

**THE GOSPEL  
ACCORDING  
TO LUKE**

*by*

*Noel Due*

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# Introduction

## A. Authorship and Date

The Book of Luke never actually states that it was written by Luke. How, then, did it come to be ascribed to him? We know that the Book of Luke and the Book of the Acts were written by the one person and both were dedicated to the same individual (viz. Theophilus). We also know that the author of them both was not one of the Twelve, but was one who had gained his information from eyewitnesses and who had taken into account earlier narratives (Luke 1:1–4). From Acts, however, we can also deduce that the author was a travelling companion of Paul (see Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1—28:16 where the word ‘we’ is used). While some scholars have denied the significance of the ‘we’ passages, the most natural interpretation is to see them for what they are—accounts of journeys undertaken together. We know that Luke was a medical doctor and a travelling companion of Paul (Col. 4:14; II Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24), and there is some evidence to suggest the author of the third Gospel was medically very astute (see the description of Peter’s mother-in-law’s condition in Luke 4:38 and that of the leper in 5:12).

When we bear all this in mind, and note that from the earliest days the authorship has been attributed to Luke, the travelling companion of Paul, we should be free to accept that it was indeed written by him. Some scholars have rejected Lucan authorship, but if the Book was indeed written by some other person, why was it attributed to the relatively insignificant person of Luke to begin with?

Though he does not mention himself by name, Luke was the author of the third Gospel.

As to the date of his work there has been much debate. If we assume, however, that both Luke and Acts were penned by the same person, and from the prefaces of each Book we know that the Gospel was completed first, Luke must have finished his Gospel a year or so prior to the close of the Book of the Acts. This would give a date of *circa* AD 60–61.

## B. Purpose and Readers

Luke, in fact, gives us his purpose in the preface of the Gospel. The work is dedicated to an otherwise unknown, but obviously highly regarded individual, Theophilus, so that he might clearly know and understand the events of Jesus’ life. But Luke is not concerned that Theophilus knows these things as a set of mere historical facts, for he interprets the events by focussing them on the Cross and Resurrection. Luke’s Gospel is thus a theological history of Jesus, a fact which is made even more clear when we consider Luke and Acts as a whole, which was the original intention. In the first volume we read of all that Jesus began to do and to teach, while in the second we read (by implication) all that He continued to do and to teach (cf. Acts 1:1f.).

The immediate recipient, Theophilus, appears to have been a Gentile who has had some contact with the word of Jesus. While Luke has dedicated his works to him, they could be directed to any one in a similar situation. He has desired to write an accurate and persuasive account of the person of Jesus and the significance of His work. To this end he has succeeded admirably.

### C. Features of the Gospel of Luke

There can be little doubt that Luke's Gospel is particularly appealing to readers of the New Testament. The reasons for this appeal are doubtless as varied as the readers, but there are a number of elements in Luke's work that make it unique and enhance its character.

Luke, for example, includes much material that the other writers do not include, thus making it the longest book in the New Testament. It is due to Luke's Gospel that we know of the events surrounding the births of John and Jesus. Only Luke includes material relating to Jesus' childhood and much of what we find in 'Luke's Special Section' (viz. Luke 9:51—19:27) is unique to his account. In Luke also we read of the events of the Emmaus road, and the manner of his concluding section leaves us ready (and eager) to read his second volume—the Book of the Acts.

Luke tells his account in a very vivid style, and of particular interest is his own interest in people. Most of the parables in Luke focus on people, and people in very domestic situations. He also draws wonderful pictures of characters such as Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary, Simeon, John the Baptist, Mary and Martha, Zacchaeus, Cleopas and his friend on the Emmaus road, and even Herod! And this list does not exhaust the number of people of whom he wrote. The resultant narrative, thus rich in personal testimony and narrative appeal, addresses the reader personally. But Luke's interest in people is not an interest in people *per se*. Rather, he tells of people who have been encountered by God Himself. Luke's work is a Gospel, i.e. an annunciation of good news, and through his carefully constructed narrative that good news comes afresh to every generation of readers as powerfully as it came to those of whom he wrote.

Throughout this commentary the reader will be alerted to a number of elements that emerge as strong themes in Luke. Without going into detail at this point, therefore, we are able simply to mention some of his key themes. Luke's Gospel (and here we must bear in mind that it is really only the first part of a two part work) stresses the *universality* of God's message of salvation. This does not mean that all will believe, but the message is for all who will believe, irrespective of social, cultural or ethnic background. Thus the angelic host sings a song of blessing to all men, John is described as being a light to the Gentiles, the Samaritans are shown as grateful receivers of God's blessings, and the parable of the wedding feast includes an invitation to all people, even those on the 'highways and the byways'. In the Book of the Acts, the unfolding of this universality is given to us in the clearest terms. Likewise Luke's Gospel has a strong emphasis on the work of the *Holy Spirit*. This One comes upon Mary to conceive the holy Child, and Zechariah and others that they might prophesy. He rests on Jesus at His baptism, drives Jesus into the wilderness and empowers Jesus for ministry. At a later occasion Jesus is said to have rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, while later again the disciples, in a clear reference to the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, are commanded to wait for power from on high. Other themes that emerge are that of the importance and manner of *prayer*, the place and danger of *wealth*, the hallmark of *joy*, and the inescapable fact that the things which God has promised He also *fulfils*. The latter theme is also taken up in a slightly different way in that both in Luke and Acts there is assurance of the *coming* of Christ, even though there be a delay in the interim period.

Every one of these themes carries on into the Book of the Acts where we see them emerge in all their richness and abundance. Indeed Luke's is an 'orderly account' which has the second volume always in view.

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1. A Warning and Encouragement	12:1–12
2. The Parable of the Rich Fool	12:13–21
3. The Father is the Faithful Provider	12:22–34
4. The Coming of the Son of Man and the Need to be Watchful	12:35–40
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1. A Healing and the Ensuing Dispute	13:10–17
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<b>J. Teaching While Travelling</b>	<b>13:22–35</b>
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2. Ten Lepers Are Healed	17:11–19
3. The Coming of the Son of Man	17:20–37
4. The Parable of the Unjust Judge	18:1–8

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| 6. | On Entering the Kingdom                           | 18:15–17 |
| 7. | The Rich Young Ruler                              | 18:18–30 |
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## VI. Jesus In Jerusalem (19:28—23:56)

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|-----------|---|--------------------|
| <b>A.</b> | <b>Jesus' Entry Into Jerusalem</b>                  | <b>19:28–48</b>    |
| 1.        | Approaching Jerusalem and the Procurement of a Colt | 19:28–35           |
| 2.        | The Adulation of the Crowds                         | 19:36–40           |
| 3.        | Jesus Weeps Over Jerusalem                          | 19:41–44           |
| 4.        | Jesus Cleanses the Temple                           | 19:45–46           |
| 5.        | Jesus Teaches in the Temple                         | 19:47–48           |
| <b>B.</b> | <b>Various Plots Against Jesus</b>                  | <b>20:1–47</b>     |
| 1.        | The Question of Authority                           | 20:1–8             |
| 2.        | The Parable of the Wicked Tenants                   | 20:9–18            |
| 3.        | The Question of Tribute to Caesar                   | 20:19–26           |
| 4.        | Testing About the Resurrection                      | 20:27–44           |
| 5.        | A Warning Against the Pharisees                     | 20:45–47           |
| <b>C.</b> | <b>Teaching Regarding the End of the Age</b>        | <b>21:1–38</b>     |
| 1.        | True Giving   | 21:1–4             |
| 2.        | The Destruction of the Temple Foretold              | 21:5–6             |
| 3.        | Signs of the End                                    | 21:7–19            |
| 4.        | The Fate of Jerusalem                               | 21:20–24           |
| 5.        | The Coming of the Son of Man                        | 21:25–28           |
| 6.        | A Parable on the Need to be Alert                   | 21:29–36           |
| 7.        | Summary of the Jerusalem Ministry                   | 21:37–38           |
| <b>D.</b> | <b>The Last Supper</b>                              | <b>22:1–23</b>     |
| 1.        | Further Plots and the Role of Judas                 | 22:1–6             |
| 2.        | Preparations for the Feast                          | 22:7–13            |
| 3.        | The Lord's Supper Itself                            | 22:14–23           |
| <b>E.</b> | <b>Jesus' Final Words to the Disciples</b>          | <b>22:24–38</b>    |
| 1.        | Who is the Greatest?                                | 22:24–30           |
| 2.        | Peter's Denial Foretold                             | 22:31–34           |
| 3.        | The Saying about the Sword                          | 22:35–38           |
| <b>F.</b> | <b>Jesus' Arrest</b>                                | <b>22:39–65</b>    |
| 1.        | Gethsemane  | 22:39–46           |
| 2.        | Judas' Betrayal and the Arrest Itself               | 22:47–53           |
| 3.        | Peter's Denial                                      | 22:54–62           |
| 4.        | Jesus' Beating                                      | 22:63–65           |
| <b>G.</b> | <b>Jesus on Trial</b>                               | <b>22:66—23:25</b> |
| 1.        | Before the Sanhedrin                                | 22:66–71           |
| 2.        | Before Pilate                                       | 23:1–7             |
| 3.        | Before Herod  | 23:8–12            |
| 4.        | Before Pilate Again                                 | 23:13–25           |

<b>H. Calvary</b>	<b>23:26–56</b>
1. Simon of Cyrene	23:26
2. Jesus' Comments to the Daughters of Jerusalem	23:27–31
3. The Crucifixion	23:32–38
4. The Repentant Criminal	23:39–43
5. Jesus' Death	23:44–49
6. Jesus' Burial	23:50–56

## **VII. The Risen Jesus (24:1–53)**

<b>A. The Discovery of the Empty Tomb</b>	<b>24:1–12</b>
<b>B. The Road to Emmaus</b>	<b>24:13–35</b>
<b>C. Jesus and the Disciples</b>	<b>24:36–43</b>
<b>D. Jesus' Final Comments</b>	<b>24:44–49</b>
<b>E. The Ascension</b>	<b>24:50–53</b>

## I. Preface (1:1–4)

The first four verses of Luke’s Gospel form one single sentence in Greek, in which Luke carefully sets out his aims and reasons for writing.

**1:1** Luke (whose name also appears in Col. 4:14; II Tim. 4:11; and Philemon 24) is not the only one to have written a record of the words and works of Jesus. ‘Many’ have undertaken the same task. Luke undertakes his task not because of their deficiencies, but because of the perceived difficulty of the task.<sup>1</sup> None of the Gospels are biographies, at least in the way that we understand the term. They are Christian documents for teaching, for evangelism, for the edification of the church, etc. They do not include all that Jesus did or taught (cf. John 20:30; 21:25), but particularly because of the birth narratives and the wider link between Luke and Acts, Luke has included more than the others.

Luke’s Gospel is a record of ‘the things accomplished [fulfilled] among us’.<sup>2</sup> The tense indicates that the events described have had their full and complete result. This accords with Luke’s emphasis on the fulfilment of prophecy in and through Christ’s ministry (cf. 1:45, 54, 55, 69, 70; 2:38; 3:3–6; 4:21, 43; 5:23; 7:20; 9:22, 44; 12:50; 18:31–33; 19:41–44; 21:21–22; 22:22; 24:25–28, 44–49; and also Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28; etc.). That which has been accomplished has been accomplished in accordance with the plan and purpose of God, and by His power. The term ‘among us’ refers to ‘the members of the church in whose midst these events took place and among whom they retain their lasting, saving significance and power’.<sup>3</sup>

**1:2** The material in Luke has been ‘handed down’ to Luke and those of his company (‘us’) by those who were ‘eyewitnesses and servants of the word’, and this ‘from the beginning’ (cf. I John 1:1f.). These eyewitnesses would include the Twelve, the brothers of Jesus, Mary and the other women, and others. The word for ‘handing down’ is seen elsewhere in the NT (e.g. Mark 7:13; Acts 6:14; I Cor. 11:2, 23; 15:3; II Pet. 2:21; Jude 3) and indicates an authoritative instruction. That they who have handed things down are designated as ‘servants of the word’ (here indicating the Gospel itself, rather than Christ as the Word become flesh—a distinctly Johannine usage) indicates the central place of Gospel proclamation in the early church.<sup>4</sup>

**1:3** In the light of all that had been passed on to him, Luke is keen to ‘write it out’ in ‘consecutive order’ for a man named ‘Theophilus’, of whom we know nothing of any certainty. That the order is consecutive does not mean strictly chronological, the Greek indicating more the orderliness and lucidity of the work, rather than chronological exactitude—though of

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek *epeidēper* here translated ‘inasmuch as’ is used only in the NT. It is a classical word meaning ‘“inasmuch as” with reference to facts already known’, (I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, The Paternoster Press Ltd, 1978, p. 41). Hendriksen (*Luke*, p. 53) gives the sense ‘since by now many . . .’.

<sup>2</sup> The translations vary at this point because the word here translated ‘accomplished’ may also be used to indicate things held in full assurance, or things most surely believed, as Paul uses the word in Rom. 14:5, 21. The context decides in favour of the more regular understanding, however, as does the fact that Luke uses the word *pragma* here for ‘things’ i.e. the emphasis is on actual historical events.

<sup>3</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> See the following references to the centrality of the word in Acts: 2:14, 22; 4:4, 29; 6:2, 7 (cf. 12:24; 19:20; 13:49); 8:4 (cf. 11:19), 14, 25; 10:36, 44; 13:4, 7, 15, 44, 46, 48; 14:3 (‘the word of His grace’, cf. 13:43; 20:24, 32), 25; 15:7, 35; 16:6, 32; 17:2 (cf. 18:4, 5); 17:11; 18:11; 19:10, 20; 20:32. The word is ‘the word of faith which we preach’ (Rom. 10:8) which is ‘the Gospel, as commissioned by God and which was communicated through His messengers by the Holy Spirit’ (cf. I Cor. 2:4–5; I Thess. 1:15; I Pet. 1:10).



course the work is broadly chronological.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Luke's task has been discharged carefully, with him 'having investigated [or followed] everything carefully from the beginning'. This task was not completed with the Gospel called Luke, however. The opening verses of Acts indicate that the Gospel is part of a two volume work.

**1:4** The aim of this labour and its being directed to Theophilus is now made plain. All has been written so that he 'might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught'. His writing and recording of events is not aimless, but to secure his reader(s) in the faith that had come to him (them).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hendriksen comments 'To him [Luke] a logical or topical connection is frequently more important than precise chronological sequence. Throughout he is writing a truly "orderly" account, as he promises here in 1:3.' *Luke*, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> On this score, see the importance attached to knowing the truth in places such as John 16:13; 17:17; Gal. 2:5; Eph. 1:13; 4:15; II Thess. 2:10–13; I Tim. 2:4; 3:15; II Tim. 2:15; II Pet. 1:12; cf. Hosea 4:6; Isa. 5:13; 1:3; etc.

## II. The Birth Narratives and Jesus' Childhood (1:5—2:52)

### A. Annunciations to Zechariah and Mary (1:5–56)

#### 1. The Prophecy of John's Birth (1:5–25).

**1:5** introduces Luke's first main topic, 'the birth narratives of John and Jesus'. The majority of this material is unique to Luke. This verse sets the time of the events as being 'in the days of Herod'<sup>1</sup> and it also introduces the main characters involved in the first part of Chapter One, viz. 'Zechariah', a 'priest' of 'the division of Abijah'<sup>2</sup>, and his wife 'Elizabeth' who is identified as being from 'the daughters of Aaron', an added blessing for a priest. Their names are particularly significant. His means, 'the Lord remembers' (viz. His covenant), and her's means, 'My God is an oath' (i.e. my God is the absolutely faithful One).<sup>3</sup>

**1:6** now fills out something of these two as people. They are designated as being 'righteous in the sight of God' and as 'walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord'. This ascription does not mean that they were sinless (cf. Job 1:1 and 42:6), but that they were people of faith who were true servants of God, in stark contrast to the general tenor of the time. As John tells us, 'the one that practices righteousness, he is righteous' (I John 3:7). In Pauline terms, Ephesians 2:8, 9 leads to Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:11 leads to Titus 2:14. Apart from the work of Christ there is no righteousness (cf. Exod. 12:13; Ps. 49:7; Isa. 53:4–6; Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:19; Rom. 3:21–24; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:22; I Pet. 2:24; Rev. 7:14), but those who receive His righteousness are evidenced by the fruit of righteousness.

**1:7** Despite their genuine piety, however, Elizabeth is described as being 'barren', something that was commonly seen as a reproach (e.g. Gen. 30:1; cf. I Sam. 1:1–11) for fertility was part of God's blessing (Gen. 1:28; Deut. 7:14; Ps. 113:9; 127; 128). While this is true as a general principle, it is wrong to suggest that barrenness, or any other affliction, is a direct sign of God's disfavour in any particular case. This was the error of Job's comforters who could only assume that Job must be suffering as punishment for his sin. In this case the ascription given of the couple in 1:6 proscribes the reader thinking that their barrenness was due to punishment for sin.

Whatever the case, Zechariah and Elizabeth had 'no children' and because they were 'both advanced in years' they were not likely to have any. For these folk the barrenness carries a double sorrow, for not only are they not blessed with children, they are not able to be the ones to give birth to the Messiah, a much longed for blessing by Jewish mothers.

**1:8–9** Having thus set the scene, we are now taken to the events that are to change their lives forever. While Zechariah 'was performing his priestly service before God, according to the

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. nearing the end of the reign of Herod the Great who reigned from 37–4 BC. Herod was an Idumean, the first foreign king of Israel. Even in the exile there was one of the tribe of Judah on the throne, though not in an effective sense (II Kings 25:27–30). As the sceptre departs from Judah, the Messiah's herald is born.

<sup>2</sup> There was a 'roster' system for the many priests to serve in the Temple (see I Chron. 24), each division being on duty twice a year for a week on each occasion. For the rest of the time they lived in their own houses.

<sup>3</sup> Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1977, p. 62.

appointed order of his division', it fell to him being 'chosen by lot' to 'enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense'. The burning of incense, which took place in the holy place at the time of the morning and evening prayers, was considered a very high honour, and indeed a priest could not offer incense more than once in his lifetime, if he was privileged to offer it at all. At the time of the offering of the incense, the other priests would withdraw, leaving the designated one to carry out his duties alone. The 'holy place' stood immediately before the 'holy of holies' into which the High Priest only could enter, and then only on the Day of Atonement.

**1:10** Outside the 'whole multitude of the people' were in prayer, as was the normal custom at this stage of the worship. During the time of the incense offering there was complete silence throughout the Temple.

**1:11–12** Inside, however, things were far from normal. 'An angel of the Lord' appeared to the aged priest, causing him to be 'troubled' and 'gripped by fear' (cf. Judg. 6:22; 13:22; Dan. 10:5–10; Luke 1:29; 2:9; Acts 10:4; etc.). The word for 'troubled' is used here in its strongest sense, i.e. 'to terrify' (cf. 24:38; Mark 6:50).<sup>1</sup>

**1:13** The angel's message immediately released him from his fear ('do not be afraid')<sup>2</sup> and announced to him that 'his petition had been heard'. As a result, he and Elizabeth, at their late age, were to be given a son to be named 'John' (i.e. 'the Lord is gracious'). What petition is meant? The tense used (an aorist) 'seems to indicate a prayer on one specific occasion rather than habitual prayer'.<sup>3</sup> The prayer that had been heard, as Morris is doubtless right in assuming, is his priestly prayer for the salvation of Israel which was associated with the evening sacrifice.

**1:14–17** now come as a prophetic description of John's ministry. His birth will be a cause for 'joy and gladness'<sup>4</sup>, but not simply for Zechariah and Elizabeth. The rejoicing engendered by his arrival will be because of his ministry. John is designated as being 'great in the sight of the Lord', as one who will 'drink no wine or liquor' (cf. Judg. 13:4; Num. 6:1–8), and as one who 'will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb'.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of his birth is restorative. He will 'turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God' (cf. Jer. 3:7, 10; Ezek. 3:19; Dan. 9:13) and he will go 'before Him' (i.e. the Lord) 'in the spirit and power of Elijah' (cf. Mark 9:13) so that (quoting Mal. 4:5f.; cf. Mal. 3:1) 'the hearts of the fathers may be turned back to the children', and the 'disobedient to the attitude of the righteous so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord'. The hearts of the fathers will have their rightful affection restored to them, relational harmony will be the fruit of the Lord's presence among His people.

The prophecy of Malachi 4:5f., however, has a sombre element as well in that the forerunner would come before the great and terrible day of the Lord. As Geldenhuys comments:

The incarnation and appearance of Christ had already brought a 'great and terrible day' into the life of the Jewish people, because by it the people were sifted. And when the majority refused to accept Him, the

<sup>1</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> There are a phenomenal number of passages (Hendriksen lists some, including Gen. 15:1; Exod. 14:13f.; Josh. 1:9; Judg. 6:23; II Kings 19:6; I Chron. 28:20; Neh. 4:14; Ps. 49:16; Isa. 10:24; Dan. 10:19; Zech. 8:13; Matt. 14:27; Mark 5:36; **Luke 1:30; 2:10; 5:10; 8:50; 12:4, 7, 32; Acts 18:9; 27:24**; John 14:1; Heb. 13:6; I Pet. 3:14; Rev. 1:17) where this formulation, or something very much like it, occurs. Apart from having the word of peace spoken to us, we must only tremble in terror in the presence of His holiness, even if that holiness is only seen in the mediated presence of His angelic servants. Marshall comments that the formula 'is almost an indicator of the divine presence', p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1974, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on joy, gladness and rejoicing is stronger in Luke/Acts than any other NT documents. See, for example, Luke 1:14, 44, 58; 2:10; 6:23; 8:1, 13; 10:17; 15:6, 7, 9, 10, 32; 19:6; 24:41, 52; Acts 2:28, 46; 8:8; 11:23; 12:14; 13:48, 52; 14:17; 15:3.

<sup>5</sup> This reference to the Holy Spirit introduces an important theme in Luke/Acts. Cf. Luke 1:35, 41, 67; 2:25–27; 3:16; 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; 11:13; 12:10, 12; 24:49; and the events of Pentecost, etc.

judgements of God smote the people in an unparalleled manner, until Jerusalem and the whole of the Jewish national existence in Palestine were totally destroyed in A.D. 70.<sup>1</sup>

**1:18–20** Zechariah's reply to the angel shows a distinct lack of faith, to which the angel does not respond in terms justifying his statement. To be sure, Abraham had asked the same question (Gen. 15:8) but from a different spirit (as Gen. 15:6 indicates). Instead the angel simply asserts who he is ('I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God') and the purpose of his visit. There is some emphasis in Gabriel's being sent to bring 'good news', a word used later characteristically by Luke to indicate the preaching of the Gospel (e.g. 2:10; 3:18; 4:18, 43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1; Acts 8:25; 14:7, 21; 16:10; etc.).<sup>2</sup> As a result of Zechariah's unbelief, the angel brings a judgement against him, telling him 'you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which shall be fulfilled at their proper time.' He indeed receives a sign, but it is also his discipline!

**1:21** Meanwhile the people waited outside, and they were 'wondering at his delay in the temple' (i.e. the sanctuary, the holy place). Normally the duties were performed quite quickly. There was a real fear of God in His service, and to dally too long may bring punishment for being presumptuous in His presence.

**1:22** Upon emerging, his physical affliction was evident to all, as the officiating priest would normally pronounce the benediction. His silence, coupled with the sign language he was using, caused them to realize that 'he had seen a vision in the temple'. 1:62 indicates that Zechariah was indeed 'mute' and not merely dumb.

**1:23** As was his duty, he saw out 'the days of his priestly service', and, when these had ended, he and Elizabeth 'returned home'.

**1:24–25** Upon their return home, Elizabeth soon conceived, in accordance with the angel's word. Elizabeth's keeping of herself in seclusion is related to the statement which follows. She did not want to be seen until it was obvious that the Lord had 'taken away my disfavour among men' (cf. Gen. 30:23).

## 2. The Prophecy of Jesus' Birth (1:26–38).

**1:26** The angel Gabriel, who played such a prominent part in the account of John the Baptist's generation, is now 'sent from God to a city [town] in Galilee called Nazareth'. For other references to Nazareth in Luke see 2:4, 39, 51; 4:16.

**1:27** The recipient of his ministry on this occasion was to be 'Mary', who is described as 'a virgin engaged<sup>3</sup> to a man named Joseph, of the descendants [household] of David'. The Greek word *parthenos* indicates a young unmarried woman, but also has clear indications of true virginity, contrary to our current connotations! Jesus was to be David's son, as the household of David is synonymous with those descended from him (cf. 1:69; 2:4; I Sam. 20:16; I Kings 12:19; 13:2; etc.).

<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> In the other places where Gabriel is mentioned by name (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26) he is a messenger of good news. Michael (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7) seems to have a function more associated with heaven's host in its battle against darkness.

<sup>3</sup> Brides could be 'betrothed' to their husbands from a very young age (at least by our standards). Usually betrothal lasted about a year, and it was as legally binding as marriage, a divorce being necessary to break it (as is indicated by Matt. 1:19). The marriage itself was not consummated until the wedding night however, and any break in the fidelity of the relationship was regarded as adultery (cf. Deut. 22:13ff., 23ff.).

**1:28** Upon entering, Gabriel delivers the greeting, ‘Hail, favoured one! The Lord is with you!’ The clear indication is that Mary has been favoured by the Lord, and this apart from any innate worth in herself (cf. 1:30).

**1:29** The response of Mary is not unlike that of Zechariah in the preceding account. She is said to be ‘greatly troubled at this statement’, and she ‘kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be’. The significant point to note is that she was not simply afraid, though this may well be true, but it is the angel’s *statement* that troubled her most. It seems she could not comprehend why she should be greeted in such terms! (cf. Ps. 138:6; Isa. 57:15).

**1:30–33** The familiar phrase ‘Do not be afraid’ issues from the angel’s mouth. The reason for her not to fear is that ‘she has found favour with God’, i.e. Gabriel had not come to her to bring judgement, but blessing. The way the latter phrase is used in the OT (e.g. Gen. 6:8; Judg. 6:17; I Sam. 1:18; II Sam. 15:25) clearly signifies ‘the free gracious choice of God who favours particular men and women; the stress is on God’s choice rather than human acceptability.’<sup>1</sup> Unless we know that we have found favour with God we must always rest uneasily. Calvin comments, ‘As all are under the scrutiny of His judgement, fear sets us afright, until He reveals Himself as our Father’.<sup>2</sup>

In Mary’s case the favour of God resting upon her is spelt out in specific terms. She will conceive and bear a son (cf. Gen. 16:11f.; Judg. 13:5; Isa. 7:14), ‘and you will call his name Jesus’.<sup>3</sup>

This son is then described. He will ‘be great’ and ‘be called the Son of the Most High’. The two are virtually synonymous descriptions of Him. ‘The Lord God [an unusual and therefore emphatic construction] will give to Him the throne of his father David’ (cf. Acts 2:30; II Sam. 3:10; 7:13, 16; Isa. 9:7), and He will ‘reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end’. The term ‘the house of Jacob’ is a synonym for Israel (e.g. Exod. 19:3; Isa. 2:5), and the eternity of David’s rule has Messianic importance (II Sam. 7:13, 16; cf. Isa. 9:7; Ps. 89; 132:11f.; Micah. 4:7; Dan. 7:14; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:24; 37:24; Hosea 3:5). Clearly this One was to be Messiah.

**1:34** There is, however, one problem that Mary recognizes. She says to the angel, ‘How can these things be, since I am a virgin’, (lit. ‘since I do not know a man’).

**1:35** Provides the answer to her question. Without going into detail the angel simply says (in synonymous parallelism), ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.’ The end point of this divine activity is given clear explanation. Because of the miraculous conception the ‘holy offspring will be called [i.e. will be] the Son of God’.<sup>4</sup> His conception by the Holy Spirit means that from the very beginning Jesus was kept from the taint of sin. As Redeemer, the Messiah had to be ‘born of woman’ (cf. Gal. 4:4), but by nature of the case His birth would have to be of a different order to normal birth since no sinful being can provide reconciliation between themselves and the One who is holy. Jesus came ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom. 8:3) meaning that His appearance was in accord with that of all sinful flesh (except where we see something of non-sinful flesh

<sup>1</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. I, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1972, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 1:21 comments on the significance of the name (thereby indicating that Matt. was possibly directed to non Hebrew speaking Gentiles). As with John the Baptist, His name was chosen by God rather than the parents. Matt. 11:27–30; Luke 19:10; John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 5:31; 13:23; Rom. 5:1; etc. all indicate what it means—that this One has come to save His people from their sins.

<sup>4</sup> The translations are equally divided on this phrase. Some (e.g. *RV*, *RSV*) express it as ‘the child shall be called holy, the Son of God’, while others express it as ‘the holy child shall be called the Son of God’ (e.g. *NASB*, *NIV*, *NEB*). Syntactically both expressions are possible. In the end they amount to the same thing. If He ‘is called holy’, i.e. He is holy by virtue of who He is, He must be ‘the Son of God’ by nature of the case—if the Father’s name is holy, so must His Son’s name be holy. Likewise, if He is ‘called the Son of God’ He too must be holy for God is holy.

exposed at the Mt of Transfiguration), though He did not come simply in the likeness of flesh. The Word truly *became* flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, but in the *likeness* of all mankind, though without the inherent taint of sin that is the lot of fallen humanity.

**1:36–37** By way of confirmation of all that he has said, the angel then tells Mary of that which had previously occurred to Zechariah and Elizabeth. Having become too old for natural means of conception, Elizabeth, ‘who was called barren is now in her sixth month’. The simple ascription tells all, ‘For nothing will be impossible with God’ (cf. Gen. 18:14; and the thought of Job 10:13; Isa. 55:11; Jer. 32:27; Zech. 8:6; Matt. 9:16; Mark 10:27; etc.).

**1:38** Concludes the account of the angel’s visit. Mary recognizes her place as ‘the bonds slave of the Lord’, saying simply, ‘be it done to me according to Your word.’ Given the sanctity of the betrothed state, and the corresponding disgrace of pregnancy out of wedlock, her’s is indeed a statement of faith! Calvin observes, ‘The unbelieving draw back from His hand and, as far as they can, impede His work. Faith establishes us before God, that we may stand in readiness to serve’.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Mary Visits Elizabeth: (1:39–56).

**1:39–40** are transition verses that take us to the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

**1:41** Upon hearing Mary’s greeting, ‘the baby leaped in her womb’, as the very beginning of John’s witness to Jesus (cf. 1:15), and Elizabeth herself was ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’.

**1:42–45** As a direct result of the Spirit’s infilling, Elizabeth ‘cried out with a loud voice’ (cf. Mark 9:24; John 1:15; 7:28, 37; Rom. 8:15; 9:27; Gal. 4:6), pronouncing the blessedness of Mary and ‘the fruit of her womb’. Mary is the mother of Elizabeth’s Lord (i.e. the Messiah, cf. Ps. 110:1)<sup>2</sup>, and she recognizes her as such. Even so, there is no devotion to Mary *per se*, but rather to the One who has been gracious to her. Elizabeth tells Mary of the baby’s response (11:44) in which the baby ‘leaped for joy’, and also indicates that Elizabeth sees Mary as being blessed as a woman of faith who will see the fulfilment of that which has been promised (11:45).

Luke’s Gospel is unique for its record of the ‘songs’ surrounding the birth narratives. There are five: the song of Elizabeth (1:42b–45), the song of Mary (1:46–55), the song of Zechariah (1:68–79), the song of the angels (2:14), and the song of Simeon (2:29–32). A comparison of the themes in these songs and their rich content repays careful study.

**1:46–47** introduces Mary’s song. The song is in some ways similar to Hannah’s song in I Samuel 2. The parallelism of the first section, ‘My soul exalts the Lord’ and ‘My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour’, sets the tone for the whole song, which is indeed a song of praise and rejoicing. She knew that God was her Saviour, and that His action towards her was of His own great grace.

**1:48–49** indicate the reasons for her joy. Mary knew that her state was only because ‘he had regard for the humble state of his bonds slave’ (i.e. her lowliness in the world’s eyes). There is a double joy, not simply for being regarded by God, but also because of the destiny of the Child to be given to her. She knew that ‘from this time on all generations will count me blessed’ and that ‘the Mighty One’ had done ‘great things’ for her, and that this One was and is ‘holy’.

<sup>1</sup> Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol I, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> The description of Jesus as Lord is distinctive in Luke, e.g. 1:76; 2:11; 7:13, 19; 10:1, 39, 41; 11:39; 12:42; 13:15; 17:5f.; 18:6; 19:8, 31, 34; 20:42, 44; 22:61; 24:3, 34.

**1:50–55** are verses full of ascriptions of the Lord's character.

Luke 1:50 quotes Psalm 103:17, the thought of which is also reflected in Psalm 22:24; 69:33; Nehemiah 1:6; etc.

Luke 1:51–52 indicate that the strength of God lies with the humble, not the mighty. Indeed He has done 'mighty deeds', but by having 'scattered those proud in the thoughts of their hearts', i.e. the enemies of God (cf. Num. 10:35; Ps. 68:1; 89:10), by having 'brought down rulers from their thrones', thus indicating His Lordship over all worldly and political powers and by having 'exalted those who were humble'.

Luke 1:53 quotes Psalm 107:9, saying that God has 'filled the hungry with good things', adding that He has 'sent away the rich empty handed'. Salvation also implies judgement. In short, He has 'given help to Israel his servant' (cf. Isa. 41:8f.; 42:1; 49:3; Acts 20:35; I Tim. 6:2). This help, moreover is in 'remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever'. His action now, in the birth of the Son, is in keeping with what He said and promised then. The tense of the verbs in the song indicate that Mary had God's actions in the history of Israel in view, and that she thus knew Him to be the covenant keeping God in the arena of human history and affairs.

**1:56** acts as a summary verse, connecting with the next significant part of the narrative.

## B. Births of John and Jesus (1:57—2:20)

Luke now takes us to the next significant point in the narrative, viz. the birth and naming of John the Baptist. The whole event sets the scene for the coming birth of Jesus, and Zechariah's prophetic song proclaims in rich terms the salvation of God and the ministry that John will have in regard to this.

### 1. John the Baptist's Birth (1:57–80).

**1:57–58** The narrative now jumps forward to the time of John's birth. In accordance with Gabriel's prediction, Elizabeth 'brought forth a son'. Significantly her 'neighbours and her friends' see the birth as an act of God by which 'He had displayed His great mercy to her'. Mercy is God's compassion in action to alleviate a person from their misery. Such misery in the Scriptures, and indeed in this particular case, does not always come from the person's own guilt. It may come upon people from the cruelty of others or from force of circumstances, but whatever the case may be the mercy of God is the cause for great rejoicing. Certainly this was the case with Elizabeth, for the whole event led all those surrounding her to 'rejoice with her'.

**1:59–60** The child was to be circumcised on the eighth day, as was in keeping with the Law (Gen 17:12; Lev. 12:3). The practice of naming a child after the father was evidently common, but Elizabeth intervenes, declaring that his name was to be 'John'. Obviously Zechariah had previously communicated to her the substance of the angel's message.

**1:61–63** The naming of the child<sup>1</sup> is emphasized in these verses as being divine in its origin. There was no one of Elizabeth's relatives of that name, and so the gathered community turned to Zechariah to enquire (by making signs to him) as to the child's name. John records the child's name on a tablet (usually a flat piece of wood covered with a film of wax). In no uncertain terms the old man writes, 'His name is John' (which means 'God is merciful'). Note the tense. His name already *is* John, and there can be no changing it! The crowd was 'astonished' by these events. The cause of the astonishment is seemingly the insistence of the aged couple to name the child in such an unusual way, but this in turn points to the astonishment surrounding God's dealings with man that pervades the birth narratives.

**1:64–65** In accordance with the angel's prophecy, John's 'mouth was opened and his tongue loosed'. Immediately 'he began to speak in praise of God'. As a direct result, 'fear came on all those living around them' and the news quickly became an item of continuing regional conversation as 'these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea'. God 'does not give miracles for amusement, but to stir human senses, when He sees them asleep'.<sup>2</sup> The slumber of the intertestamental period was well and truly being disturbed.

**1:66** Such events were without doubt unusual. As a result 'all who heard them kept them in mind' (cf. Luke 2:19, 51). Folk clearly recognized that 'the hand of the Lord was certainly with him' (i.e. the child). God was at work in the land! This verse sums up the childhood of John. 1:80 speaks of his later years.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke's clear indication is that the naming took place at the time of circumcision. This is not recorded as Jewish practice elsewhere, for in the OT the naming seemed to take place at the time of birth. The practice of Jews in the Roman era may have been influenced by the Greek and Roman practice of delaying the naming until some days after the birth.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. I, p. 43.



