place that best characterizes a Kingdom lifestyle, whether we have material means or not.

I once read an interview in which a very wealthy Christian businessman who had made and lost multiple fortunes was asked if he sometimes regretted the amount of money that he had given away to the needy in times in of plenty, and his answer really tells the story here. He replied, "No, I never lost a cent that I gave away."

I don't know about you, but I've always thought that comment was profound.

### ***Weeping and Laughter***

*Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh. (Luke 6:21b)*

*Woe to you who laugh now,  
for you will mourn and weep. (Luke 6:25n)*

Jesus was "a man of sorrows" and yet we see many times in the Gospels that He is attending a banquet or social occasion where there is probably a great deal of laughter going on; certainly some of His opponents thought He was rather too inclined to a party.

So what is He talking about?

We know that there were plenty of times when He grieved over this world and just how many of God's children simply could not fathom the things of Heaven. Have you ever done that?

If you follow Jesus, things might not always go your way in this life. You may have dear friends or family who mock you or ridicule your beliefs; they might even turn their backs on you entirely. Surely that is a sad time for anyone. Even so, it is better to endure some of these types of sorrows now and be in relationship with God, than it is to sit proud and happy in this life without Him.

### ***Hate Speak***

*Blessed are you when people hate you,  
when they exclude you and insult you*

*and reject your name as evil,  
because of the Son of Man. (Luke 6:22)*

*Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,  
for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets. (Luke 6:26)*

This final paradox is an interesting one, and to be honest, I can almost see a parallel in the current news of our time. Jesus is speaking however about being rejected because of our faith in Him and His message.

It is somewhat difficult to accept that we are fortunate and should be glad to be excluded and rejected because of our faith in Christ, yet this is so because God's message and God's ways are counter to those of this world. This was true in the Old Testament, in Jesus' day, and it is still true today— it will be true until He returns.

For me, the really telling verse is 6:26; that one is devastating. The false prophets were accorded honor and popularity; the true prophets of God were routinely murdered. Woe to those today who are so highly regarded in this world, those who are praised by all for their views, for they have just been put into the category of false prophets.

It makes a person really think about their priorities, doesn't it?

### ***Love Your Enemies, part 1***

*“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

Luke 6:27-31

Let's not kid ourselves, of all of Jesus' teachings, this might just be the hardest one to grab hold of; it is the poster child of counter-intuitive!

I used to say that I will be loving and forgiving when someone wrongs me, just as soon as I have retaliated massively. Of course I had my tongue inserted in cheek when I said it... mostly. Ues, this is a tough one.

It really comes together in the last verse:

*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

How do we treat those who are rude, who are impolite or even hostile towards us? Mo, how do we *really* treat them? For most of us, there is still work to be done, for I don't know about you, but I fall a little short on this one from time to time.

I think that this all boils down to an attitude; how do I see myself in relation to others? Am I important, am I a big shot, am I what everything is all about? Or am I a humble servant of all, a servant of God whose ego isn't all that important when compared to my calling?

I don't know about you, but I do quite a bit better when my thinking runs along these lines.

Jesus has more to say on this, so maybe we all should take a moment or two to ponder these things in our hearts, and then we will continue the discussion.

### ***Love Your Enemies, part 2***

*"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

Luke 6:32-36

I don't know about you, but this whole idea is easier after I read this paragraph; it just makes more sense to me. He's right when He makes the point that anyone can love people who love them; I get that one. I get it the next point too; sure, it isn't that hard to do nice things for people who return the favor, in fact, I want to do that. The same is true with the example of lending to those who I know will pay me back.

Years ago I decided, after a difficult experience, that from then on I would only lend to someone when I was able to make the loan a gift; I'd be pleasantly surprised if the other person ever paid me back and if they didn't, it was a gift. That saved a lot of conflict and bad feelings over the years, so yes, I get that one too.

His main point is that God is merciful to those who don't really deserve His mercy, and that God is kind to those who really don't deserve His kindness, and I get that one too, because He is merciful and kind to me, and I really don't deserve either from Him.

I'm not sure how you feel about all of this, but at this point, the 'love your enemies' thing is a lot easier for me than it started out being. Yes, there are plenty of times when I need to check my attitude at the door, but when I consider all that God has forgiven me for, I'm willing to do it as best I can, with the hope that as time goes on, I will have fewer occasions when I need to consciously think about it, for it will have become second nature.

### ***Judging Others: Who, me?***

*“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

Luke 6:37-38

As Jesus' remarks continue, He talks to the people present about judging others. As he did when talking about loving one's enemies, He essentially held up a rhetorical mirror so that we might see our own reflections. Often when people talk about judging others, they tend to be condemning someone else for doing so, yet Jesus takes quite a different approach to the issue.

Notice that Jesus doesn't get in the faces of those He thinks might be judging Him, but rather that He points out that we will be rewarded for our own generosity in showing forgiveness for those who might have wronged us. He continued:

*He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. (6:39-40)*

Not a single person who reads this is perfect, nor is the author; me. Not a single one of us has any right to condemn or judge anyone else, for we ourselves are not perfect and have been forgiven. Yet if we love others and show mercy and forgiveness, as our Teacher has shown us, then we may grow into His likeness. He brings the point home in 6:41-42...

*“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

We need to look into the mirror so that our attitudes and behaviors may be worthy of the Kingdom we serve; pointing fingers at the faults of others simply has no place in the kingdom of Heaven. Some might want to tell me at this point that I must be going soft on sin in writing this, but I would respectfully have to disagree. In our text Jesus has just made it quite clear that condemning others is itself a sin; can compounding sin remove sin?

Not as far as I can see.

### ***Trees, Fruit and the Content of Your Heart***

*“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.*

## Luke 6:43-45

At this point in the text, Jesus is summing up His remarks with the first of two parables. Remember that in this “Sermon on the Plain” we have seen His blessings and woes (6:17-26), followed by His discussion about loving your enemies (6:27-36) then about judging others (6:37-42) and now this parable, which follows directly and is in the very same contextual structure. Thus, He makes the case here that each of us must recognize the content of our hearts, for what is within us is what comes of us. The attitudes of our hearts will determine how we react to various situations and experiences that we encounter throughout our lives, and even though we might want to love others, forgive others, help others... to be outwardly focused and not self centered... that if those attributes are present and growing in our innermost being, we will fail miserably.

That last sentence that I wrote isn't one of my better sentences. I suppose that I could spend a few minutes reworking it to smooth out the awkwardness of the phrasing, to make it smooth and flow, but what would be the point? It accurately reflects Jesus' message in this short parable. Yes, the parable leaves a question dangling in the air; maybe “looming” would be a better word for it, there's a question looming...

“Great, so if I have to change the attitudes and motivations that are lurking in my innermost being or fail miserably... how the heck can I do that?”

Lucky for us there is one more parable...

### ***Building Homes; Building Lives***

*“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”*

## Luke 6:46-49

We left off with a question about how we could change the content of our hearts, and here Jesus answers the question. The problem most of us have with this is that we read His words as history, an old speech text from another time:

“Very interesting, what's for lunch?”

Since that's how we approach these things so much of the time, we find ourselves building our lives without much of a foundation. Yes, I'm quite serious; think about it...

We tend to read this the same way we might read any other history:

*Early on the morning of March 4, 1861, Washington was quiet, there was a chill in the air; there were troops in the streets, thousands of troops. Rumors ran rampant throughout the Nation, extremist groups promised that Mr. Lincoln would never be sworn in as the Nation's president at noon that day, as the country tore itself apart over the outcome of the November election...*

Funny how that one popped into my head as an example... Where was I?

Oh yes, the way we read Jesus' words...

The words of Jesus. In this case He is talking about His teachings in this sermon Luke 6:17 ff., these are not just words from the past, for Jesus IS The Word and these words are living and active. These words, if we allow them, will become not only our foundation, but who we are as human beings. The reason for this isn't all that tough to grasp: Jesus and the words He taught are One and inseparable, they live within us in the Person of the indwelling Holy Spirit. All we need to do is to allow them to work within us, to let go and let God work in our lives.

"How do I do that?"

Fair question. Here's an action step for you: Pray them.

"OK Don, you are nuts!"

No, I'm not nuts... but it is counter-intuitive. Set aside some time alone in a quiet place, just as Jesus so often went off by Himself to spend time with the Father. Open to Luke 6:17, and pray the words in the text. As you go along, ask God to open your heart to His Word, to fill your being with His Word. Give the Holy Spirit *permission* to work the Word into your being, to make them a part of who you are. Don't be afraid to ask Him questions about these words, and as you go along, to ask Him to forgive your errors that He reveals to you. Be sure *to ask Him* to replace your natural human desires and attitudes with His desires, attitudes and priorities.

Pray like this often; keep a journal.

Then see what happens as you continue to pray like this...

## Chapter 7

### ***The Faith of a Centurion***

Luke 7:1-10

After Jesus had completed His 'Sermon on the Plain' He set out for Capernaum and as He was headed there a group of Jewish Elders approached Him with a request. They were pleading for a Roman Centurion, a Gentile; a commander of many Roman troops, for his servant was seriously ill and in need of healing. The Centurion, in spite of appearances, was a good man, probably a God-fearing Gentile, and these Jewish Elders were quite earnest in their pleas, so Jesus set off for the man's house to heal his servant. As Jesus and His party got close to the house, there was another message from the Centurion:

*He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." (7:6-8)*

Looking at the second message, two things are instantly clear: First, the Centurion is a humble man, a man who has been strong enough to rise through the military ranks, but who has not allowed his success to go to his head. Second, he is a man who seems to understand that Jesus has authority over nature, that Jesus' Word is powerful and active, that Jesus is not just another itinerant preacher.

Jesus was amazed at his faith. "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."

Jesus sent the messengers back and when they arrived the servant was fine. I wonder if the Centurion was surprised... I'm betting that he wasn't, so great was his faith. Have you ever wondered why we pray for things, and when God grants our request we are so often surprised?

It's something to think about.

### ***Jesus Meets a Grieving Mother***

Luke 7:11-17

After the incident with the Centurion, Jesus approaches a funeral and encounters a grieving mother whose son has recently died. The fact that she is a widow makes the scene even more poignant, for in those days a woman needed a man for support, and a widow without a son would frequently become destitute in a very short time. This widow has just lost her son, and poverty is knocking at her door. Of course, she is also grieving because her son died as any mother would do: This is a double disaster for the woman.

Upon seeing her situation, Jesus is greatly moved, and He approaches the bier on which the son is laid out and commands him to rise.

Can you picture that scene in your mind?

It would seem from the text that this created something of a sensation, as the news of this latest incident spreads like wildfire across the region...

In chapter 6, through His great Sermon, Jesus told the people what a citizen of the Kingdom would look like. Here in chapter 7, Jesus is showing us what the Kingdom is as He heals people from their sickness, a consequence of sin, and now when He raises this young man to life showing the Kingdom's power over death itself. Of course death is the ultimate consequence of sin, and Jesus' Kingdom will be populated by people who, along with Jesus Himself, have victory over death.

### ***Jesus and John***

Luke 7:18-35

In so many ways, this is a sad story. It begins when some of the disciples of John the Baptist are sent to ask Jesus if He is really the "One". Understand that John has been sitting in Herod's jail for quite some time now, and apparently his mental state has declined to the point where he is beginning to wonder if he was wrong about the identity of Jesus. Have you ever had such a moment when your faith lags and you begin to harbor serious doubts? If so, you have some rather prestigious company.

John asks two of his disciples go to Jesus and ask, and in reply Jesus simply tells them to relate to John what they have seen (7:18-23). Notice verse 23: "Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me" Having doubts in a difficult time is natural enough, but the greatest blessing is found by the person who does not allow their human doubts to get the better of them.

After this, Jesus begins to address the crowd and in so doing He gives John a ringing endorsement (7:24-28). Everyone in the crowd responded to this endorsement positively, even the tax collectors, for they had gone out to hear John speak and had been baptized by him.

Well, almost everyone.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law in the crowd didn't respond positively for they had not received John's baptism (7:29-30). Jesus has this irritating way of knowing what people are thinking, and He knew what was going through the minds of those Pharisees and teachers of the law who believed that they never needed to receive John's baptism of repentance, after all, they were so incredibly righteous in their own minds that there couldn't possibly be anything for them to repent of...

Jesus compared them to little children who are never satisfied with anything, but who instead complain about everything:

*For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by all her children.*

Luke 7:33-35

I rather doubt that the Pharisees and teachers of the law missed His inference that they were the ones who were seriously lacking in wisdom.

The second aspect of this story that is sad is found in the fact that the best and the brightest of that generation (possibly of any generation) were the ones who completely missed the truth of God when it appeared right in front of them.

### ***A Sinful Woman in a Pharisee's House***

Luke 7:36-50

This passage tells the story of Jesus going to the home of a Pharisee named Simon for dinner. As they reclined at table, a very sinful woman enters and is so moved that she cries, her tears falling on Jesus' feet. She wipes her tears from His feet with her hair, for what else did she have to wipe with? Then, she pours perfume on His feet to anoint them. As this is going on Simon the Pharisee is thinking that if Jesus were a prophet He should know this woman is sinful and thus send her away.

Jesus responds out loud to Simon's thoughts...

You really need to read the text for this one, because it is a beautiful thing to behold, and there is no way for me to do it justice...

The upshot of the story is that a very sinful person can be forgiven just like a not so sinful person can, and in all probability that very sinful person will love God all the more because they have been forgiven so much. Naturally, those who are very upright and righteous, who have only sinned a little bit, may continue to view the forgiven one who has sinned so much more than we have, with disdain for their past actions, arguably increasing our own "sin-count" in the process.

On the other hand, God sees all forgiven souls as clean.

The lesson that Simon and his friends needed to learn here was that God's approach to sin, forgiveness and love is not a transactional approach, but a relational one. Every single one of us, whether saint or sinner, was created in the image of God. Every single human was made to be God's sacred child; God loves all of us, even the sinner who has not yet accepted His grace.

I know that this is a difficult concept for many of us to grab hold of... and no, I'm not saying that God doesn't care about sin. But our sins and transgressions against God do not cause Him to stop loving us; do you know how I can say that with so much confidence?

Because while we were still in our sin, God sent His one and only Son to die for us, that whosoever might believe in Him, might have eternal life. Therefore, if God didn't love this sinful woman, and hundreds of millions of others like her, Jesus would not have ever come to this earth.

Interesting isn't it, that she understood this, and Simon and his associates struggled with it.

## Chapter 8

### ***Whoever has ears...***

Luke 8:1-15

As we move into chapter 8, Jesus will be speaking in parables quite a bit. In fact, some of the most familiar and beloved of His parables are found right here in Luke, yet sometimes they aren't easy for us to understand. It is important for us to recognize that Jesus is doing this *on purpose* for as hard as it may be for us to understand, not everyone is His intended audience.

Does that surprise you?

Look at our text today which is Luke's account of the Parable of the Sower, one of those familiar and beloved parables. Skip down to 8:8b... right there at the end...

*"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."*

Does that mean that some don't have ears to hear? In the next paragraph we find the answer to the question:

*His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that,*

*"though seeing, they may not see;  
though hearing, they may not understand.'" (8:9-10)*

So there are people out there who will never "get it". After this, Jesus explained the parable to the disciples (8:11-15) and guess what the point of the parable is...?

Some people will never really "get it".

If I were an "old school" preacher, this is where I'd play the "us" and "them" card: Aren't we wonderful, aren't they nasty...

I am not however, and "old school" preacher. It's just that for a variety of reasons a lot of people don't want to hear about Jesus. Personally, I think this is a very sad situation, and I wish that everyone would accept His grace, but that isn't the way of love. As strange as it may sound, God loves us so much, that He allows us to make our own decisions, even when it comes to whether or not we will follow Him. Of course there are always consequences to the decisions we make, and this will result in many not receiving grace at all; think about how much grief that must cause for God!

Even so, love never forces itself on anyone.

### **Shining lamps and hidden things**

*“No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them.”*

Luke 8:16-18

Without skipping a beat, Jesus moves from His explanation of the Parable of the Sower into another parable, the Parable of the Lamps. Just so we are all together on the context, here is what came just before today's text:

*“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.*

Luke 8:11-15

Look at the text above; see how after the word “crop” at the end of the sentence (v. 15) the quotes don't close, and then at the beginning of the new paragraph the quote resumes (v. 16)? This tells us that Jesus did not stop talking between verse 15 and verse 16, thus His discussion in 16-18 is in the context from the Parable of the Sower. With that in mind, let's go back and read about those lamps once again...

As I'm sure you will recall from the last section, the key verse was 8:8b:

*“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”*

Jesus is still talking about hearing the Word of God, and the business about the lamps is now obvious: The Truth of God is going to find out all of the motivations of our hearts and those motivations are going to be exposed. A lot of people will never “get it” when it comes to the Word of God and particularly the Gospel of Christ and that is because the motivations of their hearts are to *not know*. As we see in these texts, there may be many reasons for this, it could be the *influence* of the Evil One, it could be the worries of this world, or the pleasures of this world, or something else. Yet in all cases, we control what those motivations are. Thus He says, “be careful how you listen”.

Think carefully: If the motivations of your heart were outside of your control, what would be the point of His having said “consider carefully how you listen”?

That's exactly right: There would be no point at all.

## ***Jesus and His Family***

*Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you."*

*He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."*

Luke 8:19-21

This is a curious little aside... There is Jesus teaching in parables before a very large crowd that apparently had grown as He taught. At some point in this process His mother and brothers had joined the crowd; they wanted to speak with Him, but the crowd was so large they couldn't get to where He was. A reasonable earthly expectation would be that Jesus would either pause His teaching and go to them, or that he would ask that they be escorted through the crowd; Jesus did neither of these things.

Instead, He took this opportunity to teach the people.

His reply seems at first to be a little cold toward His family members, but I don't think it was. Jesus is teaching the assembled crowd what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, a citizenship which transcends genetics and earthly relationships. As we saw when we studied the book of Hebrews a few months back, when we become followers of Jesus, we receive a new life within us in the Person of the Holy Spirit, and when this happens, we become co-heirs with Jesus to everything; Jesus is the firstborn, and we are His brothers and sisters in God's household; this is exactly what Jesus was referring to in Luke 8:21.