**1:67** introduces the next of the songs surrounding the birth narratives. Zechariah's song is introduced without specific indication of its time of utterance. Probably it is best to understand it as being uttered at the time of his receiving back his faculties. The fullness of the Spirit is an important theme in Luke (cf. 1:15, 42; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9), though to be filled with the Spirit at any particular time does not imply His absence at other times. Rather His fullness indicates that He is present in a powerful way for the specific task of witness at hand.

**1:68** The statement 'blessed be the Lord God of Israel' (cf. Ps. 41:13; 72:18; 106:48; etc.) is clearly one of praise. When men or women 'bless God' in the Scriptures it means that they praise Him for His faithfulness, grace, mercy and actions towards them, and also for who He is in Himself. God is to be blessed because He is God, as much as for His gracious actions towards man. Here the thanksgiving is specifically for His saving faithfulness, for 'He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people'. The theme of redemption is prophetically important, as indicated by the comment in Luke 2:38 and 24:21. Technically 'redemption' indicates deliverance through the payment of the appropriate redemption price (Ruth 4:4; cf. Mark 10:45; Heb. 9:12), but in common usage it had come to be virtually synonymous with 'deliverance' pure and simple.

**1:69–70** How has this redemption been accomplished? According to Zechariah it has been accomplished by the fact that He has 'raised up a horn of salvation for us' (cf. I Sam. 2:10; Ps. 2:10; 132:17; Ezek. 29:21; and the symbolism of Rev. 5:6) and this 'in the house of David his servant' (from whom Mary was descended). The horn was a symbol of strength and power, as well as authority. That the horn of salvation is raised up is at once life for those who believe, but judgement for the enemies. The tense used here is sometimes called a 'prophetic past' tense, indicating the certainty of the matter and the fact that it has already begun. Moreover, such raising up is in accord with all that God has spoken 'by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old' (cf. I Pet. 1:10ff.; Luke 24:26ff.; Rom. 1:2; etc.). Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He first reveals it to His servants the prophets (Amos. 3:7).

**1:71–75** These verses form a rich tapestry that tells of the nature of the redemption. That God has redeemed, and that this redemption is through a horn of salvation raised up in accord with the word of the prophets is without doubt, but in what does this redemption consist? Here we are told.

The redemption is 'deliverance from our enemies, and the hand of all who hate us' (1:71). Who, or what, are the enemies? To be sure they could be spoken of as 'spiritual' (as 1:77 makes clear), but it must also include all those things which afflict God's people in this current evil age and prevent them from serving Him, which is the end point of the deliverance here mentioned.<sup>1</sup> This action is said to be to 'show mercy to our fathers' which is described as being in accordance with God's remembrance of His 'holy covenant' (1:72). The emphasis is on God's enduring faithfulness to His promises made to His chosen servants. The Covenant is defined as 'the oath which He swore to Abraham our father' (1:73; cf. Gen. 26:3; Jer. 11:5; Ps. 105:9; Heb. 6:13ff.). In accordance with all His covenant keeping faithfulness, He has granted 'that we, being delivered from the hands of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days' (1:74–75). To be delivered from sin is to be made fit for His presence, and thus to know Him 'without fear' (cf. Rom. 8:1; Heb. 4:14ff.). We are thus able to serve Him in 'holiness' (because we belong to Him and have been made holy by Him) and 'righteousness' (because our sin is covered and our iniquity is taken away). Salvation without sanctification and justification is an impossibility. Rather, God brings salvation through these things.

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<sup>1</sup> This, of course, is a point we are apt to forget. Our deliverance is not for our sake in any selfish way. We have been delivered from our enemies that we may serve Him. This accords with the statement in Exodus, 'Let My people go that they might serve me' (Exod. 8:1), and is also reflected in Paul's teaching in places such as Romans 12:1ff. The serving of God, which is to say the worship of God, which is to say the love of God, is at once our true freedom and our true fulfilment.

**1:76–79** Now directs our attention to John specifically. Having spoken of the Lord's great redemptive work, we are now told of the ministry of the Lord's forerunner. John 'will be called the prophet of the Most High' for he will 'go on before the Lord to prepare His ways'.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, He will 'give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of sins' (1:77). This is an important verse in the whole hymn. There was a common misunderstanding that the Messiah would provide immediate temporal deliverance. The greater enemy, however, is the crippling force and power of sin and its concomitant guilt. This is that from which men must come to know freedom.

Such forgiveness is brought about by 'the tender mercy of our God'<sup>2</sup> with which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us' (1:78). Similar ascriptions are given to the Messiah in Malachi 4:2, II Peter 1:19, and Revelation 22:16 (cf. Isa. 60:1). All point to the one great statement, 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12). Such shining is upon 'those who sit in darkness' (cf. Eph. 5:8; 4:18; 6:12; Isa. 9:2; 60:2; Jer. 13:16; Rom. 1:21; 2:19; II Cor. 6:14; Col. 1:13; I Pet. 2:9; I John 2:8), with the purpose 'to guide our feet in the way of peace'.<sup>3</sup> True peace and salvation are bound together (cf. Rom. 5:1–2).

**1:80** summarizes this section of the narrative. John 'continued to grow, and to become strong in spirit'. The fact that 'he lived in the deserts until the day of his public ministry' is significant for two reasons. One is that John must withdraw in order for his coming public ministry to be definitive, and the other is that consistently in the Scriptures the 'wilderness' or 'desert' is pictured as the place of divine equipping, preparation and testing.

Having set out clearly for us the account of the birth of John the Baptist, Luke now takes us to the birth of Jesus Himself.

## 2. Jesus' Birth (2:1–20).

**2:1–2** In keeping with his avowed intention of setting out 'an orderly account of the things accomplished among us', Luke now gives clear chronological and historical information regarding the birth of the Messiah. He tells us that a 'decree went out from Caesar Augustus'<sup>4</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> Godet's comment is interesting (*A Commentary on The Gospel of St. Luke*, Vol. I, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1976, pp. 114–115). He says:

Why was the ministry of the Messiah preceded by that of another divine messenger? Because the very notion of salvation was falsified in Israel, and had to be corrected before salvation could be realized. A carnal and malignant patriotism had taken possession of the people and their rulers, and the idea of a political deliverance had been substituted for that of a moral salvation . . . There was needed another person, divinely authorized, to remind people that perdition consisted not in subjection to the Romans, but in divine condemnation; and that salvation, therefore, was not temporal emancipation, but the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase here used is an unusual one. Literally it means the 'bowels' or 'inward parts' of God's mercy. It signifies that God's actions are motivated by deep seated love and true compassion (cf. Hosea 11:8ff.).

<sup>3</sup> Geldenhuys comments:

The original metaphor here refers to a party of travellers who, before reaching their destination, have been overtaken by the darkness of a pitch-black night and are now sitting terrified and powerless and expect any moment to be overwhelmed and killed by wild beasts or enemies. But all at once a bright light appears to show them the way, so that they reach their destination safely, where they enjoy rest and peace.

<sup>4</sup> Gaius Octavius (grand nephew of Julius Caesar) reigned as Caesar Augustus (his official name) from c. 30 BC to AD 14, following the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium. His reign saw the consolidation of the Empire, and was one of peace and upbuilding. There are certain difficulties that cluster around this reference, however. These could be summarized as follows:

- (a) there is no independent record of a decree being made by Caesar Augustus at this time;
- (b) as Herod's territory was not officially subject to Rome until after this time (in approx. AD 6) it is doubted that such a decree, had it been given, would apply to Herod's realm;
- (c) the form of the census is not Roman, as one would expect if it were being carried out in obedience to Roman law; and
- (d) whatever the case, Mary would not have been required to register.

In the light of this, some scholars have maintained that Luke has given us an unreliable picture and therefore his whole narrative must be called into question.

The arguments dealing with these points can be found in any good commentary. Suffice to say here that with regard to:

- (a) the official census records themselves reflect considerable statistical data gathered previously, much of which was gathered under indirect, or administrative decree, rather than by special Imperial command. It is certain that Augustus reformed the administration of the Empire, new provinces were assessed and a sort of 'Doomsday Book' collated over a period of forty years or more;
- (b) at best Herod's sovereignty was only relative and especially during the latter years of his reign the relationship between himself and Rome was very strained—so much so that Augustus required all Judea to take a vow of allegiance (Paul Barnett

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suggests that the registration described in Luke 2:1–5 is that relating to this vow). In any case, being the shrewd political manoeuvrer Herod was, any display of obeisance is not beyond the realms of reason. Certainly the Jews paid Roman taxes right from the time of Pompey;

- (c) Rome would not have been particularly interested in the method of census gathering and there are later examples of this mode of collection being approved by Roman authorities; and
- (d) the private and domestic considerations surrounding Joseph and Mary's journey may well have outweighed so-called official policy.

that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth'. At the time of census a record was made of the name, occupation property and kindred of each household head. The aim of such a census was probably the levying of both capitation and property taxes, but doubtless there were subsidiary aims as well.

The time is further specified by Luke as 'the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria'. The mention of Quirinius is not without its problems. If we accept the current translation, Luke here clearly designates the census as 'the first'. It is therefore likely that the census mentioned in Acts 5:37 is a subsequent one, probably the one occurring in AD 6 as is mentioned in some other sources, and which occasioned a rebellion led by Judas of Gamala. The key problem is that other reliable extra-Biblical sources indicate Quirinius was not installed as governor of Syria until after the death of Herod the Great, the census of AD 6 being one of his first official acts as governor. There are, however, a number of other factors to be considered. Firstly, the way the clause is translated is not above dispute. Though it would be unusual in Luke, it is not impossible that the translation could be 'this was the census *before* Quirinius was governor of Syria'. Secondly, the word here translated 'governor' (*hégemoneuo*) can refer to several types of administrative command, and other sources clearly indicate that for the period preceding his official appointment Quirinius held some type of extraordinary military-cum-administrative command in Syria during the governorship of Saturninus. Thirdly, we know that censuses were generally conducted every fourteen years, and this allows for the possibility of a census in the area in 11–8 BC. In terms of timing for the birth of Jesus this is about right, for if Herod the Great died in 4 BC according to our calendar, and before this time he ordered the 'slaughter of the innocents' recorded in Matthew 2:16ff., the children thus affected would have had to be born in about 8 BC. Fourthly, there is some evidence to suggest that Quirinius may have held the governorship of Syria for a brief period before his later and better attested official appointment. Whatever the case, it is clear that there is no sufficient reason to assert that Luke is here in error.

Despite the complex arguments surrounding these two verses, it is important to note that the 'fiat of an earthly ruler can be utilized in the will of God to bring his more important purposes to fruition'<sup>1</sup> (cf. Isa. 46:8–11). Whatever speculation we may engage in about the timing of the events mentioned, the fact remains that God's purpose is being fulfilled in the birth taking place at Bethlehem and at this time (cf. Gal. 4:4).

**2:3** The census required all the local inhabitants to return to their 'own city' to 'register'. This was not the practice throughout the Empire, but is distinctively in keeping with Jewish practice at the time.<sup>2</sup> How one's 'own city' was determined seemed to be governed by ancestry, in this case that of descent from David, but it may also be that it was Joseph's own city in the sense that he owned property there, or had grown up there.

**2:4–5** Joseph and Mary were naturally caught up in all this.<sup>3</sup> They 'went up from Galilee,

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<sup>1</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> There is also a record of a similar approach taken in Egypt for the census conducted there in AD 104.

<sup>3</sup> Though it is doubtful that Mary would have been required by law to register, it is probable that Joseph did not want to leave her behind at Nazareth. It may well be, too, that with both of them aware of the identity of the child in her womb, they were keen to return to Bethlehem as the birth approached, in line with the OT prophecies of the Messiah's birth.

from the city of Nazareth' and they journeyed to 'Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem' (cf. Micah 5:1ff.). The reason for this is given, 'because he was of the house and family of David'. Mary, too, was of this line (as indicated by 1:27), but the census was taken on the male of each household. She is described as being 'engaged to him' and 'with child'. According to Matthew 1:24f. Joseph had already married Mary on her return from Elizabeth, but they were living as betrothed persons, not embarking on the full conjugal rights of husband and wife.

**2:6–7** While in the city 'the days were completed for her to give birth to her first-born son'.<sup>1</sup> She 'wrapped Him in cloths' and 'laid Him in a manger, for there was no room in the inn'. Where the inn was, and in what it consisted, is unclear. The census had caused all accommodation to be taken however, so they are left outside. The fact that Mary herself wrapped the child in swaddling cloths (long strips of cloth wrapped round and round the infant for security and protection; cf. Ezek. 16:1ff.) indicates the lonely nature of the birth.<sup>2</sup> We have no date for this event. That the church celebrates Christmas on December 25th is clear, but the reasons for this choice are quite obscure. It makes no essential difference to the celebration, however. As Morris points out, the only things we do know for sure about the birth 'point to obscurity, poverty and even rejection'<sup>3</sup> (cf. II Cor. 8:9). Long before, Isaiah had cried out, 'Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down' (Isa. 64:1). Here his prayer is answered.

**2:8** introduces the next group of people important for the narrative to continue. In the area of Bethlehem, 'there were some shepherds, staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night'. Such a practice was quite normal. The sheep would be gathered together at the end of each day, and the assembled shepherds would watch together. Come morning they would go in several directions in search of pasture to meet again the following night. Shepherds, as a group, were not highly esteemed. In the popular law of the day (the 'traditions of men' as opposed to the 'precepts of God'), they were not able to bear witness in a court of law, nor were they, along with 'the heathen', allowed to be sheltered.<sup>4</sup> By the nature of their work they were not able to participate in the normal religious life of the nation, and so were an isolated group.

**2:9** Suddenly their normal watch was interrupted. 'An angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were terribly frightened.' The glory of the Lord refers to the radiance of His presence, here reflected in His angelic servants. The ministry of angels is considerable in the Scriptures, but in being servants of God, they are servants of 'those who are the heirs of salvation' (Heb. 1:14).

**2:10–11** Again we hear the familiar greeting, 'Do not be afraid'. The reason for this is then given, 'for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people'. The substance of this good news is further elaborated. 'Today, in the city of David<sup>5</sup>, there has been born for you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.' For other uses of the title 'Saviour' see John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Eph. 5:23; Phil. 3:20; II Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6; II Pet. 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18; I John 4:14. That He is Saviour means that He must be Lord, and He is both only because He is the Christ, the anointed One of God. Luther comments:

'Unto you is born' implies: All that Christ is and has is yours, and He is your Saviour; not only that you regard Him thus, but that He can deliver you from sin, death, the devil and all misfortunes; yea, as great as He is, He is born for you, and is yours with all He has. The words 'unto you' should surely

<sup>1</sup> Passages such as Matt. 13:55f. and John 7:35 indicate something of her 'later born sons', i.e. Jesus' brothers.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> See Morris, p. 84; Godet, p. 130, etc.

<sup>5</sup> In I Sam. 20:6 Bethlehem is given this ascription. It was the place of his birth and his youth. According to the implication of II Sam 23:13–17 it always held fond memories for him.

make us happy. We have need of Him, and for our sakes He has become man. Therefore it behooves us people that we accept Him with joy, as the angel says: ‘unto you is born a Saviour’ . . . Just as the angels have sung, those who know and receive this child Jesus give God the glory in all things. Thus the angels give us the comforting promise that the tyranny of the devil is at an end, so that the Christians may lead a fine, quiet, peaceable life and live in kindness with each other. And among them for the sake of this Child a peaceful government is maintained, in which each serves the other to the best of his ability.

Moreover, this One is born ‘for all the people’, i.e. irrespective of status, rank, or reputation.

**2:12** The verse indicates an implicit command to go to Him. That the baby will be ‘wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger’ will be a ‘sign’ for them.

**2:13–14** Suddenly the one angel is joined by ‘a multitude of the heavenly host’. The ‘host’ is God’s angelic army (cf. I Kings 22:19; II Chron. 33:3; Jer. 8:2; 19:13; Zeph. 1:5; etc.). Together they are ‘praising God and saying, “Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased!”’ Both of these are significant statements. The first indicates the true nature of worship and the destiny of the creation. The second indicates the sovereign action of God (cf. Matt. 11:26; Luke 10:21; Eph. 1:4f.; etc.). The emphasis is on God, not man, as is reflected in the *NEB* translation, ‘peace for men on whom his favour rests’. The peace indicated is not so much absence of strife, but a situation of peace between God and man (cf. Rom. 5:1). There is only peace of heart if this situation obtains.

**2:15–16** In direct obedience to the heavenly visitors and in order to ‘see this thing which the Lord our God has made known to us’, the shepherds ‘came with haste [expressed emphatically in the Greek] and made their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger’.

**2:17–20** The shepherds could not keep silent about all that they had seen and heard (cf. Acts 4:19–20; I Cor. 9:16). They ‘made known the statement which had been told them about this child’, and all who heard ‘wondered at the things told them by the shepherds’. Mary, however, ‘treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart’ (cf. 2:51). For their part the shepherds ‘went back’ [to their normal employment] glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them’.

## C. Jesus' Childhood (2:21–52)

### 1. Jesus' Presentation in the Temple (2:21–40).

**2:21** Mary gives the name 'Jesus' to the child, which was 'the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb'. The significance of this name has been commented upon elsewhere.

**2:22–24** indicate what must have been usual practice at the time. There are two elements in view here. One is the purification of Mary and Joseph (the 'their' and 'they' in 2:22), and the other is the presentation of Jesus. After the appropriate period of time for purification according to the Law, they 'brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord' (cf. I Sam. 1:21ff.). We note that they offered an avian sacrifice, giving in passing an indication of their poverty, such a sacrifice being for ritual purification. The presentation of Jesus reflects the practice set down in Exodus 13:2, 12, 15; Numbers 3:11–13; 8:14–19; 18:15ff.; etc. (though 2:23 is not an exact quotation). When the child was the first born it had to be redeemed from the service of God in the Temple by the payment of a sum of money (5 shekels). God had taken the tribe of Levi to serve in the Temple and to be the helpers of Aaron's line, but required the first-born of every family to be redeemed in this way in order to keep before the people the fact that all they had and they were as a nation had come from Him.<sup>1</sup>

**2:25–26** introduces the next main character in Luke's narrative. Just as the naming of John was followed by prophetic utterance, so is the naming of Jesus. Simeon is described as 'righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel'. Both Simeon and Anna (see below) stand as testimonies to the remnant in Israel which had not given in to despair, cynicism, false religion or false Messianic expectations. The first part of the description of Simeon is similar to that given in 1:6 regarding Zechariah and Elizabeth. The latter part of the description indicates that he was looking for the Messiah (from Isa. 40:1f.; cf. Isa. 49:13; 57:18; 61:2; Matt. 5:4). Moreover, 'the Holy Spirit was upon him' and it 'had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ'. The thought of the word here translated 'revealed' is also seen with similar emphasis in Matthew 2:12, 22; Acts 10:22; and Hebrews 8:5; 11:7. The last phrase ('the Lord's Christ' or 'the Lord's anointed') is also reflected in Luke 9:20; 23:35; Acts 3:18; 4:26; Rev. 11:15; 12:10. Ultimately it has its origins in Psalm 2:2. Clearly he was a Godly man, one of the true children of Abraham.

**2:27–28** Simeon 'came in the Spirit into the temple'. The phrase indicates a special anointing of the Spirit upon him, compared with the habitual presence of the Spirit mentioned above. Jesus' parents bought Him in 'to carry out for Him the custom of the Law'. Simeon 'took Him in his arms and blessed God' and prophesied over the child.

**2:29–32** Simeon is confident of the Lord's favour to him. He states that, 'Thou dost let Thy bondservant depart in peace, according to Thy word'. The reason is that 'my eyes have seen Thy salvation' (cf. Isa. 40:5; 52:10; Ps. 98:2), which 'Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples'. Note that *God* has prepared the salvation (cf. Exod. 23:20; II Sam. 7:24), and this for the benefit of all nations (cf. Luke 3:4–6 and the development of the Gentile mission

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<sup>1</sup> This makes even more horrific the practice of child sacrifice as seen in II Kings 3:27; 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; Jeremiah 7:31; Ezekiel 16:20; 23:37; Micah 6:7. Here the first-born children were slaughtered in devotion to gods such as Molech and Chemshosh, indicating that the *idol* was the one regarded as giving life, health and fertility. That this should be practised by the kings of *Israel* was a great abomination.

in Acts). The clear indication of 2:29 is that Simeon had been told by the Spirit that he would see the Messiah before his death.

This salvation is further described as 'a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel'. Says Morris:

There is much about Glory written in the Old Testament, particularly in connection with God's manifestations of Himself to His people. But Israel will see glory in its truest and fullest sense when it sees the Son of God. His being a light to the Gentiles means no diminution of Israel's glory, but rather its full realization.<sup>1</sup>

**2:33** The 'amazement' of Mary and Joseph is amazing, given all that had occurred to them and had been shown them. But the dullness and slowness of human hearts is also an important theme throughout the Gospels (see further on 2:50). Probably the cause of the amazement at this particular time was the significance the Child would have for the Gentiles according to Simeon's prophecy.

**2:34–35** Simeon now directs his attention to Mary, saying, 'This Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed.' The first section of this description calls to mind the 'stumbling stone' testimonia seen in Acts 4:5–12 and Romans 9:30–33 (cf. Matt. 21:33–46; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:18; cf. Ps. 118:22f.; Isa. 8:14; 28:16). The use of the stumbling stone motif by the apostolic band is built upon Jesus' own use of the concept, which in turn is rooted in the prophetic words of the OT.

The significance of Simeon's statement here, and the 'stumbling stone' passages elsewhere, is that the coming of the Messiah is a two-edged action. The same stone is the foundation of God's building and the destruction of those who will not believe. The opposition, (i.e. that indicated in the statement 'a sign to be opposed') will be used by God to establish His Kingdom (cf. Acts 4:27f.).

Moreover, Simeon tells Mary, 'a sword will pierce through your own soul also, that thoughts out of many hearts will be revealed.' The latter half of this section probably applies to the material above. The Messiah's action will lay open the hearts of men (cf. Heb. 4:13; I Cor. 14:25). Particularly this is so in the crucifixion where the veneer of human respectability is removed and the true and deep anger at God is fully vented against His anointed.<sup>2</sup> However, in an abiding sense, wherever the Word of the Cross is preached the same action occurs, for God does not leave any place for our dark hearts to escape the searching beam of His own great righteousness, and the proclamation of the Truth stirs up the wicked hearts of men.

For Mary, herself, there would be pain. She would bear the pain of Jesus being opposed and crucified. In this regard, 'a sword would pierce her own soul'.<sup>3</sup>

**2:36–38** But Simeon is not the only one who is looking for the consolation of Israel. There was also 'Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher'. Asher was one of the lost ten tribes, but evidently some were still able to count their lineage back to it. This particular descendant of Asher was 'advanced in years', having been married for seven years, and then living 'as a widow to the age of eighty-four'.<sup>4</sup> She, too, was a devout and godly woman who virtually lived in the Temple, 'serving night and day with fastings and prayers'. She saw the Child and 'began giving thanks to God'. She also 'continued to speak about Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem'.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Morris, p. 88, 'When men see Christ suffer, their reaction shows on which side they stand'.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin comments (*Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. I, p. 96):

Though her faith was tested and shaken by various trials, the harshest contest was at the cross: she was able to look on Christ in death. Though she was never swamped by grief, yet her heart was not made of rock, to prevent her being sore wounded. The constancy of the saints is very different from dumb acceptance.

<sup>4</sup> It may be possible to translate this sentence to indicate that she lived as a widow for eighty-four years, thus making her a very old woman indeed!



**2:39–40** acts as a connective paragraph between this and the next main topic. We are told of the family's return to Nazareth of Galilee and that 'the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him'. Luke omits the story of the flight into Egypt (found in Matt. 2:13–18), but the implication of increasing wisdom and maturity is plain.

## 2. The Boy Jesus in the Temple (2:41–52).

**2:41** In keeping with the Law, Joseph and Mary 'used to go to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover'. While the male members of the household were required to go each year and female members only once in their lifetime, Joseph and Mary both saw the importance of the regular participation in the worship of the nation. The Passover was one of the three great pilgrimage festivals in Israel (cf. Exod. 23:14–17; 34:23f.; Deut. 16:16). As the Gospel story unfolds, and as the Book of Acts opens with Pentecost, the true significance of these feasts is expounded.<sup>1</sup>

**2:42–45** When Jesus was twelve they again went up.<sup>2</sup> After the 'full number of days' (i.e. the seven days in total for the Feasts of the Passover and Unleavened Bread, Lev. 23:5f.) they returned, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents 'were unaware of it, but supposed Him to be in the caravan'.<sup>3</sup> However, when they began searching for Him among their relatives and acquaintances, they did not find Him and so 'they returned to Jerusalem, looking for Him'. 'After three days'<sup>4</sup> they found Him. He was in 'the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking questions'. Those who heard Him 'were amazed at His understanding and His answers'. The rabbinical method of teaching was primarily one of question and answer, rather than lecture, and this pattern is reflected here. True wisdom is a matter of the heart, as this episode indicates. The problem of the human race is that it is 'foolish' (cf. Rom. 1:21–23), not because of intellectual incapacity, but of moral stubbornness!

**2:48–50** His parents were 'astonished', and Mary rebuked Him, citing she and Joseph's distress, and telling Him of their anxious search. His reply is in two parts. 'Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?' There is an inescapable necessity about Jesus' reply. He is conscious of His unique relationship to His Father, and He knew that He must be about His Father's business.<sup>5</sup>

For their part 'they did not understand the statement which He had made to them'. The non-understanding is not to be unexpected. For other examples see Luke 9:45 (cf. Matt. 16:22; Mark 9:10, 32); 8:19–21; Matt. 16:5–12; John 7:3–5; 2:19f.; 3:3f.; 4:13ff.; 6:51f.; 11:11f.

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<sup>1</sup> The feasts were: Passover and Unleavened Bread (Exod. 10:2; 12:8, 14; 23:15; Lev. 23:5f.; Num. 28:16–25; Deut. 16:1–8); The Feast of Weeks (also called 'The Feast of the Harvest' and 'The Day of the First Fruits', Exod. 23:16; 24:22; Num. 28:26) which was also later known as Pentecost because it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover; The Feast of Tabernacles (also called 'The Feast of Booths' and 'The Feast of Ingathering', Exod. 23:16; 24:22; Lev. 23:34; Deut. 16:13); The Feast of Purim established in the account of Esther 9.

There was also the regular observance of The Sabbath (Lev. 23:2f.; etc.); The Day of Trumpets (Num. 29:1; cf. Lev. 23:24) and The Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26–31). In later (intertestamental) times there developed The Feast of Dedication (John 10:22) which celebrated the cleansing of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus in 164 BC after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes.

<sup>2</sup> While there is not complete agreement about the age at which manhood according to the law was attained, it is generally recognized that at thirteen years of age a boy could become a full member of the synagogue. At twelve he began formal religious instruction.

<sup>3</sup> Pilgrims would regularly travel in groups from the same region and/or the same family, regrouping at the end of each day's journey.

<sup>4</sup> This would probably include one day travelling out from Jerusalem, one day to return and one day looking for Him. See Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 184.

<sup>5</sup> For other examples of the Divine 'must' in Luke, see 4:43; 9:22; 13:33; 19:5; 24:7, 26, 44; 22:37; cf. John 3:14; 4:4; 9:4; 10:16; 20:9; etc.

**2:51** Nevertheless, Jesus returned with them to Nazareth and 'He continued in subjection to them'.  
Marshall comments:

Jesus is obedient to his parents . . . since in general obedience to the Lord includes obedience to parents (Col. 3:20). Nevertheless, the incident has shown to Mary that Jesus' obedience to his parents lies within a more fundamental relationship to God.<sup>1</sup>

Mary, we are told, 'treasured up all these things in her heart', watching the events unfold and thus wondering at His messianic destiny.

**2:52** Jesus, however, 'kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men'. This action is related to His submission to His earthly parents. The words of Proverbs 3:1–4 are truly reflected in the life of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 130.

### III. The Introduction to Jesus' Public Ministry (3:1—4:13)

#### A. The Ministry of John the Baptist (3:1–20)

##### 1. Historical Setting and John's Preaching (3:1–6).

**3:1** As has been Luke's pattern elsewhere, here he gives to his readers a detailed set of facts confirming the historical nature of the events he is recording. The list of parameters, beginning with 'in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar' and ending with 'in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas'<sup>1</sup>, are all reliably attested to in other documents. The point of the breadth of these references is to indicate the time of the beginning of John's ministry both from a 'national' (Israelite) and 'international' (Roman) setting.

At the time thus specified, 'the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness'. Note: the word *came* to John and the *word* came to John. This is similar to other descriptions of prophetic ministries in places such as Jeremiah 1:1ff.; Hosea 1:1; and Joel 1:1; and it thus places John in the true prophetic line.

**3:2–6** outline the nature of his ministry. He 'came into all the district around the Jordan [i.e. he travelled throughout the Jordan Valley] preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'. Baptism and other forms of ritual washing were not unknown to the Jews. However, as Morris comments:

The sting in John's practice was that he applied to Jews the ceremony regarded as suitable for unclean Gentiles. Many Jews expected that in the judgement God would deal harshly with Gentile sinners, but that Jews, the descendants of Abraham, the friend of God, would be safe. John denounces this attitude and removes their fancied security.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that this baptism was 'for the forgiveness of sins' and is linked with repentance does not obviate the need for Jesus' ministry as Saviour. The baptism of John only truly took its place in that it pointed to the ministry of the Messiah (cf. Acts 19:4). The effect of Christ's Cross stretches both backwards and forwards in time to all who have faith in God to justify the ungodly.

Whatever the case, Luke is keen to point out the validity of John's ministry from the Scriptures. He quotes from Isaiah 40:3ff. Significantly the passage quoted ends with the promise, 'and all flesh will see the salvation of God'. While all four Gospels apply Isaiah 40:3 to John, only Luke includes the last section from Isaiah 40:4–5. This is clearly related to the developing theme in Luke/Acts of the Gentile mission (cf. Simeon's words in 2:32).

##### 2. Examples of John's Preaching (3:7–17).

**3:7** According to the parallel section in Matthew 3:7, the 'brood of vipers' mentioned in Luke

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<sup>1</sup> Luke here uses a singular noun 'the high-priesthood' for there was only ever one High Priest at a time. However, he is giving insight into an unusual occurrence. Annas was deposed as High Priest sometime before AD 15, but one of his sons, Caiaphas, held the office of High Priest from AD 18–36. Annas, however, 'still exercised great influence, [and] perhaps even was regarded by many Jews as the true High Priest (cf. Acts 4:6). It may be worth pointing out that when Jesus was arrested he was first brought to Annas (John. 18:13)'. Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 95.

3:7 would seem to have the Pharisees primarily in view. Certainly Luke 7:30 indicates that they in particular rejected John's ministry. Note, however, that Luke says John said this 'to all the people'. The leaven of the Pharisees pervaded the whole nation (or at least this was the real danger) and there must be a harsh word spoken in order to awaken folk to their true state.

**3:8, 9** These ones are told to 'bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance' (cf. Acts 26:20). Repentance is an important concept in Luke/Acts and the word is found more frequently in Luke than the other Gospels (3:8; 5:32; 15:7; 24:47; and six times in Acts). While it is a gift of God (Acts 5:31; 11:18), people must be called to repent. That the fruit of repentance is love is evidenced by the story of the woman 'who was a sinner' in Luke 7:36–50. To profess repentance without abounding in love is to have not truly repented. Repentance, by nature of the case, is an activity for sinners (cf. Ps. 51) and when sinners know forgiveness, love flows freely!

The 'wrath to come' is also referred to in Romans 2:5; 5:9; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6; I Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; II Peter 3:7; Revelation 6:16; etc. It indicates the final day of the revelation of His glory, which brings to finality the work of the Cross in history. While His wrath is already revealed (Romans 1:18; cf. Ephesians 2:3; John 3:18, 36) there is a time coming (the last day), in which the threshing floor will be thoroughly cleared. Until this day He is gathering together the complete complement of His elect, but on that day the judgement which will be revealed is only the final consequence of the victory of the Cross.

Moreover, there can be no presumption upon physical descent from Abraham. God 'is able from these stones to raise children to Abraham' (cf. John 8:39; Rom. 4:12; Luke 13:16; 16:22–30; 19:9; Gal. 4:22–31; Heb. 2:16; 6:13–20). Why there should be no presumption is next delineated. God is doing a new thing so that 'the axe is already laid at the root of the trees' (cf. Isa. 10:34) and 'every tree therefore that does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire'. Marshall comments:

John here addresses people who assumed that baptism itself could save them from the coming judgement without the evident fruits of repentance. Descent from Abraham is no prophylactic against judgement in the absence of changed lives. Repentance is urgently needed, since the axe is about to fall.<sup>1</sup>

**3:10–14** Naturally this sort of preaching evoked a response. The 'multitudes were questioning him, saying, 'Then what shall we do?' John's answer prefigures the teaching of Jesus. 'One who has two tunics should share with him who has none and let him who has food do likewise.' These are the actions of love, which is the sum of all the Law and the Prophets (cf. Luke 10:25–37). There are no such things as ethical commands in the abstract.

Other questions by the tax collectors<sup>2</sup> (3:12) and the soldiers (3:14) are met with similar responses. The former are told to 'collect no more than what you have been ordered to,' and the latter group are told, 'Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.' Each vocation has its own temptations to the misuse of power and to greed, but they who have callings such as those mentioned by Luke should act *within their jobs* with all integrity.

**3:15–17** illustrate the ministry of John in its particular and specific role of forerunner. 3:15 indicates a high level of Messianic expectation, and people were 'all wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he might be the Christ' (cf. John 1:20, 25). John's answer to this form of speculation is unequivocal. 'As for me, I baptize with water; but One is coming who

<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall, p. 143, comments:

These were tax-farmers who had purchased for themselves the right to collect various indirect taxes, mainly customs of tolls; they employed subordinate officials to carry out the work. The system abounded with abuses. Consequently the collectors were cordially hated and despised by their fellow-countrymen, and in addition their job made them ritually unclean. Such men, regarded as being alienated from God by pious Jews, were welcomed by Jesus and also found their way to John, while the more respectable religious people failed to do so (7:29 par. Matt. 21:31f.).

is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals<sup>1</sup>; He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire'.<sup>2</sup> The baptism of fire and the Holy Spirit referred to applies to the one group of people. Those thus baptized are cleansed and empowered in one action. The expectation of the coming of the Holy Spirit (for other OT uses of the term see Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:10f.) in the last days is quite widespread (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 18:31; 36:25–27; 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28f.).

The coming of the Messiah would be a time of judgement (cf. Simeon's comments in 2:34 and those of Zechariah in 1:71). His 'winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire'. Judgement is integral to the good news, for 'Unless we can be sure that in the end evil will be decisively overthrown there is no ultimate good news'.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, if there is no ultimate overthrow of evil there is no need to desist from evil activity!

### 3. Herod and John (3:18–20).

**3:18–20** These verses indicate that the ministry of John was not carried out in a dark corner of the nation. His preaching of the Gospel touched upon Herod the tetrach's relationship with Herodias, his brother's wife. Adding to all his other crimes, Herod 'locked John up in prison'. The placing of this comment seems unusual, for chronologically it occurred after the baptism of Jesus, the next mentioned event. Luke, however, has arranged the material this way so that the narrative of Jesus' ministry can continue, uninterrupted by a later account of the reason for John's arrest.