Luke didn't tell us who Jesus spoke to later on that day, but had there been a log kept, I would expect to see the names of His mother and brothers; they simply had to wait until the teaching was over, which is hardly unreasonable, even by earthly standards.

## ***An Interesting Demonstration***

*One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.*

*The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"*

*He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples.*

*In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."*

## Luke 9:22-25

I love this story!

Notice it begins with a shift of the scene: ‘One day...’ We don’t know how much time has elapsed since we read about Jesus teaching in parables. As they rowed across the lake, Jesus is catching up on His rest... and then a squall comes through the area placing their small boat in danger of floundering; Jesus is sleeping peacefully. His frantic disciples awaken Him, telling Him that they are all going to drown; Jesus tells the storm to knock it off and all is quiet. To the disciples He simply asks where their faith had gone... I’m guessing He went back to sleep.

His disciples probably didn’t feel much like sleeping; it would seem that they needed some time process all that had just taken place.

Well wouldn’t you?

Jesus had just done something quite remarkable, and as remarkable as telling the storm to stop and being obeyed might be, He had done something quite a bit more remarkable than that.

Jesus had just demonstrated, more in His manner even than in the miracle, just exactly who He was. The disciples had long known that He wasn’t just another teacher, for they had seen His miracles time and time again by then. Of course by this time, they knew that Jesus had truly been sent by God, but on that day they had seen that He was God in the flesh. It is possible that they had understood this on some sort of intellectual level, just as most of us understand it conceptually today. Yet on *that* day, those disciples saw it in reality, and they saw that to Jesus it was no biggie— that blew their minds, as it would blow ours too.

Yes, it would take them a very long time to fully comprehend who it was that they were following; who can blame them?

Of course if we decide right now to remember that Jesus would one day tell His disciples that they would perform greater miracles than He did, that would *really* blow our minds.

### ***Legion!***

## Luke 8:26-39

Jesus and the disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee to a region inhabited by Gentiles. We can be certain of this by taking note of the fact that they were tending pigs. There was a man there who had been possessed by a legion of demons. He was out of his mind, naked and dangerous. The people there had chained the man, only to see him break the chains with strength beyond that which is normal for a human. We can easily see that these demonic forces had deprived the man not only of his right mind, but of his human dignity as well, living as he did naked, alone and amongst the dead in the tombs.

Jesus comes upon the scene and wants the demons out of the man. The demons, knowing exactly who He was (8:28) begged Jesus not to torture them. Jesus grants their request to be sent into a herd of pigs and they ran the entire herd into the lake and were drowned. I must tell you that if I were the owner of those pigs, I wouldn't be any too pleased that Jesus had just destroyed my entire livelihood; the text tells us that the tenders of the pigs ran into town and told everyone what had happened.

The people came running to see for themselves, but when they arrived they saw the crazy man dressed and sitting at Jesus' feet, just as sane as they were; they were afraid. The idea of a Jew coming into their area and having complete authority over demons seems to have scared the you-know-what out of these good folks, and they asked Jesus to move on...

Jesus did so.

The man who had been saved by this begged to go with Him, but Jesus told him to stay and resume his normal life, telling everyone what God had done for him, and this the man did.

There are some very interesting things in this story that we should carefully take note of:

First, the demons know exactly who Jesus is, and they are terrified of Him. By extension, don't you suppose that they are just as terrified of the Holy Spirit who indwells you?

2. Jesus had complete authority over those demons, and they did exactly what He ordered them to do.

3. When the Gentiles saw the power and authority of Jesus, they too were afraid and begged Him to leave them alone, which He did for the time being. Do you suppose that the terrified demons and the terrified Gentiles had something in common, other than their terror?

4. Jesus told the man to tell everyone what God had done for him, but when He had performed miracles for Jews, He was in the habit of telling them to be quiet about it. Let's adopt a working theory that Jesus wanted the Gentiles to know about what the "Jewish God" had done for one of them to prepare the ground for another visit, and see where the story leads as we continue our adventure in Luke's narrative...

### ***Back from Gentile Lands...***

Luke 8:40-56

Jesus returned from the region inhabited by Gentiles; a crowd awaited His arrival. He was approached by, of all people, a synagogue leader whose daughter was near death. The man begged Jesus to come quickly. Jesus headed for the man's house but the crowd was very large; His progress was slowed considerably. Suddenly, Jesus felt power drain from Him and stopped.

He wanted to know who had touched Him, but as Peter pointed out, the crowd was large and pressing... it could have been anyone, and everyone denied touching Him. Then, a woman

came forward and told Him that she had been the one. It seems that she had a chronic bleeding problem, and none of the doctors could cure it; this had gone on for some 12 years, but the moment she had touched His robes, she had been healed.

Did Jesus heal the woman?

“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.” (8:48)

Just after that, the word came that the man's daughter had died, but Jesus pressed on. When He arrived at the man's house, mourners had already gathered; Jesus told them that the girl was only sleeping, but they all knew that she was dead. Along with Peter, John, James and the girl's parents, Jesus entered the house, took the girl's hand and told her to get up; “her spirit returned to her” and she got up from her deathbed (8:55).

In the previous story, Jesus drove many demons from a Gentile man, and He told the man to tell everyone what God had done for Him, now, after raising a Jewish girl from death, He advised everyone to keep quiet about what had really happened.

Our working theory from last time is looking pretty good right about now.

## Chapter 9

### ***The Twelve Move Out***

Luke 9:1-9

As Chapter 9 begins, the scene changes and Jesus sends out the twelve disciples to proclaim the Kingdom. In doing so, he gave them some unusual instructions:

*“Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” (9:3-5)*

Nobody sets off on a road trip like that, at least not by design. Jesus sent these guys out there with nothing; no provision, no supplies, not even a change of clothes. We might be tempted to criticize His lack of planning and organization...

If we did so, we would be acting in haste, for actually there was a plan, a very counter-intuitive one. The disciples were to head out and let God worry about the provisions, so they could worry about the mission. Apparently there were some places that needed to hear their message, while others wouldn't be willing to listen. How would they know the difference between the two?

If no one would welcome them, then that village didn't have ears to hear the message, and they would simply move on... This plan was elegant in its simplicity.

Of course there would be benefits for those who would receive their message, for the disciples had authority to heal and drive out demons, something that those who would not welcome them would never know about.

What an amazing picture of the Kingdom of Heaven!

Think about the times we live in: There are many who will eagerly receive the message about Jesus, and when they accept His message and receive His grace, they become rich in blessings. Yet there are also many who will refuse to hear anything about Jesus, and thus they will remain in their pride and self-assurance, but gain no real blessing at all, for their reward is purely an earthly one.

News of all of this reaches King Herod, and he is troubled. He wonders if this is the reincarnation of John the Baptist, whom he has murdered; his conscience seems to be troubled. Some think Elijah has returned; there are various theories about the stir throughout the land.

Herod wants to investigate...

### ***Feeding the Five Thousand***

Luke 9:10-17

After the disciples returned, they went off to seclusion with Jesus. The only problem was that everywhere they went, they attracted huge crowds. Like rock stars, they had little chance of remaining secluded for long. What follows in this passage is one of the most familiar stories of all, the feeding of the 5,000.

I've written on this many times before, and I would imagine that anyone reading this can tell the story with no help from me. Consequently, I will only focus on one point here...

In the last passage, Jesus sent the Twelve out entirely on their own; they had no provisions of any kind with them, and they had to depend entirely on God for their sustenance— and God provided. Now, with the hour growing late and their location being very remote, they come to Jesus and recommend that He send the crowds away so that they could find food and lodging. This seems more than reasonable; it seems advisable. Yet Jesus was having none of it.

*"You give them something to eat." (9:14)*

If you were one of the Twelve, what would you say to that?

They gave Jesus an inventory of what was on hand; Jesus didn't see a problem feeding 5,000 with barely enough for their own small group of 13.

And that is exactly what they did.

What is God saying to us in this passage?

What are you going to do about it?

See you next time!

***"Who do you say that I am?"***

*Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"*

*They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."*

*"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*

*Peter answered, "God's Messiah."*

Luke 9:18-20

It's hard to say how much time has passed since the last scene, the feeding of the 5,000, although my guess would be that it wasn't too long, since they are praying in seclusion. There is no crowd, all is quiet, and then Jesus asks them a question: Who do the people say that I am? The disciples run through the rumors and theories... and then Jesus asks them "The Question".

Peter says that Jesus is the Messiah. Sadly, that's all that Luke mentions; it would be interesting to see what the others had to say about this, but if I were to venture another guess, it would be that they agreed, since nothing else is recorded here.

We will never know for certain in this life.

Up to this point in Luke's narrative, the disciples have seen a great deal, learned a great deal and have experienced a great deal. It should be no surprise that they would have gone a long way to see just who He was...

As we have probably all experienced in our own journeys, it is one thing to believe, and quite another to follow: Jesus will very shortly begin to teach this lesson to His disciples.

From this point on, things are about to get very real...

### ***Jesus Speaks in Confidence***

*Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."*

*Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."*

*"Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."*

Luke 9:21-27

Jesus begins these rather apocalyptic remarks by telling the disciples that these things are not to be discussed with others; these things are being said in confidence. Then He proceeds to tell them that He must be killed.

Yes, He said a lot more than that, but it seems that they didn't catch the rest, although Luke doesn't make that as clear as Matthew did in his account.

Jesus also tells them that He will rise from the grave on the third day.

The rest of this (9:23-27) is Jesus telling them that in order for them to truly follow Him, they must give up everything else. For the most part, they had already done this, at least in an earthly sense. They had left their homes, their families and their livelihoods already...

...but Jesus needed more than that: They must give up "self".

To follow Him means that the follower must set aside his or her old way of doing things; everyone gets that part, even though we all struggle with it from time-to-time. Yet to give up self goes way beyond that, it is to give up our own personal identity and take up His, and not all that many of us even can comprehend that.

Of course, to be remade into His likeness means that my likeness must go!

At the end of this is a sort of “sweetener” when He tells them that some of them will live to see the Kingdom of God come to fruition.

What I’ve just given you here is a mere thumbnail, so if you find any of this confusing or troubling, don’t feel bad, you are experiencing the very same reaction that the disciples had. As they continued along the journey with Jesus, He begins to show them the contrast between a true follower and the life of this world, and we’ll be right there with all of them as we continue in Luke’s story.

### ***Transfiguration***

Luke 9:28-36

A little more than a week after the last story that Luke has told us, Jesus took His disciples Peter, John and James up to a mountain to pray and that is where this story takes place. We might note that from Matthew’s account, Jesus and the Twelve have been in seclusion for several days. Jesus has been teaching them and helping them to understand and prepare for what would be coming along in the near future; we might say that He has been discipling the disciples.

There the four of them are on this mountain; Jesus was praying as the three disciples were having a hard remaining awake, and then it happened. His face was changed, His clothing began to shine brightly and He was joined by two other forms, that of Moses and that of Elijah in their glory; Jesus was speaking with them about His “departure” which was fast approaching. Becoming fully awake, Peter had the excellent notion of building shelters for each of them, but that was not the plan.

A cloud descended upon the disciples and from the cloud came the voice of God telling them that they should listen to the Son of God (not the servants of God). When the cloud lifted, only Jesus remained. As Luke mentions in the text, when Peter offered his idea, he did not yet understand what was happening, and to be quite accurate, it would still be some time before he did.

The three bewildered disciples kept this to themselves for the present.

Needless to say, this scene is an apocalyptic one, for it really isn’t the point that Jesus was having a conference with Moses and Elijah, although He was having a conference with them. The real point is seen by taking note of what they represented to the Jewish mind: Moses was the embodiment of the Law, Elijah was the embodiment of the prophets and the Law and the

prophets speak of Jesus. When the Law and the prophets are taken away, only Jesus is left, because in Jesus we find the complete fulfillment of both Law and prophets.

The three disciples would have some difficulty getting their brains around this new reality, and if we are honest with ourselves, we still have some difficulty getting our minds around it as well. Jesus, having tried to teach the disciples about this new reality, would soon show them what He was all about...

### ***Things start to get interesting...***

Luke 9:37-50

In this text are several events that take place right after the Transfiguration. First, as they were coming down the mountain a crowd gathers to meet Jesus. When they arrive, there is a man whose son has been afflicted by demonic possession and he begs Jesus for help. His disciples seemed to have tried already to handle the situation without success, but Jesus, expressing a little bit of frustration says the word, and the demon is gone (9:37-43).

Right after that, Jesus once again tells the disciples that He is going to be killed at the hands of men, but they don't understand Him and are afraid to ask (9:43b-45). Notice how much of a contrast this is with His having just dealt so easily with the forces of demons. In these two incidents Jesus demonstrated to them His identity as the Son of God and His mission as Messiah, having on one hand divine authority over spiritual forces, and predicting on the other hand His work on the cross.

Then the disciples begin to debate which of them is the greatest— Hello, are you boys paying attention?

Who can blame them; this is a lot to get your head around. Jesus sets a little child in front of them and says: *"Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest."* (9:48b) The little child has nothing to offer, no money, no position, no particular social importance and is entirely vulnerable, at least in an earthly sense. The one, who will be great in the Kingdom, is the one who is least in this world. With this, Jesus has not only revealed His nature and purpose, but theirs as well.

Finally, John tells Jesus that they saw a guy driving out demons in Jesus' name and they told him to stop, since the man wasn't "one of us". Jesus' reply to that bit of information?

*"Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."* (9:50)

The time of conflict had come, and from this point forward, Jesus would be viewed as 'extreme and out of the mainstream' and the full force of the establishment would be turned against Him.

## **Opposition Increases**

*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village.*

Luke 9:51-56

Jesus was preparing to leave the region of Galilee to head to Jerusalem, taking the direct route through Samaria. He sends some disciples ahead to make preparations in a Samaritan village, and the village will not allow Him to stop over in their town.

James and John seem to have a "nuclear option" for that particular village, probably thinking of the life and times of Elijah, but Jesus wasn't going to battle against flesh and blood; they visited a different village.

Wouldn't that have caused a stir!

Of course, there would be more opposition to come. On previous trips, people had come out to see Jesus, bringing their sick and lame with them for healing; Luke has not mentioned a community that would refuse to receive Jesus up to this point.

Things were different now. Even so, Jesus would be welcomed in many places on this trip, but there would always be a hint of darkness looming as The Enemy was gearing up to deal with the Jesus Problem. Jesus would discuss this situation further with the disciples as the journey continued, for they needed to realize that there would be a cost in this world for following Him. That discussion begins in the next section here at the end of Chapter 9.

## **Jesus Teaches Tough Lessons**

As they were walking toward Jerusalem, there were a number of conversations between Jesus and those with His party. Luke has recorded for us several brief exchanges in which Jesus tells people about the high cost of being His follower. No, He wasn't asking for money, far from it in fact; He was revealing the earthly, social cost of becoming His follower. Let's take a look:

*As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."*

*Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (9:57-58)*

Following Jesus wherever He goes doesn't involve an expense account. He had no earthly possessions beyond the shirt on His back and being His follower will not result in earthly riches, but it might involve earthly deprivations.

*He said to another man, "Follow me."*

*But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."*

*Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." (9:59-60)*

Social custom in those days required that a son honor his father by seeing to it that the father received a proper burial, but Jesus is telling this man that His call supersedes social custom and familial obligation, a tough lesson for certain. What do you suppose this man did? What would you have done? Yep, this is a really tough one; I'm not sure what I would have done here... Maybe the guy preached the Kingdom at the funeral...

*Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."*

*Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (9:61-62)*

Here we go again! You can't even go and say "goodbye" first?

Luke doesn't elaborate on these snippets, so I suppose they are open to interpretation, and I am quite confident that most of us today would prefer to understand these in a more liberal way than people might have in past centuries. For example, we might say that this last one meant that once the man said "goodbye" that was it, don't look back after that. Maybe Jesus was using hyperbole when He said He had no place to lay His head, so it's OK to have a bunch of stuff, but don't get carried away...

However you might prefer to view these, one thing is abundantly clear: There is a cost in this life to following Jesus.

# Chapter 10

## ***Jesus Sends the Seventy Two***

Luke 10:1-16

Some of our questions from the last passage are answered in this one; Luke now tells us that Jesus was about to send 72 of those following Him on a mission. No, there isn't time to bury the dead or go home to say goodbye, and you will be taking nothing on this road trip...

To be clear, this doesn't negate the principles found in the last passage, but it does finally give them some context. In serving God, we are to place our trust and faith in Him alone. And so, Jesus sends these 72 out ahead of His party to prepare His way. Like the adventures the Twelve had experienced, they were to take no provision, for they would be depending upon God who blessed them on their journey.

That part is simple enough.

But there is a larger context than that in play here; an apocalyptic context: *The Kingdom is coming near.*

Jesus tells them:

*“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. (10:5-7)*

They are being sent on an urgent mission, there isn't time for messing around and extra socializing. They are to bestow God's peace upon any house that will receive them. This is the customary Jewish greeting, but if their host is not receptive to their message, God's peace will not remain on them. The missionaries are not to move about from house to house, they are to be about God's purpose only.

When they enter a town that is receptive to their message they are to tell them that the Kingdom of God has come near, and heal the sick in the town. However, if a town does not receive their message...

*...go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. (10:10-12)*

Jesus continues this line of thought...

*“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.*

*“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.”*

It's helpful for us to bear in mind that Tyre and Sidon were Gentile towns; Jesus has found more actual faith among the Gentiles than among the Jews, and His point is that when the great day of the Lord comes, being Jewish isn't going to change the fact that they rejected their Messiah, and they will be doomed.

You see dear reader, this whole “Kingdom” thing is very serious business.

Off went the 72; we'll hear their report next time.

### ***The 72 Return***

Luke 10:17-24

When the 72 return from their mission, they are filled with joy and are quite moved by the fact that even demons were subject to them in Jesus' name. Jesus acknowledges that they are safe from the forces of the Evil One, but tells them that they should be rejoicing not at their authority, but that their names are written in heaven (10:17-20).

I don't know about you, but that seems like very sound advice for any of us in leadership positions today.