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<sup>1</sup> A Rabbinical principle from a later time, though no doubt having its roots much earlier, indicates that disciples of any particular Rabbi should do any service for their master except untie the thong of his sandal. This is the very thing that John says he is not worthy to do! For more details see Morris, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> 'Spirit Baptism' is a topic much debated in Christian circles. We make a few *brief* observations:

- (a) The phrase 'the baptism of the Holy Spirit' never appears in the Scriptures.
- (b) The phrase which does occur (seven times) is 'to baptize in (with or by) the Holy Spirit'.
- (c) Six uses of this phrase refer to the preaching of John the Baptist: Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:15–16. Once the phrase is used by Paul: I Cor. 12:13.
- (d) When John's use is examined it clearly refers to one event, i.e. there is not 'Spirit baptism' and 'fire baptism' as two separate entities.
- (e) In the OT there are clear associations between fire, judgement and purification (e.g. Isa. 4:4; 29:6; 31:9; Ezek. 38:22; Amos 7:4; Zeph. 1:18; 3:8; Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:1–3; 4:1) on the one hand, and the Spirit and fire on the other (e.g. Joel 2:28–30; cf. 'wind' and fire in Isa. 29:6; 30:27f.; Ezek. 1:4).
- (f) Other OT prophecies link the coming of the Spirit with the coming of the Messiah or the Kingdom of God, or both (e.g. Isa. 32:15f.; Joel 2:28f.; Ezek. 39:25ff.), and also with the time of the New Covenant (e.g. Ezek. 36:22ff.)
- (g) Putting all this material together, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Spirit baptism primarily in view here is Pentecost. At Pentecost the believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire, but that fire was the external sign of the cleansing that had come to them within. In Peter's speech the whole event is seen as an undeniable manifestation of the ushering in of the last days and the fruit of Messiah's ministry. Pentecost cannot be repeated, but we individually know the cleansing effect of the Spirit as He comes to us.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, p. 98. 'For the imagery of winnowing and harvest in relationship to judgement see Prov. 20:28; Jer. 15:7; Isa. 41:15f.; Ps. 1:4; Rev. 14:14–20', Marshall, p. 148.

## B. The Prelude to Jesus' Own Ministry (3:21—4:13)

### 1. The Baptism of Jesus (3:21–22).

**3:21–22** Jesus Himself comes to be baptized at the same time as the 'people'. 'While He was praying [cf. 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28f.; 11:1; 22:41; 23:46] heaven was opened' (cf. Isa. 64:1). The end point of this was that 'the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove'. While not being characterized in this way in the OT, this event clearly indicates the spiritual anointing of Jesus as Messiah.

Together with this event 'a voice came out of heaven, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased."' This statement brings together a double set of texts. The first section quotes Psalm 2:7, a kingly, coronation Psalm. The second section quotes Isaiah 42:1, one of the servant songs. This one would be King, but not after the manner of earthly kings. He would be the Servant–King, the Suffering–Victor. While Jesus Himself did not need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, His action here at once identifies Him with the sinners He came to save, and anoints Him with the endowment of the Spirit needed to do His work.

### 2. The Genealogy of Jesus (3:23–38).

**3:23** This verse introduces the lineage of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> When 'He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being supposedly the son of Joseph . . .'. The 'supposedly' is interesting. It probably indicates that He was really the son of Mary not Joseph, or it could refer to His divine nature.

**3:23b–38** These verses give us the genealogy itself. Some of the names are immediately recognizable (e.g. David, Jesse, Boaz, Abraham), others are unknown (e.g. Hesli, Naggai, Joda, Neri, etc.). Ultimately the line goes back to Adam, 'the son of God'. What is the significance of this genealogy and why was it included? It indicates Jesus to be a real man, with real ancestors, who are not limited to Israelites, but who embrace the whole world through Adam (cf. Acts 17:26).

### 3. The Temptation of Jesus (4:1–13).

**4:1–2** The last main event in Luke's narrative has been the baptism of Jesus. After filling in necessary details about Jesus' lineage, Luke now returns to the narrative proper. The temptation of Jesus is linked inseparably with the events of the baptism, for the temptations here recorded are pitched at that relationship (of Father to Son) so powerfully affirmed in His baptismal anointing with the Spirit.

Jesus 'returned from the Jordan [i.e. after being baptized] full of the Holy Spirit'. The end point of the filling is quite different from our normal (often selfish) expectations. Jesus was 'led about by the Spirit in the wilderness'. Mark says, 'the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness,' while Matthew says that Jesus 'was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness.'

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<sup>1</sup> There is considerable difference between the genealogy here and the one found in Matthew. There are at least three main explanations for this difference. (i) Matthew gives us the genealogy of Joseph, while Luke gives us that of Mary. This would necessitate 'Joseph the son of Heli' being interpreted as 'son by marriage'. (ii) There has been a levirate marriage following the death of childless Heli, thus Matthew gives us Joseph's genealogy through Jacob, his actual father, while Luke gives it through Heli, his legal father. (iii) Matthew gives us the legal descendants of David, had his kingly line continued, while Luke gives us the descendants of David in that particular line to which, finally, Joseph belonged. Any good commentary will give you more details. No explanation is free from problems, but there are many unknown facts and diverse possibilities that make dogmatic assertions impossible.

According to Matthew, the leading of the Spirit into the wilderness was in order for Jesus ‘to be tempted by the devil’. Luke does not state it in such a way, but rather indicates that He was led into the wilderness and that the temptation occurred as part of His experience there, but not with it being the express object of His time there.<sup>1</sup> The end point of all the accounts is that He was tempted by the devil, and all are agreed on the period of forty days.<sup>2</sup>

What is the purpose of the temptation? At the outset of His ministry the nature of Jesus’ vocation had to be established. Would He live in obedience to the Father and under His hand, trusting only Him, or would He use His power selfishly and seek to ‘insure Himself’ by self-reliance on the one hand and false worship on the other? In short, would He act for Himself and for His own benefit, or in obedience to the Father and thus for the benefit of His brethren?<sup>3</sup>

The word for ‘temptation’ (*peirazo*) indicates ‘testing’ and thus, of itself, does not carry evil connotations. Thus the noun (*peirasmos*) used in 4:13 is also seen in 8:13; 11:4; 22:28, 40, 46.<sup>4</sup>

Both Matthew and Luke state explicitly that He fasted during this period, and Mark clearly implies it. Luke says, ‘when the days had ended He became hungry.’ Both Mark and Luke indicate that the testing continued throughout the forty day period, the specific temptations recorded being at the end of the time and its culmination.

**4:3–4** The first temptation relates to the immediate need. Will Jesus use His power and authority as the Son of God for His own ends? The temptation thus strikes at the heart of His relationship to the Father, and therefore is designed to avert the fulfilment of the Father’s plan. ‘The devil said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread”’.

Jesus’ reply is taken from Deuteronomy 8:3.<sup>5</sup> ‘It is written, “man shall not live on bread alone”’. He knew that His food was to do the will of the Father (John 4:34) and that His Father provided His daily bread (Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3; cf. Isa. 33:16; Prov. 30:8; Matt. 5:45). To live by bread alone is to die, even while we live!

**4:5–8** The second temptation relates to the issue of authority in a more explicit way than the first. Luke says, ‘and he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time’. The end point of this action is then expressed: ‘The devil said to Him, “I will

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall is of the opinion that ‘In view of v. 4 we should accept G. Kittel’s suggestion . . . that the forty days were for Jesus an intended period of communion with God accompanied by fasting; it was this communion which the devil sought to destroy’. *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> A close reading of the temptation accounts will reveal a number of differences, e.g. Matthew and Luke have the events in a different order and Jesus’ replies are more abbreviated in Luke than in Matthew. There are no clear reasons for these differences, but they do not materially affect the import of the accounts themselves.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, p. 135f., has a beautiful paragraph:

It was our salvation that he (the devil) attacked in the Person of Christ . . . the Son of God willingly underwent the temptations with which we are now dealing, and met the devil in a set trial of strength, that by His victory He might win us the triumph. So as often as Satan attacks us, let us remember that we can in no other way sustain and repulse his assaults than by the protection of that shield. Surely, it was for this cause that the Son of God suffered to be tempted, that He might intervene for us, whenever Satan brings any trial of temptation across our path. So we do not read of His being tempted, when He was running His own life at home, but when He entered the lists in the name of His whole Church. But if Christ was tempted as the representative of all the faithful, we should realize that the temptations that strike us are not fortuitous, or the turn of Satan’s whim, without God’s permission, but that the Spirit of God presides in all our trials, that our faith may be better tried. So we may take sure hope, that God, who is the supreme Master of the ring, will not be unmindful of us, or fail to succour our weaknesses, as He sees we are unequal to them.

<sup>4</sup> Marshall comments:

The verb means ‘to test someone’, and it is used in the OT both of God testing men in order to assess the reality of their faith and obedience (Gen. 22:1–19) and also of men testing God, usually because they doubt his goodness and power (Exod. 17:2). Especially during the wilderness period God tested the faithfulness of his people (Exod. 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2; 13:2ff.; cf. Judg. 2:22; 3:4; II Chron. 32:31), and the people fell into sin by testing God (Num. 14:22; Ps. 95:8ff.; 106:14; cf. Isa. 7:12).

<sup>5</sup> It is significant that all of Jesus’ replies to the devil are from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:13, 16) and that section dealing with the time of Israel’s trial in the wilderness. Theirs was occasioned by their own disobedience, His by His true obedience. He is the embodiment of true Israel. ‘Out of Egypt I have called my Son’ is applied to Jesus in Matthew 2:15. Their forty years is paralleled by His forty days. In Him the people of God are tested again and in Him they overcome!

give you all its domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.”’

Despite all this, the issue at hand is ‘Would Jesus capitulate?’. ‘Therefore if you worship before me, it shall all be Yours.’ Again Jesus’ answer is taken from the Scriptures. And Jesus answered and said to Him, ‘It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only”’ (Deut. 6:13; 10:20). Jesus’ Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36f.) and He had to fight against the same temptation to worldly principles of power on other occasions (e.g. John 6:15). For Him, however, there could be no thought of not worshipping the Father alone (cf. John 6:38; etc.).

**4:9–12** The third temptation is a test of whether Jesus would presume on His relationship with the Father. The devil ‘led Him up to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple’.<sup>1</sup> There he said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written, “He will give His angels charge concerning You to guard You,” and “On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.”’ The first of these references comes from Psalm 91:11, and the second from Psalm 91:12. In their context they indicate that the Lord will protect the righteous man who ‘dwells in the shelter of the Most High’ and thus abides ‘in the shadow of the Almighty’. Such a one is protected ‘in all his ways’ because he has ‘made the Lord his refuge’. The devil indeed takes things out of context! Jesus knew the Father’s protection only in order to fulfil His purpose—‘in all His ways’. Such a state does not allow for presumption, for such presumption is not faith, but distrust.

Jesus, however, is not deceived: ‘It is said, “you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”’ The true Son waits for the Father to act, and in complete trust abandons His own cause to Him. He will not test His Father’s love, but will wait upon it.

**4:13** Having thus been worsted in the encounter, when ‘the devil had finished every temptation he departed from Him until an opportune time’. Significantly, Jesus won His victory as man, without calling upon the prerogatives of Deity to effect victory by some metaphysical power (if indeed such a victory were possible). Rather His victory over the evil one is the same as ours, viz. in and through the Word (cf. Rev. 12:11). Jesus is indeed the stronger man (Luke 11:19f.) and Jesus is now able to *begin* the task of bringing release to the captives (4:18; cf. 13:16), but this victory will be confirmed and consolidated through the Cross. Luke has no record of the ministry of the angels as recorded in Mark 1:13 and Matthew 4:11, but Jesus clearly is strengthened for His task, as the following verses indicate.

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<sup>1</sup> We will never be able to identify accurately the part of the temple to which this refers.



## IV. The Galilean Ministry (4:14—9:50)

### A. The Beginning of Jesus' Public Ministry (4:14–30)

#### 1. Galilee (4:14–15).

**4:14** After the battle in the wilderness, 'Jesus returned from Galilee in the power of the Spirit; and news about Him spread throughout all the surrounding district'. These two statements are intimately related. Jesus was the man of the Spirit and the news of His return was not due to the popular press of the day, but by the evangelistic work of the Spirit Himself.

**4:15** Jesus' public ministry is introduced by the statement 'and He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all'. The popularity of Jesus is an ongoing theme in Luke, as we will see. For His part we may gather that such praise was not regarded by Jesus as significant (cf. John 2:23ff.).

#### 2. Nazareth (4:16–30).

**4:16** In Luke 4:14 we have been told, 'Jesus returned from Galilee in the power of the Spirit; and news about Him spread throughout all the surrounding district', while in 4:15 we have been informed that Jesus 'began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all'. When taken together these statements indicate that news of Him must have spread abroad, even to His home town.<sup>1</sup> With the temptation in the wilderness now behind Him, and the anointing of the Spirit still upon Him (cf. Acts 10:38), Jesus 'came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up'. He attended the synagogue services regularly ('as was His custom'), but on this particular occasion 'He stood up to read'. It was more than likely that He would have done this on earlier occasions, but these would have been without the significance of the current events and empowering.

**4:17–19** In keeping with current synagogue practice, a scroll was handed to Him from which to read. On this occasion it was that of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus 'found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor [cf. Luke 6:20; 12:32]; He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives [cf. Luke 11:22f.; 13:16; John 8:31f.], and recovery of sight to the blind [Luke 7:21f; Isa 42:7], to set free those who are downtrodden [Isa. 58:6; cf. Matt. 11:28f.; John 7:37], to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"'.<sup>2</sup>

The quotation is from Isaiah 61:1f. and includes a phrase from Isaiah 58:6. Each of the phrases has a rich soteriological significance.<sup>2</sup> That Jesus Himself did not understand them in political terms is evident from His attitude to the legal, including Pilate himself. Doubtless

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<sup>1</sup> This event is reported later in Matthew and Mark, but this is because Luke does not give a detailed description of the earlier ministry referred to in 4:14–15.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin comments, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. I, p. 148:

The first lesson we learn is the perspective of the preaching of the Gospel, and what it brings us: when we are altogether overwhelmed with every manner of evil, then God bursts upon us with His life-giving rays, to lead us out of the bottomless pit of death, and restore to us the fullness of bliss . . . Secondly, we see who they are, whom Christ invites to Himself, and makes partakers of the grace entrusted to Him: those who are in all ways to be pitied and destitute of all hope. At the same time we are warned that the only way we may enjoy these benefits of Christ is to be humbled by a serious realization of our ills, and to seek for Him as hungry men seek their liberator. Those that are full of pride, and do not groan in their bondage, find no discomfort in their blindness.

physical healing is in view, but this is not the full extent of the Messiah's ministry. All healings, being signs of the Kingdom, point to the ultimate healing to come, and are never ends in themselves.

The word here translated 'release' and 'set free' (*aphésis*) 'in normal Christian usage means "forgiveness", and it is possible that the Christian reader should hear this undertone in the word.'<sup>1</sup> There has been much debate as to the reason for the inclusion of the phrase from Isaiah 58. Its significance lies in the use of *aphésis*. There can be no release apart from forgiveness (cf. Rev. 1:5b), and given both the Divine *dei* of the Cross and the import of Zechariah's statement in Luke 1:67–79, Jesus' use of the phrase is intelligible.

**4:20** As a result of His reading, 'the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him' as He returned the scroll to the attendant and then 'sat down'. This was the customary position for teaching, and those in the synagogue were eagerly waiting for His exposition of the portions He had read.

**4:21** The exposition which follows was not, however, as they would have expected. Jesus 'began to say to them [i.e. He began by saying to them], "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."' The 'today' refers not simply to the time of Jesus' utterance but addresses us directly (cf. Heb. 4).

**4:22** brings us to the reaction to His ministry. Initially 'all were speaking well of Him and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips'. His teaching was even more amazing because the one speaking was Jesus, 'Joseph's son' (cf. Mark 6:3; Matt. 13:55f.). But there was no obedient heart behind the wonderment. It was a wonderment of incredulity, not faith. Such a response produces an initial reaction of favour that is quickly dissipated as its fleshly foundation is exposed.

**4:23–27** The news of His ministry clearly had spread to Nazareth. The ones hearing Him must have heard of various miracles being done 'at Capernaum'. Jesus addressed this directly saying, 'No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, "Physician heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done in Capernaum, do here in your home town as well."' In this way Jesus addresses the deep-seated unbelief in those present. He knew that '. . . no prophet is welcome in his home town' and He would not compromise His ministry by trying to win their approval. No sign would be done for idle speculation or curiosity.

He then spoke to them concerning the situation that obtained in the days of Elijah. This great prophet was not sent to any of the widows in Israel, but to Zaraphath in Sidon (4:25; cf. I Kings 17:8ff.). So, too, is a similar point seen in the healing of Naaman (4:26; cf. II Kings 5:1–14), who was a Syrian, even though there were plenty of Israelite lepers who were not healed. The point of these two illustrations is important. The work of God is not limited to Israel after the flesh (cf. 3:8) and in His sovereign grace He will have mercy on whom He will, be they Israelite, Sidonite or Syrian! The salvation spoken about in the reading from the prophet Isaiah is totally a matter of God's free choice, which can be neither gainsaid nor manipulated. The residents of His own home town had no more claim on Jesus than anyone else. His ministry was not to be for the upbuilding of their reputation, but for the glory of the Father who sent Him.

**4:28–29** The reaction was strong and swift. 'All in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things and they rose up and cast Him out of the city.' This was no mere expulsion, however, for they 'led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff'. This action may have been gauged to do away with

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 184.

Him in itself, or it may have been 'the prelude to a stoning'.<sup>1</sup> Either way the reaction was designed to put Him to death.

**4:30** Jesus, however, was delivered (miraculously?) from them. 'Passing through their midst, He went his way' (cf. John 7:30; 8:59; 10:39). There is no indication in any of the Gospels that He returned to Nazareth. The Word had done its work of judgement, the process of winnowing had begun.

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 108.

## **B. The Ministry Centred on Capernaum (4:31—5:16)**

### **1. The Demoniac in the Synagogue (4:31–37).**

**4:31–32** transfers the scene of the action back to Capernaum, the town mentioned in the synagogue debate at Nazareth. His teaching caused people to be 'amazed' because 'His message was with authority' (cf. 4:32; Matt. 7:28f.; Mark 1:22; John 6:63).

**4:32–37** give an insight into this authority. We presume that while He was teaching in the synagogue a man 'possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon . . . cried out with a loud voice'.<sup>1</sup> The content of the cry is significant. The demon knew and recognized who Christ was (cf. Mark 1:24; 5:7; Matt. 8:29; Luke 8:28) and it also recognized His power to destroy it. Truly the demons believe and tremble (James 2:19)!

Jesus 'rebuked him' ordering the demon to be silent and to leave the man. The demon threw the man down, but came out of him 'without doing him any harm'. The whole exorcism stands as a simple testimony to the power of God, for Jesus did not have to use any of the various magic spells or potions common to others. His authority was complete and unmediated.

The amazement of the crowd is not without its basis, therefore. Here was one with true authority, even over 'unclean spirits'. It is not surprising that 'the report about Him was getting into every locality in the surrounding district'.

### **2. The Healing of Simon's Mother-in-Law (4:38–39).**

**4:38–39** Upon leaving the synagogue He 'entered Simon's home'. There He found the family concerned for Simon's mother-in-law who 'was suffering from a high fever'. In their concern 'they made a request of Him on her behalf'. In this particular case the fever seems to have had an evil origin for Jesus 'rebuked' it 'and it left her'. Her recovery was complete and instantaneous, as evidenced by the fact that 'she immediately arose and waited on them'. There can be no general principle of the rebuking of illness drawn from this instance. The manner of His ministry on this occasion was dictated by the particular case at hand. God had allowed this situation to arise for the well-being and instruction of them all, but it is clear from the rest of the Scriptures that not all illness is demonic.

### **3. Various Healings and Summary (4:40–44).**

**4:40–41** Later in the day many others brought their sick to Him and 'laying His hands on every one of them, He was healing them'. At the same time many demonized folk found release as He 'rebuked' the demons and they 'came out' of them. It is significant that Jesus would 'not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ'. This statement introduces the concept of the 'Messianic secret' which appears in a number of places in the synoptics (e.g. Mark 1:25, 34; 3:12; 9:30; Matt. 8:4; 16:20; Luke 9:21). The object of the secrecy was to preserve the integrity of Jesus' ministry. As it was, He had to battle against the popular misunderstanding of His ministry (e.g. John 6:15) and press on to the Cross and Resurrection despite resistance (cf. Mark 9:9, 30–31; etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that the activity of Satan and his minions was at a peak during Jesus' earthly ministry. We do not doubt the reality of his evil operations even today, but it is significant that demon possession is only referred to twice outside the Gospels (Acts 16:16ff.; 19:13ff.). There was a mighty encounter leading up to the Cross and the opposition by the demonic forces was of immense proportions.

**4:42–44** The next morning 'He departed and went to a lonely place'. Even here, 'the multitudes' found Him and 'tried to keep Him from going away from them'. But He knew His purpose and could not be diverted from it, saying to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God in the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose'. Thus 'He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea'.

Here is the first use of the phrase 'the kingdom of God' in Luke. From now on it becomes a common phrase (thirty uses in Luke and seven in Acts), and in terms of frequency of use it is more pronounced in Luke than in either Mark or John. Matthew uses a synonymous expression: 'the kingdom of heaven'. Essentially, 'the kingdom of God' is God's reign. It therefore should not be identified with a place or even with a group (the church). The Church is created by the action of the Kingdom, but should not be identified with it. The Gospel we proclaim is 'the good news of the Kingdom', while the hope we have is of the Kingdom's consummation. To enter the Kingdom is to submit to the reign of the king, though none of the rebellious elements of the universe are able to undo the Kingdom or its work.

#### 4. The Calling of the First Disciples (5:1–11).

**5:1–3** These verses set the scene for the next main event in Luke's narrative. As the story appears here, it is unique to Luke. The 'multitude' pressing to hear Jesus' preaching presented a problem of space. At this time Jesus was preaching 'by the lake of Gennesaret' (i.e. the Sea of Galilee). To avoid the crush He requested Simon (one of the fishermen 'washing their nets') to take Him out a little from shore. There 'He sat down and began teaching the multitudes from the boat'.

**5:4** At the conclusion of the time of instruction, Jesus asked Simon to put out into the lake again and '... let down your nets for a catch.'

**5:5** Simon's response is not as ungracious as we are sometimes given to think, for while he believed the attempt to be futile, he nevertheless did Jesus' bidding.<sup>1</sup> He calls Him 'master', using a word that Luke uses in preference to 'rabbi'.

**5:6–7** The results of the effort were quite miraculous. They 'enclosed a great quantity of fish and their nets began to break'. In the end they had to signal to their partners for help, 'and they came and filled both of the boats so that they began to sink'.

**5:8** Simon's response is one of awe. He 'fell down at Jesus' feet saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"' (cf. Gen. 18:27, 30, 32; Exod. 20:19; Judg. 13:20; Job 42:5f.; Isa. 6:5; Rev. 1:17). There is a change from 'master' (5:5) to 'Lord' which is probably significant. The former denoted Simon's natural respect for Jesus as a teacher, but the latter term relates to divine revelation.

**5:9–10** The reaction of Peter was also mirrored in his companions, including 'James and John, the sons of Zebedee'. The focus of attention remains on Simon, however, which is understandable given his prominence in the early church. To him Jesus gave a special word, saying 'Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.' The vocation and the command to 'fear not' are correlative and equally important.

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. I, p. 156:

... when Peter was so quick to obey Christ's order, before he knew Him as Prophet or Son of God, then there is no excuse for our shame, who preach Him as our Lord and King and Judge, if we are commanded by Him ten times to do our tasks, but never move a finger.

**5:11** ‘And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.’ (cf. 5:28; 14:33; 18:22, 28; 21:3f.; Acts 2:45; 4:34; 5:1ff.; Mark 12:44; Matt. 13:44f.). God in His great mercy had gripped the hearts of these men in such a way that they could not but follow. That they left their nets and followed Jesus is not a testimony to *their* commitment, but to *God’s* grace!

### 5. The Healing of a Leper (5:12–16).

**5:12–13** (cf. Matt. 8:1–4; Mark 1:40–45). Jesus was engaged in an active preaching tour. While He was ‘in one of the cities’ (i.e. of the Galilean area) a man ‘full of leprosy’ saw Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The phrase indicates the disease had reached an advanced state. At the sight of Him, the man ‘fell on his face and implored Him, saying, “Lord, if you are willing you can make me clean”’ (cf. the attitude seen in Luke 17:12 where they stood at a distance). The leper ‘presents himself to Him for healing, unsure of the outcome, as he had not yet come to know the will of Christ.’<sup>2</sup> All the synoptic writers use the term ‘clean’ rather than ‘heal’ because of the ritual/ceremonial nature of the disease’s OT background.

Jesus’ response was instant. He ‘stretched out His hand, and touched him, saying, “I am willing, be cleansed.”’ According to Mark 1:41 the action was one full of compassion. The touching is a sign of the depth of His love as well as the means by which the power of God to heal came to the man. The healing was instantaneous, the leprosy leaving ‘immediately’. The fact that He stretched out His hand to him is remarkable given the prevailing social morés, and it indicates the totality of Jesus’ identification with sinners. He approaches boldly and directly to deal with them, not fearing their pollution.

**5:14–16** We have seen the concept of the ‘Messianic secret’ elsewhere (see notes on 4:40–41), and here the theme again emerges. While commanding the man to show himself to the priests at the Temple and to offer a sacrifice for cleansing according to the Law (Lev. 14:1–32), He nevertheless ‘ordered him to tell no one’ (cf. Mark 1:45!). That Jesus asked him to obtain an official ‘discharge’ from the condition is a great act of mercy. Without it the man’s acceptance in the wider community would have been tenuous to say the least.

News about Jesus and His work kept spreading ‘even farther’, however, and ‘great multitudes’ were coming both to hear Him and to seek healing.

For His part, ‘He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray’ (cf. Mark 1:35). At all times He lived as the true Son of the Father, in dependence upon Him to do His will, and at all times He had to ensure His work was that of His Father, rather than that which simply flowed from (or played up to) His popularity.

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<sup>1</sup> It is true that the biblical term ‘leprosy’ does not correspond exactly to that which we call leprosy today, though their term includes that which is true leprosy. Nevertheless, leprosy in any of its shapes was a dreadful malady to contract, not simply because of the physical symptoms but because of the corresponding social ostracism and religious alienation. According to Leviticus 13–14 the sufferer was virtually excommunicated, and before any restoration could take place there had to be a special sacrifice offered.

In this instance the man was in the town in which Jesus was preaching. This was in contravention of the current law, and indicates something of the degree of this man’s desperate faith as he came into prohibited ground seeking the One he believed could help him. The literal translation of the sentence is quite dramatic: ‘While Jesus was in one of the cities, behold, a man full of leprosy! . . .’

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, p. 244.

## C. Controversies with the Pharisees (5:17—6:11)

### 1. The Pharisees and the Healing of the Paralytic (5:17–26).

**5:17** This verse introduces the Pharisees<sup>1</sup> by name. The reputation of Jesus had spread far and wide, so much so that a number of ‘Pharisees and teachers of the Law . . . had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem’ in order to hear Him. As the narrative unfolds it is clear that they did not come out of faith, but in order to deceive and trap Him.

At this time also Luke tells us, ‘the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing’. This statement should be compared with 6:19 and 8:46 (Mark 5:30) where similar observations are made. These references seem to indicate that Jesus’ healing ministry was not a blanket operation, but it was all a matter of dependency. At certain times the power of the Father was with Him to heal, at other times the implication is that the power of the Lord was with Him to do other things. There can be no doubt that Jesus Himself knew when He was anointed in such a way, and this very fact indicates His approach was not a *carte blanche* affair.

**5:18–19** With the scene thus set, the circumstances of the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees are spelled out. A paralyzed man, who had been carried on a stretcher by some of his friends, is the object of the encounter. His friends ‘were trying to bring him in and set him down in front of Him [Jesus]’, but the press of the crowd was so great that they could not do so. Necessity being the mother of invention, they clambered up onto the roof, removed some tiles and lowered him down ‘with his stretcher, right in the centre, in front of Jesus’.

**5:20–21** Here we enter into the debate with the Pharisees. Jesus, ‘seeing their faith’ (this would include the faith of the man himself as well as that of his friends) said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven you.’ The immediate cause of the conflict was this pronouncement of sins forgiven. The Pharisees’ question, ‘Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ is the basis of accusing Jesus of blaspheming (cf. Matt. 9:3; John 10:33; Acts 6:11). According to passages such as Exodus 34:6; Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 1:18; 43:25; 44:22; 55:6f.; Jeremiah 31:34; etc., the forgiveness of sins was clearly a Divine action. Jesus, the Messiah, is one with His Father, however, and thus can speak with all of the Father’s authority.

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<sup>1</sup> The origins of the Pharisaic movement lie in the time of Israel’s return from the Babylonian exile. In response to the laxity in Israel before the exile, Ezra and the leaders of those returning to the land rightly stressed the need for the nation to live in accord with the Covenant and in keeping with God’s revelation in the Law. Over time, however, Israel drifted, and in response to this certain *chasidim* (pious ones) stood up against the drift to Hellenism (Greek cultural influence), siding with the Maccabees during the uprising against Antiochus Epiphanes.

By the time of the NT the Pharisees had developed into a powerful group which was easily recognizable and of very strict religious morals. Their main articles of belief were: obedience to the Law (both written and the oral interpretation that was handed down by tradition, cf. Mark 7:1–13); the looking for the Messiah to overthrow the pagan rulers of the nation; the clinging to numerous ceremonial laws designed to protect the core of the Law from being broken (such ceremonial laws related especially to concepts of cleanliness and purity, and the preservation of the Sabbath’s sanctity). They were theologically ‘conservative’ (e.g. believing in the resurrection of the body, angels and demons).

The Sadducees were their opponents. They rejected the place of tradition, the resurrection of the body (cf. Mark 12:18; Acts 4:12; 23:80), and belief in angels and spirits (Acts 2:38). They came from the aristocratic, or ruling classes in Israel, and were happy to co-operate with the Romans in order to preserve their power in the Sanhedrin. Eventually a ‘common enemy’ (viz. Jesus) brought the two into temporary co-operation (cf. Mark 14–15).

The ‘scribes’, who are also mentioned on a number of occasions in conjunction with the Pharisees, were men specially set aside to study the Law and to record debates and interpretations on it. Most scribes were Pharisees, but not all Pharisees were scribes. The Pharisees were ‘laymen’, the scribes were specially trained and had official status.

**5:22–26** The inner reaction of the Pharisees was not unrecognized by Jesus. He said to them, ‘Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, “Your sins have been forgiven”, or to say, “Rise and walk”?’

Why did He say this? The thrust of the argument is as follows: To earthly ears the first statement is easier to say, no visible proof being needed. But Jesus says the first and it is confirmed by the second<sup>1</sup>, thus indicating that the forgiveness of sins is at least as miraculous as any physical healing.<sup>2</sup> Others may be able to heal (cf. Matt. 7:22), but only He could pronounce forgiveness that precedes true healing. He commanded the man to walk, by way of confirmation of His power as ‘Son of Man’ to forgive sins (this is the force of v. 24), i.e. His pronouncement of forgiveness is thus not an empty boast.<sup>3</sup> The healing was complete and instantaneous, so that the man ‘took up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God’. The reaction of the crowds was to be ‘filled with fear’ and ‘seized with astonishment’ so that they were ‘glorifying God’ for the remarkable things they had seen.

The title ‘Son of Man’ is first used by Luke here. From now on it will appear twenty-five times in his Gospel, always as Jesus’ self designation. The term ‘. . . designates Jesus not simply as man, but as the normal man, the perfect representative of the race’.<sup>4</sup> In its OT background it appears mainly in Daniel (e.g. 7:13; 8:17; 10:16) and Ezekiel (e.g. 2:1; 3:1, 3f.; etc.), with ninety-three of its 107 OT occurrences in the latter Book. Elsewhere it is seen in poetic couplets (e.g. Ps. 8:4; Isa. 51:12). Unlike the terms ‘Messiah’, ‘Son of David’ or ‘Son of God’, it appears to have had no clearly defined political-cum-religious overtones in the time of Jesus. It thus seems, among other things, that it enabled Jesus to identify Himself as Messiah without the use of terms that had become, by His day, greatly weighted politically.

## 2. The Pharisees and the Events Surrounding Levi’s Call (5:27–39).

**5:27, 28** These verses give in simple terms the call of Levi, the tax collector. Hearing Jesus’ call, Levi ‘left everything behind and he rose and began to follow Him’. From Matthew 10:3 and 9:9 it appears that this man and the ‘Matthew’ who was one of the twelve were identical. To leave his tax collecting booth was a definitive act, ‘burning his bridges’ in order to follow. Christ had gripped Him.

**5:29–32** These verses transfer the action to Levi’s house where he ‘gave a big reception for Him’ (cf. 7:36; 9:12ff.; 10:38ff.; 11:37; 14:1; 19:7; 22:14; 24:30, 41ff.). Here Jesus was ‘reclining at table’ with a ‘great crowd’ of tax-gatherers and others. This action gave the Pharisees cause to grumble ‘at his disciples’ with the question, ‘Why do you eat with the tax-gatherers and sinners?’

Rather than the disciples, it is Jesus Himself who answers, saying, ‘It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’

**5:33** The Pharisees were not satisfied, for this attitude to them seemed too lax. They indicated that John’s followers fasted and prayed regularly (i.e. in terms of the fixed daily prayers

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<sup>1</sup> Godet, *A Commentary on The Gospel of St. Luke*, Vol. I, p. 267, comments: ‘It is no easier, certainly, to pardon than to heal; but it is much easier to convict a man of imposture who falsely claims the power to heal, than him who falsely arrogates authority to pardon.’

<sup>2</sup> Cf. P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1980 edn, p. 295:

We should realize how far from a matter of course forgiveness was for a holy, and justly angry God, for all His love. A free forgiveness flows from moral strength, but an easy forgiveness only means moral weakness. How natural for God to forgive! Nay, if there be one thing in the world forever supernatural it is real forgiveness, especially on the scale of redemption.

<sup>3</sup> While it is true that not all maladies are directly related to specific sins (so Luke 13:1–5; John 9:1–3), the forgiveness of sins is necessary for the release of this creation from all its woes. There can be no new creation without forgiveness, for the disease of the current creation is linked directly to sin and evil.

<sup>4</sup> Godet, p. 268.



engaged in by themselves), as did their own disciples, but Jesus' disciples were free to eat and drink.

**5:34–35** According to Jesus, the reason for their non-fasting was that they were the attendants of the bridegroom, and, as such, they should not fast while the bridegroom was with them. However, 'the days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days'. That there was fasting in the early church is clear (e.g. Acts 13:2f.; 14:23), but it was never institutionalized. As the Lord led, so there was fasting.<sup>1</sup>

**5:36–39** The whole discussion is followed by a parable. Both the cloth and garment illustration (v. 36) and the wine and wineskin illustration (vv. 37–38) indicate the completely new thing being done by God in Jesus. 'Jesus is not simply patching up Judaism: He is teaching something radically new. If the attempt is made to constrict this within the old wineskins of Judaism (e.g. by imposing fasting), the result will be disastrous.'<sup>2</sup>

The comment about being satisfied with old wine (v. 39) makes sense of the rejection of Jesus. Those enamoured with the old will not come to the new. Indeed they will destroy the new in order to preserve the old.

### 3. Controversy Over the Sabbath 6:1–11.

**6:1–2** Using an indefinite construction of time, Luke now introduces the next main point of dispute with the Pharisees. On 'a certain Sabbath', as Jesus and His disciples were passing through some grain fields (probably along a path dividing smaller sections of the field), 'his disciples were picking and eating the heads of grain, rubbing them with their hands'. The action itself was quite permissible (cf. Deut. 23:25), but the problem was that they were doing this on the Sabbath. This stirred the ire of the Pharisees, as they saw it to be an unlawful practice.<sup>3</sup>

Other conflicts regarding the Sabbath can be seen in Luke 13:10–19 and 14:1–6. While the principle of Sabbath rest has been 'built into' creation, the Pharisees had perverted the use of the Sabbath into religious slavery.

**6:3–5** These verses give a summary of Jesus' teaching at the time. The action was justifiable because it had been prefigured in the behaviour of David and his band who ate the sanctified bread from the Temple (I Sam. 21:1–9). Above all, He was saying to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.' The Sabbath was given by God, but not for slavery! If David could do what he did, how much more could 'great David's greater Son' bring release from slavery to a corrupt religious institution. As the true man, Jesus indicated the proper order of creation: the Sabbath for man, not man for the Sabbath.

**6:6–7** On 'another Sabbath' Jesus 'entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered'. The scribes and Pharisees 'were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, in order that they might find reason to accuse Him'. Healing was permitted on the Sabbath, but only if it were a matter of life and death. This instance did not fit into that category so it could provide ammunition for a trumped up charge.

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<sup>1</sup> The issue is not really fasting itself, but the reasons for it and the attitude that underlies it. As Zechariah 7:5ff. makes clear, true fasting is an attitude of heart. In Jesus' day the practice of fasting had become regular amongst the Pharisees and other religious groups (cf. Luke 18:12), but its observance was seen to be meritorious and it was a rank form of hypocrisy (cf. Matt. 6:16; 9:14).