Then Jesus gives some rare insight:

*At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.*

*“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*

*Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.” (10:21-24)*

This is one of those times when I see that anything I might try to add to these words would detract from them, not help to understand them. May each of us treasure these words in our hearts.

## **A Good Neighbor**

Luke 10:25-37

On another occasion Jesus is confronted by an “expert in the law” who asks what he must do to “inherit eternal life”. Jesus, as He often did, answered with a question: “What is written in the law; how do you read it?” Seems like a fair question to ask an expert in the law... The man replied:

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (10:27)*

Jesus told the man that he has given the right answer and that if he did this, he’d be in great shape. But the expert in the law had tried to challenge Jesus; Jesus had just made it obvious to everyone that the man was trying to snare Him, since he already knew the answer to his own question. Thinking quickly he asked a follow up question: “Who is my neighbor?”

The response to the question is vintage Jesus; He told a parable...

What follows in 10:30-36 is another very familiar parable, the parable of the “Good Samaritan” As Jesus often did, He follows the parable with another question: Which of the three men in the story were a neighbor to the injured man? The expert said that it was the one who had mercy on the injured man. Jesus’ classic response to another correct answer is priceless: “Go and do likewise”.

So what should we take away from this story?

First is that it isn’t a good idea to try to trap Jesus; He was pretty quick on His feet. Second, is that we should show mercy to people who need it... which is pretty much everyone at one time or another. Third, it wasn’t the very religious who showed mercy to the man, it was an unclean nasty Samaritan who went out of his way and out of his pocket to help the stricken man who had been left to die by robbers. Finally, we are to put our faith, our love into action to serve those in need, and that we don’t get to heaven by engaging in arguments or rhetorical tricks or word games.

You see dear reader, God doesn’t care so much about how much you know, or your important status, He cares about putting our faith in action and sharing His love with those who need it.

“Methinks there is much wisdom in these sayings.”

## **Only One Thing**

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be*

*made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*

*"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

Luke 10:38-42

After reading this story, take a moment to sit back and imagine...

Years have gone by; Mary and Martha have grown old. One day, Mary takes her grandchildren to Martha's house for lunch. After lunch, they move out to the patio. It's a nice sunny day, the birds are singing in the trees, and Mary begins to tell the grandchildren the story about the day that Jesus came to visit. She pauses to take a sip of her lemonade, and one of the grandchildren, a precocious seven-year-old asks Martha what she was doing when Jesus came to visit.

"I barely saw Him; I spent the whole time in the kitchen."

It would appear from Luke's narrative that this little scenario would be just about right. What I like about this little aside from the larger narrative, is that it is so true to life. Mary is spellbound at the feet of Jesus, Martha is getting irritated because she's the only one doing any work, and there's so much to be done. Let's see, Jesus was there, so there's a really good chance that His disciples are there as well, and who knows— maybe others too. They will need to be fed. If they are staying over, the guest room must be made ready... or wherever they would be sleeping. Martha is being hospitable, practical. Mary? Well she's just sitting around!

Yet when Martha mentions this to Jesus, He sees that Mary has made the better choice, for she has chosen to remain in the presence of the Son of God, while Martha is so consumed by the cares of regular earthly life, that she is missing a chance to sit in His presence and soak in His Word.

Yes, this is so true to life.

# Chapter 11

## ***Teach us to pray***

*One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."*

*He said to them, "When you pray, say:*

*"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."*

Luke 11:1-4

Do you see "look at me"? Do you see "gimme the goodies"?

Hardly.

What we can see here is humility, putting God's purpose first and foremost, necessities forgiveness, and overcoming the evil one; it is elegant in its simplicity.

We are addressing the Father in heaven, acknowledging His glory and giving Him honor, and then asking for His kingdom to come in its fullness, where His will be the only will that is done on earth, just like in heaven. Notice that this doesn't leave all that much room for my own will to be done, in fact, my will and your will are not mentioned at all.

There is a request that God would provide for us, a humble request to be sure, and then a request for God's forgiveness as we forgive others; a scary thought for many, I might add. Finally, we are to ask God not to lead us into temptation, but to deliver us from the evil one, again a request of supreme humility. When you put this all together, Jesus is teaching us to pray in a manner that is entirely foreign to the religious life of His time, and a lot more foreign in our own time than we might like to think about, with only God's will being mentioned.

Was it Jesus' intention that we simply recite these words over and over? I really doubt it; I see this as a model for prayer, the elements to be included in prayer, rather than something to be memorized and recited to the absence of anything else, particularly when we lose what He is actually saying here. Of course, I would never say that there is anything wrong with reciting these verses, or any verses.

Here's some homework: Reflect and pray on these verses, asking Him to reveal them in their fullness to you. I think you'll find this to be a fascinating exercise in spiritual practice. Next time, we'll see what Jesus says next; you won't want to miss this.

## **Ask!**

*Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.*

*"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

Luke 11:5-10

This passage is a continuation of Jesus' reply to the disciples' request that He teach them to pray. As you will recall from the last passage (The 'Lord's Prayer') Jesus has demonstrated a model for prayer that is characterized by humility and God's purpose, and God's willingness to meet our needs, if not every little whim of desire.

Here Jesus tells a little story to illustrate further; a man needs bread and goes to his neighbor late at night. The neighbor is roused from his bed by the knock on his door and isn't exactly thrilled about the intrusion on his sleep, and even though he doesn't want to open up and find the bread, he will do so to preserve his good name.

How much more will our Heavenly Father be willing to meet needs?

So, we should have the audacity to ask!

God will always give us what we really need to accomplish His will. God will also give us what we need to live, so ask, seek, find; don't just sit there.

As simple and obvious as this is, He wasn't quite finished yet...

## **Surprise Ending**

*"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for<sup>f</sup> a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

Luke 11:11-13

This is the last short paragraph in Jesus' reply to the disciples' request that He teach them to pray. As I read through it, I know how it's going to end, and yet every time, I'm surprised when I see the last seven words...

Holy Spirit– weren't we talking about bread?

Let's think about this:

What do we need to accomplish God's purpose, to build His Kingdom? The Holy Spirit.

What do we need most in this life to sustain our existence? The Holy Spirit.

What do we need most to serve one another in His love? The Holy Spirit.

What do we need most to understand the depths of Scripture? The Holy Spirit.

What do we need most to overcome the challenges of this life? The Holy Spirit.

Are you beginning to see a pattern here?

In prayer, we ask for many things, but how often do we boldly ask for the Holy Spirit? How often do we ask for the Holy Spirit to lead us, to guide us, to rule in our lives...?

That was a rhetorical question; I wouldn't presume to speak for others. The Holy Spirit will do all of these things and more if we ask Him to, and if we will get out of His way. There's really only one thing I know of that He doesn't do, and that is to force Himself on us.

We need to ask and permit.

### ***Driving out demons***

Luke 11:14-28

By now this is no longer a new story: Jesus drives out a demon, the man who had been possessed recovers completely, and the crowd is dazzled; why shouldn't they be? Then something different takes place when some in the crowd say that Jesus is driving out demons by the power of the prince of demons. Matthew identifies these people as Pharisees...

Game on!

By this time, Jesus is very popular with a significant block of the public and as such, He is a threat to the established order of things. The "establishment" is concerned, and desperate to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the public so that they can do away with Him entirely to protect their positions. Consequently, there is nothing too ridiculous to accuse Him of in public; they will stoop to any lie no matter how obviously wrong, for it is their strategy to put doubt in the minds of His supporters with the sheer volume of accusations.

If you follow the news, this tactic will seem quite familiar to you.

So, they accuse Jesus of driving out demons by the power of darkness... Show us a sign!

Some of the Pharisees' followers, establishment types, have also driven out demons, and Jesus goes on the offensive:

*Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (11:17-20)*

Those Pharisees are looking a bit stupid, but Jesus isn't quite finished with them...

*"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.*

*"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. (11:21-23)*

To drive out the forces of Satan, you have to be a lot stronger than Satan, and if you aren't on the side of Jesus in this battle, you are on the other side.

Ouch!

In 11:24-26 Jesus says something that might explain why the followers of the Pharisees haven't had the kind of success with demons that Jesus has had, for they might run off a demon, but the demon comes back with a bunch of his buddies and the person is worse off than before, because they aren't the "strong man", Jesus is. At this point a woman shouts from the crowd:

*"Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you."*

*He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (11:27-28)*

His opponents who will say anything to discredit Him have just heard the Word of God. Will they obey it?

I wouldn't hold my breath.

***"Show us a Sign!"***

*As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here.*

## Luke 11:29-32

This passage continues without interruption from the last. Jesus is responding to the request for a sign in verse 16, and Jesus is telling them that they already have their sign: Jesus Himself is a sign.

Of course I must also add that He just dazzled them by driving out a demon...

Scholars offer two interpretations of “the sign of Jonah” and I will offer a third. The first interpretation is that Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites by virtue of his preaching repentance: He preached, they responded. Jesus is preaching the Word of God, and that is the sign; they must respond to it. The second interpretation is that Jonah came out of the great fish after having been in its belly for 3 days, and that was a miraculous sign to the Ninevites. Jesus will be killed and buried, and then rise from the grave, and thus, He gives the ultimate sign. My third interpretation is both of the above. His preaching is the sign they got that day, if you don’t count driving out the demon, and they will get one more sign when He bursts from the tomb. If they don’t respond to one of these, they have a problem.

The “Queen of the South” refers to the Queen of Sheba who traveled so many miles to give acclaim and affirmation to Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-13). For “this present generation” both the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites will condemn them if they do not respond in repentance, when the Day of Judgment arrives.

Jesus is just getting warmed up, and will discuss lamps, light and the crowd next time!

### **Receive the Light**

*“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.”*

## Luke 11:33-36

As Jesus continues His discussion, He once again uses the metaphor of light and a lamp to illustrate the condition of a person’s heart. Make no mistake; when the Pharisees attributed His driving out of demons to the work of the devil, they showed how corrupt their hearts had become. When someone demanded a sign, they also revealed a darkened heart.

Jesus illustrates with a proverb in 11:33 in which a lamp is used to illustrate His point. You don’t hide the light from a lamp; you put it on its stand so that everyone can benefit from the light. From there, He moves on with His metaphor; your eye is the lamp of your body. It is the organ that allows light to enter, a fact science has verified, by the way. As long as your eyes are healthy, you can see things clearly because light has entered and been understood. Yet if our

eyes are not healthy, this process doesn't work properly, and we cannot see the environment around us.

In verse 35, Jesus uses an imperative: "See to it..." that we allow His light to enter through our eyes, reminding us of something He often says: "Let he who has eyes to see..." When we insist that we see the truth, our entire beings will be filled with His light, and our hearts will be hearts that seek the truth and not the lie of the prince of darkness.

With this, Jesus concludes His remarks. Afterwards, He receives a curious invitation...

### **Woe!**

Luke 11:37-54

After Jesus concluded His remarks recorded by Luke in 11:14-36, He accepted an invitation to dine with a group of Pharisees and teachers of the law. The Pharisees were surprised that Jesus skipped the ceremonial washing that their oral code required before eating; tisk tisk.

Not surprisingly Jesus knew their thoughts, and what followed flows quite nicely from His earlier discussion of eyes that let in the light.

Jesus' main point of attack is the fact that the religious leaders were so prim and proper... on the outside. They washed their hands at all of the right times, they said the right things, they never missed one of their little rules, and to all appearances were the most righteous of the righteous. Yet on the inside, they were, let's just say... in darkness, without a clue.

His words are full of rich imagery, His phrases razor sharp as He went right after their decay as a good prosecutor would do in a court case, and I would encourage you to read the verses now if you haven't already done so; this is not sweet Jesus meek and mild!

Was Jesus accusing every Pharisee and every teacher of the law?

Probably not. There were some very fine people in both camps, and I'm sure Jesus, who knew their thoughts, would have known that. Yet for those to whom these charges applied, this was a tough session.

It would be easy for those of us who follow Christ today to sneer at the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day as we read of their plots and schemes to silence the Word of God to preserve their own positions, clueless as they might have been about whose bidding they were actually doing. Yet I would hope that we would refrain from this kind of finger pointing, because the temptations and habits of these men are all too common in our time, and none of us are so perfect. Rather it seems to me that we should study the problems that those Jewish leaders encountered and learn from their mistakes so that we might each examine ourselves to ensure that we do not fall prey to the same snares as we go through this life.

## Chapter 12

### ***All Will be Known***

Luke 12:1-12

Having just been with a bunch of Pharisees over lunch, Jesus and the disciples are with a crowd that has gathered; a crowd of several thousand. Before He addresses the crowd, Jesus shares a warning with the disciples, a warning that they will be tempted by persecution to become the kind of hypocrites so often found amongst the Pharisees.

Needless to say, Jesus warns His disciples to resist this temptation and couples the warning with reassurance that God will remain with them. In the first paragraph, He assures them that every hypocrisy of their accusers will be exposed, that nothing will remain hidden. The schemes, the plots, the evil... will all become known, and they will be vindicated.

*“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. (12:4-5)*

Here, Jesus seems to be telling the disciples to take a long view of things, to look beyond their earthly existence into eternity. Those who will one day persecute them can only affect the present; the worst thing they can possibly do is to kill someone. But physical death is not the end of the story; it's only the end of the beginning of the story, for there is an eternity to follow this life. The One to fear is the One who can throw us into hell. Yet He will bring us into glory instead, as Jesus indicates in the next two verses as He tells them how valuable they are to God who reigns supreme.

In 12:8-10 Jesus urges them to remain faithful to Him under severe physical pressure, for the faithful who do not deny Him before men will be protected; they will be saved, and those who reject Him will be condemned. They should not even be concerned for what to say, for when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will give them the words they need, and will sustain them through trials. Later, as Luke tells the story of those disciples in Acts, we see that they heeded these warnings and that as a result many more came to salvation as a result. Yet I can't help but wonder what they were thinking at the moment Jesus uttered these words. Sadly, Luke doesn't tell us, for right about then someone from the crowd shouts an interesting request, and Jesus turns to address them...

### ***A Rich Fool***

Luke 12:13-21

Jesus has been speaking to His disciples in a sort of an aside in front of a very large crowd when suddenly a man in the crowd shouts out a request: He wants Jesus to tell his brother to cut him in for a piece of his brother's inheritance. Presumably, their father left his estate to the

brother, probably the firstborn of the two... or maybe the more responsible of the two. Jesus isn't getting involved in their dispute, but tells a parable instead, one that should be quite familiar to us...

A well-to-do farmer has a bumper crop of grain, much more than he can store in his barn. What will he do??

His solution is to tear down his old barn and build a new bigger one so he can store up his harvest and take the next few years off for a big party. That very night, he dies suddenly; who will get his riches?

Here's the pinch line:

*"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."  
(12:21)*

I've heard it said in our time that 'he who dies with the most toys wins'. But what do they win? Jesus' point is that if we spend our whole life worried about amassing a great fortune, we will have nothing when we die, for while we could have been working and devoting ourselves to projects with an eternal purpose and reward, we wasted our efforts on something that will do us no eternal good whatever.

A person's life is very short, blink and it's about gone. Eternity is forever, so which of these should be a greater priority for us?

Come to think of it, isn't this pretty much what Jesus was telling the disciples in their little chat before the man asked Jesus to help him with his brother?

### **Therefore Do Not Worry 1**

*Then Jesus 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 clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"*

Luke 12:22-26

The NIV and several other translations as well, have a subheading above this section of text: "Do Not Worry". Interestingly, they also had a subheading above the last section (12:13-21): "The Parable of the Rich Fool". Now there is nothing at all wrong with these subheads, in fact they are there to make it easier to find what we are looking for, you know what I mean; you're looking for a certain parable, you know it's right around here... oh there it is. Because of the handy tool of adding subheadings, we might assume that the passages are more or less unrelated, but in this case, and a number of others, they are not only related, but they are really

part of the same statement: “Do Not Worry” is actually where Jesus tells us what He meant in “The Parable of the Rich Fool”.

You might be wondering how I know this, and that’s a fair question, so here’s the answer: See the first line?

*Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry...”*

Here’s how the narrative actually fits together: Jesus told the parable of the rich fool and then...

*“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”*

*Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry...” (12:21-22a)*

In 12:21 Jesus was speaking to the crowds, then He turned and said to His disciples; **“Therefore”** and as you know any time you see that word, the speaker is drawing a conclusion from what he has just said, which in this case is the parable of the rich fool so... **therefore** the section under the heading “Do Not Worry” is the conclusion from the parable i.e. its meaning.

All this time, from 12:1 until now, Jesus has been teaching His disciples that they shouldn’t be overly concerned about the cares of this life, including being persecuted.

In this section, Jesus uses birds as an example to make His point. Our lives are more than food and clothing; God provides for the birds of the field and He will do so for you as well. A disciple is so much more important than birds... so why do we spend so much energy worrying about these things— what good will that ever do?

Then He poses a question: Since we cannot add a single hour to our lives by worrying, why do we worry about other things?

It’s a complete waste of time and energy; a distraction from the things that are actually important.

Don’t roll your eyes just yet! There’s plenty more coming, including the larger point Jesus is trying to make...

## ***Therefore Do Not Worry 2***

Luke 12:27-34

Once again Jesus uses an example from nature to illustrate His point, this time it’s the flowers and grasses of the fields. God dresses them magnificently, God provides all they need; how much more will He provide for you!

Don’t worry about what you will eat, drink or wear, for the “pagan world” is concerned with these things. God knows what you need so seek His Kingdom, and He will see to your earthly needs

as well (12:27-31). This is all familiar territory for us; we've read this a thousand times... ho-hum.

Hold on before you discount this familiar theme, there's a shift coming...

*"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (12:32-34)*

Did you catch that first sentence? God has been pleased to give us His Kingdom!

This is a game-changer; we have His Kingdom, and that renders the things, cares and worries of this world essentially irrelevant, at least as far as God is concerned. Oh sure, He'll see to our needs, but we aren't in this world for a party or to be rich and famous; we have something much better in store. So Jesus says they should sell their possessions and give to the poor, and to place their treasure in the Kingdom where nothing bad will happen to it. For where our treasure is, so will our hearts be.