<sup>2</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, p. 122, comments:

The Pharisees would find in the plucking of the ears a breach of the regulation which forbade reaping and in rubbing in their hands that which prohibited threshing. Throwing away the husks probably represented winnowing, while eating showed that they had prepared food. Four distinct breaches of the Sabbath in one mouthful!

**6:8–11** Jesus ‘knew what they were thinking’ and yet He commanded the man to come forward to Him. Turning to the Pharisees He said, ‘I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do harm, to save a life or to destroy it?’ Jesus left no middle ground for His opponents. To not do good was to do evil. And even they knew it was not right to do evil! After ‘looking around at them all’ (awaiting a reply) He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand!” And he did so; and his hand was restored.’ The command was an impossible one, but the command was also the enabling power of God for it to be done.

The event led to an increase of opposition. The Pharisees were ‘filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus’. Their rage was as much because of their own loss of face as because of the ‘transgression’ of the Sabbath. If He were to continue unchecked the whole fabric of their religious observance and the power base it gave them would be undone!

## D. Jesus' Teaching on the Mountain (6:12–49)

### 1. The Choosing of the Twelve (6:12–16).

Jesus again spent the night in prayer. We have noticed elsewhere the emphasis that Luke brings through in this regard (see 3:21). Here the specific object of prayer is the choosing of the twelve. The term 'disciple' (*mathétés*) means a 'follower' and thus 'one who learns'. It is found in the Gospels and Acts, but not in the rest of the NT, where the words 'brother' or 'brethren' predominate. True discipleship is subsumed in sonship (and thus familyhood) under the Father!

Luke records that He called them 'apostles' (*apostoloi*). This term occurs also in Luke 6:13; 9:10; 11:49; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10; and twenty-eight times in Acts. Given Luke's chronicling of the mission of the Church under the Lord's headship, it is not surprising to see the love he has for the term. The word means a 'sent one' (cf. John 13:16; 20:21–23; Heb. 3:1) and in the NT has both a looser and a stricter sense. In the looser sense Barnabas, Apollos, Epaphroditus, Timothy and Silvanus are called apostles. Indeed anyone 'sent out' by the Spirit through the Church is 'apostolized' (cf. Acts 13:1f.; II Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). But the term is also used in a restricted sense with reference to the twelve and to Paul. This is a specific office (cf. Eph. 4:11) which forms, under Christ, the foundation of the Church (cf. Eph. 2:20; 3:5; II Pet. 3:2; Jude 17; Rev. 18:20; 21:14). Note that the twelve were *chosen* (the word is found also in 9:35; 10:42; 14:7), rather than volunteers (cf. John 15:16; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:25; I Cor. 15:9f.). All authority exercised by them was by virtue of the One sending them.

Also note the different personalities and gifts of the twelve. None of them were of high rank or political power. Most were poor. None were 'great according to this age' (cf. I Cor. 1:26ff.; 4:6–13). J. C. Ryle observes:

With a doctrine most unpalatable to the natural heart, with nothing whatever to compel obedience [they were not possessed of money to give to their hearers or followed by armies to frighten them]—a few lowly Galileans shook the world and changed the face of the Roman empire. One thing only can account for this. The Gospel of Christ, which these men proclaimed, was the truth of God.<sup>1</sup>

The list ends with 'Judas who *became* a traitor'.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis is Luke's, as only he has it. Judas apparently set out with good intentions, but Jesus' passion overshadows the public ministry from the very beginning. The twelve also includes two pairs of brothers, viz. Peter and Andrew, and James and John. Some argue that Jude and James, the son of Alphaeus, were also brothers, but it is a matter of no great consequence.

### 2. The Multitudes Described (6:17–19).

The twelve, however, were not the only ones who demanded His attention. A 'great throng of people' from throughout the country had come 'to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases'. We see the ongoing action of the King of the Kingdom as the forces of darkness were pressed back and those 'troubled with unclean spirits were being cured'. On the observation that power to heal was coming out of Him, see the comments made on Luke 5:16.

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<sup>1</sup> *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin comments (*Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. I, p. 166): 'When the Father with His wonderful providence put one devil in with eleven angels, He yet kept such a grip on the event, that his failure gave the Church more strength than upset.'

### 3. The Beatitudes (6:20–23).

Here we have the Lukan version of the beatitudes.<sup>1</sup> The words are addressed to the disciples for ‘He turned His gaze upon’ them as He spoke, but clearly the discourse expands to include others (esp. 6:24–26) as it develops, and the wider crowds would also have heard His teaching to the disciples.

**6:20** These disciples who are ‘poor’ are ‘blessed’ because ‘yours is the kingdom of heaven’. As places such as Proverbs 30:8f. and Isaiah 8:21 make plain, physical poverty is not of itself a blessing. Here the poverty is that engendered by following Him. As Morris says, ‘It is His disciples of whom Jesus is speaking. They are poor and they know that they are without resource. They rely on God and they must rely on Him, for they have nothing of their own on which to rely.’<sup>2</sup> These, Jesus says, have the Kingdom of God *now* (note ‘is’ rather than ‘shall be’ in 6:20). This is an important point. In these words He is speaking to a group of Kingdom people. Their physical poverty is linked to their poverty in spirit which has driven them to be His disciples. All the other beatitudes flow from this basis relationship.

**6:21** Those who are ‘hungry now shall be satisfied’ (cf. 13:28f.; 16:20–22; 22:16, 30), and those who ‘weep now shall laugh’ (cf. Isa. 60:20; 61:3; 66:10; Jer. 31:13; cf. Rev. 7:17; 21:4). In the context of the disciples there would be physical hunger, but also a hunger ‘for righteousness’ (as Matthew has it). The weeping in this context is not for some personal hurt or grief, but for the sake of the Kingdom and thus the world (cf. Dan. 9:1–20; Ezek. 9:4).

**6:22, 23** There is a special blessing attached to being persecuted (i.e. hated, ostracized, insulted and spurned) ‘for the sake of the Son of Man’ (cf. Acts 5:41; 16:25; 21:13f.; Rom. 5:3–5; James 1:2; I Pet. 1:2, 6). These have a great reward in heaven (cf. Rev. 7:9–14), and are being treated in just the same way as the prophets themselves were treated (cf. II Tim. 3:12; John 15:18–19; 16:33; I Pet. 4:12–19).

### 4. The Woes (6:24–26).

On the other hand, there are also ‘woes’. These are unique to Luke, and correspond directly with the beatitudes above, but with a different group of people in mind. If the blessings are attached to the Lord’s disciples, then the woes are attached to those who persecute the disciples. ‘Woe’ is difficult to translate. It is not so much a threat, but an expression of regret and compassion.<sup>3</sup> The first woe is pronounced against the ‘rich’ who ‘are receiving your comfort in full’. Rather than seeing their need for God, these are they who are self-sufficient (cf. Luke 12:16–21; 16:25). Likewise, the ones who are now ‘well fed’ will be ‘hungry’ later, and those who ‘laugh’ now will ‘mourn and weep’ later as the reality of their eternal poverty comes home to them. Ultimately all will see that there is no reward or security other than God. This group stands in contrast to the persecuted ones of the Kingdom, for they are false rather than true witnesses—‘woe . . . when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets’ (cf. Isa. 5:31; 30:10; Micah 2:11; Jer. 5:31; 14:14–16; 23:17ff.).

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<sup>1</sup> Is this material in Luke the same as that in Matthew 5–7, commonly called ‘The Sermon on the Mount’, or do we have two separate discourses? Some (e.g. Ryle) argue that they are indeed two different sermons. If it is fair to assume that similar material was taught on a number of different occasions they may well be two different events, but, whatever the case, we only have a summary of Jesus’ teaching (cf. John 20:31; 21:25) and we should not over-emphasize any differences.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, p. 127.

### 5. The Way of Love and Mercy (6:27–45).

**6:27–30** The blessings and the woes are followed by a section of teaching on the way of love. The words are addressed to ‘you who hear’ (6:27) in contrast to those who do not have ears to hear. Those who hear are to ‘love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat [revile] you’.<sup>1</sup> This teaching stands in contrast to that of the scribes on the one hand (cf. Matt. 5:43), but in conformity with the true intent of the OT Law on the other (Lev. 19:18; cf. Exod. 23:4f.).

Moreover, no hurts should be held (6:29), and generosity should be unstinting (6:30). This does not mean that we are to be preyed upon, however. Says Morris:

Love must be ready to be deprived of everything if need be. Of course, in a given case it may not be the way of love to give. But it is love that must decide whether we give or withhold, not a regard for our possessions. Give, incidentally, is in a continuous tense. Jesus is talking about the habitual attitude, not the occasional generous impulse.<sup>2</sup>

Paul’s comments to the Christians at Thessalonica regarding work and charity illustrate the point (I Thess. 5:12–15; cf. II Thess. 3:6–15).

**6:31–36** The whole thrust of true living is summed up by, ‘just as you want people to treat you, treat them the same way’ (6:31). This statement really is the ‘golden rule’ for by it at any point we are able to measure our reactions and responses to given situations. All of the prohibitions of the Law are observed through the positive practice of love (Rom. 13:9) and this rule is the measure.

The actions of true love are different from those of convenience. To ‘love those who love you’ (6:32), to ‘do good to those who do good to you’ (6:33), and ‘to lend to those from whom you expect to receive’ (6:34), are no different from the actions of ‘sinners’. Rather, ‘the sons of the Most High’ should love freely, doing good and lending without expecting anything in return. As Jesus says, ‘your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men’ (6:35). The reward we have is God Himself! (cf. Rev. 21:3).<sup>3</sup> As the Father is merciful, so should His sons be (6:36).

J. C. Ryle comments (cf. I Pet. 2:21–24; Rom. 12:19–21):

... our Lord condemns every thing like a revengeful, pugnacious, litigious, or quarrelsome spirit ... He enjoins forbearance, patience, and long-suffering under injuries and insults ... He would have us endure much inconvenience and loss, and sacrifice some of our just rights, rather than have any contention.<sup>4</sup>

**6:36–38** In short, the sons of the Father must live in simplicity of relationships, not judging or condemning<sup>5</sup>, but pardoning (6:37). All giving must be in full and complete measure ‘for

<sup>1</sup> Morris quotes Caird as saying, ‘He who retaliates thinks he is manfully resisting aggression; in fact, he is making an unconditional surrender to evil.’ *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> When we speak of ‘rewards’ we are also led to the consideration of the relationship between grace and works. We note briefly the following points:

- (a) The Son came to do the works of the Father (e.g. John 4:34; 5:36; 9:4; etc.) and this work has been finished (John 15:24; 17:4; cf. Heb. 1:1–3), i.e. to do the Father’s work is at one with His role as Son.
- (b) Believers are saved by grace (the work of the Father through the Son and Spirit) in order to work the works of God (Eph. 2:10; cf. Col. 1:10; Gal. 6:4; II Thess. 2:17; II Tim. 2:21; etc.).
- (c) Yet no work for God can be done except by God and the operation of grace (Eph. 2:10; 3:20; Phil. 2:13; Col. 1:29; I Cor. 15:9), i.e. ‘works are what grace is all about’.
- (d) Such good works are a demonstration of God’s grace and are to His glory (Matt. 5:16; John 6:28) while, conversely, works done in separation from God are ‘dead’, however ‘good’ they may be (John 3:19; Col. 1:21; Eph. 5:11; Matt. 7:22).
- (e) To be judged according to our works is thus to be judged in the light of our response to the grace that has come to us. To be rich in good works is to be rich in the fruit of grace.

<sup>4</sup> *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, p. 187f.

<sup>5</sup> That there is a difference between ‘judging’ and ‘discerning’ is clear from such references as John 7:24; I Corinthians 5:12; 6:1–5; Galatians 1:8f.; Philipians 3:2; I Thessalonians 2:14f.; I Timothy 1:6f.; Titus 3:2; I John 4:1; II John 10; III John 9; etc., as well as Jesus’ own attitude to the Pharisees and His warnings about the ‘false prophets’.

by the standard of measure it will be measured to you in return' (6:37). Like Father, like son! Just as the Father gives generously, so should His children. In fact, the degree to which they share in His giving will govern the manner of their receiving.

**6:39–45** Next follows a series of parables which all make the same basic point. The parable of the blind leading the blind (6:39; cf. Matt. 23:16; 23:24; Rom. 2:19) relates to what the disciples are to hear and do. They should not follow the blind (i.e. the false teachers of the Pharisaic or scribal party). The comment about the teacher and his pupil 6:40 (cf. 22:27; Matt. 10:24; John 13:16) illustrates the first statement. If Jesus' hearers persist in hearing the false teachers, they will never rise above them.

The comments about the speck and the log (6:41–42) thus relate. One cannot hope to help another unless the log is first removed, but the false teachers delight in dealing with 'specks' without first looking to themselves. Indeed, this is not solely the prerogative of the scribes and Pharisees, but is the perpetual pursuit of all fallen and self-righteous humanity!

All these comments are brought together (the force of the 'for' in v. 43) in the teaching about the fruit produced on good and bad trees (6:43–44), and the comments about treasure and the heart (6:45). Simply said, the life of love is the fruit of love. There can be no natural production of good fruit from a bad heart.

### **6. Hearing the Word: The Parable of the Two Builders (6:46–49).**

These verses are immediately related to that which precedes. The point is simple. The calling of Jesus as 'Lord' must be followed up by actions of love that bear testimony to Him (cf. Matt. 7:22). The one who hears Jesus' words and 'acts upon them' is like a wise man who has built upon a strong foundation a house that is not destroyed when the flood comes. The others, the ones who are hearers only (cf. James 1:19–27) are left with nothing but ruins (cf. I Cor. 3:11ff.).

## E. Two Examples of Jesus' Healing Ministry (7:1–17)

### 1. The Centurion's Slave (7:1–10).

**7:1–3** Jesus, having 'completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people' went to Capernaum. Here He was met by 'some Jewish elders' who had been sent to meet Him by a certain 'highly regarded centurion' whose beloved slave 'was sick and about to die'. While there are some parallels to the healing of the nobleman's son in John 4:46ff., they seem to be two different incidents.

**7:4, 5** The Jewish elders had been sent to Jesus to entreat Him to come to help the Gentile centurion. From 7:4–5 we gather this man was a 'God fearer', to use a term that occurs later in Acts (e.g. Acts 10:1f., 22, 35; 13:16). God fearers were folk who were worshippers of the Hebrew God, but were not full Jewish proselytes.

**7:6, 7** While Jesus and the attendant crowd of disciples and followers were travelling to the centurion's house, He was met by a delegation of the man's friends setting forth (i) the centurion's unworthiness to have Jesus come under his roof, and (ii) the fact that he recognized that Jesus did not physically need to be present but could heal the slave with a word. The messengers do not appear in Matthew's account of the event, which is abbreviated, but for Luke the messengers are important because his emphasis is on the character of the man and the nature of his faith, and a Gentile at that!

**7:8** The reason for the centurion's belief in Jesus' ability to heal from a distance is now stated. According to the centurion's messengers he said, 'For I, too, am a man under authority . . .' This statement stands instead of the more expected, 'I am a man with authority'. This is an important principle. There can be no true exercise of authority unless one is under authority. Jesus was the true Son of His Father who only did that which His Father gave Him to do (cf. John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10) and who therefore had authority. He thus stands in contrast to the other so-called teachers of the day who were devoid of true authority and had created a false and burdensome authority structure.

**7:9, 10** The faith of the man caused Jesus to 'marvel at him' (cf. Matt. 6:6 where the same word is used in a negative sense) and He commented to the multitude following Him, 'I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.' Needless to say, when the messengers had returned, the slave was well. In comparing the accounts of Matthew and Luke, Morris observes:

*Matthew says that the healing took place while the men were with Jesus, but Luke leaves us to infer this. He puts no stress on it. His emphasis is on the centurion's faith. And he leaves us with the question, Did Jesus go beyond even that great faith and heal without so much as a word?<sup>1</sup>*

The inclusion of this incident, and the whole way in which it is stated, reflects Luke's concern with Gentiles and the Gentile mission. Later (Acts 10) there was to be another significant incident involving a centurion!

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 139.

## 2. The Raising of the Widow's Son (7:11–17).

**7:11, 12** Next follows the story of the raising of the widow's son at Nain. Again there was a 'large multitude' accompanying Jesus and the disciples. As they approached the town they met a funeral procession coming the other way. The person being buried was 'the only son' of a woman 'who was a widow'.

**7:13, 14** At the sight of this 'He felt compassion for her', and after telling her not to weep any longer (this is the force of the tense used), 'He touched the coffin'<sup>1</sup>, causing the bearers to halt. He then said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise!' The widow's plight was really quite desperate. There was no social welfare system, and left without a male protector she would have found it extremely hard to fend for herself. 'And besides the hardship and the sense of loneliness and sorrow, there was also the knowledge that the family line had ended.'<sup>2</sup>

**7:15–17** At His command the young man 'sat up and began to speak', the end point of the action being that 'Jesus gave him back to his mother' (7:15; cf. I Kings 17:23). The action was one of compassion for a family in distress, rather than simply individuals. The whole event caused 'fear' to grip all who were following 'and they began glorifying God' (not Jesus!; cf. Matt. 5:16), both for the raising up of a great prophet (cf. the actions of Elijah and Elisha in I Kings 17:17ff. and II Kings 4:18ff.) and God's evident visitation (7:15–16). Again Jesus' reputation kept spreading (7:17).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The word here translated 'coffin' usually refers to an open bier, with the body wrapped in a shroud lying atop. The use of coffins as such was not unknown, but it was unusual.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, p. 139.

<sup>3</sup> It is significant that 7:13 (in a passage where death itself is seen to be emptied of its power by Jesus' word) has Luke's first instance of Jesus being designated simply as 'the Lord'. This designation is also seen in 10:1; 12:42; 13:15; 17:6; 18:6; 19:8, 31, 34; 22:61; 24:3, 34. It is clearly the title ascribed to Him by Luke and the early church. When compared to other uses of 'the Lord' (e.g. 1:6, 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, 25, 28, 32; etc.) there must have been clear connotations of divinity attached to its use.



## **F. Jesus and John the Baptist (7:18–35)**

### **1. Jesus and the Messengers from John (7:18–23).**

**7:18–20** Earlier in his narrative Luke has given a brief account of John the Baptist's arrest (3:18–20). Now we return to John, whose disciples 'reported to him all these things'. John sent messengers to Jesus, asking whether He was in fact the longed for Messiah or whether they needed to wait for someone else. The reasons for John's sending of his disciples are not clear. Some suggest that John was acting not for his own sake, but for the sake of his followers who were wavering in faith. Others suggest that John's own faith and/or patience had begun to waver while languishing in prison, and yet others suggest that the Messiah's reported actions did not seem to John to be consistent with One who was to 'baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire', and whose winnowing fork was in His hand, i.e. where was the vindication and judgement? Whatever the case, the arrival of the messengers provides the opportunity to speak about both Jesus' and John's ministries.

**7:21–23** The messengers arrived with the questions 'at [the] very time' that Jesus cured many suffering from diseases, affliction, demonization and as 'He granted sight to many who were blind' (7:21). Jesus therefore responded to the disciples of John with the command to tell him what they had seen and heard, which He summarized as '... blind receive sight, lame walk, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear, dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them' (7:22; cf. Isa. 35:5, 6; 61:1). He ends by saying, 'And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me.' Stumbling is the opposite of believing in Him. Jesus' words thus are a strong encouragement to John to persist in faith, for all that He is doing is testified to in the Scriptures as being truly Messianic.

### **2. Jesus' Comments on John (7:24–30).**

**7:24–28** When 'the messengers from John had left', however, He 'began to speak to the multitudes about John' (lest they be deceived into thinking that Jesus was meaning to denigrate John). He reminded them that they went out to the wilderness not to see a man who was easily swayed (like a reed in the wind), nor was he one of the world's rich and powerful men, but rather they saw '... a prophet... and one who is more than a prophet' (7:26). Since John is the one spoken about in Malachi 3:1 (which is quoted in 7:27), Jesus was able to say, '... among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he' (7:28). John's unique calling set him apart from all other men generally and all other prophets specifically, yet the least in the Kingdom is greater than John, not because of any personal power or prowess, but because of the time in which they live. John lived in the time of prophetic preparation, those now in the Kingdom were in the time of fulfilment (cf. I Pet. 1:10f.).

**7:29, 30** This assessment of John's ministry is then followed by two significant statements. On the one hand, 'when all the people and the tax-collectors [a synonym for 'sinners'] heard, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John' (7:29). These folk had been baptized with the baptism of John, looking for the coming of the Messiah, to whom John pointed. When they heard Jesus they saw that God had indeed been faithful. They thus declared God to be just—true and steadfast. On the other hand, however, 'the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been

baptized by John' (7:30)<sup>1</sup>. For these ones the plan of God in His redemptive action was made worthless. They did not believe John and were not baptized by him, so they would not believe Jesus.

### 3. The Parable of the Fickle Children (7:31–35).

In the light of this, Jesus compared the generation to a fickle group of children who could not be pleased (7:31–35). Whether it be John or Jesus, the hearers would not do nor hear the truth. 'Yet wisdom is vindicated by her children' is thus a significant use of an apparently well known Proverb.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Lawyers' in this verse is equivalent to 'scribes' seen elsewhere (cf. 10:25; 11:45, 46, 52f.).

<sup>2</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 145: 'Those who are really wise (the children of wisdom) will pronounce right the right way, whether it be ascetic or social. They will see the wisdom of God in both John and Jesus. They will not walk in the critical ways of men who can never be pleased.'

## G. Jesus in the House of Simon the Pharisee (7:36–50)

**7:36–38** The Pharisaic hardness of heart is now illustrated by a moving story that takes place in Simon the Pharisee's house.<sup>1</sup> The designation of the woman who comes to Jesus as a 'sinner' (7:37) indicates that she was in all likelihood a prostitute, or at best a person of very loose morals whose reputation was well-known. Whatever the case, she would have realized that she would not have normally been welcome at a Pharisee's house, so it must have taken great bravery to come. Sin met by grace promotes fear of God, not man! This one 'brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him, at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet, and anointing them with perfume' (7:38). When people 'reclined at table' they leaned on the left arm with the head near to table and the feet pointing away from it. In this position she approached Jesus. Women commonly wore a small glass or alabaster vial of perfume or fragrant oil around their necks. As this woman came to Jesus' feet, probably intending to simply anoint them, her tears of gratitude started to flow. Here was a deeply emotive display of affection and humility. For a woman to be seen with her hair down was a thing of great humiliation, yet she did not let it down in order to attract attention, but simply as the spontaneous response to the fact that she had started crying over Jesus' feet and had nothing with which to wipe them!

*It is a fair conjecture that Jesus had turned this woman from her sinful ways and that all this was an expression of her love and gratitude. It is not clear whether she had met Jesus. She may simply have been among the crowds who listened to His teaching and had been so convicted that her life had been changed.<sup>2</sup>*

**7:39–47** Simon reasoned to himself that Jesus could not be a true prophet, for if He were He would understand the sort of woman she was (i.e. a sinner) and therefore He would not let Himself be contaminated by her (7:39). But Jesus understood what he was thinking. In response He told the parable of two debtors who were both forgiven their debts, but one debt was much larger than the other (7:40–42). In response to Jesus' question about the parable, Simon correctly answered that the one who had been forgiven the most would love the most (7:43), a statement which immediately led Jesus to the application of His teaching. 'Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet (cf. Gen. 18:4; Judg. 19:21), but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss (cf. Gen. 29:13; 45:15; Exod. 18:7); but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil (cf. Ps. 23:5; 141:5), but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."'

All of the actions here mentioned would have been ones of common courtesy for an esteemed guest, but Simon had done none of them. Her actions were the sign of her forgiveness, not the cause of it. As one translation has it: 'her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown such great love'. Indeed, this is the point of the parable of the debtors, that forgiveness results in love, not vice versa, and it is confirmed by 7:47b.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 26:6–13, Mark 14:3–9 and John. 12:1–8 seem to be speaking of one event that has some parallels to this anointing, but it is best to see Luke here recording a separate event that the others do not. That there were folk present at the feast who were not actually reclining at table was not an uncommon practice.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to Luke*, p. 147.

**7:48–50** The woman had her forgiveness confirmed to her by His words (7:48), but ‘those who were reclining at table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this man who even forgives sins?”’. The question remains unanswered, but the implication is clear. To the woman He said, ‘Your faith has saved you, go in peace.’ Faith is humble trust in the Word of God, i.e. in God Himself. The peace which flows is firstly objective, then subjective. Says Marshall: ‘What was a customary farewell in Judaism, meaning “May God’s peace be yours” (cf. Judg. 18:6; I Sam. 1:17; II Sam. 15:9; I Kings 22:17; Acts 16:36; James 2:16), takes on a fuller meaning when it is used in the context of the bringing of divine salvation to men in Jesus.’<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 314.

## H. Jesus' Itinerant Ministry (8:1–56)

### 1. Jesus and the Twelve Set Out (8:1–3).

**8:1–3** Jesus' ministry was to be widespread (cf. 5:43) and here we are given an insight into the progress of His preaching tour. He was accompanied by 'twelve' and also 'some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses'. Among them was Mary 'who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna'. There is no reason to identify this Mary with the woman 'who was a sinner' in Luke 7, though this identification has often been made. Of Joanna and her husband, as is the case also with Susanna, we hear no more, though the fact that they are mentioned by name seems to indicate that they were well known identities in the early church. Of the exact nature of Chuza's office we know nothing, but we note that the good news had spread very widely (cf. 'those of Caesar's household' in Phil. 4:22).

All these folk, together with 'many others . . . were contributing to their support out of their private means' (cf. Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49, 55; 24:6, 10; Acts 1:14). There is a wonderful simplicity about all this which reflects the constraint of God's love upon these people in order for them to provide the support for Jesus' time of public ministry. We note in passing the place of women afforded by Jesus in contrast with that afforded them by the Pharisees (Luke 20:47; also cf. John 4:27).

### 2. The Parable of the Sower and its Interpretation (8:4–15).

**8:4–8** This travelling band was met by a 'great multitude' (cf. 4:40, 42; 5:1, 3, 15, 19; 6:17–19; 7:11) to whom Jesus spoke 'by way of a parable'.<sup>1</sup> From now on the parabolic method of teaching becomes increasingly important in Luke's account, as is also the case in Matthew (13:10, 34) and Mark (4:10, 33f.). The greatly increasing crowds, the curiosity aroused by His teaching and healing, and the speculation as to His person and ministry, all necessitated this manner of teaching, for one of the purposes of the parables was to sift the hearers.

The parable is that of the sower, whose seed falls on different types of ground. This parable and its interpretation appears in all three synoptic Gospels. It thus was an important thread in Jesus' teaching and in the life of the early church. The seed is the Word, as we are told later, and it is not unreasonable to assume that Jesus saw Himself as the sower. In the parable some seed fell by the road and was lost to birds or trampled under foot (8:5), some fell on rocky ground where there was no depth of soil and so the seed withered through lack of moisture (8:6), some fell amongst the thorns where it was choked as the thorns grew with it (8:7), but other seed fell on the good ground where it produced a crop a hundred times as great (8:8). As Jesus told the parable Luke tells us He was calling out (i.e. loudly), 'Him who has ears to hear, let him hear.'<sup>2</sup>

This phrase is significant. While all may have physical ears, not all are able to truly hear. Hearing is a gift (cf. Ps. 40:6). Those who heard were caused to hear (Prov. 1:20–23; 20:12; Jer. 13:15; 25:4; cf. II Cor. 4:3f.) by the power of God. 'The hearing of this Word depended not on His skill as a teacher, nor on the plainness of His utterance, but first on their own

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<sup>1</sup> The term *parabolé* 'denotes a form of instruction in which, by the side of the truth, is placed the image which represents it' (Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, Vol. I, p. 366).

<sup>2</sup> Godet comments, p. 370:

. . . these are the words which He emphasizes. He endeavours to awaken that inward sense of divine things without which religious teaching is only an empty sound.—The design of Jesus is, first of all, to show that He is not deceived by the sight of this crowd, which is apparently so attentive; then to put His disciples on their guard against the expectations which such a large concourse might create in their minds; lastly, and more than all, to warn His hearers of the perils which threatened the holy impressions they were then experiencing.

desire to be addressed by God's word, and second, upon the gracious act of God by which their blind eyes and deaf ears were opened to it.<sup>1</sup>

**8:9–15** The disciples 'began questioning Him as to what this parable might be' (8:9). They had not understood it. Instead of answering them directly, Jesus began by making some comments about the reason for His teaching in parables (8:10).<sup>2</sup> Morris says, 'Parables both reveal and conceal truth . . . [they] are a mine of information to those who are in earnest, but they are a judgement on the casual and careless.'<sup>3</sup> We must understand the setting of the

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<sup>1</sup> G. W. Barker, 'Mystery' in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Vol. III, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1986, p. 452.

<sup>2</sup> **Note:**

- (a) The purpose of the parables cannot be isolated from the whole of Jesus' life, mission and teaching. John the Baptist bore witness to the proximity of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 3:1–12 and parallels), this being the reign and rule of God over His creation and in history. Jesus also came preaching the message of the Kingdom (Matt. 4:17 and parallels), but also asserting that in Him the Kingdom had virtually come (Luke 11:20; cf. 10:9). There can be no doubt that Jesus knew Himself to be the promised Davidic Messiah-King of the OT prophecies, but His understanding of the nature and purpose of His kingship was completely different from that of popular expectation. There emerges therefore a concept called 'the Messianic secret' (See Luke 4:35, 41; 5:14; cf. Mark 10:32ff.; Luke 9:51ff.; John 6:15; 18:36; etc.). Also see the emphasis in Matthew on the mission of Jesus to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:6; 15:24; cf. 23:37ff.).
- (b) In view of all this, most of the parables are thus described as 'parables of the Kingdom', and even those that do not have this specific appellation relate to the same theme.
- (c) It is against this background that the purpose of the parables must be understood. The one revelation of Christ is at once grace and judgement (see Matt. 13:10–15, 34–35; Mark 4:10–12, 33–34; Luke 8:9–10; cf. John 3:16–21). The purpose of the parables is not so much one of general instruction, but of sifting the hearers ('He who has ears, let him hear'). For those who have ears to hear there is much to be learned from the parables, but for others their teaching remains 'uncomprehended'. The very significant 'stumbling stone' passages also relate to this theme of sifting and hearing (Matt. 21:33–46; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:18; cf. Acts 4:5–12; Rom. 9:30–33; I Pet. 2:4ff.).
- (d) There is no doubt that comments such as these are offensive to fallen man, but we must carefully note the *judicial* aspect of the non-hearing. In this regard see the following comments on Romans 9:18ff:

Much has been said about **9:18**, particularly the last section. In what did the hardening of Pharaoh consist? There may be some precedence for interpreting it as a self-hardening on his part, i.e. God allowed Pharaoh to harden his own heart, but the action of hardening was Pharaoh's own (cf. II Sam. 12:11; 16:10; Ps. 105:25), but the description of the events in Exodus (Exod. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8) seem not to fit this interpretation.

Added to this is the fact of the Greek syntax of Romans 9:18. The first clause of the sentence obviously expresses a direct relationship between the will of God and the showing of mercy, and the second clause of the sentence is expressed in exactly the same pattern, thus indicating that there is a direct relationship between the will of God and the hardening of the heart. The key for us to see is that *both parts of the verse rest upon the premise of ill-desert*. There is *none* who deserve mercy, and all, of themselves are hardened against God from the outset (cf. Rom. 8:5–8; 5:6, 8, 10; etc.). There is thus a judicial aspect to the hardening action of God. All who are hardened are hardened by God, for they have not wanted anything else. All who are saved are saved by God, despite the fact they have never wanted to know Him.

The question asked in **9:14** implies what is the natural (fallen) human response to these things, viz. that God is unjust. Paul does not even attempt to answer the allegation, rather he simply condemns such a thought as impossible ('may it never be!'). The allegation, however, proceeds from the proud and self-righteous heart of man in believing that, somehow, he *deserves* to be the focus of God's electing love. **9:19** arises directly out of the bold (cf. 15:15!) statement that Paul has made in the preceding verse. The showing of mercy and the hardening of the heart are both inscrutable and irresistible actions of God, even if the latter is judicial. There is no question of injustice, for the underlying premise is the non-deserving nature of all who are in Adam. 'If a man forgives only one of two offenders, he is not unjust; he is merciful towards one, just towards the other' (Sanday and Hedlam, *Romans*, p. 273). No one can complain of being unjustly treated, for all are deserving only of punishment.

The second section of **9:19** is therefore interesting. Paul does not say 'For who *can* resist His will?', but rather, 'For who *resists* His will?' What does he mean here? Possibly it refers to the presumption of righteousness that is the height of our sin. We say to ourselves in our deception, 'I am a righteous person, and one who does not resist God's will, therefore why does He still find fault?' In other words we do not *subject* ourselves to the righteousness of God that is by grace through faith (cf. 10:3), holding instead onto a righteousness of our own construction and imagining. However, the context of the verse makes this interpretation doubtful, even if it is true. What Paul seems to be doing in this verse is giving expression to a cynical question asked out of a sinful and angry heart. The question is, 'Why does He still find fault, for who resists His will?', i.e. if Pharaoh's heart was hardened by the will of God, why does He still find fault? The question is one that obviously misses the point in that it does not really recognize the absolutely destitute and undeserving nature of rebellious humanity. The implication of the question is that the hardening is an arbitrary and fatalistic process, but the poser of the question (sinful humanity) does not recognize the juridical nature of it.

The only proper state of man in the light of his plight is to plead for mercy, not to debate with God about His eternal decrees! (**9:20a**).

- (e) The term 'mysteries of the kingdom' which appears in Luke 8:10 should not be interpreted in a magical or esoteric sense, nor is the term 'mystery' exactly the same as contemporary English usage. The word *mysterion* has a special meaning in the NT. It relates to the plan and purpose of God, hidden under shadows and types for many centuries, but finally and definitively revealed in the Son. It is a divinely revealed secret (cf. Eph. 3:2–11; also see Matt. 11:25f.; 16:17).

<sup>3</sup> *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 152.

parable. There were folk coming from many directions to hear, but Jesus knew that for the greatest majority of them the hearing was not effective (cf. John 2:23f.; 6:66). He could see in the crowd assembled before Him all four types of ground and the responses appropriate to each. The reason for His talking in parables is related to His task of winnowing. To those who have ears to hear, there is rich instruction in the parable. This instruction He now gives to His disciples.

The seed is clearly identified as ‘the word of God’ (8:11). The first situation described in the parable corresponds to those who have heard, but ‘then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved’ (8:12). These have heard but not believed for they have hard and impervious hearts. The scribes and Pharisees would be one example of such ‘hearing’.

The second group are those who have received the word joyfully and believe for a while, but who have ‘no firm root’ and therefore ‘in a time of temptation they fall away’ (8:13). Perseverance is the mark of the true believer (I John 2:19; cf. John 10:27f.; Phil. 1:6; I Pet. 1:4; etc.).

The next group are those who have heard, but ‘as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity’ (8:14). Says Ryle, ‘. . . a weekly process of truth stifling goes on within’.<sup>1</sup> The cares and worries of the world are equally a snare for the materially secure as the materially impoverished (cf. Luke 18:18–24; 12:13–21; 16:19–31; also see Paul’s words in II Tim. 4:10; I John 2:15f.).

The last group are those who have heard the word ‘in an honest and pure heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance’ (8:15; cf. Acts 17:10–12; I Tim. 6:11–21; etc.).

What are we to make of the parable as a whole? At least two things can be said, and these are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand there is great encouragement in the parable. No matter how meagre the response seems in the preacher’s eyes, there is nevertheless a great harvest in the end. After all, it is a parable about the word of God!

On the other hand the parable commands careful hearing. All men ought to hear the truth, and as with our ignorance (Rom. 1:21f.), our hearing problem is not physical or intellectual, but moral. Just as repentance must be demanded of all men everywhere, so must hearing. Yet we must recognize that not all will hear or repent, even though they ought to do so.

### 3. Various Sayings (8:16–21).

**8:16–18** Next follows a parable that underlines the importance of what Jesus has been saying. The comments about the lighted lamp (8:16, 17) indicates that the purpose of hearing is not selfishly orientated, but for the true benefit of others. The lamp is again an image of the word of God (cf. Ps. 119:105). The Pharisees and others had obscured the light of the Word, but to the disciples the light of the Word was again being made plain in Jesus (cf. John 1:1–13; 3:16–21; 8:12; etc.), and through them to the world (cf. Matt. 5:14–16; Phil. 2:15). In the end all darkness will be dispelled, and nothing will remain hidden. In view of these things Jesus warns His hearers, ‘Therefore take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him shall more be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him’ (8:18). Those who hear the word of God and do it are blessed in increasing measure, but those who do not hear lose even that which they think they have (cf. John 9:40f.; II Cor. 6:1ff.).

**8:19–21** It is not clear why Luke has placed the visit of Jesus’ ‘mother and His brothers’ here, for in the other synoptics it occurs before the parable of the sower. That they came to see Him is plain, as is the fact that they could not get in because of the crowd, but the purpose of the visit is less clear. It seems as though it was not simply social, however. As is clear from

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<sup>1</sup> *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, p. 252.

Mark 3:20–22, they came because they believed He had lost His mind. In Matthew 12:46f. the visit is also connected to the passage about Jesus being accused of having a demon, while in John 6:5 the hostility of His brothers is more than implied. When it was reported to Him that His mother and brothers were outside, His response was, ‘My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.’ Once again we are back to the theme of hearing. While Jesus, even on the Cross, loved His mother (cf. John 19:26–27), He would not be distracted from His task as His Father’s Son, and, as such, He also knew His Father’s household crossed family ties and traditional loyalties. Of ultimate importance is the hearing of the Word of God. Not even family kinship is more important than this.

#### 4. The Stilling of the Storm (8:22–25).

**8:22–25** We are again met with one of Luke’s unspecific time constructions. On ‘one of those days’ Jesus and the twelve were journeying across the Sea of Galilee to the other side (i.e. to the region of Decapolois on the western side of the lake). Jesus fell asleep as they were travelling (indicating both His rest in God and His extreme tiredness after such continuous ministry), during which time a fierce storm came down upon them (from the surrounding hills) ‘and they began to be swamped and they were in danger’. Such storms were (and are) not uncommon on the lake, but clearly this must have been a severe one, for even the experienced fishermen among them were afraid. In panic the disciples woke Him up (8:24; cf. Mark 4:38 where they imply negligence or apathy on Jesus’ part), and ‘He rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped and it became calm’. The term ‘rebuked’ we have seen elsewhere and it may well indicate that the storm was of demonic origin (4:39; cf. 5:35).

Jesus’ comment, ‘Where is your faith?’ is very pointed. The disciples needed to be brought up short to realize who it was that was with them, rather than to be critical of Him on the one hand, or fearful of the circumstances on the other. The point of the story ‘is not simply that Jesus could still the storm, but rather that the disciples should have trusted His power to help them’.<sup>1</sup> The result of the miracle was that the twelve were ‘fearful and amazed’, wondering who this could be that had such authority over even the wind and the waters. Who indeed (cf. 9:18ff.)? The answer to this question is what Luke’s Gospel is all about.

#### 5. The Gerasene Demoniac (8:26–39).

**8:26–29** Arriving at the country of the Gerasenes (also referred to as the Gergesenes or Gadarenes)<sup>2</sup>, Jesus and the twelve were met by a demonized man who was in the habit of living naked among the tombs. 8:29b gives some indication of the superhuman strength of the possessed man, yet Jesus was ‘commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man’ (8:29a). The demon ‘cried out and fell before Him and said in a loud voice, “What have we to do with You, Jesus Son of the Most High God? I beg you do not torment me.”’<sup>3</sup> Here again we see something of the demons’ knowledge of God and His Messiah (cf. 4:34 and comments). For His part, Jesus was not put off by the demonic resistance to His will. He ‘kept on’ (this is the force of the tense used), calmly commanding the demon to come out of the man.

<sup>1</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> We will probably never know the actual location of the town, or the reasons for the differences in the Gospel texts as to the name of the town, but these considerations are of little importance in the unfolding of the story.

<sup>3</sup> Godet, p. 384, has a beautiful picture:

The sight of Jesus appears to have produced an extraordinary impression upon him. The holy, calm, gentle majesty, tender compassion and conscious sovereignty which were expressed in the aspect of our Lord, awakened in him, by force of contrast, the humbling consciousness of his own state of moral disorder. He felt himself at once attracted and repelled by this man; this led to a violent crisis in him, which revealed itself first of all in a cry. Then, like some ferocious beast submitting to the power of his subduer, he runs and kneels, protesting all the while, in the name of the spirit of which he is still the organ, against the power which is exerted over him.



**8:30–33** In 8:30 we have the only recorded account of Jesus' dialogue with any demonic spirit. 'Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" And he said "Legion"; for many demons had entered him.' A literal Roman legion had 6,000 men, but we should not press the number in this case. That 'many' had entered is conveyed by the term 'Legion', with all its connotations of might, strength and invincibility. Why did Jesus ask the question? Probably it assisted in bringing the man out from under the demonic influence in that such a question would have caused some recognition in him that there was a differentiation between the demons and his own personality. For their part the demons 'were entreating Him not to command them to depart into the abyss' (cf. Rom. 10:7; Rev. 9:1, 3, 11; 11:17; 17:8; 20:1ff.), but eventually Jesus 'gave them permission' to enter a herd of swine, which then rushed headlong into the lake and there were drowned. The episode with the swine is hard to fully understand. That the demons were given only a brief reprieve from destruction is clear, but how they could have influenced the beasts, and for what purpose, is not immediately apparent. Arguments from some commentators that the action was one of judgement against keeping swine seem forced, especially in the light of Luke 11:41 (cf. Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15; etc.). What is certain is that the dramatic manner of departure assured the man, and all those watching, that the demonic forces which had been afflicting him for so long had indeed been driven off.

**8:34–37** The result of this remarkable action was that the herdsmen reported all they had seen to the owners of the beasts and those who lived in the town. When all the surrounding inhabitants came out and when they saw the once demonized man now sitting 'at Jesus' feet, clothed and in his right mind' they became greatly afraid. Such a thing had never been heard of! Though news about the healed man kept on spreading (8:36), the local folk, being gripped by great fear, asked that Jesus leave (8:37). They loved the things of the world too much for Jesus to remain.

**8:38–39** The now healed man, however, wanted to follow Jesus (8:38), but this Jesus did not permit, instead instructing him to 'Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you,' and thus he went on his way 'proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him' (8:39). In passing, we note the identification made between the work of God and that of Jesus, who was one with the Father in all His action. The command of Jesus here stands in sharp contrast to the command elsewhere not to tell anybody (e.g. 5:14). The reason is probably that this was a predominantly Gentile area, so Messianic misunderstanding was less likely. There is also an important link here in the unfolding action of the preaching tour. Jesus had been asked to leave, but the people were not left without a witness and on a later visit to the Decapolis region He was received quite differently (8:39; Mark 5:20; cf. Mark 7:31f.).

## 6. The Raising of Jairus' Daughter and the Healing of the Woman with the Haemorrhage (8:40–56).

**8:40–42** There next follows two interconnected stories. On returning from the country of the Gerasenes 'the multitude welcomed Him, for they had all been waiting for Him'. One of those who had come to see Him was a certain 'Jairus', described as 'an official of the synagogue', i.e. one of those responsible for oversight of the synagogue services. Jairus had 'an only daughter' who was sick to the point of death. Falling at Jesus' feet he entreated Him to come to his house, but as they were travelling the multitudes pressed in on them.<sup>1</sup>

**8:43, 44** In the crush, a woman 'who had a haemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, came up behind Him, and touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew's account is much more abbreviated and thus omits the initial approach for healing.

her hemorrhage stopped'. The action does not refer to the lowest hem of His tunic, but to the tassel on His cloak. (For the manner of the garment described see Num. 15:38; 22:12.) What was the reason for this secretive approach? It is probably linked with the nature of her sickness. Such a flow of blood (probably a uterine hemorrhage is meant) would have made her ceremonially unclean (Lev. 15:25ff.) and thus social contact would have been limited. She most likely felt that she would not have been received by Jesus or the crowd if the nature of her plight was made public, and there would also have been the embarrassment attached to speaking publicly of such a condition.

**8:45–48** Jesus knew that He had been touched by somebody (for He knew that power had gone out from him, 8:46), and asked who it was. Given the crowd, it was likely that many bumped up against Him and thus touched Him in a physical sense, but she had touched Him in faith, however furtive and hidden that faith was. The disciples all denied having done so, and pointed to the crush of the crowd, thus indicating it could have been anyone (8:45). The woman, however, 'when she saw that she had not escaped notice', came forward to Him, trembling, and 'fell down before Him'. There she publicly declared the reason for her action (8:46), to which Jesus responded, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace.' 'Peace' indicates soundness in all aspects, not only physical. The term 'daughter' is also a very warm address and is the only mention of anyone being spoken to by Jesus in this way. He had a great compassion for this dear woman of faith.

What was the purpose of the question? Jesus must have known what had happened, but He would not let the woman escape with the impression that she had by stealth obtained a magical cure from Him. The power was not a magical, metaphysical force that could be transferred arbitrarily.<sup>1</sup> There was both a need for the woman to 'come clean' and thus be freed from any abiding social stigma or ostracism, and for the multitude to see the willingness of Jesus to bless.

**8:49, 50** While all this was happening, the ensuing delay was too great for the ailing daughter of Jairus. While Jesus 'was still speaking' messengers came from Jairus' house to say that the girl had died and that therefore Jesus need not be put to any trouble (8:49). His response is significant, 'Do not be afraid any longer; only believe and she shall be made well' (8:50). There has been no mention of fear to this point, yet clearly it was there. The tense of the verb 'believe' is interesting. It is an aorist and thus has the implication: 'Put your trust in Me' in a once for all way.

**8:50–56** Jesus still proceeded to the house, but allowed only Peter, John, James (cf. 5:10; 6:14; 9:28; 9:54; Acts 1:13) and the girl's parents to enter with Him (8:51). The 'They' of 8:52 probably refers to the mourners who had already assembled in the house, some of whom would have been professionals (cf. Matt. 9:23–25; Mark 5:38–39). At Jesus' words, 'Stop weeping, for she has not died, she is only asleep' (cf. John 11:11–14), they all laughed at Him (8:53) considering Him to be very poorly informed as to the realities of life and death. They knew she was well and truly dead. In spite of their reaction (and according to Matt. 9:24, after sending them out) 'He, however, took her by the hand and called, saying, "Child, arise!"' (8:54). Immediately she arose, and Jesus gave orders for some food to be given to her (8:55). 'And her parents were amazed; but He instructed them to tell no one what had happened' (8:56). He needed no publicity, as Ryle says, 'The shallowest streams and emptiest

<sup>1</sup> Godet, p. 391, says:

In each of Jesus' miracles there are, as it were, two poles: the receptivity of the person who is the subject of it, and the activity of Him by whom it is wrought. The maximum of action in one of these factors may correspond with the minimum of the action in the other. In the case of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, in whom it was necessary to excite even the desire to be cured, as well as in the raising of the dead, the human receptivity was reduced to a minimum. The activity of the Lord in these cases reached its highest degree of initiation and intensity. In the present instance it is the reverse. The receptivity of the woman reaches such a degree of energy, that it snatches, as it were, the cure from Jesus. The action of Jesus is here confined to that willingness to bless and save which always animated Him in His relations with men.

vessels make the most noise.’<sup>1</sup> All of His ministry was with a restrained majesty that only comes from true meekness. Of the command to tell no one Marshall says, ‘The command itself should not be regarded as historically impossible: so long as the parents said nothing, the scornful Jews could persist in believing that the child had been merely asleep.’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 342.

## I. Jesus and the Disciples (9:1–50)

We come next to a section of Luke's Gospel that concentrates on Jesus' relationship to the twelve, and which in particular underlines their lack of insight. In all the Gospels the dullness of heart of the disciples is a clearly illustrated theme. Luke 9:1–50 is an important section as it leads to the turning point of Luke's Gospel, as found in 9:51. Immediately following this turning point there is further confirmation that no one understood the true nature of Jesus' Messiahship.

### 1. The Sending out of the Twelve (9:1–6).

**9:1, 2** At some time after the series of mighty works recorded in Luke 8, Jesus 'called the twelve together' and, having given them 'power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases' (9:1), 'He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to perform healing' (9:2). There were probably two reasons for this activity. One was that the time of the Galilean ministry was drawing to a close and the Kingdom needed to be proclaimed to all the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The second was that the disciples themselves needed to gain experience, not so much of ministry, though this is surely implied, but of the Father's care for them.

**9:3, 4** As these verses make clear, they were not to plan ahead, but rather be dependent upon the provision of the Father and upon His direction. Such rigorous 'go as you are' preparation (or lack of preparation) relates specifically to this trip, the requirement at other times being different (e.g. Luke 22:36). Why the requirements for this trip should be expressed in the terms they are may well relate to the ongoing lesson of trust that is implied in the unfolding events. Would they learn to trust the Father for their needs on this preaching tour? And if so, would they trust the Father for the provision of food for the 5,000 at a later time? Would they trust Him when the glory of the transfiguration seemed to fade? Would they trust Him when Jesus spoke about His forthcoming passion?

**9:5, 6** At those places in which they were not received they were to shake the dust off their feet, by way of testimony against those who may reject them (9:5; cf. Acts 13:51). They were to speak as kingly messengers, and those who rejected them were really rejecting the One who sent them. In this power and authority they went out (9:6). In passing we note that to preach the Gospel (in 9:6) is the same as to proclaim the Kingdom of God in 9:2. Healing, in the full sense, is seen to be part of their mission as proclaimers of the Kingdom. On this see the copy of Note 1 from *God and Man in Signs and Wonders*, p.40, attached below.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G. C. Bingham, NCPI, 1988:

NOTE: The statement, 'The preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom was at one with healing', must be fully understood. We are not saying that without the healing of all who heard there was no true preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom, anymore than we are saying that when it was fully preached all were healed (cf. Mark 6:1–6). In passages such as Acts 10:38 and Luke 4:18 (cf. Isa. 61:1), the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom brought deliverance from satanic oppression. Such oppression was not always in the form of illness or even demonic domination. The woman who was a sinner was 'saved' or 'healed' of her sins by faith (Luke 7:47–50). The Greek verb *sozo* ('to save') in the Gospels is sometimes translated by 'to heal' or 'to save', and can mean 'to deliver' or 'to heal'. What we are saying is that wherever Messiah proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom there was deliverance for his hearers in whatever form that he—Messiah—deemed to be necessary. We ought to see that true healing is not limited to deliverance from sickness even though it may happen to include it; nor does the healing of a person from sickness necessarily mean that person has received salvation. Salvation is by the Gospel and nothing else. Whilst healings and other signs may attest to the word of God (the Gospel) and to the proclaimers of the Gospel, healing is not one of the essential ingredients of the Gospel. If we miss the fact that the Gospel is not an entity in itself, but is in fact God personally redeeming His people, then we will tend to make the Gospel a self-working power which operates in a stereotyped fashion, e.g. if we think that all illness has to be healed, healed in a certain way and at a certain time, then we will look upon the Gospel as a means of healing and regard it as utilitarian. The evil of man, the rightness of judgement, and the utter gift of grace will be lost in the face of a deficient view of God's holiness.

## 2. Herod's Curiosity (9:7–9).

**9:7–9** The reason for this piece of information being inserted here is interesting. The activity of Jesus and the twelve was widely reported, and in such a way that speculation was increasing rapidly, so much so that even 'Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening; and he was greatly perplexed' (9:7). His perplexity consisted of the fact that he knew John had been beheaded, yet rumours kept spreading that Jesus was John resurrected (cf. 9:19). Luke alone adds 'and he [i.e. Herod] kept trying to see Him' (9:9; cf. 13:31ff.; 23:6–12). This explains why from now on in Luke's narrative Jesus and His band avoid Galilee, seeking ministry in areas outside Herod's domain. The other synoptics include the account of John's beheading at this point, but Luke has already dealt with the incident in 3:18f.

## 3. The Return of the Twelve and the Feeding of the Five Thousand (9:10–17).

**9:10** When the 'apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all they had done' (9:10). He took them away, however, to a quieter spot. From Matthew it appears the catalyst for this withdrawal was the beheading of John. On the one hand He did not want the disciples to be overcome by hubris (cf. 10:20); on the other hand He did not want them to be overcome by panic that may have been caused by the news of the death of John. According to Mark 6:31, they also needed a rest!

**9:11–13** 'The multitudes', however, 'were aware' of His movements 'and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing' (9:11). Even in this situation Jesus did not look upon the people with hardness in His heart (cf. Matt. 14:14; Mark 6:34). As it grew late, 'the twelve came and said to Him, 'Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place' (9:12). Jesus, however, had different plans. 'He said to them, "You give them something to eat!"' This is a significant statement. The 'You' is expressed emphatically. It means that at this point, having come back from their preaching tour and having been given authority to exercise at first hand, Jesus expected the twelve to be about the work of the Kingdom in the feeding. Instead of this there comes a faithless response: 'And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people" (For there were about five thousand men)' (9:13f.; cf. John 6:7).

**9:14–17** Jesus responded by getting the disciples to bring some careful order to the crowd by seating them in groups (9:14–15). The purpose of this action was so that the people could see clearly, and thus know that the provision of food was not done by trickery. The action, i.e. 'He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the multitude' (9:16), was all done openly before them. To 'bless' the loaves and fishes is the Biblical way of speaking about giving thanks to God. Its background is to 'bless God for the thing', rather than to magically bless the object itself. Jesus wanted the crowd (and the twelve) to see that they were being fed from God's hand, just as in a different way Israel of old had been fed by His hand in the wilderness. They (i.e. old Israel) grumbled against God for His provision. Would this current generation respond any differently when the provision was so clearly miraculous? The great amount left over after 'they all ate and were satisfied' (9:17) indicates the unstinting nature of God's giving and thus prefigures the greatness of God's provision at the Messianic banquet that is yet to come.

## 4. Peter's Confession and the Passion Predicted (9:18–27).

The next incident is not fixed in a specific time relationship to the feeding. Matthew and Mark both report that it took place in Caesarea Philippi, i.e. out of Herod's dominion and in pagan territory away from the crowds.

**9:18–22** At some time ‘while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him . . . He questioned them, saying, “Who do the multitudes say that I am?”’ (9:18). The various responses given reflected the current diversity of opinion (9:19), but He would not let them be content with this. So ‘He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God”’ (9:20). Again, the ‘you’ is emphatic. The other Gospels fill out the response in more detail, but the point here is that He is the Messiah *of God*. This means that He has been sent forth from God and is under the Father’s hand, even for the passion (from the Gk word *pascho*, ‘I suffer’). He is the Christ of God, not of man, and thus cannot be consigned to act in the way men want Him to. It is in the light of this that Jesus immediately warned them to tell no one (9:21), and gave instruction about the coming passion (9:22). He *must* suffer, the Greek word *dei* indicating the indispensability of the Cross, not simply its inevitability. That Jesus was Messiah is obvious, but that His Messiahship was not at all in keeping with human expectation is a theme unfolded throughout the rest of the Gospel. The ‘Messianic secret’ is built upon the contradiction between Jesus’ true identity and the popular misconception of it.

**19:23–27** It is against this background that we have the teaching of Jesus on the matter of taking up the Cross. Luke reports, ‘And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”’

The import of these verses should not be missed. The disciples knew that to take up a cross was a thing of death. The only people who took up crosses in their society were condemned criminals, and none of them returned alive having taken their cross up. Jesus is teaching the disciples plainly about His end. He will end in death, and so will all who follow Him. Their death is something effected in and through His death (as Paul expounds for us); and thus discipleship is not a self-indulgent relationship. To be a Christian means death to ourselves, but through Christ and for the sake of His name. Such a death is beyond ourselves to accomplish, but in Him we die. Daily, however, we must reckon on that great happening. We must take up the position of the condemned man, whose life is already finished. To be ashamed of Jesus is to refuse to take up the cross, it is a refusal to share in the suffering of being named with Him. We are confronted with either choosing the way of men, avoiding the shame of the Cross, and thus preserving our ‘self’ while losing our life, or choosing the way of Christ, which is weakness and shame in the eyes of the world, but life eternal in the eyes of God.

The final sentence in this section (viz. ‘But I tell you truly, there are some of those standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God’) has puzzled many. There are a number of possible interpretations (e.g. the Transfiguration, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension, Pentecost, etc.) as to what the ‘kingdom of God’ here means specifically. We note generally that the Kingdom of God means His reign and His rule, so whether we should even try to tie it to a specific event may be problematic. What is clear is that even if the taking up of the cross meant literal martyrdom for some of those present, the Kingdom would still be established.

### 5. The Transfiguration (9:28–36).

This episode stands as an important development in Luke’s Gospel. The whole work is heading for the climax of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. The Transfiguration points to that climax in that it is both significant for Jesus (‘He was transfigured that He might be disfigured, so that we who are disfigured might be transfigured’) and for the disciples, teaching them that the Cross and glory are not two different things.

**9:28–31** The time is fixed more specifically than has often been Luke's manner. 'And some eight days after these sayings, it came about that He took along Peter and John and James, and went up to the mountain to pray' (9:28). During His time of prayer 'the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem' (9:29–31). The word for departure is *exodos* and we should probably understand it as a direct reference to the OT event which prefigured the work of Christ in bringing His people out of slavery and bondage. Moses and Elijah (the Law and the Prophets) are the two representatives of the total OT witness to Christ and His Crucifixion.

**9:32, 33** The sleep of 'Peter and his companions' (9:32) is not just due to physical tiredness, but there is a theological point being made. This same point is also implied in 9:33 where Peter makes the suggestion of building some tents 'not realizing what he was saying'. Both the sleep and the tent building episodes reinforce the point that the disciples had not heard the discussion about Jesus' 'exodus', i.e. His death and Resurrection. Peter's was a deficient view, for he wanted to preserve the glory of the moment without the Cross.

**9:34–36** The cloud of 9:34 should best be understood as the cloud of God's glory, the sign of His presence (cf. Exod. 16:10; 19:9; 24:15–18; 33:9–11; 40:34; etc.) and it was out of this cloud that a voice came 'saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!"' (9:35; cf. 3:22; Isa. 42:1). Just as on the old mountain (Sinai) the will of God was revealed, so on the new mountain (of the Transfiguration) is the will of God revealed in His Son, who is the embodiment of the Law. The implicit reference to the suffering servant indicates that the will of God and the glory of the Son are one in the action of the Cross.

'And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen' (9:36). As Morris points out, the vision of the glory of God does not promote idle chatter!<sup>1</sup>

## 6. A Demonized Boy is Healed (9:37–43a).

Upon their descent from the mountain 'on the next day' they were met by a large crowd (9:37). From the midst of the multitude a man called out 'saying, "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only boy, and behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams, and it throws him into a convulsion with foaming at the mouth, and as it mauls him, it scarcely leaves him. And I begged your disciples to cast it out, and they could not"' (9:38–40). Jesus' answer (9:41; cf. Deut. 32:5) reflects the lack of insight of the disciples, yet He meets the need of the boy and his father. 'Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father' (9:42), 'And they were all amazed at the greatness of God' (9:43a).

## 7. The Passion Again Foretold (9:43b–45).

The lesson of the coming passion is what Jesus really wanted His disciples to understand, however, for 'while everyone was marvelling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men"' (9:43b–44). The categorical and emphatic wording of 9:45 ('But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement') makes it clear that they did not perceive His meaning.

<sup>1</sup> The Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 173.

### 8. The Dispute About Greatness (9:46–48).

In the midst of this time ‘an argument arose among them as to which of them might be the greatest’ (9:46). Jesus understood ‘what they were thinking in their heart’ and so ‘took a child and stood him by His side’ (9:47) to illustrate the simple statement, “Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me, for he who is least among you, this is the one who is great.”’ At first reading the comment does not seem to relate to the theme of greatness, yet it surely does. Morris comments:

The child stands for the helpless and unimportant. The test of loving service is that we receive such in the name of Christ. To receive the child is to receive the Christ, and to receive the Christ is to receive the Father . . . True greatness is not earthly greatness, but its antithesis. The really great man is the lowly one. Jesus is not saying that the great man is one who is ready to serve his stint in a lowly place.<sup>1</sup>

Note also, in the Kingdom there is not one who is ‘greatest’.

### 9. The Strange Exorcist (9:49–50).

This incident is interesting, especially in the light of comments such as those made in Matthew 7:22 and the incident of the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13. It has an OT parallel in Numbers 11:24–30. The jealousy of John and the others is understandable given the discussion about greatness that immediately precedes the incident. That the other man was approved of by Jesus is implicit in the story, but what the disciples found difficult was that he had not been part of the twelve who had been sent out. The whole incident is even more embarrassing given their immediate failure to heal the boy. The statement in 9:50, when compared with 11:23, indicates that there is no middle ground in the matter of Christ and His Kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 176.



## V. The Journey To Jerusalem (9:51—19:27)

### A. Jesus ‘Sets His Face’ Towards Jerusalem (9:51–62)

#### Introduction.

There is no parallel to Luke 9:51—19:27 in any of the other Gospels, though some of the material Luke includes here is very similar to that which Matthew and Mark (but mainly Matthew) have included elsewhere. The majority of what is sometimes called ‘Luke’s Special Section’ or ‘the Perea Ministry’ is a summary of Jesus’ teaching, but all of this with the Cross in view, with His ‘face resolutely set toward Jerusalem’.

#### 1. Heading to Jerusalem (9:51–56).

**9:51** is the turning point in Luke’s Gospel. Already there have been predictions from Jesus about His approaching passion, yet here Luke tells us, ‘when the days were approaching for His *ascension*, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem’<sup>1</sup> (9:51). The noun translated ‘ascension’ occurs only here in the NT. Elsewhere the verbal form is used (e.g. Acts 1:2, 11, 22; Mark 16:19; I Tim. 3:16).

The emphasis on the Ascension is significant. The Crucifixion is not the end point of the story of Jesus. This is the point being made in Acts 1:1, Luke’s second volume, where he designates the material in his Gospel to be concerned with ‘all that Jesus began to do and to teach’. The implication is clear. Through the church we see what He has continued to do and to teach, after the Ascension and before the *Parousia* (His coming again). As the ascended Lord He has poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower, equip and lead the church, which Spirit He received from His Father (Acts 2:32f.). Such empowering was (and is) for the proclamation of the message of the Crucifixion. The Cross leads to the Ascension so that hearers may be brought to the Cross through the power of the Spirit.

No less significant, however, is the fact that His face was ‘resolutely’ set toward Jerusalem. He would not be deflected from His task. The Cross was the reason for His coming into the world (cf. John 12:27) and to this He must go.

**9:52–56** Having set His face towards Jerusalem, Jesus ‘sent messengers on ahead of Him. And they went, and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make arrangements for Him’ (9:52). The sudden arrival of an unspecified but sizeable number of people would have been a great strain on any village not prepared for it. When, however, ‘they did not receive Him because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem’ (9:53) James and John suggested, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?’ (9:54).

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<sup>1</sup> For other references to the journey towards Jerusalem see 9:53, 13:22, 33; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28; and the suggestions of a journey found in 9:57; 10:1, 38; 14:25. A problem arises, however, when we try to follow the route of the journey. Scholars have written much on this problem! There are a number of different theories (e.g. that there were in fact two journeys which Luke has telescoped into one account; that Luke has used two different accounts of the journey to Jerusalem and combined them to form one narrative; that Luke has included much other material that is not part of the journey proper, but about which he had information, and has included it here to form a fuller account of Jesus’ teaching). Others argue that the ‘journey’ is a theologically significant motif in Luke, and that it is an artificial construct used as a vehicle to convey the truth.

The interested reader may continue reading in any of the major commentaries for more information! What is clear is that Jesus pursued His ministry with the Cross and Jerusalem inescapably set before Him.

There may well have been some seeming logic to their request given that they had seen Elijah with Jesus on the mountain, and he had been used in such a way in the OT (I Kings ch. 18; II Kings 1:10ff.). But even if there were a logical connection in their minds, there was no true understanding of Jesus and His Messianic task. Again we are faced with the dullness of the disciples. To be sure the conflict between Jews and Samaritans had been very spiteful over the centuries (cf. II Kings ch. 17; Ezra ch. 4), and there are some accounts of zealous Samaritans setting upon pilgrims to Jerusalem, but there should be no hatred of them, for all this. They had to be 'rebuked' in order for them to see the error of their thinking<sup>1</sup> (cf. Luke 19:10). With good reason did Jesus call James and John 'Boanerges'—sons of thunder (Mark 3:17). Jesus simply moved on to the next village (9:56).

## 2. The Urgency of His Mission (9:57–62).

**9:57, 58** The section before us contains three examples of Jesus' teaching about the urgency and finality of following Him. As they were travelling along 'someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head"' (9:57–58).<sup>2</sup> The import of this encounter relates to the theme of security. In earthly terms there is little security in the Kingdom of God, and it should not be sought. Home is with the Father, and His children are at best 'sojourners' on the earth.

**9:59, 60** The second example is one initiated by Jesus who 'said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father"' (9:59). Jesus' reply, 'Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God' (9:60) seems harsh, until it is realized that apart from the Son all are dead. Death is a state, more even than it is an event (cf. Eph. 2:1ff.; et al.). There is some debate as to whether the man's father was already dead, or whether his answer to Jesus' call implied that he wanted to wait until his father had died. The former is the most likely option, but whatever the case, Jesus' reply still stands. There is nothing more important than the Kingdom of God and its proclamation. And, according to Matthew 8:18, the order had already been given to depart to the other side of the lake, so the man must follow immediately or not at all.

**9:61, 62** The third example is of another who said, 'I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:55–56 contains a portion which does not appear in the earliest manuscripts ('... and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them"'). It is generally agreed by scholars that these words are a later scribal insertion, but the statement they make is true in itself, even if it is not an utterance made by Jesus at this point.

J. C. Ryle (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, p. 337) quotes Quesnal:

It often happens that the ministers of the Church, under pretence of zeal for her interests, offend against Christian meekness. The Church, knows no such thing as revenge, her ministers ought not to know it either. Their wrath should be directed against sin, not the sinner. The fire of heaven is one day to come down and to purify the world by destruction. At present it comes down only to sanctify it by edification.

<sup>2</sup> Hendriksen comments (*Luke*, p. 560.):

As the story develops, Judea rejects Him (John 5:18), Galilee casts Him out (John 6:66), Gadara begs Him to leave the district (Matt. 8:34), Samaria refuses Him lodging (Luke 9:53); earth will not have Him (Matt. 27:23) and even heaven forsakes Him (Matt. 27:46).

say good-bye to those at home.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God' (9:61–62). The man making the request had a divided heart. He could not follow for he would always be looking over his shoulder at what had been left behind, rather than straight ahead. In ploughing, if one looks back crooked furrows result.

## B. The Sending Out of the Seventy (10:1–24)

### 1. The Sending Out (10:1–16).

**10:1** The construction of 10:1 is indefinite with regard to time. ‘Now after this’ probably refers to the turning toward Jerusalem. The seventy<sup>1</sup> would have come from the larger band of disciples who had followed Him for some time. These were sent out ‘two and two ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come’ (10:1). He was obviously going to have a very busy time of ministry in the thirty-five villages thus covered. The fact that they were sent out in pairs is not unimportant. There would have been need for mutual encouragement, admonishment and upbuilding, as even to this day!

**10:2, 3** The instructions given at this time parallel those given to the twelve. Notice in 10:2 that they are to ‘beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’, thus indicating firstly that their authority lies in being sent by the Lord of the harvest, and secondly that it is not in the way of a man to send himself. The Lord of the harvest must send him. In being sent, however, they were ‘as lambs in the midst of wolves’ (10:3). That the Kingdom of Christ is not the same as the kingdom of the world is obvious. Those who are of His Kingdom will be despised by the world (cf. John 15:18ff.; 16:33), yet they must not take up the weapons of the world in order to win the world. The church is always weak, it is always as sheep among wolves. Indeed this is how her Head and Saviour came, and in coming in such weakness He accomplished the redemption of the world!

**10:4** As with the earlier sending out of the twelve, these disciples were to travel lightly and in dependence upon God for their needs (10:4), but the instruction to ‘greet no one on the way’ (cf. II Kings 4:29) seems obscure. Surely the thrust of the comment relates to the urgency of their task in preparing their hearers for the visit of the King of the Kingdom. This must not be delayed by anything, not even polite greetings, which especially in the East could be very time consuming.

**10:5, 6** As they entered houses they were to give a blessing of peace (10:5), ‘And if a man of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him; but if not, it will return to you’ (10:6). The immediate point is that the blessings of God rest upon the people of God, but for those who reject Him there is no blessing that abides upon them. While it was common practice to give a blessing of peace, there was nothing magical about this. There would be no peace for one who was not a man of peace.

**10:7** Moreover, wherever they were welcomed they were to stay ‘eating and drinking what they give you’ without embarrassment ‘for the laborer is worthy of his wages’ (10:7). The attached instruction about remaining settled in the house thus provided is with a view to efficiency of time. To go from house to house is time consuming and distracting. The emphasis on eating everything set before them here and also in 10:8 (cf. Mark 7:19) indicates that a new era had arrived, where all foods are clean. The old racial and ceremonial divisions were being broken down even as they preached.

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<sup>1</sup> Some manuscripts have ‘seventy-two’. It is hard to decide which is the best reading. There may be a symbolic meaning in the number, e.g. as a symbol for the nations of the world (cf. Gen. ch. 10 which lists seventy), as an indication that Jesus is the prophet like unto Moses who had seventy elders (cf. Num. 11:16–25), but this should not be pressed.

**10:8–11** Wherever the seventy were received they were to ‘heal those who are sick, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you”’ (10:8–9). The Kingdom was attested to in the healing, and it had thus come *near* to them. In the King Himself it would come *upon* them (Luke 11:20). Where there was no reception of them they were to witness against that village by shaking the dust off their feet and leaving it (10:10–11; cf. 9:5).

**10:12–16** The sober warnings of 10:12–16 (for comments on ‘woe’ see 6:24) naturally follow on from the statement about the messengers and message of the Gospel being rejected. There is a phenomenal hardness to the human heart, as indicated by the reception of all the miracles indicated in this passage without either repentance or true faith. To reject the Gospel message, together with those who bring it, is to reject Christ Himself (10:16; cf. I Thess. 2:13), yet this rejection is not to be unexpected in view of the fact that He was Himself rejected. Capernaum is a particularly significant example. It was the headquarters of Jesus for much of His public ministry (cf. Matt. 4:13; 9:1), and Peter, Andrew and Matthew all came from there (John 1:44; cf. Mark 1:29; Matt. 9:9). It was at Capernaum that the centurion’s servant was healed (Matt. 8:5ff.), the man lowered through the roof was healed (Mark 2:1ff.), Peter’s mother-in-law was healed (Mark 1:29–31), and other miracles were performed (Luke 4:23). It was to Capernaum that the multitudes came after the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:16–24) and it, or rather the plain of Gennesaret near it, was the site of much of Jesus’ teaching and healing activity (Mark 6:53ff.). Yet they had not believed—they had no true faith. Thus ‘you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will be brought down to Hades!’

## 2. The Return of the Seventy and Jesus’ Comments (10:17–24).

**10:17–20** The seventy returned ‘with joy’, ecstatic at the fact that even demonic powers were subject to them (10:17), even though this was not part of their commissioning. Jesus shared their joy as He ‘saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning’<sup>1</sup>, their ministry prefiguring Satan’s ultimate and inevitable end. The reference to treading on serpents and scorpions (10:19) is best taken symbolically. We do have the account of Paul in Acts 28:3ff., but this is the only record of such an incident in the whole of the NT. The thrust of Jesus’ comment is that while the messengers were engaged in His service they were secure, especially from cunning and dangerous enemies. As Livingstone once said, ‘I am immortal till my life’s work is done.’

There is also an important warning against spiritual pride — ‘Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven’ 10:20). True joy is in knowing that God has secured His people, i.e. in the grace of the Gospel itself, not in any affects that preaching might bring. For the thought of the Book of Life see Exodus 32:32f.; Psalm 68:29; Daniel 12:1; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27.

**10:21–22** Here is a rich passage indeed! In seeing the unfolding of the plan and purpose of God ‘at that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit’. We have seen elsewhere Luke’s emphasis on the Spirit and Jesus. True joy is one of the elements of the Spirit’s fruit, so little wonder that it should be greatly present in the Son, who had received the Spirit ‘without measure’.