Did you see what I just did? If you didn't, don't feel bad, I manipulated the wording as most do, so you probably didn't notice, but I attributed the "hard" parts to "them" and the good stuff to "us". Of course I did that because we don't want to hear what He is really saying... Let's try that again:

We don't need all the stuff of this world anymore, so Jesus is telling us to sell our possessions, give to the poor and place our treasures in Heaven (Kingdom) for where our treasure is, so will our hearts be also.

So dear reader, how does that sound?

Yes, I can see my 'approval ratings' falling like a brick! Remember the story of the rich young ruler? Jesus told him to do this same thing, and he went away "sad". We love to take that story and use it to criticize others, the rich in particular, but here He tells His disciples to do this, and... are we disciples too?

Feeling sad— or just irritated with me?

If you look at your Bible, it may appear that Jesus is finished with this subject because there is another one of those subheadings after this, at least there is in the NIV. Yet once again, Jesus may have paused to take a breath after this, but He didn't pause for more than that; He's just getting warmed up!

***Be Ready!***

Luke 12:35-48

Jesus is still talking to the disciples; the scene has not changed from last time. Having introduced the Kingdom to the conversation, Jesus now moves further along with three parables that deal with His future return to judge all. You will no doubt recognize the parallels here between these verses and Matthew 25.

The first of these parables (12:35-37) deals with servants who await the return of their Master from a wedding banquet. They know he will return, but they don't know *when*, so they keep themselves ready to jump into action the moment he returns; *they are always ready for him*.

The second parable (12:38-40) uses the illustration of a thief in the night; if the home owner knows the thief is coming, he would be ready to ward him off. Likewise, the loyal servant must be ready for the Master *at any time* on any day, for he knows not when the Master will return, for *the Master will return when no one expects him to do so*.

In verse 41 Peter asks a question that Jesus doesn't exactly answer; certainly He didn't answer very clearly. Instead He tells another parable, this time about a servant who is the manager of the Master's estate. In that sense, he is responding to Peter, considering the role that Peter and the others would play in the early church, and by extension, it is also quite relevant to those today who find themselves serving as leaders in the church.

So there aren't any misunderstandings, when I say 'serving as leaders in the church', I don't necessarily mean holding offices in a formal church structure. I mean anyone who is serving in a leadership role, including those who teach or inspire others... such as authors of Christian blogs, for instance.

In the parable, (12:42 ff.) Jesus makes it clear that a servant, such as you or me, who is given the position of manager (steward is another word) over the possessions of the Master, must be diligent to work in the Master's interests at all times. If he or she does so, then they will be richly rewarded. But if they do not because of laziness, or if they abuse the Master's property or servants, they will be the most severely punished when the Master returns.

As in the first two parables, the message is that we, the servants of Jesus, must be diligent and ready to receive His return 24/7, for we do not want to be caught napping when he returns.

This may seem a bit abstract to you, or it may seem a little unclear as to how to put this into practice, but fear not, for the subject will come back again before Luke has finished the narrative and all should be clear before we are done. If this sort of teaching seems hard to you who know already how the story ends, just imagine how bewildered the disciples must have been when they heard all of this for the first time!

### ***Peace, Discord and Division***

*"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family*

*divided against each other, 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 daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."*

Luke 12: 49-53

We continue with Jesus' conversation with the disciples uninterrupted from the last section. Recall that Jesus has been telling them not to worry about the affairs of this life, for they have a vastly higher calling. He has already told them they shouldn't worry about their physical needs or much of anything other than God's purpose; not even persecution. This text reintroduces the idea of persecution to the discussion, albeit indirectly, and is quite controversial in certain circles to this day. How will we understand this text?

To be honest, most of our perceptions of it will probably develop based entirely upon our general theological approaches. If you tend toward a 'liberal' approach to theology, you will see it one way, and if your approach is more 'conservative' you will see it the other way. If you are like me and you really can't stand those labels... keep reading!

Oh, why do I dislike those terms? I dislike them because in theology as in politics, those labels are applied to thinking that is the exact opposite of what the labels mean... but alas, that's a discussion for another time.

If we take this passage in its context, always a wise move, Jesus is telling them that there will soon be a time when there will be a significant divide within society that is based upon which side you are on: You are either a follower of Christ, or you are not. Of course this is why I mentioned the two camps above: the first will disagree with my statement and burst into a rousing chorus of "All you Need is Love" and the other will burst into a rousing shout of "Repent or Perish".

Both are right, and both are wrong; we must think before we react.

In 12:49, Jesus says that He has come to bring fire to the earth, and that He wished it was already kindled. Of course is a metaphor here, for after His death and resurrection, He will unleash the Holy Spirit on the earth, and the earth will react to Him: Many will receive grace, while many others will react with violence against the message. This violent reaction, seem throughout Acts, is called persecution, which Jesus warned about in 12:1-12; it's the whole point of this larger section we've been going through in this chapter.

In the rest of this section (12:50-53) He is simply reinforcing the divisions that will result between those who receive the Gospel and those who reject it, and as we all know, those same kinds of divisions exist to this very day.

What should we say about all of this? How will we react to it?

Our response is to be the response of love, not condemnation, but our love must not be so blind that we cannot comprehend the fact that not everyone will receive it, for in fact, most probably

will not. After all, the servant is not greater than the Master, and this world nailed our Master to a cross!

### ***Signs of the Times***

Luke 12:54-59

As we have seen for quite some time now, Jesus has established a pattern of teaching the disciples, and then teaching the same basic thing to the crowds, and here is another example. The things Jesus has been teaching in this chapter so far have been to the disciples only, or in the case of the Parable of the Rich Fool, while spoken to the crowd, was directed to the disciples. Now, Jesus turns to the crowd and sums up for them what He has been trying to teach the disciples.

They are able to discern many things in the physical world around them; He uses a couple of examples of how they might come to understand signs in the weather. Many of them are probably pretty good at predicting changes in weather; all you need to do is to notice its little subtleties. Yet how many bother to pay attention to the spiritual signs all around them to discern what is going on right in their midst?

As we have gone through 12 chapters of Luke's narrative, we've also come across the signs, over and over in fact. Jesus has been travelling around giving sight to the blind, health to the sick, He has driven out demons, He has made the lame walk, and He has preached the Good News to the poor: All of this has been in fulfillment of the prophets as the people knew full well.

"Give us a sign" they kept asking Him: How many signs did they need?!

Just one more...

In 12:57-59 He uses an analogy of a person who has wronged someone and been notified that the person is suing them in court. Jesus' advice is that they should quickly reconcile with their legal adversary; we would call this entering into settlement negotiations, so that they might settle the case out of court, for whenever you go to court, anything can happen, and the judge might toss you into jail until you repay your judgment creditor in full, for that was the practice in those days...

In the analogy, the appearance of Jesus on the scene is the sign of the beginning of the last age before God judges the world. The people cannot deny that they have sinned before God and the time has come when they must either be reconciled with God or await trial before Him on the last day Jesus' advice is that they repent and receive the grace He has to offer. How do they do that?

Simple: Follow Him.

## Chapter 13

### ***Massacres, Disasters and Figs***

Luke 13:1-9

This is a curious little passage, don't you agree?

The scene hasn't changed from that of Chapter 12; the disciples are still there, and so is the crowd, when someone brings news of a massacre of Galileans in Jerusalem. This is the only historical account of this particular massacre, although Josephus the historian records others of a similar nature at the hands of Pilate. Jesus uses this news to further illustrate the point He has been trying to make to the crowd...

Those unfortunates who were killed by the Romans recently were not guiltier than anyone else although they had obviously come to Pilate's attention for some reason. Nor were the unfortunate victims of the disaster that had taken place when the tower of Siloam had collapsed killing some eighteen bystanders; they just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It sounds as though Jesus was having difficulty finding His well known compassion, doesn't it?

Yet, as I said just above, He was trying to teach the people; He explains with a parable...

*Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'"*

*"'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" (13:6-9)*

Remember now the last passage, 12:54-59: The people need to understand that time is running out for them to repent, just as time is running out for that fig tree. Everything has been given to that tree; it should be producing fruit; what is its problem? Patience has already been given, along with the blessing of its provision by its owner. Yes, time is running out for that tree.

Just as time was running out for the Jews to repent and follow Jesus... Isn't it interesting that the owner had been waiting on that tree for *three years* already?

What is really happening here is that Jesus is hinting about something that He will make very clear in Chapter 21, and that is that a certain amount of time will be allotted for the Jews to accept grace before God's judgment comes upon them. It will strike first in Galilee, and then move south to Jerusalem, where the city, including the Temple itself will be utterly destroyed along with tens of thousands of people... Oh yes, God has been patient for centuries, they have received their sign, which is their very Messiah come to save them from their evil ways: It's now time to quit fooling around.

Luke wrote this somewhere in the 65-75 AD range. The Roman campaign against Judea ran from 66-70 AD and culminated in the utter destruction of their way of life, and terminated their sacrifices, the very center of their national identity. It has never been resumed.

This curious little passage would have been easily understood by Luke's original audience. As for those of us who come along so much later, we'll see much more about the subject in Chapter 21, as I mentioned...

### ***Turning Up the Heat***

Luke 13:10-17

In this passage, Jesus manages to infuriate the religious establishment of His day, and believe it or not, He didn't even have a Twitter account. He did it simply by going to synagogue on the Sabbath, as any good Jew would do. When He was there, He saw a woman crippled by a demon for some 18 years, and then... He called up front so everyone could see Him heal her affliction.

Did I mention it was the Sabbath?

In doing this, He stuck His finger right in the eye of their customs, and they didn't like it one bit. The synagogue leader points out that He can heal six days a week, but not on the seventh, which if you think about it, isn't all that unreasonable, at least on the surface. Sadly, the religious leaders never got much further into anything than the surface.

Jesus replied to this by pointing out that they wouldn't think of keeping their animals tied up for the whole day, and neither would God have His child tied up by Satan on the Sabbath; He had set her free. As Luke points out, they were humiliated, and rightly so, for their reasonable argument had been exposed as purely idiotic.

The people were delighted.

As relevant as this exposé of their ridiculous tradition was, there was a larger lesson in all of this, for Jesus has been in the process of demonstrating to His disciples the distinction between their religious leaders and their traditions, and what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. In this little episode, He has shown them that God does not care for our forms and religious traditions, for these are the inventions of men. Rather, God cares for our souls, and in His view, there is no legitimate reason for anyone being bound by the devil in any such form of religion: They must be set free.

Jesus had come to set everyone free from slavery to sin, death and the oppression of this world, and He did not care what the reaction of the religious establishment would be to His actions; "do not worry about such things".

### ***A Little Heat and Then Some Mustard and a bit or Yeast***

*Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches."*

*Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."*

Luke 13:18-21

Jesus went to synagogue on that Sabbath day where He healed the crippled woman. When the synagogue leader rebuked Him for healing her on the Sabbath day, He made the synagogue leaders look like the hypocrites they were, humiliating them before their congregation and then says to the congregation, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?"

One must admit that there wasn't much of a transition between dressing down the synagogue leaders and then asking a couple of rhetorical questions that have nothing whatsoever to do with anything that has been going on. I would imagine that heads were spinning on that fine day...

So were the people still delighted, or were they confused?

Maybe I'm the one who is confused!

He gives two short mini-parables: First, a man plants a tiny mustard seed in his garden that grew into such a large bush or tree even, that birds could perch in its branches; so tiny became so large. Second, a woman put some yeast into a whole lot of flour, and the yeast grew throughout the flour so that it could be made into a great deal of bread.

Yes, the Kingdom is just like that!

In both cases, something that is comparatively small, tiny in fact grows into something surprisingly large; and that is what the kingdom of God is like. On that Sabbath Jesus went to the synagogue in the town of... well I guess Luke didn't bother to mention the name of the town. While there, He healed a crippled woman whose name was... well I guess that really isn't all that important for us to know. He was rebuked by the synagogue leader named... I guess it doesn't matter what his name was, and then Jesus exposed the sheer hypocrisy of their traditions and in the process planted a tiny little seed.

Two thousand years later, we are still reading about this minor event involving unnamed people in a nowhere place, a story that has been read and studied by billions of people.

My how that tiny little seed has grown!

## ***The Narrow Door***

Luke 13:22-30

There is a change of scene; Jesus is no longer in the synagogue, but has been out preaching the Kingdom from town to town. Someone asks Him if only a few people will be saved. That's an interesting question, isn't it? Yet often when I have taught about Jesus' teachings, I have had people, either in comments here or in class discussions in the past observe that the contrast Jesus continually draws between "citizens" of the Kingdom and "citizens" of this world is so stark, so hard, so seemingly impossible that nobody can live up to the standards He set. When I get this question, I find a little comfort in the fact that it wasn't just my poor teaching of these things that has led to that concern.

What we must not forget in considering Jesus' teachings is that God's grace makes everything possible. To those who heard Him teach these things, there was Grace Incarnate there before them, but He had not yet completed the task of making grace available to everyone who will have it, but in our time, His grace is right there for the asking. I'd say that's a fairly important fact to bear in mind.

Jesus tells a parable, although not everyone sees it that way, for reasons that elude me. It is the parable of the narrow door (13: 24 ff.) which contains some interesting apocalyptic elements. Notice first that the usual character (a man, a farmer etc.) has been replaced with "you". This is probably what throws people off here; Jesus didn't mean the specific person who asked the question, it's the generic you. Then we meet the "owner of the house" which refers to God.; the house is the Kingdom. When the appointed time comes, He will "close the door". Yes, it is true that this can refer to the Second Coming and final judgment, but for the overwhelming majority of people, it will happen for them when they die, for there will be no further opportunity to repent. After that, there are no appeals (13:27).

In verse 28 we have more apocalyptic elements: "weeping" and "gnashing of teeth" are nearly always indicative of God's judgment. "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all of the prophets" is a reference to the faithful component from Old Testament Israel who will be in the Kingdom. "People from east and west and north and south" refers to the full number of the redeemed who will be present in the Kingdom, and the "banquet" is the consummation of the Kingdom, which is to say eternity with the Lord where the first will be last and the last will be first.

Notice that these elements reveal to us that millions, a vast number of the redeemed are involved here, so that the answer to the question that was asked would be that no, many many will be saved. Therefore put your faith and trust in God's grace and you will be in their number. Yet, should you decide to put it off until another day, your time might run out; and we wouldn't want that, would we?

I'm sure that you will agree with me that there have been a lot of warnings in this chapter, but don't get the idea that Jesus is just fine with having to keep anyone out of the Kingdom. As we see in the next passage, this likelihood grieves Him greatly.

## ***Jerusalem, Jerusalem***

*At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."*

*He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"*

*"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"*

Luke 13:31-35

There are a few things in this text that I'm going to let others speculate and debate so that we can focus on a larger theme here without running the word count through the roof. I will point them out to you as we go however. The first is at the very beginning; some Pharisees warned Jesus to get out of there because old Herod was after Him. That seems odd for weren't the Pharisees plotting to kill Jesus— weren't they working with the Herodians in this effort? Or were these particular Pharisees secretly in Jesus' corner... or all of the above? For our purposes we'll just say this issue is unclear, and others can discuss it. Jesus now replies to their warning...

Jesus is defiant in His reply (13:32-33); He will go ahead as planned, and they can relay the message right to Herod if they want to. What these Pharisees cannot know is that Jesus has every reason to be confident, for Herod will never be able to stop God's eternal purpose from working out at the appointed hour. Indeed, "no prophet can die outside Jerusalem".

We now reach our destination; verses 34-35. Again, there is something you can argue about because Matthew places this quote in a different location entirely (see Matt. 23:37-39). For our purposes I'll just say don't worry about it; the message is the same.

Jesus is headed for Jerusalem where His Ministry will come to its climax. Like the prophets before Him, He will give His life there in God's service, yet there is a significant difference between His approaching death and the deaths of the prophets of old, for His will be the last sacrifice of the old covenant, the sacrifice that ends atonement for good. I say this because the sacrifices of the Temple were atoning sacrifices; they put off the payment of the penalty for sins until a future date; that is why they were done with animals. Jesus' sacrifice was the payment itself, and that's why it was done by the Son of God; fulfilling God's promise to Abraham. To put it another way, every time the priests performed the sacrificial rites, their sacrifice pictured God's promise of ultimate redemption; each pointed to what Christ would ultimately do to end the process and take sin away completely.

Yes, each of these was a picture of how much God loved His people. Jesus loved His people so much that He was headed to the city to give His life willingly for their salvation.

His words in 13:34-35 demonstrate that their constant refusal to draw close to God in faith had broken God's heart. Look carefully! Israel had been looking forward so eagerly to the coming of Messiah, but God was even more eager for the day to dawn.

We've seen quite a few warnings in the last several passages of Luke's narrative and some of them sound a bit harsh when taken verse by verse. Now look back at them and you can see that Jesus isn't giving warnings through clenched teeth as someone might give a threat. No sir, He was pleading with them to hear His message and receive it in faith, for God wants no one to perish.

There are still many adventures to come before Jesus' work is complete, and Chapter 14 opens with Jesus visiting, of all things, another Pharisee.

# Chapter 14

## *Jesus Visits a Pharisee's House*

Luke 14:1-15

I wonder if we can see Jesus pleading with the guests of this Pharisee to hear His Kingdom message in this scene. Oh, don't look for melodrama, for tears and dramatics as you might find in a bad movie, Jesus was much more matter of fact than that. As the scene opens we quickly see that Jesus has been set up: There in the room is a man who was seriously ill and the Pharisees and teachers of the law who were present were watching carefully to see if Jesus would take the bait. Jesus asked them for their legal opinion about healing on the Sabbath, but it seem that they were uncharacteristically silent,

Jesus made sure they saw Him heal the man.

Jesus sent the man on his way and then asked them another question: I f they had a child or an ox that fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't they rescue them? Again, those men who talk so often and so loudly were silent as the grave.

The party moves to the dining room, and each carefully picks a seat at the table. Jesus notices how they carefully choose their seats according to their rank or honor by protocol for such occasions, and sees an opportunity. He gives some interesting advice in a little parable:

He tells them that they shouldn't choose a seat of honor, for if they do, their host may have to ask them to move to another seat. By that time, only the "lowest" seat will be available, and they will look foolish in front of everyone. Instead, they should choose the least seat and their host will move them to a better one, and they will be exalted in front of their friends; good social advice, but apparently they all had just gone through this little ritual. Then came the punch line:

*For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (14:11)*

Ah yes, I suspect that these men who seldom missed the chance to lord their positions over others caught His drift. For us, He has explained what He means by having said to the disciples that the first will be last and the last will be first in the Kingdom.

With a full head of steam now, Jesus has some more social advice: When giving a luncheon or a dinner party, don't invite your friends and family, for if you do, they will return the invitation and invite you to their homes as a sort of "payback". You will then be "even". Instead, invite the poor, who are in no position to return the favor, and you will find yourself repaid at the resurrection; you will be first in the Kingdom. At this point in the proceedings, it would appear that someone found his voice:

*When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." (14:15)*

Was Jesus beginning to reach them?

Maybe. We'll see what happens next as the scene wraps up in the next passage.

### ***The Parable of the Banquet***

Luke 14:15-24

We left off earlier with the reaction of one of the guests at the Pharisee's house where Jesus had been speaking to them about the Sabbath and the Kingdom after He had healed a man right in front of them on that *Sabbath day*. As you will recall, it would seem that none of these great men had much to say that day until after Jesus gave them some social advice in 14:7-14:

*When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." (14:15)*

As you can see, verse 15 is the transition between the last part and the Great Banquet parable. In this parable, a man puts on a large banquet for many guests. When the banquet is about ready, he sends his servant to let the invited participants know the time has come, but in the three examples we have in the parable, each guest has a lame excuse. The first must rush out to see some property he has just purchased; it would seem he bought real estate sight unseen. The second invitee needed to try out a new team of oxen he has recently purchased, and the third says he must stay home because he's a newlywed.

*Seriously?*

The host is not at all pleased, and sends his servant out to invite the poor in the town; they come gladly, but there is still room, so he sends the servant back out to the highways and byways to invite all comers, for he is determined that none who have rejected his generosity will taste of his banquet.

Consider the scene in which this parable was given: Jesus is dining in the home of a Pharisee on the Sabbath. The other guests are Pharisees and teachers of the law, and they have set Him up by having a man present who was in need of healing; they wanted an excuse to accuse Jesus of a violation and Jesus obliged them. Then He gave His explanation asking if they would not save their ox or child if either had fallen into a well on the Sabbath and they had nothing to say to that. Then He told two brief parables about banquets, one dealing with the place of honor, humility and the first being last and the last being first, and then about the blessings of inviting people to their tables who could not repay them with a return invitation, and now this one.

When we look at it in context, we can easily see that the ones Jesus was speaking to were the ones who gave lame excuses at the last minute to the Great Banquet, and that the Great Banquet is the Kingdom of God, and that God is the host. Jesus was in their midst proclaiming that the Kingdom was at hand; they were the ones with the lame excuses like "let's see if He will heal someone on the Sabbath so we can accuse Him!"

Such great men of high position would never taste God's banquet, but those who were poor and outcast, even Gentiles, would receive God's invitation with gladness.

I wonder what the guy who had spoken up in verse 15 was thinking at that moment...

### ***Discipleship Doesn't Come Cheaply***

Luke 14:25-35

Once again we are on the road with Jesus as He makes His way toward Jerusalem. There is quite a good-sized crowd travelling with Him along the way and at some point in their progress Jesus speaks to them about the cost of being His disciple. His remarks are set up in 14:26-27:

*If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

These words will sound a little crazy if we don't recognize that Jesus has inserted a bit of hyperbole to make His point. No, we need not literally hate our families; obviously hate is not the way of love. Yet we also mustn't allow them to keep us from following Jesus, or be so concerned with what they think of us that we will turn our backs on our Lord. The same is true of ourselves; we must not be so concerned with our own persona and interests that we cannot put His first, for if we do not put Him first, we will not be a disciple.

Reduced to simplest terms, a disciple is one who knows what the Master knows, and who does what the Master does, thus a disciple will put neither their own interests nor those of other people ahead of their Master's interests. To better illustrate His point, Jesus tells a parable:

If a person is going to build something, in the parable it's a tower, they must first obtain a good estimate of the building cost, for if they do not, then they run the risk of having to halt construction midway through the process for lack of money to complete it. It seems like common sense doesn't it?

Then He gives another example, this time of a king thinking about making war on a neighboring king. He must consider his chances of winning the war before he jumps into a fight. If it turns out that he is unlikely to survive the war, he must seek a diplomatic solution. Again, this is common sense.

What Jesus is trying to tell people is simply that following Him isn't going to be all peaches and cream; there may well be problems that come up in this life. Doesn't this remind you a little bit of the warnings we saw in chapter 13?

*In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.  
(14:33)*

Then He closes with an interesting observation...

*Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.*

*“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” (14:34-35)*

Here He uses common salt as an analogy to discipleship; a disciple is like salt. If salt is no longer salty, then what good is it? It’s only good for being thrown away. If a disciple of Christ is pulled back into the old ways and no longer follows the Master, then what good is he to the Master? Yes dear reader, this is another warning...

It is also another illustration of what He means by “giving up everything”. The Master must come first.

This is a very touchy point, for there is a great deal of nuance here for the reader to pick up on. All too often, preachers and commentators leave this at a very negative point and launch into discussions of heavy religious duties and obligations, into hellfire and damnation or finger pointing and condemnation, and in so doing leave wreckage in their wakes. The problem that these preachers and commentators have is that they forget the building project and the king, and concentrate on the salt... and they don’t know the first thing about cooking, except that their wives do all of it for them!

Let’s pause and talk about the nature of salt so that we can have ears that hear.

### ***Bonus Subject: Salt***

*Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.*

*“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” (13:34-35)*

This is where we ended our last discussion: Salt. As I’m sure you know, there is a parallel in Matthew 5:

*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. (Matt. 5:13)*

Salt had many uses in the ancient world, and from these verses it isn’t easy to nail down which use Jesus had in mind when He said this. Whichever use He was thinking about, if the salt wasn’t “salty” it would be useless. Let’s see if we can get a little closer to His thinking...

The two most common uses for salt in those days were as a food preservative, and as the basis for seasoning food. Traditionally, preachers and commentators speak of this “salt” as a preservative and so they say that if we are the “salt of the earth” that means that we are supposed to preserve it from sin and wickedness, and then they would go off into a sermon about sin. Ah yes, as a student long ago, I read many old sermons that went down this path, sermons that would scare the heck out of anybody.

Yet in context, this really doesn't ring true, does it? We've already seen that in these appeals to His followers, He was giving warnings, but not threats. Rather, they were pleas for faithfulness, for to have even one person fall astray would grieve Him greatly.

My thought is that the preservative angle is valid, but it isn't the whole story.

As the basis for seasoning food, salt is used to bring out flavor. Ask a chef, and he or she will tell you that food must be seasoned to be worth serving. Many people today confuse seasoning with spices and herbs, but a chef will tell you that seasoning is salt and pepper (mainly salt). You can put all of the herbs and spices you want into a dish, but you won't develop a pleasing flavor without salt. If you are not a cook, I'll add this so you'll appreciate what I mean here: You will never taste salt in a properly seasoned dish; you will taste everything but salt. Ah yes, this is the nuance I mentioned last time.

Matthew's parallel has more information than Luke's, so let's have a look at Matthew's complete parallel now:

*"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*

*"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

Matthew 5:13-16

Isn't that interesting! We've already seen the rest of this in Luke and when you put these together, it's much easier to see what the salt is all about. The light, as we have seen, shines forth the Truth of God's Word, the salt brings out the wonders of God's creation and the two together represent His glory bursting forth amidst the status quo of this world...

...And that is what the Kingdom is all about.

A true disciple doesn't ever want to lose that "saltiness" any more than he or she would want to extinguish the light.

## Chapter 15

### **Lost Sheep**

*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*

*Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?<sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."*

Luke 15:1-7

It's ironic, isn't it, that the Pharisees and teachers of the law are grumbling about Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, when He has so recently eaten with Pharisees and teachers of the law; do you suppose they were the "sinners" in the equation?

Probably not.

Jesus in His response to their grumbling will tell a series of parables that show how much God desires to have sinners repent and return to Him, for unlike the Pharisees and teachers of the law, God loves His children, even those who stray from His path, and wants not even one to perish. For the rest of us, we mustn't fail to see the contrast between God's way of love, and the Pharisees' way of self-righteousness, for there are a great many "Pharisees" among us in our time; will we join their ranks?

In this parable, Jesus uses a simple humble shepherd to illustrate His point: If one lone sheep wanders off, the shepherd leaves the flock to find the lost sheep. When he does, he returns joyfully and puts the recovered sheep back in the flock and celebrates its return. Luke doesn't say, but I wonder if the Pharisees and teachers of the law grumbled about comparing God to a lowly shepherd, since they were only a notch or two above "tax collectors and sinners" in the social order of the day.

The parable ends with a memorable comment: There is more rejoicing in heaven for one sinner who repents than for 99 righteous men who had nothing to repent of.

I've often wondered how many people might repent of their sin and follow Jesus if they had the impression that they would be received with joy and celebration by the "flock" rather than criticism and scolding. I'm sure that in most cases, the flock would be genuinely pleased and happy for one who repents, not critical, so maybe we could do a better job of communicating than most of us are doing...

It looks like Jesus wasn't waiting around for their reaction; He was off to the next parable.

## ***Like a Lost Coin***

*“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

Luke 15:8-10

Jesus quickly moved on to the next parable, this time of a woman who loses one of her ten coins. She drops everything and searches the house until she finds it, and then tells her friends of her joy at having it back. Once again He tells that that it is just like this kind of joy in heaven when a sinner repents, for just as that coin was of great importance to the woman, it was ten percent of her savings after all, it is so important to the angels of heaven. I would imagine that the Pharisees and teachers of the law might identify with this one, being rather well-to-do; imagine searching the house for ten percent of your net worth that has gone missing!

If this would get their attention, it just might serve as a revelation to them about the value that God places on each person, even those who are “tax collectors and sinners”. As we know, this term describes people the Pharisees didn’t much care for. Yet it was more visceral than just not caring for or enjoying their company for the Pharisees wouldn’t even want to be seen with such people because they were considered so ultra-nasty socially.

Oh yes, such people were so ultra-nasty that you would be damaged even being seen around them: Yuk!

But God loves them anyway and does not want even one to perish!

I wonder: Are there such social outcasts today; people who we would feel dirty just being near, or people whose company would cause others to look down on us for being in?

Even if **“they”** repented and followed Jesus, heaven would rejoice more that it does for you and me, so great is God’s love for them. How does that strike you?

Jesus had another parable coming...

## ***The Prodigal Son***

Luke 15:11-32

Jesus tells a third parable to the Pharisees and teachers of the law, this one is so familiar to us that I need not recount the details. Of course we know that the younger son who had taken his inheritance early went out and squandered it on wild living, ended up broke and in very bad circumstances and then having come to his senses, had gone home to beg his father for a job as a servant, believing that he was no longer fit to be called a son. His father rejoiced upon

seeing him and threw a great party to celebrate his return, causing his older brother to harbor serious resentment; their father explained:

*“My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” (15:31-32)*

Such is God’s attitude when a sinner repents, as we all know. Now, picture in your mind the vilest, the most unattractive, the least deserving kind of person you can imagine; yes, the one you would least want to be seen with— that is the person we are talking about here.

When that person repents, God is in the mood to throw a party!

With this in mind, why do we not always share His enthusiasm?

## Chapter 16

### *Under New Management*

Luke 16:1-18

Jesus continues with the parables, this time the Parable of the Unwise Manager. A rich guy received accusations that his asset manager was wasting (or dispersing) his assets. He calls the manager in and tells him he is fired and asks for an explanation. The man, realizing he was losing his job, came up with a plan; he would call in his master's debtors and discount their balances for immediate payment. This would be good for the master because he would have those accounts paid up immediately. It would be good for the debtors because they would pay a discounted rate and have the debt off their backs, and it would be good for the manager because he will have made new friends, and he is about to be looking for a new job.

I've heard preachers call this "dishonest" dealing on the manager's part, but I must disagree; it is a common business practice that turns bad debt into a win-win. What good is a note receivable to a business person if it isn't collectable? We have come to call such uncollectables "toxic debt" in recent years, because it's a loss that looks like a gain. What the manager did was to turn the "bad paper" into the equivalent of cash for the master for the benefit of all concerned, and I have often wondered if he had done so sooner if he might have kept his job. You should note that the master commended him for this... but he was still fired. Might he have been given another chance had he done this sooner?

Of course, none of this is really the point Jesus was making; He was talking about our hearts to people who were lovers of money.

In 16:8 ff. Jesus is actually saying that the manager's move was a good one, but for all the wrong reasons. We should use worldly assets shrewdly for the kingdom, money and possessions to make friends so that we might share the light of Christ with them, as opposed to keeping all for ourselves.

You see, it's a matter of the heart. God has entrusted us with certain things in this life. We are to handle these things for God's benefit, rather than for our own, yet if we cannot be trusted to this, what will God think of us after all, He is the "master" in this parable.

The Pharisees sneered at this. Jesus pointed out that they might fool most people, but they can never fool God who sees all, including the condition of the heart. He continues in the next few verses with a warning: They will not be able to force their way into the Kingdom by manipulation of the law and indirectly at least, He comes to another area in which the condition of the heart is exposed: Divorce. The system of that day had so manipulated the law concerning divorce that great injustice was being done to many people.

To put it another way, the Pharisees and teachers of the law had enabled wealthy men to abuse their wives and to get away with it by dedicating their assets to the Temple. In an extreme case, a wealthy older man could divorce his wife of many years, get a younger model and dedicate his

fortune to the Temple, making everything all neat and proper, and leave both women destitute upon his death, to the profit of the religious establishment.

Ah yes, that was the corruption He was talking about, and there's another parable right after this one...

### ***The Rich Man and Lazarus***

Luke 16:19-31

It is very important to remember that this parable follows without any break whatsoever the previous parable, the Parable of the Unwise Manager. Thus, the context is still the same. In this one, Jesus is taking His message another step forward for His listeners who consist of the disciples, and Pharisees and teachers of the law. At the end of the last parable, the Pharisees sneered at Him, and then He mentioned their manipulation of the law concerning divorce and how they profited from it...

Lazarus was poor and destitute; he had nothing in this world other than severe hunger and sores. The rich man was loaded and lived the life of luxury and plenty. Lazarus begged at the rich man's gate, but received nothing. As the story goes, they both died...

Lazarus was gathered to Abraham's side, while the rich man went to torment. There was a great chasm between them, but the rich man could see Abraham and Lazarus in the distance; who was the beggar now? The upshot of the story is that there is no way to send aid to the tormented rich man, and Lazarus will not be going back from the dead to warn his brothers to change their ways. There is great justice in this, for the rich man had been blessed with much in his lifetime, and now felt the torment Lazarus had felt during his life; their roles had been reversed and the scales of justice were even. The rich man and his brothers had all been able to follow the teachings of Moses and the prophets (the Scriptures) but were living in negligent disregard of them. If they would not listen to the Scriptures, they won't listen to anyone, and the brothers' fates will be just like that of the rich man.

I must add that we should resist the temptation to take this as a teaching about heaven and hell, and thus miss the point. This is a parable, not a historical account; it is not a teaching about heaven and hell.

The rich man represents lovers of money and wealth, such as the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They might have a grand time in this life; wealth, position, power, influence and self-righteousness, but in the end they will come to ruin for their folly. As in the last parable, the very part the Pharisees sneered at, they refused to use the assets they had been given for God's purposes. There were desperate needs all around them and they ignored those needs, and basked in luxury, which is to say that they could not be trusted with "little".

In the Kingdom, we will be co-heirs with Christ *to everything*. If we cannot be trusted with “little” in this life, we won’t be trusted with “much” in the Kingdom: This is the warning Jesus is giving to those Pharisees and teachers of the law.

In the next section, Jesus will turn to his disciples and explain further...

### ***Some Words for the Disciples***

Luke 17:1-10

This is an odd passage because Jesus, who has been addressing Pharisees and teachers of the law now, turns to His disciples again with some instruction that might not quite seem to fit the situation... Yet other than turning once again and speaking to the Twelve, the scene hasn’t changed. Jesus has just gone through a series of parables with the Pharisees about the condition of the heart. There have been various themes and examples; the love of money, corruption, putting God first, and the response in heaven to a sinner’s repentance...

And now this.

The first part is Jesus warning His disciples that believers must not cause one another to fall into sin (17:1-3a). Then He quickly tells them that they must forgive others who might sin against them. Even seven times in a day, if they repent, we must forgive (17:3b-4). We might conclude that Jesus is implying that our failure to forgive would cause others to sin. This is followed by the disciples’ reaction to 17:1-4...

*The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” (17:5)*

Do you see how this fits together? This is a part of a long and flowing narrative that began back in Chapter 14; this passage is not four separate items, it is one conversation, an aside really, in a very large narrative all on one occasion. Jesus has just been telling the Pharisees about how heaven rejoices more at the repentance of one sinner, than for all of the righteous, so great is God’s love for His children. Then Jesus turns to the disciples and tells them they must never cause even one of God’s “little children” to fall into sin. By implication we can add “like the Pharisees and teachers of the law do”. Then He tells them they must forgive, something the Pharisees and teachers of the law are not really known for doing, and then they ask for more faith: Apparently this sounded difficult to them.

Jesus tells a couple of parables to clarify the point *He has just made*:

The first one (17:6) is quite short, and the upshot is that they already have all the faith they need. Hold that thought...

Now He speaks of a master and a servant (17:7-10). The Master gives instructions to the servant, the servant does his job. In the process of His telling, Jesus makes it quite clear that the servant does his job because it is not his place to tell the Master how things are to be done. Jesus is the Master, the disciples are the servants, they have their instructions and all the faith

they need to carry them out. They have received God's great favor, they will soon receive His grace, and they will show this grace to those around them, for this is the way of love.

It is also quite a contrast to the ways of the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

The scene ends on this note, but as Luke continues his story, Jesus will be showing the disciples what He has been talking about...