Jesus’ declaration about the Father is significant. He said, ‘I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst

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<sup>1</sup> Some argue that this refers to Jesus’ pre-incarnational view of Satan’s fall, and thus stands as a warning to the disciples not to imitate his example by being carried away with pride. While there is a warning clearly implied later in the passage, the proximity of the comment to that about His rejoicing seems to indicate that in the action of the seventy He saw Satan’s demise.

reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.’ Jesus could see the fulfilment of the Kingdom and that this fulfilment was the work of the Father. The disciples were ‘babes’ compared to the great powers of the day, yet to them the Son had willed to reveal the Father, whom only the Son knew. The Son could do this because of the authority the Father had given to Him (cf. John 3:35; 13:3), which great work He still does!

Note the Trinitarian action. The Son rejoices through the Spirit and gives praise to the Father. So, too, with us who are sons by adoption.

**10:23–24** These verses come as a great encouragement to the disciples to whom the words were addressed (10:23). They were in the position of no other generation, and that notwithstanding that those in other generations may have been ‘prophets’ or ‘kings’. Indeed they were a privileged group! For the thought of this section cf. I Peter 1:10ff.

## C. Questions Asked of Jesus (10:25–42)

### 1. The Lawyer and the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37).

The unfolding theme of conflict with the Pharisees (first seen in 5:17—6:11) emerges here again (10:25–37). It is against the background of this conflict (which is developed throughout chapter 11) that Jesus impresses on Martha the importance of truly hearing Him (10:26–42) and he teaches the disciples about prayer (11:1–13).

**10:25** While both Matthew and Mark record the debate with the lawyer, only Luke adds the parable. The purpose of the lawyer's question was evil. This man 'stood up and put Him to the test' by saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'. That he stood would seem to indicate that Jesus had been teaching, and now he wished to test Him out. According to the answer of the question, Jesus would be judged. There was already suspicion of Him being a law-breaker, as the debate about healing and the Sabbath indicates (see 5:17—6:11). If Jesus could be seen to give an answer that was in contradiction to the OT, they would have grounds for taking action against Him (cf. 6:11).

**10:26–28** However, Jesus would not be deceived. Instead He took the initiative and turned the question around saying, 'What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?' (10:26). Being thus forced to answer, and fearing loss of face before the crowds, 'he answered and said, "YOU SHALL 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 YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."' The man was here quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, such verses being clearly recognized as the sum of the Torah (cf. Jesus' own use of the passages in Mark 12:30f.). Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS, AND YOU WILL LIVE,' here quoting from Leviticus 18:5. The lawyer had been completely outdone, having no leg to stand on. Jesus knew that no fallen man had ever kept the Law, nor could they even if they desired to do so, which they did not. There may have been a desire to keep the Law for the sake of self-justification, but not for pure love, which is the intent of the Law (as the Sermon on the Mount makes clear).

**10:29** The man also knew that he had not kept the Law, and so, 'wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"' The emphasis on 'justification' is not insignificant. Elsewhere in Luke, Jesus has some harsh words to say about those who seek justification by works (Luke 16:14ff.). Faith in Him was the important thing, not faith in one's own religious endeavours.

**10:30–35** The man's self-justification became the occasion for one of the best known parables in any of the Gospels. The journey 'from Jerusalem to Jericho' was a particularly difficult one, the road descending through some very rough and isolated country. Thus the events of the parable were not unlikely in current experience. The scene is set with the man being left 'half dead', having been stripped and beaten (10:30). The first one to come across the poor unfortunate was a priest who 'passed by on the other side' (10:31). Why he did so would seem to be bound with the ceremonial Law. He could not touch a dead man without becoming ceremonially unclean (cf. Lev. 21:1f.), and from a distance he could not determine whether the man was dead or not. Rather than risk defilement, he left the man on the road. It may also be that he feared further trouble from robbers himself, so he chose not to get involved lest he

too suffer. Next came a Levite<sup>1</sup> who took the same evasive action (10:32), probably for the same sorts of reasons. At length a Samaritan, a member of the hated and despised race that had on occasions been the bitter enemy of the Jews, saw the man. When he saw him, ‘he felt compassion, and came to him, and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him’ (10:33–34). This man also paid the innkeeper out of his own pocket (and an extremely generous sum at that), promising to also cover any extra expenses incurred by the innkeeper on his return journey (10:35).

**10:36, 37** The point of the parable is revealed in Jesus’ question to the lawyer on the one hand, ‘Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell into the robber’s hands?’ (10:36), and the inescapable answer on the other, ‘And he said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” And Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same”’ (10:37). The man had been brought face to face with the implications of his own statement as to the heart of the Law. Neither the priest nor the Levite, with all their concern to preserve their ceremonial purity, had kept the Law as they should have (cf. Micah 6:8; Lev. 19:34; Exod. 23:4, 5; II Kings 6:8–23). Neither had loved, and neither had the man who tested Him with the question!

While there may be many parallels between Jesus’ own ministry and the actions of the Good Samaritan, such an interpretation is not the main point of the parable.

## 2. **Mary and Martha (10:38–42).**

In a simple but powerful story about Jesus’ visit to the home of Mary and Martha, unique to Luke, the importance of hearing the Word of God is again emphasized. We have seen this theme elsewhere (8:4–21), but its proximity to the parable of the Good Samaritan, and its setting here, in the midst of a section of growing conflict, make it all the more significant.

The ‘certain village’ is not mentioned here by name, but we know from John 11:1 that they lived in Bethany—a small town about 5 kms from Jerusalem. Martha, who must have been the elder sister, ‘welcomed Him into her home’ (10:38). Her sister, Mary, ‘was listening to the Lord’s word, seated at His feet’ (10:39). Such action (or rather inaction) stirred Martha’s ire, who was ‘distracted with all her preparations’ (10:40), a significant word to use in the current situation. In her frustration she complained to Jesus that Mary had left her to do all the serving alone, but even more significant is the tone of her comments: ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me’ (10:40). Doubt over the Lord’s care and the seeming injustice of the situation was the reason for her anger, and is close to the heart of all anger.

Jesus’ reply comes as gentle but firm rebuke, urging her to see that Mary had in fact discerned what was really ‘necessary’ at the time, and that would not be taken from her (10:41–42).

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<sup>1</sup> Levites were those of the tribe of Levi, which tribe had specific functions to perform in the Temple. While all priests were Levites, not all Levites were priests.



## D. Teaching on Prayer (11:1–13)

### 1. The Lord's Prayer<sup>1</sup> (11:1–4).

We have already seen the importance prayer had in the life of Jesus (3:21; cf. 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28f.; 11:1; 22:41; 23:46). That 'one of His disciples' should come up to Him, requesting Him to teach them to pray, just as John had taught his followers (11:1) is not unusual. It was common practice for a teacher to give his followers the form of words to say by way of prayer, often thus distinguishing them from other groups or teachers. However, Jesus does not give them a prayer as such, but a model of prayer.

The content of the prayer is a model for all prayer. That the pronouns are all in the plural is significant. It is prayer to the Holy Father from those who are His family, and thus prayer is essentially a corporate activity. It is also from those awaiting the coming of His Kingdom (11:2), i.e. the full consummation of His reign and rule, as Matthew's version indicates—'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. It is a prayer for daily provision (not of literal bread simply) and forgiveness of sins, as we forgive<sup>2</sup> (11:3–4). It is also a prayer to be kept from temptation. The last phrase of 11:4 has occasioned much debate. What does it mean? It appears to be a Greek translation of a Hebrew verb form meaning 'cause us not to succumb to temptation'. It is a prayer of dependence upon God's keeping power (cf. Eph. 5:15f.; II Thess. 1:11f.; I Tim. 6:11–16).

### 2. The Friend at Midnight and Other Sayings (11:5–13).

**11:5–8** There next follows two small blocks of teaching about the nature of the God who answers prayer. The humorous story of the friend at midnight, who answers the door 'even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs', must be held over against the unstinting nature of God's goodness (cf. 11:13). If we, even for a 'friend', will get out of bed because of his insistence, how much more will God not do for those who ask Him? He is eager to give, but how much do we really want that for which we ask?

**11:9–13** Following on from the point He has just made, Jesus commanded His disciples to *keep on* asking, seeking and knocking (this is the force of the tense used) in order to receive an answer (11:9–10). The point is simple. We, who are evil earthly fathers, do not neglect the needs and requests of our children, so how much more does God not neglect the needs and requests of His own children? (11:11–12). Surely 'your heavenly Father [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him' (11:13).

The emphasis on the Spirit is again a key theme of Luke (cf. 1:35, 41, 67; 2:25–27; 3:16, 22; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; 11:13; 12:10, 12; 24:49; and the events of Pentecost; etc.), and in the context is particularly significant, for one cannot call upon Him as Father unless the Spirit comes to us (cf. Rom. 8:15f.).

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<sup>1</sup> The reasons for the differences between the prayer as recorded in Luke and that recorded in Matthew have been long debated. It is not unusual to think that Jesus would have taught similar things on a number of occasions, so we may have here two different forms of the same basic teaching.

<sup>2</sup> Morris comments (*The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 194):

This does not make human action, the forgiveness of others, the ground of forgiveness. The New Testament is clear that forgiveness springs from the grace of God and not from any human merit. Rather the thought moves from the lesser to the greater: since even sinful men like us forgive, we can confidently approach a merciful God.

## E. Teaching on Demonic Activity (11:14–28)

Luke 11:14–54 develops the theme of conflict with the Pharisees (seen to be emerging in the last section) even further. The conflict relates to their blasphemy (11:14–28), their sign seeking (11:29–36), and their hypocrisy (11:37–54).

### 1. The Beelzebul Controversy (11:14–23).

**11:14–16** At some time after the teaching on prayer, Luke reports that ‘He was casting out a demon, and it was dumb; and it came about that when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke; and the multitudes marveled’ (11:14). We note in passing the connection between physical symptoms and spiritual affliction as seen elsewhere (e.g. Luke 9:37f.). Clearly, however, not all disabilities are demonic, nor should they be treated as such. In this case a demonic force had gripped its unfortunate victim so that he was unable to speak or hear (Matt. 12:22f.). The great act of compassion embodied in the deliverance became, however, a source of contention. Some (Pharisees and scribes according to Matthew and Mark respectively) argued that He had power to cast out demons ‘by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons’ (11:15)<sup>1</sup>, while others ‘to test Him, were demanding of Him a sign from heaven’ (11:16). Both responses were equally evil, being both blasphemous in their own way. The first accuses the King of the Kingdom to be an agent of Satan, the opponent of the Kingdom (cf. John 7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20; where Jesus is accused of being possessed by the evil one, such an implication not being absent here in Luke), while the second refuses to believe His word, denying the sufficiency of His works and demanding that He prove Himself to sinful hearts.

**11:17–19** Jesus, who ‘knew their thoughts’ (11:17), answered simply. If in earthly terms it is impossible for a kingdom or a household at war with itself to stand, how much more is this the case in the spiritual realm (11:17–18). Moreover, if He cast out demons by Beelzebul, by what power did they cast them out (11:19)? In this matter their sons (followers) would be their judges, witnessing to the truth of His action by virtue of their own (11:19b).

**11:20–23** Jesus’ exorcism work was no less than the Kingdom of God in action. ‘But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you’<sup>2</sup> (11:20; cf. Exod. 8:19; Deut. 9:10; Ps. 8:3; and also see Exod. 7:4; 9:3; etc.). In Luke 11:21–22 Jesus is the strong man who delivers the captives from the bonds of the evil one by overcoming him and taking away ‘all of his armour on which he has relied’ (11:22). Consequently, Jesus is able to say, ‘He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters’ (11:23; cf. Matt. 12:30; Mark 9:40). The picture here refers to the gathering of scattered sheep (cf. John 10:16). The one who sees the action of the Kingdom, but denies it to be truly the action of the King, actually works against it. There can be no neutral ground.

### 2. The Return of the Evil Spirit (11:24–26).

The placing of this passage is significant. The discussion leading up to this point has been concerned with the validity or otherwise of Jesus’ exorcisms and the concomitant fact that with

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<sup>1</sup> The name ‘Beelzebul’ is of unclear provenance. There may be some connection to the events recorded in II Kings 1:2f., 6, 16, but just what that connection is and how it developed over the centuries is far from clear. Whatever the case, that Jesus and those present understood the name to be speaking of Satan is beyond doubt (cf. Luke 11:15, 18).

<sup>2</sup> Matthew has ‘Spirit of God’, but the same point is made.

regard to Him and His work there can be no neutral ground. We know that there were others who practised exorcism at the time, but Jesus' point here is that they were actually working against the Kingdom of God. Their exorcism did not radically renew a man and fill him with a new heart, but only tidied things up temporarily. Note that the evil spirit in this case is not driven out by Jesus, but it simply 'goes out of a man' (11:24). That it has not given up its hold is made plain by the fact that 'it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, "I will return to my house from which I came." And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order'. It is still the demon's house, tidied up to be sure, but not filled with the truth, not filled with God. As a result 'it goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first'.<sup>1</sup>

But there is also something else being said here. It is obvious from Matthew 12:45b, and implied by the development of Luke's theme in 11:29, that the illustration above is primarily national, rather than personal. The whole parable applies to the generation of those hearing Him, and more particularly the religious leaders. These are they who have sought to 'tidy up' the heart of the nation through the wrong use of the Law, through false piety, and even through exorcisms, but they have not heard the Word of God and heeded His Son, so their last state is worse than their first.

### 3. The Need to Hear the Word of God (11:27, 28).

These verses again emphasize the need to hear the Word of God and keep it. The important thing is not one's physical relationship to Him, but the attitude to the Word itself. To be sure Mary was blessed in being chosen to be His mother (cf. Luke 1:42), but she too needed to hear the Word of God and do it (Luke 8:19–21).

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<sup>1</sup> Morris comments (*The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 199):

When a man gets rid of an evil spirit but puts nothing in its place, he is in grave moral danger. No man can live for long with his life a moral vacuum. The kingdom of God does not bring about such a vacuum in a man. It means such a victory over evil that evil is replaced with good and with God.

Godet says (*A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Vol. II, p. 63):

... the house vacated is not occupied by a new tenant, who can bar the entrance of it against the old one. Jesus, on the contrary, does not content Himself with expelling the demon; He brings back a soul to its God; He replaces the unclean spirit by the Holy Spirit. As a relapse after a cure of this sort is impossible, so is it probable and imminent in the former case.

## **F. Teaching on Signs (11:29–36)**

### **1. The Sign of Jonah (11:29–32).**

**11:29, 30** Jesus now returns to the demand for a sign made in 11:16. It is significant that Luke records Jesus' teaching in this section against the backdrop of the fact that 'the crowds were increasing' (11:29). There is a constant struggle in all the Gospels by Jesus against His own popularity. Not that He rejected the crowds, but He refused to put any store by them (cf. John 2:23f.). Rather, 'He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so shall the Son of Man be to this generation"' (11:29–30). Wickedness is associated with sign seeking in more than one place in the Scriptures (e.g. Matt. 16:4; 12:39; Mark 8:11f.; John 2:18; 6:30; I Cor. 1:22; and the testing of God by the people in the wilderness, Exod. 17:7; etc.) According to Jesus, the only sign will be that of Jonah, i.e. that Jonah himself was a sign. He became a sign to the Ninevites in that he appeared to them after three days in the belly of the great fish—as good as a dead man come to life again. In Jesus the same sign will be seen, except in Him the death which Jonah prefigured would become a reality (cf. John 2:19).

**11:31, 32** Against all this the hardness of the generation is indicated. 'The Queen of the South shall rise up with the men of this generation at the judgement and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgement and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.'

### **2. Sayings Related to the Theme of Light (11:33–36).**

There has been something similar to the first part of this section reported in Luke 8:16 (cf. Matt. 5:15). The point of 11:33 is simple—lighted lamps are used in order that people may see, they should not be hidden. What, however, is the meaning of 11:34–36? The premise is this, 'The lamp of your body is your eye' (11:34a). By this Jesus means that the eye is the organ by which the light enters the body. Thus a good eye fills the whole body with light. The warning of 11:35 is against making the false assumption that one has a good eye and is full of light, when in fact one is not. Rather, says Jesus, insure that 'your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it.' Here the fundamental reason for the demand for a sign becomes clear. In the unbelief of the nation's leaders, the light of the Son could not be seen by them, yet they assumed that they were full of light while accusing Him to be an agent of darkness.

## G. Pharisaic ‘Woes’ (11:37–54)

### 1. Woe to the Pharisees (11:37–44).

**11:37–41** This section sets the scene for the ultimate event of the Cross. The Pharisaic opposition builds from here to a fever pitch of Crucifixion. The first paragraph (11:37–41) is set in the home of one of the Pharisees who had asked Him to lunch (11:37). Jesus did not ceremonially wash before eating (11:38; cf. Mark 7:1–7; John 2:6), and the Pharisee ‘marvelled’ at this fact. ‘But the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish one, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you”’ (11:39–41). The force of the statement is that to be concerned with ritual washings is as foolish as only washing the outside of a cup. The inside of a cup must be cleansed if it is to be useful. But the Pharisees, for all their seeming piety, were lovers of money (Luke 16:14; 20:46f.; cf. I Tim. 3:3, 8; 6:10; Titus 1:7; Heb. 13:5; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5), and if greed amounts to idolatry, the love of money can only be dispelled by the love of God. It is no good giving alms as a religious work (cf. Luke 21:1–4; I Cor. 13:3) if the heart of the man is not given (cf. I John 3:17; James 2:15–16; Gal. 5:6).

**11:42–44** The ‘woe’ of 11:42 concentrates on the point that the Torah is being observed in letter (and more than in letter, for the degree of the Pharisees’ tithing was not required by the Law), but not in spirit. ‘But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others’ (cf. Isa. 1:10–17; 58:4–8; Amos 5:21–24; Micah 6:6–8; Zech. 7:8–10; Col. 3:12f.), while 11:43 condemns a religion that is observed for the sake of kudos. In sum says Jesus, ‘Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it.’ The latter comment has a particular twist to it. The very Pharisees who were so concerned with ritual purity and ceremonial law-keeping, who would have abhorred walking over an unmarked grave and thus becoming ceremonially unclean, are themselves a source of insidious, hidden contamination.

### 2. Woe to the Lawyers (11:45–52).

**11:45–48** The comments thus made brought a response from one of the lawyers (see comments on 5:17) who said, ‘Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too’ (11:45). Jesus’ first woe directed to this group relates to the burdens of Law and interpretation that the lawyers placed on the common folk (11:46).<sup>1</sup> The second woe (11:47–48) relates to the building up of the tombs of the prophets. In this action they were supposedly honouring the dead prophets, but in fact they were finishing off the murderous job of their own forefathers. The true way to honour the prophets would be to heed their word and to listen to the One to whom their words pointed.

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<sup>1</sup> Morris comments, (*The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 205f.):

On the Sabbath, they taught, a man may not carry a burden ‘in his right hand or in his left hand, in his bosom or on his shoulder’. But he may carry it ‘on the back of his hand, or with his foot or with his mouth or with his elbow, or in his ear or in his hair or in his wallet (carried) mouth downwards, or between his wallet and his shirt, or in the hem of his shirt, or in his shoe or in his sandal (*Shabbath*, 10:3) . Multiply this by all the regulations of the Law and ordinary people have a burden beyond bearing even to know what they might do and might not do. But there is also a multitude of loopholes for a lawyer who knew the traditions which enabled him to do pretty well what he wished.

**11:49–52** Whether Jesus is quoting from any hitherto unknown book in 11:49f. is unlikely. It appears more likely that He is saying, in effect, ‘This is the wisdom of God’ (cf. the personification of wisdom in Prov. 1:20–33; ch. 8). Whatever the case, the point is clear. All the prophets from Abel (Gen. 4:8) to Zechariah (II Chron. 24:21f.), have been murdered by their jealous and rebellious kinsmen. Their blood will be charged to the generation of Jesus’ day in that He, as the Prophet of all prophets and One to whom they all pointed, would be murdered in the same way as His predecessors. And the judgement which God had foregone so often would not be neglected (cf. Rom. 2:3–5; I Thess. 2:15–16).

The last verse in this section is particularly telling. ‘Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered’ (11:52). They had taken away the key by hiding the true intent of the Law (love) amid a plethora of legalistic observances, and by obscuring the principles of grace and promise by their own works’ righteousness, not lifting a finger to help those being crushed by their intolerable burden (cf. Ezek. 34).

### **3. Pharisaic Plotting (11:53, 54).**

Luke tells us, ‘And when He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him, to catch Him in something He might say’. The word here used for ‘catch’ is that normally used to describe the hunting of wild animals. Surely their anger against Him was as wild as it was irrational!

## H. Teaching to the Disciples and Others (12:1—13:9)

### 1. A Warning and Encouragement (12:1–12).

**12:1** The setting for this particular block of teaching is given to us. It is designated as being ‘under these circumstances’, i.e. in the face of mounting conflict with the Pharisees and with a very powerful description of the urgency of the multitudes—‘after so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they were stepping on one another’. In this context Jesus began to teach ‘His disciples first of all’. This phrase indicates that His instruction was meant primarily for the twelve, rather than meaning He spoke to them before He spoke to the crowds.

That the first section of the teaching is directed to the disciples specifically is significant, for they, more than the crowds, were in danger of being influenced by ‘the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy’. They were to ‘beware’ of such an influence (cf. Luke 20:46; Matt. 7:15; 10:17; 16:11; etc.). The symbol of leaven is a very apt one. Leaven (yeast) is not easily seen, yet its effects are obvious. The yeast works its way into every corner of the mixture, as does hypocrisy. Nothing is left pure because of it. Says Morris, ‘its penetration is slow, insidious and constant’<sup>1</sup> (cf. Mark 8:15; Matt. 16:6; I Cor. 5:7f.). The word ‘hypocrite’ has its background in the Greek theatre. The ‘hypocrite’ was a large mask used by actors to both represent characters and amplify the voice.

**12:2, 3** But essential to hypocrisy is secrecy, hiddenness, deceit. Jesus tells them that there is nothing hidden or secret that will remain so, and that which we think has been done in secret ‘shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.’ By such figures as these, Jesus is pointing to the time when all will be revealed. Hypocrisy cannot be maintained in the light of God’s judgement. Even now the Word penetrates (Heb. 4:13; cf. John 3:19ff.; I Cor. 14:24f.), but at the final judgement everything will be revealed (cf. Eccl. 12:14; Matt. 10:26; Rom. 2:16; I Cor. 3:13; 4:5; Rev. 20:12).

**12:4** In the light of this, the disciples (and we) should ‘not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do’ (12:4), but rather, they (we) should ‘fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!’ The fear of God (for this is the One surely meant in this verse) is an important theme in the Scriptures, even though we agree with Leon Morris who says that it is somewhat out of fashion these days! From it flow obedience (cf. Amos 5:6f.; Hosea 6:6; Lev. 19:14; Deut. 13:11; etc.), good conduct (e.g. Luke 18:2, 4; Acts 9:31; I Pet. 2:17; Rev. 11:18), and wisdom (Ps. 103:11, 13, 17; Prov. 1:7; 23:17), not to mention true worship, godly boldness and true love. Fear of man is related to death, in a temporal sense. That men can threaten others with death is their ultimate weapon. But God’s power is not limited to time. He is able to cast a man into hell. The word used here is ‘Gehenna’ which is derived from two Hebrew words meaning ‘the valley of Hinnom’. This valley, which was adjacent to Jerusalem, was used for false and debased worship in some OT times (e.g. Lev. 18:21; I Kings 11:7; cf. Jer. 7:31ff.; 19:6). Such false worship did not persist up into the NT times, but the valley was still treated with contempt, being used as a rubbish tip and having in it continually burning fires. It thus stands as a powerful symbol for eternal punishment (cf. Mark 9:43–47), and Jesus’ point here is that it is God who has the power and authority to execute such punishment.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 208.

**12:5–7** Such fear of God, is not, however, cringing terror, as 12:5–6 indicates. After all, Jesus is speaking to His friends (12:4; cf. John 15:13f.). The One whom we fear is our Father (cf. 11:2; 12:30, 32). Thus, not one of the sparrows (small birds of diverse species) is forgotten by Him and ‘indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows.’ God knows even the smallest detail about His people, things which they would not even know about themselves, and to this degree He cares for them. The command to not fear here seems to be in contradiction to that which has just been said above, but really they are complementary. True fear of God is the only prophylactic against fear in the sense of anxiety, such fear stemming from the fear of death.

**12:8–10** In the light of these comments, how does 12:8–9 fit into the teaching being given? Jesus’ statement that ‘. . . everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man shall confess him also before the angels of God’ is the positive side of the picture. Our problem is related to the second section of the statement, ‘. . . but he who denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God’. That forgiveness for denying Jesus is available is illustrated in the case of Peter (Matt. 26:74f.; Luke 22:31f.; John 18:15ff., 27ff.), not to mention Paul and his persecution of the Church (Acts 9:1; 22:4; 26:9ff.; I Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8; Phil. 3:6). The denial must then be virtually equivalent to apostasy as mentioned in Hebrews 6:6. This is further born out by what follows. It seems clear that to ‘speak a word against the Son of Man’ is not the same as ‘denying’ Him in the preceding verses, for unlike the implication of 12:9, the speaking of a word against the Son of Man ‘shall be forgiven him’. On the other hand, ‘he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him’. The word for ‘blaspheme’ in this context indicates a life-set, a mind-set, an unremitting and unbridled hardness of heart, rather than any specific set of words. The meaning becomes clearer when we see that Matthew and Mark have this saying in the midst of the Beelzebul controversy, i.e. the blasphemy spoken of indicates the attitude portrayed by those accusing Jesus of being an agent of Satan, when, in fact, He cast out demons ‘by the Spirit of God’.

**12:11, 12** But Jesus is speaking to His friends, and, despite the picture just given, there is strong encouragement (12:11–12). Jesus tells the disciples ‘. . . when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not become anxious about how or what you should speak in your defense, or what you shall say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say’ (cf. Matt. 10:19f.; Mark 13:11; Luke 21:14f.). Such action we see fulfilled in passages such as Acts 4:8–12, 19f.; ch. 7; 21:39–22; 23:1; 26:1–23; etc.) The Spirit is indeed ‘another Comforter’ (John 14:16) to Jesus’ friends.

## 2. The Parable of the Rich Fool (12:13–21).

This parable is unique to Luke. Like all the parables, however, it has its own specific setting. Here ‘someone in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me”’ (12:13). This person was one who was concerned for his rights, and who sought to use Jesus to win his point against his brother.<sup>1</sup> Jesus dismisses the option to become involved (12:14), and then goes on to address the issue underneath the man’s question, viz. the love of money. Thus ‘He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”’<sup>2</sup> This is the premise upon which the parable proceeds. The error in believing that life consists of possessions when one has an abundance of them is not unique to the NT times (cf. Eccl. 2:18f.; Ps. 39:6). The parable (12:16–20) is as powerful as it is straightforward.

<sup>1</sup> Rabbis would not uncommonly be asked to settle matters of dispute with regard to interpretations of the Law. In this case, however, the man is not even asking for that. He has come to get Jesus on his side against his brother.

<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastes tells us that the world’s goods are of no benefit unless one is given the gift of enjoyment by which to appreciate them truly (Eccl. 2:26).



The man did not recognize the productivity of the land to be a blessing from God (see the use of ‘I’ and ‘my’ in 12:18–19), and neither did he recognize that such productivity was not simply for his own benefit. Rather, he sought to hoard that which comes each day from the Father’s hand, and therefore he came to a tragic end. Jesus comments simply, ‘So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God’ (12:21).

### 3. The Father is the Faithful Provider (12:22–34).

**12:22–26** The ‘this reason’ is a linking phrase that connects 12:22 with the parable of 12:21. In view of the fact that we are all dependent upon God for our life and health and daily bread, there is no point in hoarding, for hoarding implies fear about His provision. Rather, says Jesus, ‘do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. For life is more than food, and the body than clothing’ (12:22–23). The term ‘anxious’ is a key one to the understanding of this passage. The illustration of the ravens in 12:24, and the comment added in 12:25–26, indicate that anxiety is both unnecessary (for if God provides for the ravens He will do so for you) and useless (it cannot accomplish even adding a cubit to one’s span of life). Ravens are mentioned in a similar context in Psalm 147:9, but in Leviticus 11:15 they are designated as being unclean birds, making the choice of them for this illustration even more pointed. If He cares for even unclean birds of the air such as ravens, how much more will He care for you? We have been given three reasons not to be anxious (following Marshall): Life is more than food and clothing, God will provide what is needed, and such anxiety is ineffective in any case.

**12:27, 28** The illustration of the lilies (though exactly which species of flower is meant is unclear), makes essentially the same point as the paragraph above. Here, however, the reference is to clothing rather than food.

**12:29–31** The statement of 12:29, ‘And do not seek what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and do not keep worrying’, is deliberately expressed in the present continuous tense. But the point is not one simply of personal well-being. The mark of the nations (Gentiles) is worry, anxiety and clamouring after food and clothing, but such should not be the mark of those in the Kingdom for ‘. . . your Father knows that you need these things. But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you’ (12:29–31). We are not ever to seek Him and His Kingdom in order to get these things, but they are incidental to the life which flows from Him. There is in these verses a *command* not to worry which we must heed.

**12:32–34** The closing remarks of this section are powerful. Those who believe are only a ‘little flock’ who are commanded not to fear.<sup>1</sup> The reason is as simple as it is powerful, ‘. . . for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom’. The Father gives (cf. Isa. 55:6f.; Ezek. 18:23; 33:11; Hosea 11:8; Matt. 23:37; Luke 2:14; 13:34f.; Eph. 1:5, 9; etc.), and gladly. The remarks which follow are illustrative rather than universal rules. While we are always to build up treasure in heaven, the divesting ourselves of possessions is not always required of us.<sup>2</sup> ‘Where is our heart?’ is the question (cf. I Cor. 7:30; Phil. 4:12ff.), for the heart is the seat of the mind, the emotions and the will, and will thus govern all our actions (cf. Matt. 12:34f.; 15:18; Isa. 32:6; etc.).

<sup>1</sup> While the term ‘little flock’ is found only here in the NT, some other references where the ‘flock’ image is employed are Matthew 10:6; 15:24; 25:32f.; Mark 6:34; 14:27; Luke 15:4–6; John 10:1–27; Acts 20:28f.; I Pet. 5:2f.

<sup>2</sup> Godet comments (*A Commentary on The Gospel of St. Luke*, Vol. II, p. 103):

The essential character of such a precept alone is permanent. The form in which Jesus presented it arose from the present condition of the kingdom of God. The mode of fulfilling it varies. There are times when, to disentangle himself and practise Christian love, the believer must give up everything; there are other times when, to secure real freedom and be the better able to give, he must keep and administer.

#### 4. The Coming of the Son of Man and the Need to be Watchful (12:35–40).

This paragraph introduces the topic of Christ's coming again. This topic does not appear *in vacuo*, though—chapter 12 has opened with a sobering reminder of the coming judgement, when all things now hidden will be revealed (12:1–3), and the immediately preceding section teaches the need to seek the Kingdom. Here the title 'Son of Man' (Luke 12:40) has its full eschatological weight, as seen in such passages as Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; Revelation 1:7, 13; 14:14. Other places in the NT indicate that the NT Church took its cue for its eschatological teaching from passages such as the one before us (e.g. I Thess. 5:1f.; II Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15).

**12:35, 36** In view of the coming hour of judgement, Jesus says that His people should be dressed and ready with lighted lamps (12:35), like servants waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast (12:36). There are other NT passages which urge alertness and wakefulness in a similar way (e.g. I Cor. 16:13; Col. 4:2; I Thess. 5:6, 10; I Pet. 5:8; Rev. 3:2f.; 16:15). The image presented here has a sociological setting as well as a theological one. In the common practice of the day, weddings would be conducted over an extended period, some lasting up to two weeks. A wealthy householder would attend the wedding for some if not all of this time, leaving his servants to attend to the running of the house so that it would be ready for his return. The long-flowing robes commonly worn needed to be hitched up in order to allow freedom of movement and to make work possible. The picture is of the master returning to a scene of readiness and faithful activity. The theological setting unfolds as the passage progresses.

**12:37–40** Jesus gives a remarkable picture in 12:37. He says, 'Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at table, and will come up and wait on them.' Here the normal roles are reversed (cf. 22:27; Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:35–45; John 13:1–15; etc.). Truly the first will be last and the least will be great! The greatness of the love of God is seen in this verse as perhaps nowhere else.

12:38 and 39 are further injunctions to readiness. 12:38 relates to the thought of 12:37 directly, while 12:39—'And be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into'—introduces a different concept, but makes the same point. What is clear is that the coming of the Son of Man will be unannounced, though it should not be unexpected, at least by His people (12:40; cf. Matt. 24:36, 42–44; Luke 21:24; I Thess. 5:2–4; II Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15).

#### 5. The Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants (12:41–48).

**12:41** The disciples were unsure of the significance of all that Jesus was saying. We can assume that Peter spoke for them all when he said, 'Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?' (12:41). The disciples had had times of special instruction, and perhaps Peter had one of these in mind when asking the question. They had not understood Him on other occasions, and He had instructed them privately, would the same situation apply now?

**12:42, 43** Jesus' reply is not a direct one. By means of a question (cf. 10:36) He simply designates that the one found doing his duty is the faithful and sensible steward. This means that membership of the twelve or otherwise is of no importance in the matter of the Son's return. The important thing is the service being rendered at the time. The one thus found rendering good service will be greatly blessed and given more responsibility (12:44). This latter suggestion is important. Paradise is not a place of unrestrained pleasure, but is one of true fruitfulness, and true work (i.e. work not subjected to futility). The servant described in 12:43

had been given temporary charge over other servants of the household, but in 12:44 it seems that his position is changed from that of temporary servant to Co-regent (cf. Rev. 5:10; 3:21; 20:4; Matt. 19:28; II Tim. 2:12; etc.).

**12:45, 46** There is a different situation pictured in the verses that follow, however. Here the picture is of one of terrible retribution. Here the slave has not believed in the immanence of the master's return and arrogated authority unto himself, using it to bring destruction and exploitation to those under him, and selfish eating and drinking to himself. He had reasoned 'in his heart' that the master would be away a long time, and thus acted in a manner that sought to avoid his true responsibility on the one hand, and to usurp the master's position on the other. He is an *unfaithful* servant, in contrast to the *faithful* one of verse 42. In terms of the Church, such a one is a deceiver and a false minister of Christ (cf. II Cor. 11:13–15; Acts 20:30; Gal. 1:7ff.; 2:4; Phil. 1:15; II Pet. 2:1; Rev. 2:2). The master 'will come on a day when he does not expect him, and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers'. The punishment spoken of was not unknown in earlier days (II Sam. 12:31; I Chron. 20:3; Heb. 11:37), but here is used figuratively of the place of outer darkness.

**12:47** In 12:47 the situation is different. Here 'that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes'. The problem of wrong doing is not simply one of doing wrong, but failure to do that which is right (cf. James 4:17). Such folk as described here have not been deceitful workers like those above, but disobedient servants who should have known better. They will suffer loss (cf. I Cor. 5:5; 3:10–15) but not necessarily be lost.

**12:48** presents a different picture again. Here 'the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few'. The thought is paralleled by Numbers 15:30, Deuteronomy 17:12 and Psalm 19:13, where there is a difference drawn between sins of presumption and sins of ignorance. The whole picture is of differing responses by the master to the servants, depending on their particular responsibility. The harshest judgement falls on those who have acted the most presumptuously. Thus, 'from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more' (12:48b). Those who are leaders of the Church have a greater responsibility than others (cf. Lev. 10:3; Ezek. 3:16ff.; 33:7–9; Amos 3:2; Acts 20:26f.; I Cor. 4:1f.; Titus 1:7ff.; I Pet. 4:10f.; James 3:1; I Tim. 1:5ff.; Heb. 13:7).

## 6. Jesus' Constraint and the Division Because of Him (12:49–53).

**12:49, 50** indicates Jesus' understanding of His own ministry. He says, 'I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!' What is this fire? Commonly 'fire' is related to judgement (e.g. Isa. 66:15; Joel 2:30; Amos 1:7, 10–14; 2:2ff.; Mal. 3:2; I Cor. 3:13; II Thess. 1:7f.), and this is also the case in Luke 3:16–17. In what does this judgement consist? The fact that it is not already kindled (12:49b) is significant. It seems undeniable that the kindling of the fire is linked with the baptism of 12:50—'But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!' (cf. Mark 10:38f.; Matt. 20:22). There can be no doubt that the baptism refers to the event of the Cross. To be baptized is to be overwhelmed, to be immersed in something. Jesus had not yet been overwhelmed by the sin of the world, but this was to be the point of the Cross and that to which He had resolutely set His face. All this means that the fire of judgement is linked with the Cross. The Cross is the 'winnowing fork' of 3:16f. Men will be judged by their response to the Cross, where the judgement for the sin of the world was played out. The word here translated 'distressed' is also used in Luke 4:38; 8:37; Philippians 1:23; Acts 18:5; and II Cor. 5:14, where its meaning becomes clearer.