### ***Healing Lepers***

Luke 17:11-19

The scene has changed; Jesus and His party are on the road again travelling near the Samaritan border on the road to Jerusalem. Suddenly 10 lepers cry out to Jesus for mercy. He tells them to present themselves to the priests, and as they leave they are healed. One of them rushes back and throws himself at Jesus' feet, giving praise to God and thanks to Jesus. Jesus takes note of the fact that only one in ten has seen fit to give praise to God and tells the man that his faith has healed him.

He was a Samaritan.

Please recall that as far as the Jews were concerned, Samaritans were unclean, dirty, nasty and more or less on a par with Gentile dogs.

We can speculate quite a lot about this story as many have. Was this man healed in more than one way? Were the others thankful? Did the man's faith heal him in the first place or was it Jesus?

It appears to me that all 10 believed Jesus could heal them; they had heard the stories and the reports of what He had been doing, but this one man seems to have seen more than the others. Luke doesn't give a great many details, but it seems likely that this man had come to realize that Jesus was at least God's special representative; maybe he saw that Jesus was the Messiah.

One thing is quite clear however: This man, though he was only a Samaritan slime, had enough faith to be healed of leprosy and made clean again, not only from the disease, but from being a Samaritan. "Faith as small as a mustard seed..."

I'm guessing this probably made an impression on the disciples as they recalled Jesus' words in the previous passage.

### ***Not an Easy Question***

Luke 17:20-37

On a particular occasion some Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come (17:20). In His answer, He both conceals and reveals the answer; it's one of those "he who has eyes to see" kind of answers. He says that the coming of the Kingdom isn't really something that you can observe; it's just there "because the kingdom of God is in your midst."

Jesus Himself was the embodiment of the Kingdom.

Then, to the disciples but not to the Pharisees, Jesus tells them quite a lot more, but He isn't exactly addressing the same question...

*"The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it." (17:22)*

In the remainder of this passage, Jesus is telling the disciples about the coming of the Kingdom in its consummation upon His second coming. There are difficult times ahead for the disciples, and for all of His followers, and they will wish for His return, but they will not have it yet.

There will be rumors and people will say that He has returned, but they will be wrong, for when He returns, everyone will know because His Second Coming will be sudden and not in secret (17:23-25).

When exactly will He return?

Nobody knows, yet every generation was sure theirs would be the one to see it, including our own, yet all have been mistaken so far. Jesus would suffer at the hands of the generation living at that time, in fact He was heading to Jerusalem for just that purpose, then He would rise from the grave and be taken to heaven, and the Kingdom of God would enter a new phase as the church. In Jesus' day, He embodied it, in our day it is embodied in His Body, the church. Then, at a time as yet unknown, He would return to judge the Nations and the Kingdom would be consummated in eternity... and when this will happen, will be a surprise.

Just as in the days of Noah, everyone will be surprised. Just as in the days of Lot, everyone will be surprised (17:23-29). Things will be moving along as always; business as usual: Then Judgment. Over the centuries that have followed, many have speculated, books have been written, sermons have been preached, claims have been made, videos and movies have been sold... and every single one has been wrong. He will come when we do not expect it.

When He does come, it will be for judgment. Verses 30-35 describe the Final Judgment; one is taken to the Kingdom, one is left for judgment. Why do I say this so clearly, you ask? Simple, because the context requires it. He is talking about a) the Kingdom (v. 20) and b) His coming (v. 22).

Finally, the disciples ask "where" (17:37). It is apparent they have been confused by His mention of one being "taken" and the other "left"; where were they taken; where were they left?

Who came blame the disciples for being confused, when scholars have been fighting over the answer to that for centuries; this is a tough text to understand, and many see it quite differently than I do, and if you are one of those, that's perfectly all right. I've approached simply by

following the rules of grammar and context, recognizing that this passage is chock full of apocalyptic elements that are found throughout the Scriptures, and many others apply different methods of understanding it. One day we'll all find out, and most likely we will all have gotten some parts right, and some parts wrong, so let's not go crazy about this now, for He will come when and where He comes.

*"Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."*

## Chapter 18

### **A Persistent Widow**

*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'*

*"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"*

*And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"*

Like 18:1-8

The scene has not changed from the last passage (Luke 17:20-37), Jesus has just said "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather." Then He tells this parable to clarify things.

It is not a difficult parable to understand: God hears our prayers, and comes to the aid of His persistent children in this life. Jesus assures the disciples that there will be justice; this is easy to see. The "kicker" is at the very end:

*when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*

Do you remember their question (17:37), "Where Lord?" Remember His answer (17:37)?

There is a considerable controversy over when and where He will return, as I mentioned last time. There are books, videos, presentations, even blogs that are filled with speculation, but none of this builds faith; it is a distraction. How many come to Christ because they are afraid He will return next week and they need to get their house in order? How many non-Christians read those end of the world books? How many Christians draw closer to God while arguing about the Second Coming and End Times?

The disciples had much more important things to worry about, and so do we. We and they have been tasked with taking His love to a dark world that so desperately needs it, and we cannot do this while arguing about the end of the world, particularly when Jesus' entire guidance on the subject is that it will be a surprise and we must be ready whenever it happens.

Don't worry; God will do His part— we need to worry about doing our parts.

Oh my, there's another parable coming up in the next passage...

## **A Pharisee and a Tax Collector**

*To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’*

*“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’*

*“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

Luke 18:9-14

Luke sets this parable up in an interesting way, because he mentions no particular scene change, and has Jesus talking to people who are “confident in their own righteousness”; has he turned back to those Pharisees and teachers of the law, or has another group come along? Recall that we are on the road heading for Jerusalem...

Whoever it was, He tells a short parable that goes right at the attitudes of their day, that some people are “better” than others because they have achieved righteousness through their observance of a *form* of worship. The Pharisee in the parable is praying a prayer of thanksgiving in which he is thanking God for making him better than other people. Honestly, I cannot imagine such a thing as this; such audacity...

But this is a parable after all.

The tax collector humbles himself, acknowledges his sin and asks for God’s mercy, as well he should, as well as we all should. It is the tax collector who is “justified” before God, not the righteous Pharisee, for the tax collector humbled himself and put his trust in God, while the Pharisee exalted himself and trusted his own ability to keep the law.

All God wants from us is that we humble ourselves and trust Him. When we do so, His grace is sufficient for salvation. Yet should we exalt ourselves and consider ourselves better than others for our ability to keep the law, we will be condemned by the law and our own excessive pride. Quite frankly, to thank God for making us “better” than everyone else is to bear false witness right to God’s face.

Yikes!

## **Humility**

*People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the*

*little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”*

Luke 18:15-17

This is another story with which we are all quite familiar. The disciples sought to keep the children away from Jesus as He taught the people; children can be such a distraction and Jesus was doing important work. Jesus saw things differently, explaining that we must receive the Kingdom like little children.

What is it that little children bring to the party? They have no money or resources, they have no social position or influence in the community. They have no accomplishments or knowledge to speak of; nobody respects them. In fact, little children are messy, loud, and uncouth and they consume resources without contributing much of anything in return other than the occasional “cute” moment.

Little children are innocent, they must be dependent on their parents for everything; they have no guile. Of course this is precisely the point Jesus is making. To enter the Kingdom of God, we must be like little children, entirely dependent upon God for our provision and our acceptance, for we bring nothing to the party other than ourselves in complete humility. Again, Jesus is making quite a contrast between God’s ways and the ways of men, for this kind of thinking is quite the opposite of our earthly way of looking at things.

### ***Jesus Meets a Rich Ruler***

Luke 18:18-23

This account matches up quite nicely with Matthew’s (Matt. 19:18-22) although Matthew tells us that the rich man was young as well.

Social conventions and customs are a funny thing; they influence most of us in a way that enables us to make sweeping assumptions concerning great truths, even eternal ones, and yet those very conventions change often through history. We should take this reality as a warning to question the social conventions of our time, and this tale is a case in point. In Jesus’ day, as in many other historical periods, it was assumed that most wealthy people were the ones favored by God; why else would they be so blessed? Yes, some were not so ethical in their conduct, but many were good, hard working people, the bedrocks of the community; surely God’s favor was upon them!

What a contrast to those little children in the last scene, those little ones that represented vulnerability and humility. Right after Jesus commented about the little ones, a rich young man walks up to Him and asks a question:

*A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (18:18)*

Here's a guy who appears to have it all, but he apparently believes that he is lacking in the way he has led his life; there is an element of humility here that we often overlook. In the dialogue that follows, we learn more about this young man:

*"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"*

*"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. (18:19-21)*

In Matthew's account, the man asks Jesus what he was still lacking right here. This young man was righteous, and appears to have good intentions, and as you will see, Jesus doesn't dispute his claim that he has kept all of those commandments. It would also appear that the man was beginning to realize, perhaps more quickly than the disciples, that merely keeping commandments as was the Jewish prevailing thought, wasn't quite enough, after all, why else would he have asked Jesus in the first place? Yet, he still seems to have believed that eternal life was contingent upon his ability to *do something*. Maybe he was right:

*When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

*When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. (18:22-23)*

Jesus told the man to sell everything he owned, give money to the poor and follow Him. I cannot over-emphasize how radical this was, for the prevailing thought of those times said that the rich were blessed, worthy and most favored of all, yet Jesus told the man to liquidate and give to the poor. Notice, He didn't say to give *everything* to the poor (as some older translations say) but the implication is clear enough. The story ends with the man going away sad, because he had great wealth.

Traditional teaching assumes the man did not do as Jesus told him, but I want to point out that the text doesn't say so; maybe he did, maybe he didn't... but he was sad.

This is where we like to bash people who have more than we do; I can't tell you how many times I have heard this in class discussions and sermons and how many times I have read it, but I would suggest that we should not go rushing into this too quickly. I have known quite a few people who are quite wealthy, rich people, and they usually discover that their wealth, while handy for sure, is also a millstone around their necks; a burden more than a pleasure. Yet once they have it, it is hard to let go of. Even so, let's not concentrate on those who have more than we do, let's look in the mirror instead, for there is where Jesus message, and the young man's predicament resonate:

Suppose Jesus came to you and told you to liquidate everything you have, that's right dear reader, sell all your possessions, give to the poor and follow Him.

Would that make you happy?

If you answer “yes” to that question, then let’s take a closer look: Your home, your car(s), your accounts, retirement plans, investments, kids’ college funds, the contents of your house... everything. You show up to follow Jesus with only the shirt on your back. Hold on, the shirt on your back is also a possession, so you show up without even a shirt on your back or anything else, to follow Jesus. Are you happy?

More importantly, would you do it?

Maybe we should think carefully before we make this all about pointing fingers at others!

The good news is that we are still in that section where the instruction is *for the disciples*, and in the next part, we will see what Jesus has to say to them; will it get easier? Well, you’ll have to come back next time to find out!

### ***The Rich, The Way and The Kingdom***

Luke 18:24-30

Jesus was fully aware that the disciples would be confused after His conversation with the rich man because, as we noted last time, He had blown up a major cultural expectation of the time that the rich were more favored by God than others were. As a result, He begins to teach them, even while the man is standing right there...

*Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (18:24-25)*

The rich man hadn’t been overly enthused at the prospect of giving up all of his wealth, and Jesus underscored the difficulty that many have in entering the Kingdom and leaving the priorities of this world behind. Looking at His example here of putting a camel through the eye of a needle, I think we can safely say that He was engaging in a touch of hyperbole to make the point. The reaction of the disciples speaks volumes about the prevailing assumptions of that culture: “Who then can be saved?”

If you notice, Jesus in His answer blows up a second predominant assumption of that time:

*“What is impossible with man is possible with God.” (18:27)*

There are two cultural teachings that are being corrected here: First, that the rich are most favored by God, and the second is that a person can attain righteousness by reliance upon their own ability to keep the Law; both of these are false. This second teaching is still with us, sometimes it is obvious, and sometimes it is more subtle, we call it “works”. You cannot earn your way into the Kingdom by following the rules, “doing church right” or by doing good deeds, for you can only enter the kingdom by faith in God through Christ. Can the rich enter the Kingdom? Yes, they can, by placing their faith in God, and not in their earthly possessions and positions.

Peter is beginning to comprehend: "We have left everything to follow you! (18:28)

In reply to Peter, Jesus indicates that there may be more than just "stuff" that can get in the way...

*"Truly I tell you," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life." (18:29-30)*

Notice the relationships that may also need to be left behind, notice also that they are in the same list as "home", Matthew has "fields", which is to say material possessions. The real point is that the follower of Christ must be willing to leave anything behind if it interferes with following Him, for with the Kingdom, you are either "all in" or all out. Aren't these things that we all struggle with at one time or another?

This is one of those cases when the theology of the teaching is very simple, but living it can be difficult, yet with God, all things are possible. Consider this: The man who wrote Matthew's Gospel was a tax collector. He was rich, he also had a family, friends and associates, but by the grace of God, he was one of the Twelve, and he wasn't the only one. Remember Zacchaeus? Joseph of Arimathea? Saul of Tarsus?

With God, all things are indeed possible!

### ***Jesus Tells the Disciples Why They are Going to Jerusalem***

*Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."*

*The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.*

Luke 18:31-34

When you come right down to it, there really isn't all that much to say about this passage. Jesus told them very explicitly why He was going to Jerusalem. Yes, of course, it was for Passover, but in reality, it was for a great deal more than that; He was going to fulfill His Messianic destiny.

Which was to be killed by evil men.

Luke tells us that the meaning of this was “hidden” from the disciples; maybe Luke’s meaning is hidden from us!

Do you suppose that the Holy Spirit or the Father had somehow intervened so that the disciples would be incapable of comprehending what Jesus has just told them so graphically and unambiguously?

Or maybe they were just stupid or something...

Personally, I doubt highly that God was keeping the truth from them, for if He was, why would Jesus have bothered to tell them what was going to happen; this is the third time He has told them. I also know full well that they were not stupid; they were actually rather clever as we see elsewhere.

So what’s going on here?

It seems to me that there are two complications: First, Jesus isn’t making it any easier for them to understand, even though He is speaking in graphic terms, for while He does so, He is also speaking the third person: “The Son of Man” and “he”, rather than “I” and “me”. The second complication is that the disciples believe, like everyone else, that Jesus’ Messianic destiny is to march into Jerusalem, overthrow the Romans and restore Israel to its former earthly glory as king. In fact, these assumptions have quite clouded their perception of so many obvious things throughout this story, just as many of our assumptions cloud our perceptions about many things today.

For this reason, it is no mistake that the next event chronicled by Luke involves a blind man...

### ***Jesus Encounters a Blind Man***

Luke 18:35-43

Jesus was drawing ever closer to Jerusalem. As He approached Jericho there was a blind man begging in the street. When he heard the crowd passing by he asked what was going on; “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by” was the answer (18:35-37).

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” he cried out, but those near him rebuked him; he cried out yet again, louder this time. Jesus heard his cry and asked that the man be brought to him. Upon his arrival Jesus asked him what he wanted Jesus to do:

“Lord, I want to see,” was his reply. Jesus told the man that his faith had healed him, and immediately he received his sight. The man gave praise to God and followed Jesus; everyone present gave praise to God for Jesus had given the man sight to see (18:37-43).

In the previous passage, Jesus had, for the third time, revealed to His disciples the nature of His Messianic mission to Jerusalem. Yet, for the third time, they simply could not comprehend it for they were blind to its truth. Even after their arrival in Jerusalem, even as Jesus was fulfilling His

mission on the cross, they would not comprehend what was happening, but soon, very soon, they would receive their sight just as the man in the streets outside Jericho had received his. May we too receive our sight!

## Chapter 19

### ***A Tax Collector in a Tree***

Luke 19:1-10

As Jesus and the crowds were passing through Jericho, a chief tax collector named Zaccaeus wanted to lay eyes on Jesus, but being a short man, he couldn't see above the crowd, so thinking quickly, he ran ahead of the procession and climbed a tree so that he could have a good view. When Jesus came to the tree, He commanded Zaccaeus to come down from the tree, for He was heading to his house.

To the amazement of everyone, Zaccaeus came down and greeted Jesus happily, but the crowd muttered about Jesus consorting with "sinners". Once at his house, Zaccaeus made an amazing declaration: He, a very wealthy man, would give half his fortune to the poor, and anyone he had cheated, and he was in the business of cheating people, he would repay fourfold.

*Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (19:9-10)*

And so there you have it, dear reader; *a camel can in fact, pass through the eye of a needle*, for where the Kingdom is, lives will change.

### ***Parable of the Minas***

Luke 19:11-27

This parable is similar to the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25, however while it may be similar, it is unique to Luke. Jesus is still at the home of Zaccaeus when He told this story and will soon be departing for the last leg of His journey to Jerusalem; there is a grave misconception about His purpose there, and He seeks to set the record straight.

In the first verse, Luke makes this point clear; the people thought the Kingdom would appear at once, and Jesus wants them to understand that He will be "away" for a time.

In the story, there is a "man of noble birth" who represents Jesus. He is going to a distant city to be appointed king, and when this is finished he will return to rule. Jesus as he tells the story, is about to complete His trip to nearby Jerusalem, but He is not going there to, as many believe, be made their king, He is going to die for their sins, after which He will be "away" for some time.

The nobleman in the story gives a mina (3 or 4 month's wages for a common man) and tells them to put the money to work for him while he is gone. After this, the nobleman heads off. His servants don't like him very much, and they send a delegation ahead to speak against him, but in due course he is made king and eventually returns home. Upon his arrival he calls his servants together to settle their accounts. One servant has invested the mina he was given and

earned 10 more; an excellent job. This man is rewarded with a big job; he will rule over 10 cities in the nobleman's kingdom. The next man realized a profit of 5 minas, and is put in charge of five cities. Then came the third servant...

This man completely disobeyed his master, and didn't put his mina to work for the master. Instead he has carefully placed it into safekeeping for his master's return.

The master was not at all pleased with this disobedience, for he had been quite clear in giving his instructions, and the first two servants' actions proved it. This man had everything taken from him as a result of his failure to serve the master's interests. His mina was given to the servant who had the ten. Some onlookers pointed out that this might not be all that fair, for the first servant already had quite a lot, and the third one had nothing. Yet the new king did not change his mind. In his view, the man got what was coming to him because of the choices he had made.

Then the new king had those servants who had been in the delegation that had tried to prevent his being made king brought in and killed. They also got what they had coming, for everyone knows it isn't a good idea to oppose the king.

I've already mentioned that the nobleman represents Jesus. He went to a distant place and was made king. Jesus was going to a "distant" place also, for He would soon ascend to heaven in glory, but the day will come when He returns to settle accounts. The servants represent the followers of Jesus. We have been given much to use (put to work) for our Master while He is away, and upon His return, He wants to see a return on investment.

This may seem strange to some people because most of the time Jesus used agricultural metaphors, but here He used metaphors from the world of finance...

Those who have produced good returns will be reward accordingly. Those who put their gifts and talents away for safekeeping will also be rewarded accordingly.

The delegation who attempted to prevent him from being made king represents the Jewish leadership who arranged His death... for them His return means the Final Judgment; they are done for.

After this, Jesus heads off to fulfill His destiny.

### ***Arrival in Jerusalem***

Luke 19:28-44

Jesus and His party left Jericho and headed up the steep Roman road to Jerusalem; Luke doesn't provide as many details about this part of the trip as Matthew did, although he does discuss briefly the procurement of the colt. Luke does however, make it clear that most of the crowds Jesus encountered upon His arrival believed He was there as a king to seize power.

Yet, Luke's main focus is at the end of his account; it isn't how the people reacted to Jesus, but instead it is about how Jesus reacted to Jerusalem:

*As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." (19:41-44)*

Try to imagine the scene: The crowds were welcoming Him as their king in full expectation that He is about to seize control of the city and restore the Nation to its ancient glory with the help of the armies of God. Jesus is astride the colt representing His divine kingship in His hour of triumph, and when He sees the city, He weeps. But these are not tears of joy, they are tears of mourning, for He knows as no one else does at that moment that Jerusalem's disastrous fate is about to be sealed. To make matters even more tragic, He knows that the fate that is about to be sealed is utterly unnecessary.

In these verses, Jesus speaks of what will happen here to God's beloved city, the city that symbolized God dwelling in the midst of His people, when Roman armies encircle it and impose one of history's most brutal sieges culminating in the utter destruction of the city and its remaining inhabitants.

Jesus knows at that precise moment, that He is coming here to die for the sins of Mankind, that His death will be brought about by the leaders of Jerusalem who will reject Him as they had rejected the prophets of God before Him. Of course He also knew that His death will be in fulfillment of God's plan of redemption. Yet even so, He also knew that the very leaders, who will have Him killed, will lead the vast majority of the people against Him after the resurrection... and to their destruction.

Is it any wonder that He wept?

### ***Jesus Visits the Temple***

*When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be a house of prayer"; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"*

*Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.*

Luke 19:45-48

Here's a trustworthy saying: "When the leaders fear their own people, something is very wrong with their leadership."

What's that— who said that?

I did.

At least in this case, the Jewish leaders had a great deal to fear from their people; something had to be done.

Sadly, there were no overnight polls in those days; I sure would like to see what clearing the Temple did to Jesus' approval ratings. Of course, I suspect it might have been a "push" for it might well have delighted about the same number of people He angered, for the Temple was big business at Passover; there were jobs that depended on it. Come to think of it, I'll bet His approval dropped.

In clearing the Temple, He asserted His role as Messiah; this would be difficult for the Jewish leaders to have missed. Coupled with His entry into the city as King, they were certainly had a second good reason for concern: Not only was He very popular with the people, He was the agent of God.

Yes indeed, something had to be done to preserve their positions, and nothing scares a politician, and make no mistake they were politicians, than losing office.

How could they turn the tide?

Their first move would be to issue a very public challenge to His authority, for in clearing the Temple, hadn't He broken a law of some kind? It seems likely that nobody had made up a law for clearing the Temple and asserting that it is a house of prayer; who would dare? Yet He had challenged their authority in the most public of ways.

They concocted a plan...

They would send the best and the brightest to trap Him, He might win a round or two, but in the end, He would surely make a mistake...

Surely He would, after all, they were the great ones, He was only an uneducated Galilean!

## Chapter 20

### ***Let Battle Commence***

Luke 20:1-8

Here's another trustworthy saying: "When you start a war, whether military or verbal, never underestimate your opponent."

Yep, that one is me too.

The time has come for the first assault wave to attack Jesus. He is teaching the crowds about the good news, when He is approached by the chief priests and teachers of the law. These are the best and the brightest of the Jewish leadership; this is strength against strength, a full frontal attack. They demand to know by whose authority He is doing the things He's doing; namely clearing the Temple and ruining their cash flow...

Jesus' reply is less than 20 words in two short sentences. He will answer their question, if they answer His, which is, "John's baptism— was it from heaven or of human origin?"

A simple theological question for such giants of scholarship and piety...

Luke tells us of their dilemma:

*They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet." (20:5-6)*

They held an impromptu caucus. They knew right off they were in trouble... and everyone was watching! They came up with a solution... They replied that they didn't know.

It's very important for us to think carefully about this: This was to be a clash of power against power. The Jewish leaders, who were the highest *authorities* in the Jewish world on such matters, were in the process of challenging the *authority* of a carpenter's son from the provinces who had never been educated, and in 19 words, He had them in a corner.

Whose *authority* is in question now?

Jesus declined to address their question since they had ducked His question.

Again I ask: Whose *authority* is in question now?

The best and the brightest are on the ropes, and Jesus is about to deliver the knockout with a nice little story...

### ***There was this vineyard...***

Luke 20:9-19

We continue the story of the assault of the Jewish leaders against Jesus in the Temple courtyards; we pick up from last time with the chief priests and teachers of the law, the best and the brightest, on the ropes. Jesus finishes them off with a little story about a vineyard...

The owner of the vineyard hired some tenants to operate the vineyard; He has gone away. At harvest time he sends a servant to collect his portion of the harvest, but the tenants beat him up and kick him out. The owner sends two more servants with the same result. The owner decides to send his son for surely those tenants will respect his son.

The tenants see an opportunity; they reason that if they kill the son, they will inherit the vineyard themselves. They murder him. When the owner hears of this what will he do?

He will go to the vineyard and kill the tenants!

“Heaven forbid” say the people in the crowd, and Jesus poses a question:

*Jesus looked directly at them and asked, “Then what is the meaning of that which is written:*

*“The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone”?*

*Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.” (20:17-18)*

The best and the brightest knew exactly what the meaning was...

God was the owner. The vineyard was Israel, the servants were the prophets, Jesus is the son and they were the tenants!

They desperately wanted to seize Jesus right then and there, but they were afraid of the crowd, for they had utterly failed in their attempt to turn the crowd against Him: They withdrew...

### ***The second assault team moves into position***

Luke 20:20-26

What do you do when your best troops fail to defeat your opponent in a full frontal assault? Well naturally, you cheat!

At least that’s what the Jewish leaders tried to do.

You'll recall that they have sent their best and brightest to Jesus in an attempt to turn the people against Him with a direct challenge to His authority to clear the Temple and teach. This really should have worked, for everyone knew who the authorities were in Jewish life, yet Jesus made fools of them in 19 words. Like I said before, if you want to start a war of words, never underestimate your opponent.

The Jewish leadership decided to use spies to trick Jesus.

The spies pretended to be sincere. They positively dripped with sincerity as they asked him the question; naturally it was a trap question, for any answer He gave would ensnare Him, either with the people or with the Romans. The Jewish leaders really didn't care who killed Him, as long as someone did...

The question was so innocently simple: "Is it right that we pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (20:22)

It was certainly a question that would interest everyone present. If He said yes, He would anger everyone and if He said no He would be subject to treason charges by the Romans...

He said neither.

*"Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?"*

*"Caesar's," they replied.*

*He said to them, "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."  
(20:24-25)*

That was all it took to shut the spies up, they had no choice but to retreat in failure. The third assault team would pose a much more fascinating threat...

### ***One Last Attempt: The Third Assault***

Luke 20:27-40

Having failed to trap Jesus in two waves of attack, they try a third time. This time, the Sadducees move forward and pose a rather twisted hypothetical that is fraught with more political danger than it is with theological danger. The Sadducees and Pharisees had been at each others' throats for a long time over the subject of resurrection from the dead; the Sadducees did not accept any sort of resurrection while the Pharisees did. Might they be able to get Jesus to push the Pharisees over the top with a hypothetical question involving resurrection and marriage?

Oh it was terribly clever, and it left the Sadducees with a great deal of plausible deniability in case the people were outraged, and every politician likes plausible deniability. Oh yes, if Jesus' answer so angers the Pharisees that they kill Him right then and there, that's a good outcome for the Sadducees. If that angers the people and they rise against the Pharisees that would be even better...

The hypothetical is based on the tradition that if a man is married and dies childless, his brother will marry the widow and produce children for the dead brother. The Sadducees run a crazy hypothetical in which seven brothers end up being married to the same woman, each in his turn, and they all die before a child is born. In the resurrection, whose wife would that woman be? You see, they could comprehend a man having more than one wife, but a woman with multiple husbands was beyond even imagining, so I'm sure they thought they had Jesus in a corner.

"Never underestimate your opponent."

In His answer, Jesus smashes their idea about there being no resurrection without even addressing it directly. In the resurrection, there will be no need for marriage or children; we will be "like the angels" in this respect. When the Kingdom comes in its fullness, there will be no further need for bearing and raising children, for it is the full number of the redeemed who ultimately enter the Kingdom when Jesus returns.

Jesus went on to show that there had already been a resurrection of sorts, for God had long ago described Himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" and our God is the God of the living, not of the dead.

There would be no further questions; they would need a new strategy.

However, Jesus wasn't quite finished...

### ***Who is My Father?***

*Then Jesus said to them, "Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms:*

*"The Lord said to my Lord:  
"Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies  
a footstool for your feet."*

*David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?"*

Luke 20:41-44

Jesus seizes the initiative with a thorny question of His own, and in so doing, not only are His opponents silenced, but He also has exposed the theological error that everyone seems to have about His Messianic mission in Jerusalem. Jewish teaching of the day emphasized that the Messiah, son of David, will come to the city to restore Israel as a great kingdom in the pantheon of Nations.

This, however is not to be the case, for Jesus has come to establish a Kingdom that is entirely apart from the pantheon of Nations, for it is not to be of this world at all. The Messiah would

indeed be of the line of David, but the Messiah will be far greater than David. He might have the genetics of Davidic descent, but He will be the very Son of Almighty God.

Notice in the Psalm He quoted, David is speaking, and he uses the word “Lord” twice. The first refers to God the Father, the second to His Son. David calls the Son “my Lord” indicating that the paternity of Jesus vastly transcends genetics.

When you consider the actual wording of the Psalm, Jesus’ point is irrefutable and so His critics have nothing to say. Now, notice Jesus’ precise wording: He spoke of the Messiah in the third person... “he” and not “I”.

His time was now close at hand, but it hadn’t come quite yet.

### **Beware!**

*While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, “Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”*

Luke 20:45-47

Notice that Jesus has just asked His opponents the question concerning the paternity of the Messiah, seizing the initiative. Then without hesitation He turned to the disciples and says these things for their instruction so everyone can hear it. His scorn is directed at all of the teachers of the law, including Pharisees and Sadducees alike.

They are hypocrites who go out of their way to appear to be righteous and holy, but they are neither. They cherish the honor they receive in society, yet they do not deserve honors. They put on a great show and fool many people, but the disciples must not be fooled, for it is all a lie.

It is hard to say exactly what He meant when He said they “devour widows’ houses”, but I would imagine that He meant something like they would steal from those who are helpless with hardly a thought or care...

They are not the nice people they want you to think they are.

Why should Jesus say these things now?

He knew that the people by and large would turn away from Him very soon, and He would be headed for the cross. He also knew that the disciples would be put to the test; it would be very easy for them to turn away as well in the coming days. It was vitally important that they remain in their faith through the coming trial; even as one of their number betrayed Him into the hands of these very teachers of the law.

The time had come for their final preparations for what would soon befall them.

## Chapter 21

### ***Speaking of Widows...***

*As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."*

Luke 21:1-4

It's only been a moment or two since Jesus made His remark about the teachers of the law and their tendency to "devour widows' houses" and then what should happen? Right there in front of them rich people are making a show of putting large sums into the collection box, followed by a poor widow putting in just a couple of copper coins. How's that for timing?

As Jesus points out, the rich are putting in large sums they will never miss, and the poor widow is putting all she has and will likely go hungry as a result.

In strictly earthly terms, the rich with their large sums are buying influence and high honor with their contributions; no doubt the bystanders are quite impressed with the substantial sound of all that money clanging around in the collection box; how pious they must be!

Who would even notice the poor widow and her trivial contribution; get out of the way so someone can make a real contribution!

God, it would seem, isn't all that impressed with the large contribution, for the rich person will not notice that it is gone. God takes note of the person who gives everything they have to His service, whether it is a great amount or a tiny amount, for they have given their all.

This provides a huge contrast with the false piety of those who would shortly have Jesus killed.

### ***War, Destruction and the End***

Luke 21:5-36

In this section Jesus is speaking to the disciples about something that troubles many to this day; it all began innocently enough when they were noticing the amazing beauty of the Temple:

*Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down." (21:5-6)*

In the verses that follow, Jesus tells them that the Temple and the entire city of Jerusalem will soon be utterly destroyed. The context of the passage is easy enough to see in the two verses

above, yet this is a controversy in certain quarters today. You can view this however you like; I'm not going to argue about it. For our purposes here, I will only give a few general observations, since I have written on the subject extensively in the past...

There is a much more detailed parallel passage in Matthew 24-25 and for those who are interested in further reading; I would suggest you check out my comments on those two chapters.

The disciples ask a reasonable question:

*“Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” (21:7)*

In Matthew's account the question is slightly different:

*“Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3b)*

I mention this difference because the answer Jesus gives in Luke's account is easier to understand when compared with Matthew's account of the question.

Jesus answers the question about the destruction of Jerusalem in Luke 21:5-24 and talks about His Second coming in 21:24-36.

Notice that in His reply about the destruction of Jerusalem, that there really isn't a particular sign about when it will happen, other than the fact that things will be going along more or less as always. There will be rumors of His coming, rumors about wars and calamities, natural disasters and all the rest, just like always, indeed just like any day's news in our time. The only sure sign would be when there is an army beginning to surround the city, and when that happens run!

Of course history tells us that Jerusalem was utterly destroyed by Roman Armies in 70 AD.

Relating to the Second Coming, His primary message is that we be ready whenever He comes. If you look very carefully, the “signs” He mentions for the Second Coming you'll see that they are things that seem to happen quite a lot through history. In fact, every generation from the First Century until the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have believed His coming was right about at hand... but it still hasn't taken place.

So what can do other than to be ready in case He comes today?

## Chapter 22

### **Judas Goes Rogue**

*Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.*

Luke 22:1-6

With these words, the greatest betrayal of all is set into motion; things will begin to happen rather quickly. The Jewish leaders found themselves in a precarious position at that moment; they simply had to find a way to get at Jesus in a secluded setting. As had been the case for quite some time now, they feared their own people who seemed to like Him. He had been right there in the Temple more than once in recent days, but despite their best attempts to turn the people against Him, Jesus always seemed to make them look foolish. Needless to say, this made their predicament more and more precarious; what if He would incite the people to directly act against *them*?

So they plotted in secret...

...and then the greatest of gifts fell right into their laps.

Let's stop and think for a moment: If you are the religious elite, the best and the brightest, the most righteous and pious of God's servants on earth and you find yourself in a quandary like this, what is the best thing that could possibly happen?

Treachery, of course.

Luke tells us that at this precise moment, Satan entered into Judas, and Judas went to the Leadership with a proposition.

If you are Satan, you must know that the time has come to destroy the Son of God, for if you do not take your chance now, He might well redeem all of Israel, and then where would you be? No, this was a moment for decisive action, and he took decisive action.

Naturally the Jewish Leaders are thrilled for such salvation for their plans, and they quickly strike a deal with Judas, who will betray Jesus for money at the earliest possible moment.

The die is cast, the stage is set and the pivotal climax of human history is about to unfold just as Satan has desired it to. Will Jesus pull the iron out of the fire one more time— or will they finally be rid of Him?

## ***The Last supper, part 1***

Luke 22:7-23

Luke's account of the Last Supper is interesting for its brevity. In such a brief account, two main themes seem to emerge; in this first part, the main theme is His sacrifice, in the balance of the narrative, it is their trials and roles in the Kingdom.

Luke begins with a brief account of the arrangements for the Passover meal (22:7-13) and then the hour came for them to sit down together. Notice that Luke refers to them as "apostles" for the first time in 22:14 as they sit down at the table; it was only a few verses earlier (22:11) that they were still called "disciples".

Jesus opens with an interesting personal observation:

*"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." (22:15-16)*

He was eager to eat the Passover meal with them one more time, for everything was about to change; there would be no more Passover dinners with Jesus. Some might suggest that this means we will have Passover in the Kingdom, but notice that He didn't say that here; He said that the symbolic sacrifice of the Passover would be fulfilled.

That is something quite different.

Unlike other accounts of this event, Luke has Jesus taking the cup first and the bread second. Why he did this, I cannot say; I've read some scholarly essays on the question over the years, but I haven't been convinced by any of them. I'll only say here that I find it curious...

Notice that when Jesus takes the cup and divides it among them and tells them that He will not partake of the "fruit of the vine" again until the Kingdom of God comes. Then of course, He takes the bread and tells them that it represents His body which is to be given for them.

After the meal, He again takes the cup and tells them that it is His blood of the new covenant which is "poured out for you". In these snippets we have the exact nature of the New Covenant, which is the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham represented in the Passover sacrifice. To put it differently, in less than 24 hours from this moment, Jesus will perform the sacrifice that the Passover lamb put off and the need for any further sacrifice will be eliminated forever. Jesus' sacrifice will indeed be the last and final sacrifice under the Old Covenant which will immediately be rendered obsolete by the New.

Amazingly, Jesus kept right on talking...

*"But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!" They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this. (22:21-23)*

He's just dropped the biggest theological bombshell of all time on the apostles, something they have never yet come close to comprehending, and then turns their attention to the fact that among their number is the man who will very shortly betray Him into the hands of those who will kill Him. This leaves a question: When the betrayal takes place, will the remaining apostles connect the dots?