**12:51–53** As 12:51–53 indicates, the fire and baptism from which it proceeds is not pre-eminently for a humanistic sense of peace. That the Messiah would bring peace is undeniable (e.g. Ps. 72:3; Luke 1:79; 2:14; 7:50; John 14:27; 16:33; 20:19f.; Rom. 5:1; etc.), but such peace is first and foremost with God, against whom we have been fighting and with whom we have been at war. That subjective peace of heart flows from the forgiveness of sins is true, but the same word of grace that brings comfort to anxious sinners also stirs up the wrath of the world and all evil forces so that there is not peace but a sword. The dramatic description of division—‘for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two, and two against three. They will be divided, father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law’—is not the final picture, however. In the end, even the Lion will lie with the Lamb, but not before the catharsis of all evil and wickedness.

### 7. A Call to Read the Signs of the Times (12:54–59).

**12:54–57** In 12:54–55 Jesus states an obvious fact, ‘When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, “A shower is coming,” and so it turns out that way’ (perhaps indicating that their system of weather forecasting was better than ours is now!). The point of the saying is that, while the generation could read the signs in the clouds etc., they would not read the signs as to His person and ministry (12:57). That their blindness was culpable is emphasized by the description of them as ‘You hypocrites!’ (12:56), who ‘know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time?’ The word here translated ‘time’ is *kairos*. There are two NT words for time, viz. *kairos* and *chronos*. The latter is the more general term meaning time considered as a succession of moments. The former is more specific term meaning a special time within the general duration of time. To say that the people of His day were not able to recognize the *kairos* means that they would not read the time of His visitation—they would not recognize the hour in which they lived.

**12:58–59** These verses form a neat conclusion to the section. Jesus is speaking about relationships in the Kingdom, but also the image picks up that which has been said earlier about the urgency of the situation apropos the coming judgement and the corresponding need to be ready. The message is simple: ‘Make peace now before it is too late!’

### 8. A Call to Repentance and the Parable of the Fig Tree (13:1–9).

**13:1** The first verse of this paragraph raises the issue of God’s seeming injustice in letting ‘innocent’ folk suffer. While Jesus was teaching ‘there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices’. Perhaps the question was prompted by the Lord’s teaching on judgement (as recorded in the preceding section), for misfortune was commonly linked with judgement for sin (John 9:2; cf. Job. 4:7; 8:20; 22:4f.). The event spoken of here is otherwise unknown to us, but it seems to have been common knowledge of the day.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the bearers of the message were frustrated that Jesus seemed to be ignoring such an issue. After all, Messiah was to be a man of justice and a deliverer, so what would Jesus do about it?

**13:2–5** Rather than replying to the direct accusation (for this is what it was), Jesus ‘answered and said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than

<sup>1</sup> Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, p. 371, quotes another scholar: The Galilean zealots were notoriously turbulent, and Pilate was ruthlessly cruel. Many massacres marked his administration.

all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”’ This, at first glance, seems no answer at all. There is a very important point being made here, however. The questioners were asking the wrong question. The implication of the question is that God is unjust. Doubtless Pilate was harsh and cruel, but his sin against the worshippers did not make them any the more righteous. Those suffering injustice are no more righteous because of it, but neither does this excuse those who are inflicting the pain. In the case of those upon whom the tower fell there was no second party to blame. That the eighteen died did not mean they were more unrighteous than the rest. Rather, death comes to all, in one way or another, so do not fear men, or even death itself, but He who holds our times and seasons in His hand. The inquirers needed to repent of asking such a question—one of no faith and no insight. As R. C. Sproul points out, in view of the unrighteousness of man they should have been asking ‘Why didn’t the tower fall on me?’ Repentance is not an option to be deferred until a convenient time, for the time of death may be close at hand!

**13:6–9** The parable of the fig tree and its keeper relates directly to the thought being expressed above. It is usual to interpret the parable as referring to the nation of Israel as a whole, but there may be another alternative. In such OT passages as Isaiah 5:1–7, Hosea 9:10 and Joel 1:7, the vineyard is Israel, as is also the case in Luke 20:9–16. However, in the Hosea and Joel references, as well as in such places as Jeremiah 24 and Micah 7:1ff., the fruit of the fig is a symbol for the fruit of righteousness that should have been evident in Israel in general and among its leaders in particular. This is even more significant when we see that in the vineyard parable found in Luke 20:9–16, the scribes and Pharisees realized that they were the main object of Jesus’ instruction (20:19) and this seems to be the case here also. Here the vineyard owner is concerned for the productivity of the vineyard as a whole, and the words addressed to the keeper of the vineyard signify that the unproductive tree is robbing the soil of the vineyard (13:7b). The problem discussed in this parable seems to be the crisis of fruitless leadership within the nation, rather than judgement on the nation itself.<sup>1</sup> Fruit should have been borne by the tree. As Bailey points out, according to Leviticus 19:23f., fruit for the first three years of a tree’s productive life was not to be taken, but it would take up to three years for the tree to begin to bear. It thus may be that Jesus’ hearers would have understood Him to be talking of a delay of some nine years in total: three for the growing, three years of prohibited fruit (had there been any), and three years of vain searching for any good fruit as a result. Whatever the case, the point is clear that the tree had sufficient time to bear fruit, but it remained barren (cf. Luke 3:7). The fact that the vineyard keeper intervenes to prevent the immediate destruction of the fig tree (13:8) is a powerful illustration of God’s patience. Time and time again He had sent the prophets in order to bring the people to repentance, but they were all slain (cf. 11:45ff.). Yet there will eventually be a cut off point. The fig tree is given only limited time before the end is finally and irrevocably brought down (13:9), as the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 confirmed.

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<sup>1</sup> K. E. Bailey, ‘Through Peasant Eyes’, p. 82 in *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, Eerdmans, 1983.

## I. Sabbath Events (13:10–21)

### 1. A Healing and the Ensuing Dispute (13:10–17).

**13:10, 11** The setting of the miracle is given as a time when ‘He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath’. The woman is described as one who ‘for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all’.

**13:12, 13** The account of the healing is simple. Jesus ‘saw her, He called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your sickness.” And He laid His hands upon her; and immediately she was made erect again, and began glorifying God’ (13:12–13). The healing was done at Jesus’ word, but notice the thanks she gave was to God (cf. Matt. 5:16; I Pet. 2:12).

**13:14–17** All of this brought to the surface again the earlier disputes about the Sabbath which had occasioned so much hostility (cf. 6:6ff.) According to the traditions of the elders, healing could not be conducted on the Sabbath unless it was a case of life and death. Jesus answered the accusations by unmasking the hypocrisy of the stance taken by the ruler of the synagogue and those who agreed with him by saying, ‘You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?’ (13:15–16). There are a number of interesting insights given in these verses. One is that this woman was a child of the Covenant—a daughter of Abraham (cf. Luke 19:9; Acts 13:26). The second is that she had been bound by Satan for the years of her condition (cf. Job, who was a righteous man also so afflicted).<sup>1</sup> The third is that wherever there is Satanic bondage, Jesus has come to bring release—that she *must* be released is the force of the Greek word *dei* used in 13:16.

All of this had a double-edged response: ‘All His opponents were being humiliated’ on the one hand, while ‘the entire multitude was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him’, on the other.

### 2. Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven (13:18–21).

**13:18, 19** These two small parables make interrelated points. The first parable, that of the mustard seed, emphasizes that the end result of the Kingdom is much greater than its first appearances. To earthly eyes the Kingdom seems small and ineffective, yet there will be a great result. The image of the mustard seed is intriguing, for from such a small seed a plant of some 8–12 feet emerged. It did not grow into a large tree, like a cedar, but the point being made is the contrast between the small beginnings and the end result. The birds roosting in the trees were a symbol of the nations sheltering under the rule of a kingdom or empire (e.g. Ezek. 17:23; 31:6; Dan. 4:12, 21). But this Kingdom will be universal (cf. Isa. 2:11f.; 45:14, 23–24; 56:6ff.; Zech. 3:9).

**13:20, 21** The second parable, that of the Leaven, uses the same image as seen in 12:1, except here the action of the leaven is used to illustrate a positive function. Again the emphasis is on hiddenness, but with an obvious end result.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. Trench, *Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord*, Baker Book House, 1976, p. 205: ‘. . . for the saving of her soul on the day of the Lord she had come under the scourge of Satan’.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 225: ‘It is perhaps worth noting that yeast works from inside: it cannot change the dough while it is outside. But it is also important that the power to change comes from outside: the dough does not change itself.’

The placing of these parables is also important. The activity of the Messiah as seen in the above healing is only the beginning of the Kingdom. Its end point will be one of total liberty (Rev. 21–22). Jesus' miracles are *signs* of the Kingdom, as John so clearly stresses. As signs they point to and tell us of the Kingdom, which is *active* in their being performed, but which is not *consummated* in their being performed.

## J. Teaching While Travelling (13:22–35)

### 1. On Being Shut Out of the Kingdom (13:22–30).

**13:22** The journey of 9:51 is set out again in 13:22: ‘And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem.’

**13:23–30** On the way ‘someone said to Him, “Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?”’ (13:23). The import of the question is in the context of Covenant. Evidence from other sources shows that it was a question much discussed at the time, with the prevailing opinion that all Israel would be saved, except for the most presumptuous sinners. Jesus’ reply has three elements:

- (1) There is only a limited time to hear the Gospel (13:24–25):

And He said to them, ‘Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, “Lord, open up to us!” then He will answer and say to you, “I do not know where you are from.”’

There is a current time to respond. In the last day many *will* seek to enter (the future tense is important) who have given the matter no thought in the present. Such an attitude is of no value. Faith now is the important issue, not then. To strive to enter is to seek for His Kingdom and His righteousness (cf. Paul in Phil. 3:4–16). No one who strives to enter now will be refused, but only those who seek to enter then, when it is too late.

- (2) There is no possibility of being justified by works, or gaining entry into the Kingdom by merit (13:26–28):

Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets’; and He will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being cast out.

The OT quote is from Psalm 6:8. The ‘evildoers’, according to Matthew 7:22f., are those who have done many seemingly good and mighty works, but all out of a self-justifying heart, not out of love (cf. I Cor. 13:1–3). ‘Wailings express despair, gnashings of teeth rage. The souls of the condemned oscillate between these two feelings.’<sup>1</sup>

- (3) Yet there will be a multitude from every corner of the world gathered on the last day. And those thus gathered will not have been brought together in terms suitable for analysis by human observation. The ones highly esteemed here will not be so there, and vice versa (13:29–30):

And they will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last.

The Messianic banquet, seen in such prophecies as Isaiah 25:6ff., is taken up by Jesus Himself in Matthew 26:29 and is also illustrated by His presence and sign at the Wedding Feast in Cana of Galilee. Most clearly it is seen in the closing chapters of the Revelation.

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<sup>1</sup> Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, Vol. II, p. 125.



## 2. Leaving Galilee (13:31–33).

In a section again unique to Luke, we are given some insight into both the political machinations of the day and Jesus' own understanding of His task.

That some Pharisees should ask Him to depart because of Herod's<sup>1</sup> plots (13:31), is indeed remarkable. We doubt, however, that they were exercising loving concern for Him. Morris suggests that they may have been Herod's messengers giving Jesus a death threat in order to drive Him out of Herod's dominions, particularly after all the fuss caused by John the Baptist. There may be some merit in this view in light of Jesus' response which implies that (i) they will return to Herod with some news of His reaction; and (ii) the only place for Him to die is Jerusalem. It may be, however, that the scribes and Pharisees wanted Jesus back in Judea under the dominion of the Sanhedrin, rather than in Herod's territory. Whatever the case, Jesus' reply (13:32–33) has two elements. Herod was a sign seeker (cf. 23:8f.) and Jesus reported to him that He was indeed performing signs, but only with an end point in view.<sup>2</sup> The 'fox' was variously a symbol of slyness and cunning and also of inferiority in the animal world. For such a one, signs would be of no benefit. As it was, the signs would end in Jesus' death at Jerusalem (the second element of Jesus' reply), which death would vindicate Him and show not only to Herod, but also the world, the true nature of power and authority.

## 3. Lament Over Jerusalem (13:34, 35).

Though God's prophets had often been rejected by His people, and here Jerusalem stands for the heart of the nation, God had never rejected Jerusalem (cf. Hosea 11; Ezek. 16; etc.). Godet notes: 'Like a bird of prey hovering in the air, the enemy is threatening the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Jesus, who was sheltering them under His wings as a hen her brood, withdraws, and they remain exposed, reduced thenceforth to defend themselves.'<sup>3</sup> Now was the hour of judgement.

The time referred to in 13:35b is best taken as the end time of history, especially in view of the import of Jesus' teaching in the latter half of Luke chapter 12. Jerusalem will then recognize the Messiah, for better or worse.

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<sup>1</sup> This is Herod the tetrarch, younger son of Herod the Great, who had received the districts of Galilee and Perea on the death of his father.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'the third day' in 13:32 should not be taken literally for it was often used of an indefinite time chronologically, yet it being a time of set duration.

<sup>3</sup> *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, Vol II, p.131.

## K. More Sabbath Teaching (14:1–35)

### 1. A Pharisaic Trap (14:1–6).

**14:1** The account of the healing of the man with dropsy is unique to Luke, as is the block of teaching which follows it. The setting is indicated as ‘the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath’, possibly indicating that this man was a member of the Sanhedrin. Because of earlier conflicts about the Sabbath (this is the last of five recorded healings on the Sabbath, 4:31ff., 38ff.; 6:6ff.; 13:10ff.), ‘they were watching Him closely’, yet Jesus did not avoid them—for their own good as much as anything else.<sup>1</sup>

**14:2–6** Present at the feast was a gravely afflicted individual. The man is described as ‘suffering from dropsy’ (14:2). The condition thus indicated, which is an excessive build up of fluids in body tissue and cavities, is not a disease as such, but a symptom of some other problem which remains unspecified. How did he come to be there? Feasts such as this one on the Sabbath were special occasions, and guests were invited. We cannot rule out the possibility that this poor unfortunate had been deliberately brought to the feast, invited by the one giving it, specifically as a trap for Jesus. He was there as human bait in order to gain a response from Jesus that may have incriminated Him. Knowing the thoughts and intentions of the hearts of His hosts, Jesus directly addressed them. He ‘spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?”’ (14:3). In response they ‘kept silent’ (14:4) for to have answered would have incriminated themselves. Jesus had asked a very difficult question (cf. the argument presented in 13:14, 15). There was nothing in the Law of Moses to prohibit such healing, but in Rabbinic tradition healing could only be done if the sufferer’s life was in danger. The question thus posed by Jesus struck at the very heart of the authority base for ‘the traditions of the elders’. If they had said that it was indeed lawful to heal on the Sabbath, then they would have no power to continue to assert their false authority in that they would be seen to be running contrary to their own system of Sabbath protectionism. If they were to answer that it was unlawful to heal on the Sabbath, they exceeded the bounds of Moses’ Law. They were left with nothing to say.

Having thus dealt with the opposition of those gathered, Jesus ‘took hold of him, and healed him, and sent him away’. He had indeed healed and done good on the Sabbath, a fact obvious to all. ‘And they could make no reply to this’ (14:6). The Sabbath had indeed been given for man, not man for the Sabbath, and Jesus had truly shown Himself to be Lord of the Sabbath, and this for the benefit of His people.

### 2. A Parable Regarding Honour (14:7–11).

Jesus was a careful observer of people. He knew what was in their hearts (cf. John 2:23–25) and He knew what their actions signified. So ‘when He noticed how they (i.e. the invited guests) had been picking out the places of honour at the table’, he began telling them a parable. The parable is steeped in cultural customs and considerations. The places of highest honour were those to the right and left of the host on the head table (cf. Mark 10:35–37), with other places of honour in descending order on those tables situated furthest away from the head table in a ‘U’ shape. In the parable, Jesus says those who are invited to a wedding feast (the most formal of all feasts and therefore the one at which social etiquette was more rigorously observed) should not take the places of high honour lest someone greater than they

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. Trench comments (*Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord*, p. 207): ‘The invitation, though accepted in love, had not been given in good faith’.

arrive later. Such a late arrival, which was in itself a sign of being a distinguished guest, would occasion, at the instigation of the one providing the feast, a shamefaced and shameful move to a lowlier seat (14:7–9). Rather, says Jesus, one should seek the places of lowest honour so that the one giving the feast may honour the guest by asking him to move to a place of higher honour (14:10). This is not an encouragement to a false show of humility, but instead makes the point that the place of honour is not for the guest to choose. It must be given to him, not grasped by him (cf. III John 9; Rom. 12:10; 13:7; Phil. 2:3; I Pet. 2:17). The parable ends with the statement, ‘For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted’ (14:11; cf. 18:14; Matt. 11:23; 23:12; II Cor. 11:7; James 4:10; I Pet. 5:6), which, as the passage unfolds, is seen to be a telling judgement against the Pharisees.

### 3. The Way of Love and the Parable of the Wedding Feast (14:12–24).

**14:12–14** Jesus next directs some remarks directly to the one who had invited Him, saying, ‘When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous’ (14:12–14). The significance of this statement is immense in view of the prevailing social morés. Weddings and other feasts (such as our dinner parties) were something grand, occasions both to show and receive honour. They were also something of an insurance policy, for those who provided such feasts were invited by others in return. In consequence, the outcasts of society were locked into being outcasts. Here the very ones incapable of giving honour are to be the object of the true host’s concern. Again there is a prophetic element that is made plain below. The phrase ‘the resurrection of the righteous’ probably indicates simply the resurrection on the Last Day (cf. Luke 10:12; Acts 24:15; John 5:28f.; Rom. 2:5; II Cor. 5:10; II Tim 4:1).

**14:15–24** The above teaching caused ‘one of those who were reclining at table with Him’ to say to Him, ‘Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!’ (14:15). The ascription gives an insight into the eschatological expectation of the day. We have seen elsewhere the import of the wedding feast image (13:29; cf. Ps. 23:5; Isa. 25:6ff.; Matt. 8:11f.; 22:1ff.; 26:29; Mark 14:25; Rev. 3:20; 19:9), and here the same theme is reiterated. Quite possibly the comment was made in a smug and self-centred way, but whatever the case Jesus saw the interruption as an opportunity to teach those gathered.

The parable pictures a man giving a banquet, who had invited many guests (14:16), but when he sent out his servants to call the guests to the feast (14:17) they all began making excuses (14:18). The double invitation was needed. The first call, sent out some time ahead, was to ascertain numbers for catering purposes, and the second call, given at the hour of the feast, was to indicate to the guests that all was ready (cf. Esther 5:8; 6:14). It was an invitation to ‘Come and get it while it’s hot!’ The acceptance of the first guaranteed their presence when the second was issued. Rather than responding by coming to the feast, as they should have done, the guests made various excuses. Such a practice would have been unheard of in contemporary social relationships.

Now excuses are reasons for not doing that which we should do, such reasons being given to satisfy our conscience, maintain our righteousness and to save face. But here the situation is even worse. The excuses here offered—the need to look at a recently purchased block of land (14:18b), the need to ‘test drive’ some new oxen (14:19), and the need to stay home and (have relations?) with a wife (14:20), are none of them valid. Nothing thus proffered by way of excuse has any urgency about it. By all cultural, economic and religious customs of the day they are patently a fabrication, deliberately designed to be insulting to the one giving the feast (cf. John 15:24).

When the servant returned and reported all this to the master, he sent him out again, but this time ‘into the streets and lanes of the city [to] bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame’ (14:21). When this had been done there was still room at the feast (14:21) and so the slave was sent out again with the command, ‘Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner’ (14:23–24). To compel is not to force, after all there was only one servant, but to constrain them to come in against their own knowledge of their unworthiness. Social custom and politeness means they would have not dared to come in if they were not genuinely convinced of the host’s desire to honour them. Note that the gathering of the outcasts of Israel has already been accomplished in the parable, but the gathering of those from the highways etc. is left unfulfilled, yet it was clearly in the mind of Jesus (cf. Luke 2:32; 3:6; 38; 24:47). He had indeed come to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 15:23), but not exclusively *for* them.

The whole parable is a picture of the nation and its leaders. Covenant invitation had been given and accepted (cf. Deut. 29–30). Indeed, how often the invitation had been repeated (cf. 13:34–35; 11:49–52), and always to the leaders of the nation first. Now Jesus Himself had come to issue the final invitation. Their rejection would be the occasion for the invitation being accepted by those they despised (cf. 14:13), and ultimately the inclusion of those not of the nation at all. Bailey sums up the teaching of the parable in this way:

God’s Messiah is here. He is inviting you to the messianic banquet of the day of salvation. The banquet is now ready. Do not refuse! For if you do (with your ridiculous excuses) others will fill your places from among the outcasts of Israel, and (in the future) an invitation will go out to the Gentiles. The banquet will proceed without you. It will not be cancelled or postponed. The eschatological age has dawned. Respond to the invitation or opt out of participation in God’s salvation.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. On Taking Up the Cross (14:25–35).

**14:25** The setting has now changed. Having left the feast, ‘great multitudes were going along with Him’ and to these He turned to give instruction. The instruction was needed, for the multitudes were in danger of misunderstanding Him and His mission, as we have seen before. They needed to be told that things would not work out as they hoped, and that following Him was not going to be a life marked by unrestrained blessings and ease (cf. John 6:15 and 6:25f., as compared with 6:66ff.). Jesus was under no illusions about the fickle nature of mass popularity, but they were under an illusion as to the nature of His Messiahship.

**14:26** The opening statement in this section puts everything into its right perspective. ‘If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple’ (14:26). To ‘hate’ is not here used in the way we might understand the term. It is not unusual to see it used in the Scriptures in the sense of ‘to love less’ (e.g. Gen. 29:31–33; Deut. 21:15–17; II Sam. 19:7; Prov. 13:24; Isa. 60:15; Mal. 1:2f.), but ‘it must be noted that the Hebrew . . . has the sense “to leave aside, abandon” and this sense may be present . . . The thought is, therefore, not of psychological hate, but of renunciation.’<sup>2</sup>

**14:27–33** The teaching on cross-bearing (14:27; cf. comments on Luke 9:23f.) indicates that the follower of Jesus must regard himself as a man condemned to death. Added to this, Jesus gives teaching on the need to heed what He is saying. The parable of the tower builder who must first count the cost of the project (14:28–30), and the parable of the king who assesses the strength of his forces relative to another’s before engaging in battle (14:31–32), both stress the same point—to follow Jesus is no lightly undertaken project for it will be costly, at

<sup>1</sup> K. E. Bailey, ‘Through Peasant Eyes’, p. 111 in *Poet and Peasant & Through Peasant Eyes*.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 592.

least in worldly terms (cf. Paul in Phil. ch. 3). The illustrations are applied in 14:33 where Jesus says, ‘So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.’ There is a world of difference between self-denial and denial of one’s self. One may practise self-denial in a very selfish way, as indeed the Pharisees were doing. Asceticism does not equate with spirituality. As we have seen elsewhere, where one’s treasure is, is what counts. And in the hour at hand all of Jesus’ followers must be as condemned men, having no claim on any material security, but gripped by the Kingdom.

**14:34, 35** The closing parable of the salt sums up all that has gone before. The salt of those times was quite impure, and true salt would often be contaminated by or mistaken for other substances such as gypsum or carnallite. These latter substances were known as salt that had lost its flavour, and was useless as either a preservative or a flavour enhancer. It could only be discarded. ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear’ is the comment—do not be like this useless salt is the implication.

## L. Teaching On God's Mercy (15:1–32)

The bulk of Luke chapter 15 is unique to Luke. The parable of the lost sheep appears in slightly different form in Matthew 18:12–14, but the rest is unknown outside the third Gospel. The theme of repentance has been in focus throughout chapters 13 and 14, and this chapter is no different. It gives the rationale for Jesus' ministry to the outcast of Israel, and teaches that the true basis of repentance is the free love of God in and through which He seeks and saves the lost.

### 1. On God's Love for the Lost (15:1–7).

**15:1–2** gives us the setting for the three parables which follow. As 'all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him' (15:1), 'both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them"' (15:2). The cause of their complaint lies in what is signified by the eating. To eat with someone was a sign of fellowship and acceptance. While other rich folk may occasionally provide food for the poor or the outcast, they would never eat *with* them.<sup>1</sup> Not that the folk here mentioned would of necessity have been poor. On the contrary, in the case of the tax-collectors (cf. the note on Luke 3:12) they could have been quite wealthy, but they were certainly a despised and hated group whom no self-respecting Pharisee would go near. In Jesus, however, they found '... not that righteousness, full of pride and contempt, with which the Pharisees assailed them, but a holiness which was associated with the tenderest love'.<sup>2</sup>

**15:3–7** The parable of the lost sheep is rich in both its cultural setting and the significance gained thereby. For all the devotional romance that may have been attached to the Shepherd images of the OT, contemporary shepherds were greatly despised (cf. comments on Luke 2:8). Note that the parable is told to the scribes and Pharisees (15:3). 15:4 thus contains an interesting twist—'What man *among you*, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine sheep in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it?' The scribes and Pharisees despised the shepherds, yet here they are referred to as being such, as was truly their role (cf. Ezek. 34; Zech. 11:16). Moreover, the number of sheep is interesting. A flock of this size would belong to a privileged family or clan who would normally employ shepherds to watch the flock. Here the family member or owner himself is pictured as watching the sheep, and searching for the lost one. He is no hired hand who makes a token search for the sake of satisfying conscience, but he searches until he finds that which he seeks. The practice referred to was common. The ninety-nine would stay together, possibly being watched over by a 'hireling' or another member of the family, but the lost one needed to be found. Upon finding the lost sheep, Jesus says, 'he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing' (15:5), thus taking up the burden of the lost sheep, but with joy. As a result, 'when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!"' (15:6). The celebration here pictured was not out of proportion to the event recounted. The point of the parable is then brought home to the scribes and Pharisees who were listening. 'I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance' (15:7). Here the picture is reversed somewhat. No longer are the scribes and Pharisees shepherds, but they are represented by the non-straying sheep. The tax-collectors and sinners are the straying sheep who must be found. And in them being found, Jesus, the true Shepherd, knows great joy.

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<sup>1</sup> See K. E. Bailey, 'Poet and Peasant', p. 143 in *Poet and Peasant & Through Peasant Eyes*.

<sup>2</sup> Godet, *A Commentary on The Gospel of St. Luke*, Vol. II, p. 143.

## 2. The Parable of the Lost Coin (15:8–10).

The parable of the lost coin makes essentially the same point as that above. The coin pictured in the parable may have been one that was attached to a necklace, as was (and is) common amongst village women. Its value is greater than simply its monetary worth. Not only was it one of a set, but in villages where there was more barter than commerce, 'hard currency', such as this coin, was of greater worth than its face value may indicate. 15:8 indicates the diligence of the search, while 15:9 reflects the rejoicing already seen in the parable of the lost sheep. Again the parable is directly applied—'In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents' (15:10).

Both the parables illustrate the diligence with which God seeks sinners. The first, however, focuses on the misery of the sinner in his lost state, the second focuses on the value such a one has in the eyes of God.<sup>1</sup>

## 3. The Parable of the Prodigal Son (15:11–32).

Apart from the parable of the good Samaritan, this parable must be one of the best known pieces of all Jesus' teaching, if not the whole Bible itself. It is well nigh impossible to plumb the depths of it.

**15:11, 12** We must begin by noting the utter impossibility, culturally speaking, of the situation described in 15:11–12. That 'A certain man had two sons' would not be unusual, but that 'the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me"' is utterly unthinkable. This statement is equivalent to 'I wish you were dead!'<sup>2</sup> But even more remarkable is the fact that the father 'divided his wealth between them'. The elder son does not attempt to mediate in the proceedings, as he should have done, and thus shows no concern either for the father's honour or his brother's well-being.

**15:13–16** As the parable unfolds, the younger son takes his father's graciously given provision 'and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living'. The country is described as being 'distant', the thought being that it is out of the father's oversight. The loose living is not clearly specified, but the older son gives some indication, or perhaps some insight into what he would have done, in 15:30. Whatever the case, the son became desperate since, 'when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be in need' (15:14). As a result he 'attached himself to one of the citizens of that country [indicating that he sought to curry favour with a wealthy landowner] and he sent him into his fields to feed swine' (15:15). The ignominy of this can barely be imagined by us. For Jews the swine were impure creatures with which they should have no contact.<sup>3</sup> But, to make matters worse, he was so hungry that 'he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him' (15:16). Instead of freedom he had found slavery; instead of happiness, abject misery.

**15:17–19** Now the picture changes. From being in the depths of despair we are told that 'he came to his senses' (15:17a). This is an unusual turn of phrase. There were other words available for 'repentance' as such, so there may be an indication that the son's initial motives for returning home were not the most lofty. Notice in 15:17b that the coming to his senses is

<sup>1</sup> See Godet, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> See Bailey's comments in *Poet and Peasant & Through Peasant Eyes*. His insights into the whole chapter are indeed remarkable and are reflected throughout this set of notes.

<sup>3</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 608, quotes a rabbinic dictum: 'Cursed is the man who rears swine or teaches his son Greek philosophy.' Bailey points out that the polite way a Middle-Easterner gets rid of unwanted 'hangers-on' is to assign them a task that they know they will refuse. The son's pride is still intact, however, and he accepts the task allotted him!

related to the goodness of the father's provision to even his hired men. He was a son—how much more did his father provide for him in the past, and how much had he taken that provision for granted?<sup>1</sup> 15:18–19 detail the son's reasoning to himself in order to win back his father's acceptance. He clearly recognizes that his sin is primarily against God, but in the sight of his father.<sup>2</sup> His actions were a terrible breach of the fifth commandment. By not honouring his father he had sinned against God, and in his father's sight. In his reasoning there could be no hope of being restored as a son. Instead he argues to himself that he could become as a 'hired man'. Such people were not slaves, as such, but daily workers who were paid for their labour and who lived outside of the household. For a son to be made as a 'hired man' was unheard of, yet so was the son's original action! In his thinking something so deliberately insulting as his initial action could not be atoned for fully, but there may be the possibility of at least finding provision in the father's house, even as a hired man. Such a position would also take care of the son's three primary relationships (viz. with the father, his brother, and the village generally). Says Bailey:

He plans to live in the village as a hired servant. With such a position his status will be secure. He can perhaps fulfil his responsibility to his father, and the problem of any relationship to his brother is eliminated. The village with its mockery will have to be faced. He will have to pay this bitter price in order to get home. He must go home because he is starving.<sup>3</sup>

**15:20** With his reasons in mind 'he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him' (15:20). Notice that the father was waiting for the son's return, the message of which was probably brought to him by others in the fields on the outskirts of the village. It is as much the parable of the waiting father as it is the parable of the prodigal son! That the father should *run* to the son is culturally unheard of. But the father, intent on the restoration of the son, does not shrink from bearing the public shame and humiliation such a gait would have prompted. In a very real sense, the father runs through the village taking on the shame that would have accompanied the son's return journey through it had he returned alone.

**15:21–24** In 15:21 the son begins to recite his prepared speech of repentance (*after* the kiss of greeting and forgiveness!), but he does not finish all that he had prepared to say. That which he does recite—'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son'—is true, but the father takes no heed of it. Rather, 'the father said to his slaves, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found"' (15:22–24). All of the things here mentioned are significant. The robe is a garment of sonship, not slavery, and the 'best robe' would be that belonging to the father himself. The ring is a symbol of authority and ownership. The sandals do not merely cover the son's presumably sore feet, but act as a seal of covenant love and affection (cf. Ruth 4:7). Barefootedness was a sign of slavery (II Chron. 28:15; Isa. 20:2), whereas the master of the house wore sandals, even in the presence of invited guests. That a calf is killed indicates the public nature of the celebration, an animal of this size only being killed for a feast that would involve the whole village. The feast is a celebration—all is forgiven, the son has come home and he

<sup>1</sup> Geldenhuys (*Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, p. 411, note 4) quotes Schlatter:

Sin consists in this, that a man monopolises the things with which God endows him in nature and makes them serve his own selfish desires. From this arises the godlessness of his thought and will; he is absorbed in the natural order. From this arises, further, his impoverishment and inward starvation. When a man has become godless, nature no longer supplies him with what he needs. He becomes wretched, lonely, helpless, hopeless; and human society affords no defence against this, for it founders on human self-seeking.

<sup>2</sup> R. C. Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*, p. 146:

... we may injure ourselves by our evil, we may wrong our neighbours, but we can only *sin* against God; and the recognition of our evil as first and chiefly against Him, is of the essence of all true repentance.

<sup>3</sup> 'Poet and Peasant', p. 178f. in *Poet and Peasant & Through Peasant Eyes*.



is fully restored *and this by a complete and unwarranted gift from the father!* Quite simply 'they began to be merry'.

**15:25–28** The attention now moves to the older son. He was 'in the field', working. Perhaps wondering at the commotion and the crowd that would have doubtless been gathering, 'when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things might be' (15:25–26). Again we are given an insight into his perception of his relationship with the father. Normally a son would not be coy about entering his house. That he lurks about outside gaining information from the servants is indicative of the poor esteem he held for his father and the way in which he has not enjoyed the security of their relationship. When he heard that his brother had returned and that the celebration was in his honour (12:27), 'he became angry, and was not willing to go in', even though he should have been present at least in terms of social custom, if not for sheer love. Not to participate in the feast was an insulting act, carried out in public, against his father. Nevertheless, 'his father came out and began entreating him' (15:28). See here the true father, who does not love one son more than the other, but wishes them both to be sharers in the good benefits of being his sons. He goes out to the elder brother, even as he went out to receive the younger one home.

**15:29, 30** The elder brother is not to be placated, however. His reply gives further insight into the nature of his sonship. While being a son of the father, he regarded the work he did no different than a slave might regard his work, saying literally, 'I have slaved for you for all these years.' He had worked as slave, with a slave's mentality, but never had he lived as a son!<sup>1</sup> He gives no title of honour to his father, but speaks in angry tones, and despite having publicly insulted him, avows that he is still righteous, having never disobeyed him (15:29).<sup>2</sup> By referring to the prodigal as 'this son of yours' (15:30), he denies any relationship with his younger brother, and the whole attitude portrayed is one of resentment at the father's free love.

**15:31, 32** The father's reply is tender, and in it he appeals for the older brother to rejoice in the son's return. It assures the elder son of his love for him, and indicates that nothing either the younger son has done or the older son has done has placed his standing in the household in jeopardy. In the context of the chapter the significance is plain. If the prodigal son adequately represents the tax-collectors and sinners, the elder brother even more adequately represents the scribes and Pharisees. Would they stay away from the feast? Would they effectively exclude themselves from the father's free love? Or would they go in? Some, like Nicodemus, did. The majority did not.

Some commentators have concerned themselves with the fact that there seems to be no reference to the work of atonement in the parable, but the situation is not of any great consequence. The parable is, after all, only that—a parable. We should not expect to find every element of the Gospel contained in it. The parable speaks of earthly relationships as figures for eternal realities. In earthly relationships there was no sacrifice of atonement offered to an offended person, but in terms of the heavenly realities the parable is spoken by the One whose face was resolutely set toward Jerusalem and the atonement to be there effected. Rather, in the

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<sup>1</sup> Godet, p. 156, says:

Such is a man's view of accomplishing good under the law: a labour painfully carried through, and which consequently merits payment. But by its very nature it is totally deprived of the delights which belong only to the sphere of free love; it has no other idea of them than that which it gets by seeing those joys of the reconciled sinner, by which it is scandalized . . . in the eyes of pharisaism, as virtue is a task, sin is a pleasure; and hence there ought to be a payment for the first, an equivalent pain for the second.