Naturally, the guys being the guys, they begin to dispute among themselves who the traitor could possibly be... and which one of them is the greatest as we will see in the next part of Luke's narrative.

### ***The Last supper, part 2***

*A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials.<sup>9</sup> And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Luke 22:24-30

So there they are, sitting around the table at the Last Supper arguing over who might be the traitor, and which one of them is the greatest. I'm sure that later on they would have agreed that none was looking all that great at that moment. Jesus poured cold water on their delusions of grandeur: The greatest is the one who looks like a lowly servant.

From a purely earthly viewpoint, this seems like hogwash; what's so great about a servant?

For me, the key to understanding this came when Jesus told them that God had conferred the Kingdom upon Jesus, and Jesus is conferring it upon the apostles. We are near the end of Luke's narrative concerning the life of Jesus: Did He ever act like a grand king? No, He always deported Himself as a servant, the servant of all. At that very hour, He was only a very short time away from allowing Himself to be captured by evil men and put to *death in the service of His Father*. This is hardly something that the great ones of human culture would usually consent to doing.

While the disciples/apostles wouldn't quite get the point that night and the next day, it wouldn't be long before they did understand His teaching, with the aid of the Holy Spirit. For when the Kingdom came at Pentecost, just a few weeks hence, they would be God's humble servants; when the Kingdom comes in its fullness when Christ returns, they will be seated upon thrones judging the 12 Tribes of Israel.

We face the same challenge of understanding today. How often we see people in the kingdom who put themselves forward as great to the adulation of many. Seldom however, do we notice the truly great as they serve in humility.

### ***The Last supper, part 3***

*“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”*

*But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”*

*Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”*

*Then Jesus asked them, “When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?”*

*“Nothing,” they answered.*

*He said to them, “But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.”*

*The disciples said, “See, Lord, here are two swords.”*

*“That’s enough!” he replied.*

Luke 22:31-38

With these words, Luke wraps up his account of the Last Supper, doing so on an ominous note. Recall that the disciples have been discussing which of them will be the greatest and Jesus has set them straight on a few points. Here He hints about Peter being tested in his faith and falling short that very morning and how that will take place at the instigation of the Evil One. Yet even so, when that phase passed, He tells Peter to “strengthen” his brothers in their faith. He reminded them that in the past, when He sent them out on their own with literally nothing, they had lacked for nothing because of the providence of God, and so it would be in the future.

Yet now, He was about to leave them; they would be moving into a new era in which they would have to operate outside of His literal presence in this dark world, and they would need their “purse” and maybe even a sword; yet God would provide.

John in his account includes Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit; Luke omits it and the result in Luke’s narrative is that we leave this scene with a clear sense of foreboding. How is it that God would see them through the coming trials?

I will not pretend to know why Luke left the narrative without telling of the promised Holy Spirit, but I would suggest that his approach leaves us with a sensation similar to that experienced by the disciples who, not understanding what Jesus had promised, must have headed out to pray with their heads spinning and feeling very unsure of what was to become of them.

### ***In the Garden***

Luke 22:39-46

Jesus leads the disciples out of the upper room and into a garden on the Mount of Olives that He frequented for prayer on that tense night. When He reached their spot, He told the disciples to pray that they would not fall into temptation, and went on a little further to a solitary place to pray. It's funny isn't it that He told to pray not to fall into temptation without telling them what sort of temptation they were about to face. Would they be tempted with too much wine, with women, with a crooked business deal...?

Not on that night of nights.

Alone, Jesus prays...

*“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (22:42-44)*

While Jesus went to the cross willingly, He wasn't entirely thrilled with the prospect; who can blame Him? Look at His prayer: He asked if there was another way forward, but if not then God's will is the only will He would do. He certainly had the raw power to avoid the cross; He could have spoken the word, and His tormenters would have fallen dead.

But He would not speak that word.

An angel ministered to Him giving strength. His sweat fell “like drops of blood”. Note that His sweat was not blood, it was sweat, but it fell “like” blood to the ground; He was really sweating. Yet even in the midst of His anguish, He was submissive to the will and purpose of His Father.

*And the least among you will be the greatest...*

Arising from prayer, He returned to the disciples only to find that they had fallen asleep, exhausted from sorrow. He woke them up and told them to pray that they don't fall into temptation.

Little did they know that temptation was just about to arrive upon the scene...

### ***Temptation Arrives***

Luke 22:47-53

Jesus was still speaking to the sleepy disciples when their temptation burst upon the scene in the form of a large force that had been sent to arrest Him in the dead of night, led by none other than Judas Iscariot. Judas had arranged with his sponsors to reveal the identity of Jesus with a kiss... as though they didn't know what He looked like.

Such irony!

The disciples are confused; is this what He meant when He had spoken earlier of swords? Someone hacked the ear off of one of the men who had come to arrest Jesus. Jesus tells them to stop and heals the man.

Whenever I read of the arrest of Jesus, I'm amazed at the contrast between His time of prayer, and His actions when the actual moment comes for Him to submit Himself to the cross. Look carefully at the text and ask yourself who is actually in command of this scene. The temple guards and officials have come upon them with an overwhelming force and you would expect that the temple officials would be firmly in command of the situation, but they are not. Not only is Jesus firmly in command of the situation, He shames them:

*Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns." (22:52-53)*

Oh yes, what big men they were, sneaking around in the dark, taking an overwhelming force of men out into the night to arrest a preacher whom they could have arrested at any time in the temple courts. Of course, out here in the darkness of night, no one would know who had done this deed; they would have plausible deniability for their actions.

Shameful indeed!

As we read Luke's account of this scene, it would appear that the disciples have avoided falling into temptation to deny Jesus; after all they were right there with drawn swords— they even obeyed His command to stop. Yet, this was only the beginning of the ordeal.

### ***Peter Succumbs to Temptation***

Luke 22:54-65

Jesus is led from the Garden by the force sent to arrest Him; He is taken to the courtyard at the home of the High Priest and held there. Peter follows at a discreet distance and quietly joins a group of people gathered around a fire in the courtyard. It would be hard for anyone to say for certain why Peter was there, other than to see what would happen to Jesus, but in due course he was recognized, first by a servant girl and then two more times. Each time someone spoke up about his identity, Peter denied ever having known Jesus.

And then the rooster crowed.

According to Luke's narrative, Peter found himself looking right into the eyes of the Lord at that moment: He had succumbed to the temptation Jesus had warned him about, and the prediction that he would deny Jesus three times before the rooster crowed had come true.

Peter was devastated and rushed out of the courtyard and wept "bitterly".

This is the point where I am supposed to ask if we too would deny Jesus when the going gets tough, and where you say 'no way'... but I won't... because there is really no way to place ourselves in Peter's circumstances honestly. It's kind of a funny thing, we can look back at the story of the disciples from start to finish, and find all kinds of fault with them. We can comment, as all of us have, on how they didn't always "get it" when Jesus taught them. We can ask how they could see so many miracles and then still have questions. We can be critical all day long about the things they might have done or said, but the reality of the situation is that they are us; we are every bit as clueless, stubborn and silly as they were.

Yes, it is true that they had the advantage of being in the physical presence of Jesus and actually bearing witness to His miracles. Yet in spite of that, they had no idea how the story was going to end, even though Jesus told them several times. We must recognize that the ending of the story ran completely counter to everything they had been taught and had known... and people rising from their graves are nothing if not foreign to all of us.

We who know how the story ended and all that happened after that are still bound by the things we have been taught, the things we have seen and the things *we think we know*. Very often, this makes us even more clueless than the disciples were. I think that if we are honest about it, had we been in the same position as Peter was, we would have done the same thing; or we wouldn't have been in the courtyard at all.

During this time, the soldiers guarding Jesus had a bit of fun with Him before daybreak and the momentous events that would follow.

## Chapter 23

### *Jesus on Trial*

Luke 22:66-23:25

Luke's account of the trial of Jesus, which was actually three "trials" in one, is not the easiest to follow. Sadly, he left out some details that would make the whole tale more sensible to read, details that Matthew and John recorded. Yet I think there is a certain wisdom in Luke's approach, for if nothing else, it reveals to us that the big players in this drama were really little more than pawns on a great chessboard.

First there were the Jewish leaders, who on purely human terms were the instigators of the whole thing. Of course, we've already seen that they were really Satan's pawns in an attempt to cut short the mission of Jesus, the Messiah of God. Their behavior through the whole story is nothing short of ridiculous as they went against everything they believed in to silence God's voice in the midst of His people. It would be a fair question to ask how such a thing was possible, and yet Satan uses this same tactic even today.

Herod as we know was afraid of Jesus, thinking that He might have been John the Baptist come back to life. When Jesus was brought before Herod, He was asked many questions that He chose not to answer, and then He was ridiculed and insulted, but in the end, big bad Herod returned Him to Pilate, too fearful to render the judgment he would have loved to render.

If there was anyone in this story who might have changed the tide of history, it was Pilate, for Pilate wanted no part in any of this. He knew perfectly well that the whole Jesus matter was nonsense; that Jesus had not broken any Roman law... and he said so more than once. All of the false charges, all of the blatant lies coming from the Jewish authorities, the handiwork of Satan himself, were not motivating Pilate to act against Jesus. Even so, in the end, Pilate bowed to the political pressure that was brought to bear in the form of an implied threat of rebellion.

Jesus was led off to be crucified.

In the larger sense, there is an amazing paradox in play through this drama. Satan was trying to kill Jesus before He could realize the Kingdom of God that would be Satan's undoing. Yet apparently unknown to Satan, he was playing right into God's hands, for God's purpose was not to rise Israel to her former glory, it was to build a Kingdom that included all of humanity, and so, Jesus must go to the cross. One can almost say that the entire situation was God's trap that even Satan fell into.

So off Jesus went to His destiny, a destiny that not only is Satan's ultimate destruction, but that is also our ultimate salvation.

## ***Jesus Completes His Mission***

Luke 23:26-49

Any time you read a transcript something is lost, for a transcript reads without emotion or emphasis and a great deal of the communication that took place is lost. Most human communication is nonverbal whereas a transcript is only verbal, thus voice inflection, tonal quality facial expressions and body language are all gone. As we read Luke's words, our perception of what is going on tends to be rather stale; we have a conversation recorded between the three who are being crucified and it reads as though they are sitting by a warm fire with nice cups of coffee on the table in front of them, along with fine pastries... and nothing could be further from the truth for they were in the process of being tortured to death slowly, agonizingly...

Luke mentions that the Romans grabbed a guy named Simon on the street and forced him to carry Jesus' cross through the streets, but he neglects to mention that Jesus was physically unable to carry it because of the beating He had receive by their hands. His back would have been torn open, He would have been a bloody mess; probably His body would be in shock. When He spoke to the "daughters of Jerusalem" (23:28-31) He would have had difficulty speaking and have been in unbelievable pain. Even to have seen this scene would probably cause most of us to lose our breakfast in the street.

Yet Jesus is quoting Scripture...

The three condemned men are stripped naked and nailed to their crosses. When they are lifted up, no doubt they were immediately in a state of panic even through their unimaginable pain, for as soon as these crosses were upright, they would be unable to breathe, for they could only take a breath by pushing up on their feet which had a nail driven through them rubbing their bare backs against the rough wood of the cross; try to imagine what that would feel like for Jesus who had His back ripped open.

That is where Luke inserts his conversation.

With all of this in mind, take another look at what is said.

*One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"*

*But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."*

*Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*

*Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

Luke 23:39-43

Can you hear them struggling for breath, their crying out in pain, their emotion and sheer terror?

Sadly, many commentators like to get into the gruesome details of this scene to impart guilt on their readers, for after all, Jesus was bearing my sins and yours too on that cross. As for me, I don't think that imparting guilt is a very useful strategy for teaching about this scene for guilt is a negative emotion that impairs our relationship with our Lord, for it tends to defeat the very purpose for which He went willingly to the cross— His purpose was to take our guilt away. What we really have is quite different, for we have a picture of our human condition:

The first criminal is angry. Bystanders are hurling insults at Jesus, and he joins in and uses the occasion to demand that Jesus save him from the situation as though it was Jesus' fault that he had committed a capital crime. How many people have you known who seek to blame God for their circumstances and turn away from Him?

The second criminal, realizing that he is responsible for his own situation rebukes the first man, instead asking Jesus to "remember" him in the Kingdom. Which of these two men, in spite of the horrific circumstances in which they met Jesus, was justified before God on that day?

Round about noon, the landscape became dark, perhaps a storm was moving in. The curtain in the temple is torn in two around three in the afternoon, and Jesus commends His spirit to His Father and breathes His last... The curtain that was now broken in two was what symbolically had been the separation between humanity and the presence of God. The commander of the Roman troops on the scene was moved by what he witnessed, the onlookers went on their way... and the Messianic mission of Jesus Messiah was now completed; darkness was upon the land.

## Chapter 24

### ***Burial and Resurrection***

Luke 23:50-24:12

It is interesting that we now discover that not all of the Jewish leaders were involved in the plot to kill Jesus; at least one Pharisee dissented, although his opposition isn't mentioned in the accounts of the trials of Jesus. Joseph from a town called Arimathea was the man. He was wealthy as one might expect of such a person, and had a tomb that had never been used. Having influence, he approached Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, and Pilate agreed. In haste, he took the body down from the cross and quickly laid it to rest in his tomb, and had the heavy stone rolled into place before the sun set. The women from Galilee took note that they would need to prepare spices to complete the process as soon as the Sabbath was over.

Just after sunup they approached the tomb with their preparations no doubt wondering how they would move the great stone blocking their way into the tomb, but when they arrived on the scene, the stone had already been removed. Quickly they discovered that the body was missing, and as they wondered what could have happened, they found themselves in the presence of two "men" dressed in robes that shown like lightning. The "men" asked why they were seeking the living among the dead and reminded the women of Jesus' predictions concerning His death and resurrection...

The women hurried back to the disciples and told their story with great excitement, but the disciples thought it was nonsense. Yet Peter and John did run off to the tomb to see for themselves that it was empty.

Sadly however, they couldn't comprehend what had happened there, for even after Jesus had told them three times that He would be handed over to evil men and killed, and then would rise from the grave on the third day, and even after the women had told them what the angels of the Lord had said, they simply couldn't believe it.

Hadn't Jesus warned them about this sort of thing just a few nights before?

### ***On the Road Again***

Luke 24:13-35

Two followers of Jesus were walking along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus that covers a distance of about seven miles. As they were walking along they were discussing the unsettling events of recent days when they came upon another man who asked them what they were talking about. Their response seemed to be one of wonder; was this guy the only man in these parts who didn't know about what had taken place concerning Jesus?

They gave the man a quick synopsis of events, including the body of the Lord missing from the tomb. The man now had his turn to wonder who was clueless here... Didn't they know what the Messiah was destined to do? Of course He was to die at the hands of evil men, and of course He was to rise from the grave; the stranger went through all of the Scriptures with them as they walked along, revealing God's entire plan to them.

They had no clue that it was Jesus they were talking with on that lonely road.

When they arrived in Emmaus, the two insisted that the stranger stay with them, for it was almost sunset; he agreed. When they sat down to eat, the man took the bread, gave thanks and broke it... and their eyes were opened. This was Jesus Himself, alive and well after having risen from the dead. As soon as they realized the identity of their new companion, He disappeared from their sight. With much excitement the two rushed back to the city, to the house where the Eleven were staying, along with other followers of Jesus. They told of all they had seen and heard.

When the women told the Eleven about the empty tomb, the disciples hadn't really been willing to believe that Jesus had arisen from the grave. Peter and John had rushed out to verify that the body was missing, but for them the real question was who had stolen it, and why. Would they believe the two men who had just returned from Emmaus?

They wouldn't have very long for questions...

### ***Jesus Pays a Visit***

Luke 24:36-53

I mentioned at the beginning of Luke's description of the Last Supper that he approaches these events in a way that leaves out many details that are recorded in the other gospels, but that in doing so he makes certain themes very clear without having to sift through a lot of detail. Never is this approach clearer than in this last passage of the book; it reads almost like a highlight reel of the risen Christ's interactions with the disciples. Yet in doing so, Luke has brought the most important theological elements together so that his readers can "get" the gist of what is happening, and how it ties in with the Acts narrative.

His scene is the house where the Eleven are staying in Jerusalem with an undisclosed number of other followers. The two men who encountered Jesus on the Emmaus road have returned and told their story when suddenly Jesus is present in their midst: "Peace be with you." They are terrified thinking they are seeing a ghost.

*"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."  
(24:38-39)*

After this, seeking to solidify the impression that He is indeed real and not a ghost or spirit of some kind, He asks if there's anything to eat, and they serve Him a fish dinner. He gets to the important part:

*"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."*

*"This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (24:44, 46-49)*

Here it is: Jesus reminding the disciples/apostles of what He had taught them, and then tying together His ministry and theirs which was about to begin. I am confident in telling you here that this passage from Jesus' own lips is why Luke only gives us a "highlight reel" account of the post crucifixion story. You see dear reader, if we can understand this connection between the gospel story and the Acts story, then we can also see our parts in the overall narrative, for we as the Body of Christ, are the successors to the disciples and the early church ministry.

I have left out one verse, verse 45. In that verse Luke adds that Jesus caused their minds to be opened so that they could comprehend everything Jesus was telling them. I can't help but note that Luke had never told us that anyone had "closed" their minds; did you notice such a statement anywhere along the way?

No, of course not.

The problem that the disciples, along with most other people at the time had encountered was that they had closed their own minds because they *thought they knew what should happen*, and when God had other ideas, they refused to accept them.

After this, Jesus led them out of town in the direction of Bethany. He stopped to bless them, and while doing so He was lifted up to heaven. They worshipped Him and returned in joy to Jerusalem where they praised God and awaited the coming of the Spirit.

Luke would pick up the story in the book of Acts: Our study of Luke's Gospel has concluded, and I wonder as I finish this up how many of us struggle to understand our roles in the wide and long scope of redemptive history because *we think we know* that God has selected us to receive His blessings, and has selected others to do His work.

I pray now that God will open our eyes to see the truth.