<sup>2</sup> Bailey quotes an Arab scholar, Ibrahim Sa'id, on p. 197:

The difference between him and his younger brother was that the younger brother was estranged and rebellious while absent from the house, but the older son was estranged and rebellious in his heart while he was in the house. The estrangement and rebellion of the younger son were evident in his surrender to his passions and in his request to leave his father's house. The estrangement and rebellion of the older son were evident in his anger and his refusal to enter the house.

immediate context, the emphasis is on the freeness of the love of God, and its steadfastness. There are rich OT parallels to the parable in this respect in places such as Jerermiah 3:22; 31:18–20; Hosea 11:1–9; Isaiah 63:15f. The parable is saying something about God's acceptance of sinners, more than about *how* this acceptance can be granted. It is speaking about the effusive nature of God's love, rather than giving a theological statement of how that love's desire is effected. The cultural understanding of the father's unheard of gracious action gives clear enough indications of God's dealing with sinners, however.

The three parables form a unity. The first two emphasize the seeking nature of God's love. The last emphasizes the change of heart in one cognizant of that love.

The possessor of a hundred sheep, in some sort a rich man, was not likely to feel the loss of a single one so deeply as the woman, who, out of ten small pieces of money, should lose one; and her feelings would come infinitely short of the parental affection of a father who, having but two sons, should behold one of them going astray. Thus we find ourselves moving in ever narrower, and so ever intenser circles of hope, and fear and love—drawing thus nearer to the innermost centre and heart of the truth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. Trench, p. 134.

## M. Teaching on the Matter of Wealth (16:1–31)

### Introduction.

Luke chapter 16 contains the parable of the unjust steward and its application (16:1–13), and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, prefixed by some comments directed to the Pharisees (16:14–31). Both these parables involve the use of this world's goods. They are told to the disciples (who were poor in the world's eyes and naïve in the world's ways) and the Pharisees (who were lovers of money) respectively, both groups being present and the indirect hearers of the comments to the other. The two parables are related. Says Godet:

These two portraits are evidently counterparts of one another. The idea common to both is that of the relationship between the use made of earthly goods and man's future beyond the tomb. The steward represents the owner who is able to secure his future by a wise use of those transitory goods; the wicked rich man, the owner who compromises his future by neglecting this just employment of them.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The Parable of the Unrighteous Steward (16:1–13).

Again we come to a passage unique to Luke. If the parables of Luke chapter 15 are the most well known, then this particular parable must be by common consensus the most difficult to interpret. The problem relates to the fact that Jesus should make his point by such an illustration as that involved in the parable, one which seems to approve of an unjust action. However, we should not be put off by this. The steward in the parable is not praised for his dishonesty, but for his initiative. The word translated 'shrewdly' in 16:8a is seen also in 12:42; Matthew 25:2, 4, 8f.; I Corinthians 4:10; 10:15—such references indicating it is not always used in a pejorative sense. In the matter of the Kingdom, those who are sons of the Kingdom must show initiative (shrewdness) with this world's goods for the sake of the Kingdom. It is not an 'ends justifies the means' philosophy, but says, 'deal with your earthly means now in the light of the end'.

**16:1–8a** The teaching is directed 'to the disciples' (16:1), and the parable involves the following elements. A rich man receives a report that one of his stewards is squandering his possessions (16:1). He calls the steward to give an account of his actions, indicating that his position is forfeit (16:2). He is not called in to clear his name, but to give an inventory of the property still remaining. The steward reasons to himself that he must do something in order to secure his future, seeing he is not cut out for manual labour and his pride will not let him become a beggar (16:3). He therefore comes up with a plan to be received into the homes of his master's debtors (16:4). He summons the debtors and instructs them to discount their bills by varying amounts (16:5–7). This may have been a discount of interest being charged, such interest being forbidden according to the Law of God (Exod. 22:5; Lev. 25:36; Deut. 23:19), but allowed by cleverly devised laws of men, or it may have been a discount out of his own pocket (in that he was foregoing his commission). Whether either of these options are true, or whether it was an action as blatantly perfidious as it seems, the truth remains that it was aimed at currying favour with the debtors. In total contrast to what we would expect, the master praises the steward for his shrewd action (16:8a). The master does not give unrestrained approval to the steward, and there is no thought of his being reinstated. Rather, the master is observing with approval his shrewdness, perhaps in much the same way we might say, 'Well, good on him!' even if we do not approve of the action itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Godet, *A Commentary on The Gospel of St. Luke*, Vol. II, p. 160.

**16:8b–9** begins the application of the parable. Jesus says, ‘for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light’. He is saying here that the children of this age are more prudent toward their brethren than those of the Kingdom.

Those of the first sphere use every means for their own interest, to strengthen the bonds which unite them to their contemporaries of the same stamp. But those of the second neglect this natural means of prudence. They forget to use God’s goods to form bonds of love to the contemporaries who share their character, and who might one day give them a full recompense, when they themselves shall want everything and these shall have abundance.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, while not imitating the steward’s dishonesty, the followers of Jesus should imitate his provision for the future—‘make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings’ (16:9). ‘Mammon’ stands for money or wealth generally. The ‘eternal dwellings’ must be heaven itself. The thrust thus seems to be as follows: Use this world’s goods now as shrewdly as the unjust steward would, but for the Kingdom. Do not be unjust, as he was, but show the same diligence for the Kingdom’s sake as he did for his own sake. In the world’s way of viewing things, the sons of the Kingdom may be seen to use their money unwisely. But in reality they are storing up treasure in heaven, for which those in heaven will thank them on the Last Day (cf. Matt. 25:31ff.).

**16:10–13** The comments about faithfulness in 16:10—‘He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much—cannot be separated from the verses which follow it. If therefore you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the true riches to you? And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?’ (16:11–12). 16:10 is saying, as Morris tells us, that life is a unity—‘What a man does with the small things of life he also does with the big things’.<sup>2</sup> Now, if we have been unfaithful in our use of something as small as unrighteous mammon, how will we be able to handle the true treasure of the Kingdom? If we have proven ourselves to be unfaithful in that which is God’s, i.e. that which we use and enjoy now as tenants (cf. Deut. 8:11–20; I Chron. 29:14; Ps. 50:10–12; Rom. 11:36; I Cor. 4:7b; Gal. 6:3), how will we be able to exercise true oversight over those things which will be given to us to own on the Last Day? (cf. Matt. 5:3; 19:29; 25:34; Luke 12:32; I Cor. 6:9; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; James 2:5; Rev. 5:10; etc.).

The final point of the parable is this: ‘No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon’ (16:13). In the context, the emphasis is that even mammon must be used in subservience to the Kingdom. We cannot pursue the Kingdom *and* mammon, we can only pursue one or the other. But we can use mammon in the pursuit of the Kingdom and for its sake. That this is what we should do is confirmed by the parable that follows.

## 2. Confrontation with the Pharisees (16:14–18).

**16:14, 15** The Pharisees, ‘who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things, and they were scoffing at Him’ (16:14.) The scoffing was probably caused by two factors. One is that their sin had been exposed in all that Jesus was saying, and the scoffing was another form of self-justification. The other is that they saw material well-being as a sign of God’s blessing, rather like Job’s comforters. For them mammon was not ‘unrighteous’, but the very evidence of righteousness. But their unrighteousness is exposed. They were not concerned with God’s opinion of them, no matter how much they would have said they were, but their main

<sup>1</sup> Godet, p. 164f. Also see p. 161, ‘Everyone should respect his neighbour’s property, just because it is not the latter’s property, but that of God, who has entrusted it to him’.

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 249.

area of concern was to justify themselves in the sight of men (cf. Luke 18:9ff.). They were highly esteemed, by themselves more than by anyone else, but that which men highly esteem, God detests (16:15).

**16:16–18** These verses expose the false righteousness of the Pharisees and set the scene for the parable of the rich man and Lazarus to follow. Jesus says that, ‘The law and the prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the gospel of the kingdom is preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it’ (16:16). Again we are faced with a difficult passage to interpret.<sup>1</sup> The meaning of the verb in its particular form in the last clause is far from clear. What the verse seems to be saying is this: With John the Baptist the period of preparation for the Kingdom concluded, but with Jesus the Kingdom itself had broken in on the world of men. As the great multitudes testified, and as the parables of Luke 15 chapter have suggested, while the Pharisees stood outside of the Kingdom and criticized the King, many others—tax-collectors and sinners included—were forcing their way into it. Such forcing had all the desperation about it as the action of the unjust steward.

But Jesus would not allow his words to be wrongly and deliberately misinterpreted by the Pharisees. By saying what He had just said, he was not meaning that all that had gone before (in the Law and the Prophets) must now be ousted in favour of something else. Rather, the Law will not fail, ever. In fact it ‘is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail’ (16:17). The Law will not fail because it speaks of Christ (cf. John 5:39–40), who is the end (goal) of the Law (Rom. 10:4). In Him and through Him all the just requirements of the Law would be fulfilled. He had not come to undo the Law and the Prophets, but to establish and confirm them.

The teaching about divorce is an abbreviation of that found elsewhere (16:18; cf. Matt. 5:31–32; 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–12). Why is it included here? The immediate topic under consideration is the eternal validity of the Law, and the immediate audience is the scribes and Pharisees. In the context of the chapter, Jesus is speaking about the relationship between the here and the hereafter. While the Pharisees could justify their actions before men, and could do so in terms of their interpretation of the Law in order to give their actions the stamp of divine approval, the essential nature of the Law can never change. When we look carefully at Jesus’ teaching on the subject<sup>2</sup> by comparing all the utterances recorded in the Gospels, we find the following. Divorce is not according to the creational principle of God; it was tolerated by Moses in a provisional situation to regulate current practice, but never commanded by him; it is never approved of by Jesus and it only occurs because of the hardness of men’s hearts. The Pharisees of the day had divided themselves into different schools of thought on the issue of divorce and remarriage, and it seems that Jesus’ response is framed against the most lax interpretation of the whole issue. Here a man could put away his wife and marry another woman because she was ‘displeasing’ in his sight. She could be so through no fault of her own, even simply by the husband seeing someone who was more pleasing to him and with whom he wished to take up. Such actions were nothing less than hypocrisy and usury of the worst sort and thus were nothing less than adultery by another name.

### 3. The Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19–31).

**16:19–25** The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is unique to Luke. The rich man is described as one who ‘habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendour every day’ (16:19). The picture is one of the most opulent luxury. The poor man, Lazarus, is

<sup>1</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 630, comments: ‘few sayings in the Gospels are so uncertain in interpretation as this one’.

<sup>2</sup> For those wishing to pursue the matter further, I suggest G. C. Bingham’s book, *God’s Glory, Man’s Sexuality* (NCPI, 1988), and B. Ward Power’s book, *Marriage and Divorce, the New Testament Teaching* (Family Life Movement of Australia, 1987).

described as one ‘laid at his gate, covered with sores’ (16:20) who was longing to eat the crumbs and scraps from the rich man’s table and whose sores were licked clean by the (unclean) dogs of the village (16:21). The picture here is of the most abject poverty. Both the men died (16:22). The one went to heaven there to rest in ‘Abraham’s bosom’ (cf. Luke 13:28f.), but the rich man ‘was buried’ (Lazarus would not have been buried—his body would have been thrown onto the tip) and consigned to Hades (16:23, 24; cf. the term in 12:5). Being ‘in torment’ he ‘lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom’. From the midst of the agony of the flames he cries out for a cooling drop of water to be given to him (16:24). The one who replies to him is none other than Abraham, who states that now Lazarus, who only received bad things in his life, is being comforted in Abraham’s bosom, while the rich man, who had no shortage of earthly good things is in agony (16:25). Note the tender form of address used in this verse—‘Child’.

**16:26–31** Moreover, the gulf between the two places is fixed so that crossing from one to the other is impossible (16:26).<sup>1</sup> The man then begs Abraham to send Lazarus back to his own household to warn the five brothers who remain so that they may avoid similar torment (16:27–28), but the reply is firm—they should heed the voice of Moses and the prophets (16:29). The man responds by saying that this is not enough, but that if someone were to return from the dead, then they would repent (16:30). However, the truth of the matter is quite different. If they do not listen to the voice of Moses and the prophets, they will not even believe if one would rise from the dead! (16:31).

All of this has been spoken to the Pharisees. Jesus has shown their true state before God, despite their seemingly esteemed state before men. He has unmasked their hypocrisy yet again. By means of a parable He has revealed unto them the true nature of their current actions and by the same story He has announced to them their end.

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<sup>1</sup> The syntax suggests that the chasm is fixed *in order that* there be no crossing over, rather than the fact that there is no crossing over because of the incidental presence of the chasm. It stands for that which God has decreed and is therefore beyond human contradiction.

## N. Teaching and Parables on Various Topics (17:1–37)

### 1. On Sin, Forgiveness and Faith (17:1–10).

**17:1–2** To the disciples Jesus addresses the statement about stumbling blocks. The statement is twofold—such stumbling blocks are inevitable (17:1a), but this does not excuse the one causing a ‘little one’<sup>1</sup> to stumble. The punishment for such a one will be severe and inescapable (17:1b–2), the millstone here mentioned not being the smaller one used for hand grinding, but the large one used in grinding mills which was so heavy that it needed to be pulled by an ox or donkey. The background against which these statements are set is not insignificant. Throughout the parables of Luke chapters 14, 15 and 16, there has been a clear emphasis on Jesus’ acceptance of sinners, and His commission to seek and save the lost. This emphasis has been developed in the face of increasing Pharisaic opposition based on pedantry, legalism and their own false righteousness. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus has brought the issues into very sharp focus. This, then, enables us to comprehend the nature of the stumbling block being mentioned here. The disciples must not repeat the error of the ones who have been the object of Jesus’ teaching in the preceding sections. Because of the nature of the age (cf. Gal. 1:4; Matt. 13:22; Rom. 12:2; II Cor. 4:4), and because of the slavery of the flesh (here used in its theological sense) to sin, it is inevitable that stumbling blocks such as those set up by the Pharisees must come, but woe to them! The one who stumbles is offended by false righteousness, and, seeing an unattainable goal of religious observance set before them, decides to ‘be hung for a sheep as a lamb’. Thus they are drawn deeper into sin.

**17:3–4** contains some teaching on forgiveness. What is its relationship to the verses immediately preceding it? The thrust is this: While it is wrong to cause a person to stumble, it is also wrong to compound that stumbling by simple denunciation or opprobrium. The injunction to ‘Be on guard’ is directed at personal care not to fall into the same sin (cf. Gal. 6:1). Forgiveness is needed for all. A sinning brother must be ‘rebuked’, and upon repenting he must be forgiven. Moreover, this process should not be limited to one occasion, but ‘seven times a day’, i.e. it must be the constant attitude of heart. Does the parable countenance holding unforgiveness if a person does not repent? No. If one does not seek to be reconciled, there must still be love and forgiveness (cf. Luke 6:27–38), even if the other person does not live in the good of it. The issue at point in this parable is that of personal relationships. There should never be any barrier to open relationships, even if one is in need of reconciliation seven times a day! The parallel to this is seen in Paul’s dealing with the man at Corinth (I Cor. ch. 5; cf. II Cor. 2:1–11; and also II Thess. 3:15; James 5:19).

**17:5–6** The catalyst for the disciples’ request of increased faith is not mentioned explicitly. There is probably some significance in the fact that their request for faith is immediately preceded by the teaching on forgiveness, i.e. forgiveness in the way that Jesus has been talking about it, is as much supernatural as anything else. They ask for an increase of faith, yet He does not seem to answer their request. Rather, there is the simple statement that if they had faith ‘like a mustard seed’ they would be able to command a mulberry tree (the most likely identification of the tree named) to be uprooted and go into the sea. These trees were proverbial for their strength and longevity. The emphasis is on that which is impossible and illogical to human eyes. Godet suggests that the tree is a symbol for the Kingdom of God, and the

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that they are designated as ‘little ones’ does not necessarily refer to chronological age (cf. Luke 10:21; Mark 10:24; I Pet. 2:2; I Thess. 2:7f.; etc.).

sea represents the nations. This may be reading too much into the statement, however. Rather, the Lord is saying that in the matters of the Kingdom things normally considered impossible may be done, but the doing of such will be linked to a person's faith. The issue is not the amount of faith (for even faith of the size of a mustard seed is powerful), but its quality, and its quality is determined by its object. To be sure, Paul mentions a special gift of faith (I Cor. 12:9; cf. 13:2b) which seems to be related to the ability to perform otherwise impossible feats, but this faith comes from God. Where it is not focussed truly, where it is not subservient to love and the truth, it is useless, however powerful. The point thus made leads into the following parable, for not even miracles earn merit from God.

**17:7–10** The brief parable contained in these verses at first appears to be something of a puzzle, at least when compared to the parable of the waiting servants in 12:35–38. 17:7 indicates the normal situation, culturally speaking. The slave, having returned from a day in the fields, would not be asked to come in and be seated in order to eat. Rather, that slave would have to prepare the food for the master of the household before having his own meal (17:8), all for which the slave should and would receive no special thanks from the master. In all that he had done he had simply done his duty as a slave (17:9). So, too, the disciples are to say, they are only unworthy slaves at best (17:10). When we compare the two parables of Luke 12:35–38 and 17:7–10, we find them making complementary points. 'He *is* among them as one who serves, indeed as *their* servant. At the same time he is still the *master*, and they need to remember who they are as servants.'<sup>1</sup> The parable undermines Pharisaic righteousness, or merit on any score (cf. Matt. 7:22f.). Obedience does not earn reward, simply because obedience is what should be normative anyway. We have been created to serve Him and there should be no 'blue ribbons' for doing so (cf. I Cor. 9:16). And how much more is this the case when we have *not* 'done all'. God is not beholden to any man. Grace is a gift.

## 2. Ten Lepers are Healed (17:11–19).

**17:11** The setting is given. While Jesus was 'on the way to Jerusalem . . . He was passing between Samaria and Galilee'. This is a significant indication for it would seem that the miracle here reported was one that occurred at the start of the journey to Jerusalem, unless he had turned further north unexpectedly. This leads to the question of the reason for Luke's inclusion of it here. Clearly the journey is still being emphasized, but is this the only reason for its inclusion? We note that once before He had not been received in the region (9:51–56), yet Luke has had an emphasis on Samaria and the Samaritans elsewhere (cf. 4:25–27; 7:9; 11:30–32). Do these factors have any significance?

**17:12–19** We have had a similar account of the healing of leprosy in Luke 5:12–16. In that case the man approached Jesus in the very midst of the village, but here the ten 'stood at a distance' (17:12). Together they cried out for Him to have mercy on them (17:13), and this may have been a request for healing, or it may simply have been the normal request for alms. Jesus commanded them to show themselves to the priest (cf. the comments on 5:12–16) and 'as they were going they were cleansed' (17:14). Of the ten, one only turned back 'glorifying God with a loud voice' (17:15), and 'he fell on his face at His [Jesus'] feet, giving thanks to Him'. But now comes the punch line—'And he was a Samaritan'! The sentence has been deliberately constructed for dramatic effect. The whole incident relates to the themes developed throughout the preceding chapters, viz. Jesus' ministry to the outcast of Israel, the true nature of repentance, the hardness of heart of the Pharisees, and the intimations of the Gentile mission. The account of the miracle seen in this way has a close relationship to the following discourse about the coming of the Son of Man. Those in Israel who should have heeded the word of the Law and the Prophets and given thankful worship to the King Himself, would

<sup>1</sup> K. E. Bailey, 'Through Peasant Eyes', p. 119 in *Poet and Peasant & Through Peasant Eyes*.



not do so. The despised and rejected would. They would be the ones ready for His coming, not the self-centred and religiously preoccupied Pharisees.

The fact that the man who came back to give thanks was a Samaritan is deliberately emphasized by Jesus in 17:17–18. To the man He said, ‘Rise and go your way, your faith has made you well’ (17:19). What does this mean for the faith of the others? They were made well physically, but they were not made well eternally, as is the implication here. Literally the phrase runs, ‘your faith has saved you’.

### 3. The Coming of the Son of Man (17:20–37).

**17:20, 21** Some Pharisees had been questioning Him ‘as to when the kingdom of God would come’ (17:20). Why were they questioning him? They looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, for they equated His coming with a period of economic, political and religious supremacy for Israel. Hence, they had a great desire to find out if Jesus really was the Messiah, or rather the Messiah they thought He should have been. His answer turns them away from the normal looking for signs (17:20b), and says, ‘the kingdom of God is in your midst’ (17:21). This does not refer to a self-enlightenment trip. The actual presence of Jesus was the Kingdom in their midst (cf. the proximity of the Word in Rom. 10:6ff.). The statement that the Kingdom is not coming ‘with signs to be observed’ seems to fly in the face of implications made and statements given in places such as Matthew 11:2–6 (Luke 7:18ff.); Luke 11:14ff.; 12:54ff.; Mark 13:28f. The solution to the seeming contradiction lies in the audience and the intention of the question. The ones asking the question had their own eschatology, and this was linked to their constant seeking for a sign. Jesus is saying to them that the Kingdom will not come in the way they expect it to, nor will it be accompanied by the signs they wish to see. It is indeed amongst them, but unrecognized by them.

**17:22–33** The comments to the Pharisees are now taken up in some teaching to the disciples. Just as the Pharisees were not to look for signs, so, in a different sense, must the disciples be alert to the same danger (17:22–23).<sup>1</sup> Rather, the coming of the Son of Man will be sudden and unexpected like lightning (17:24), but just as visible. His coming must be preceded by His own suffering (17:25; cf. 9:22, 44; 18:32; 24:7; Matt. 16:21; 12:40; 17:9, 12, 22f.; 20:18f.; Mark 8:31f.; 9:12, 31; John 2:19; 3:14), but the subsequent day of His coming will be like that of the time of Noah and Lot (17:26–30). The days of this patriarch were marked by excess in all things. None of the things mentioned in the list here are wrong, of themselves, but they indicate a people which has become wholly given up to them. They are bent on the pursuit of pleasure and are utterly self-centred. Noah is a type of Christ who was a preacher of righteousness (Gen. 5:32–7:5; cf. I Pet. 3:20; II Pet. 2:4ff.). Neither Noah nor Lot were perfect men, in the sense of sinless perfection (cf. Gen. 9:20f. and 19:30–38!), but they were both men who heeded the word of God and this is the point here. On the day of His coming there can be no time to return for possessions (17:31) and no looking back like Lot’s wife (17:32), for ‘Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life shall preserve it’ (17:32). The ones seeking to keep their lives do not recognize that the coming of the Son of Man is their life. They have not exchanged earthly security for eternal treasure.

**17:34–37** The time will be a time of separation and judgement. Some will be taken and others left. It is the time of separating the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats, the elect from the finally impenitent. Those who have the name of God written on them will be ‘taken’ (cf. I Thess. 4:17), the others will be left (cf. II Thess. 1:7–9; Matt. 13:41f.; Rev.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase, ‘. . . one of the days of the Son of Man’, is not clear, but it must be understood to comport with that said in 17:24, 26 and 30.

14:17–20). What then is the significance of 17:37? It seems to mean: ‘Where the spiritually dead are found there will be judgement’.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. The Parable of the Unjust Judge (18:1–8).

**18:1** The purpose of the parable is set out for us. Jesus ‘was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart’. Such an attitude is doubly important in the light of the teaching just given. That He would appear again, but that there would be a delay in His appearing are both evident from Luke chapter 17. Moreover, the time of the delay would be a time of trouble and turmoil, judgement and grace, hence the great need for perseverance. The parable is related on a ‘lesser than to greater than’ principle, i.e. if it is so with the unjust judge, how much more so with God.

**18:2–5** The substance of the parable is as follows. A judge ‘who did not fear God, and did not respect man’ (18:2; cf. II Chron. 19:4–6; Amos 2:6–7; 5:10ff.; Jer. 5:30f.; etc.), ‘hears’ the case of a widow who ‘kept coming to him’ in order to seek legal protection from an opponent (18:3).<sup>2</sup> The character of the judge thus described sets him apart as one who was thoroughly hardened, one who would only respond to bribery. The judge’s initial reaction was one of unwillingness, but eventually he relented because of her persistence (18:4–5). As a widow she was totally helpless (cf. Exod. 22:22f.; Deut. 10:18; 24:17; 27:19; Ps. 65:8; Isa. 10–12; etc.), and could bring no other forces to bear on the situation than her own persistence on the basis of knowing her request was legitimate (cf. Isa. 1:17). She could not bribe him, nor did she have any support to force his hand. There is no attempt to impute to the judge any high or altruistic motives. Out of pure selfishness a judgement was given.

**18:6–8** The point of the parable is expanded as Jesus says, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?’ (18:6–7). The parallel with the judge is important. God is not unjust and acts in accordance with His own holy name (cf. Exod. 32:12; Deut. 9:28; Ps. 74:22; 79:9; 143:11; Jer. 16:20f.; Ezek. 36:21ff.; 38:23; 39:7; etc.). If the unrighteous judge acted despite his name and reputation, albeit unwillingly, how much more will God act! That they are God’s elect assures them of His hearing them, but that they cry to Him day and night indicates something of the anguish in which the elect live (cf. Rom. 8:18–39; Rev. 6:9f.). The meaning of the last phrase in 18:7 is not immediately clear. The word used (*makothumia*) is to be patient or forbearing, especially in view of the sinfulness of man (cf. Matt. 18:26, 29; I Cor. 13:4; I Thess. 5:14; II Pet. 3:9). With whom, then, is He being patient? Is it the oppressors of the elect? That He is being patient with the oppressors with repentance in view is not to be doubted, but the natural sense seems better to apply to the elect themselves. Bailey comments:

God will indeed vindicate His elect, who cry to Him day and night. But these same elect are also sinners, not sinless saints. If He is not willing to put aside His anger, they cannot approach Him in prayer and dare not call out for vindication lest, with Amos, the Day of the Lord be a day of darkness and not light (Amos 5:18–20). The act of seeking vindication does not make them righteous, as in the case of the political enthusiasts encountered in Luke 13:1–5, a righteous cause does not produce righteous people. So here, a sincere cry for God’s intervention to vindicate the elect does not in itself make them holy in His presence. Only as God is willing to ‘put His anger aside’ is it possible for them to invoke Him day and night and to ‘pray and not be afraid’. Only with a liberal exercise of *makrothumia* toward *them* can God vindicate them at all.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> We should not imagine a contemporary court room scene with all its order and decorum. The judge would most likely have been assailed by a number of people at once, all jostling to get their case heard first. Some may well have been shouting, others would have relied on bribes. The widow came into a situation that was far from ordered. See the comments from Bailey in *Poet and Peasant & Through Peasant Eyes*.

<sup>3</sup> K. E. Bailey, ‘Through Peasant Eyes’, p. 139 in *Poet and Peasant & Through Peasant Eyes*.

There can be no question as to the manner of God’s dealings with His people—‘I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily’ (18:8). Whether they perceive something to be done speedily is problematic. Our timing is not His (cf. Ps. 46:5; 143:7–9; I Pet. 4:12–19; II Pet. 2:3; 3:8f.), hence the need for faith and prayer. Yet there is something else to be said. The question in 18:8b—‘However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?’—has sometimes been a puzzle. The solution would seem to lie in the unusual use of the definite article with the word ‘faith’. The object is not faith generally, but that specific faith which believes in God’s righteous vindication of His people and which issues in persistent prayer—the things which the parable is about. Consistently in the Scriptures the last days are understood to be times of great tribulation. The pressure and deception will be so great that, if it were possible, the elect themselves would be lost (cf. Matt. 24:22ff.). That His people will be there when He comes is clear (cf. Luke 12:37; 17:34f.; I Thess 4:13f.; etc.), but when He comes, will He find that faith amongst them that persists in prayer and believes in His righteous judgement, all evidence to the contrary? Such had to be the faith of the Son of Man as He confessed God’s holy judgement on the Cross, and such is the greatest faith of His brethren, as Hebrews chapter 11 makes clear.

### 5. The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector (18:9–14).

The above parable is about the nature of the One to whom we pray. This parable emphasizes the nature of prayer that is heard. It must also be a parable about righteousness, as we will see.

**18:9–12** The parable’s audience is delineated as ‘certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt’ (18:9). The scenario is as follows. A Pharisee and a tax-collector went up to the Temple to pray (18:10). The time indicated would have been one of the occasions of public worship in the Temple. We have already seen the ministry of Zechariah in Luke 1:10 in offering up the incense in the holy place, during which time the people remained outside, praying. The incense offering was only made after the morning or evening atoning sacrifice was made. The Pharisee ‘stood’, the usual posture for prayer during corporate worship (cf. Matt. 6:5; Mark 11:25), ‘and was praying thus to himself, “God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get”’ (18:11–12). It is possible that the opening line could be translated, ‘he was praying by himself’, i.e. standing separated from the other worshippers by reason of his self-perceived purity. His prayer would probably have been uttered out loud. The righteousness of the Pharisee was twofold. On the one hand he was able to recount all the things from which he abstained, and on the other he was able to recite all the things which he did. The second list includes works above and beyond the prescriptions of the Law, which only required one fast on the Day of Atonement, and the tithing of certain crops only.

**18:13** The tax-gatherer, however, was ‘standing some distance away’. His separation was not due to his purity, but to the deep knowledge of his impurity. This is further stressed by the fact that he ‘was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!”’ The action of beating his breast was one of deep anguish and is seen only here and in Luke 23:48. It is a recognition that the problem of sin is seated in the heart of the man. His actual prayer is important. He prays that God would be ‘propitious’ to him as a sinner, i.e. he knew himself justly to be under God’s wrath, and he prayed for that wrath to be removed. His prayer acknowledges his own moral bankruptcy, for there was nothing he could offer to God for such removal. His prayer is thus for the sacrifice of atonement offered during the service to be effective for him. Like David before him, he is cast solely on the mercy of God (Ps. 51).

**18:14** The result of the two prayers is then expressed. Jesus says that the tax-collector, not the righteous Pharisee, ‘went down to his house justified.’ The word is used in the same sense that Paul uses it. He went down to his house acquitted from his sin, he went down to his house having been declared ‘not guilty’. Why? Because ‘every one who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted’. Those who humble themselves, in the context of the parable, are those who look for God’s mercy and know they have nothing else. By the same token, those who exalt themselves will not find mercy, simply because they feel there is no need for it. He dwells with the humble and contrite of heart, not those of proud degree.

### 6. On Entering the Kingdom (18:15–17).

The ministry of Jesus had spread amongst the common people. While there was continual conflict with the Pharisees, the common people loved Him, so much so that Luke tells us ‘they were bringing even their babies to Him, in order that He might touch them’. But the disciples did not understand their action or Jesus’ own heart and so ‘when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them’ (18:15). Jesus saw this as an opportunity to teach them, so He ‘called for them, saying, “Permit the children to come to Me, and stop hindering them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all”’ (18:16–17). To receive the Kingdom of God is to submit to it, i.e. to submit to the reign and rule of God. Unless this happens one will not enter it, either in the sense of sharing in its benefits now, or sharing in the consummation of the Kingdom in the future. Little children, like the infants here, can do nothing but receive, so it is with the children of the Kingdom. ‘Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.’<sup>1</sup>

### 7. The Rich Young Ruler (18:18–30).

**18:18** The ‘certain ruler’ who is introduced here is not identified. To say that this one was a ruler is to say that he belonged to the ruling class of society, the term being more general than specific. Whoever he was, he came asking Jesus, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to obtain eternal life?’ The form of the question in Matthew is different from that found in both Mark and Luke. The reasons for this are not clear, though Luke and Mark are in close agreement. That he should call Jesus ‘good teacher’ is remarkable and worthy of comment. There is no recorded instance of any rabbi ever being addressed in this way. The reason for this is theological. The Jews knew, at least in theory even if the Pharisees denied it in practice, that the only good One was God Himself, for He was the only Holy One. The question is thus phrased in a way that indicates the young man had not really thought about what he was saying. Morris describes the comment as ‘a piece of thoughtless flattery’.<sup>2</sup> That he should ask about what he needed to do in order to inherit eternal life indicates that he regarded salvation as something to be earned, and earned by something over and above what he was already doing. Works religion can never lead to peace of mind, for the nagging doubt always persists as to whether one is doing enough, or doing it properly.

**18:19, 20** Jesus’ answer is in two parts, corresponding to the two parts of the original question. His first statement is, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.’ This answer begins to unmask the shallowness of the man. Here ‘He is inviting the young man to reflect upon his own statement’<sup>3</sup>, to see if he would understand the importance

<sup>1</sup> From the hymn ‘Rock of Ages’ by Augustus Montague Toplady.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, p. 267.

of what he had said. Had the young ruler done this, he would have realized to whom he was speaking and prayed the prayer of the tax-collector, rather than reflecting the pride of the Pharisee.

The second part of Jesus' answer picks up the second half of the man's question. He says, 'You know the commandments' and then recites the seventh, sixth, eighth, ninth and fifth commandments. The man had asked a 'doing' type question, so Jesus frames His reply in the same way. The commandments here recited all relate to the second section of the Decalogue. On another occasion (Luke 10:25ff.) Jesus had summed up the Law as love toward God and love toward one's neighbour. Here He is enquiring about the second greatest commandment. The first and greatest commandment will be addressed shortly.

**18: 21–23** The young ruler replied by saying that he had indeed kept these commandments from his youth up (18:21), but Jesus would not be deceived. He said to him, 'One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me' (18:22). This reply was the test point for all the commandments. Did he love the things of the world more than God?—i.e. had he even begun to keep the commandments truly and from the heart? Very simply Luke records, 'But when he had heard these things, he became very sad; for he was extremely rich' (18:23).

**18:24–30** The whole situation leads into some teaching on riches and the Kingdom. Seeing the rich man turn away He commented, 'How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!' (18:24). In order to reinforce the point, He added that 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God' (18:25). This statement should not be emptied of its humour. He is saying that the entry of a rich man into the Kingdom is as impossible as a camel squeezing through a needle's eye. Men cannot be easily separated from their false loves.

Those who heard then asked, 'Then who can be saved?' (18:26). The question was prompted by two things. One was the common assumption that the blessing of wealth was automatically a sign of God's favour, *a la* Job's comforters. If the rich, favoured as they were, cannot be saved, then who can? The second cause was the recognition of the rich man in every heart, i.e. the propensity to be possessed by the love of money (I Tim. 3:3; 6:9f.; James 5:1ff.; Col. 3:5; etc.) and earthly things in general. In natural terms it is impossible to wean oneself from the love of the world. Hence, Jesus said, 'The things impossible with men are possible with God' (18:27).

Peter, here acting as spokesman for the twelve, betrays worry about all that they have left (18:28), but Jesus' reassurance is firm. He said to them, 'Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life' (18:29–30).

### 8. The Cross Again Foretold (18:31–34).

We have already seen a number of predictions of the coming passion (5:35; 9:22, 43–45; 12:50; 13:32; 17:25). This one is a very carefully worded, recounting of the events before them (18:31–33). For their part 'they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said' (18:34). The fact that it was hidden from them is interesting. It implies that they were not able to understand because God had not yet opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (cf. Luke 24:45). They were not yet able to understand.

## O. Jesus Passes Through Jericho (18:35—19:27)

### 1. The Healing of a Blind Man (18:35–43).

**18:35–37** Jesus was now getting quite near to Jerusalem, Jericho (18:35) only being some seventeen miles away. Upon hearing the multitude going by, a blind beggar asked what was happening (18:36) and upon hearing what was going on, that ‘Jesus of Nazareth was passing by’ (18:37), ‘he called out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”’ (18:38). Here indeed was a cry of faith! He alone in Luke calls Jesus the Son of David, a well understood Messianic term (cf. Luke 1:32; Ezek. 34:23f.). No one else may have recognized it, but this blind beggar knew who Jesus was.

**18:36–43** ‘Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more’, repeating his cry for mercy (18:39). The same misunderstanding of Jesus’ wishes with regard to the children is seen here. The underlying thought is that He is too busy and important to be worried with children and beggars. But Jesus ‘stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him’ (18:40). When he had been brought over to Him, He asked, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ (18:41a). The blind man’s response was immediate—‘Lord, I want to receive my sight!’ (18:41b). Jesus, at a word of command, restored his sight to him saying, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has made you well’ (18:42). As a result, he ‘began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God’ (18:43; cf. 9:43; 13:17; 19:37; etc.). This is a sign of the Kingdom, not just a work of the King’s power. The rich young ruler, the Pharisee, the disciples and the multitudes who sought to prevent Jesus speaking to the beggar were just as blind as he, except in a spiritual sense. To them all the light must come (cf. Eph. 5:8; Col. 1:12f.; Acts 26:18).

### 2. Jesus and Zaccheus (19:1–10).

The story of Jesus and Zaccheus is unique to Luke. Its inclusion here makes a powerful theological statement. In Luke chapter 18 there has been the account of the incident with the rich young ruler, together with Jesus’ comments about riches and the difficulty of the rich entering the Kingdom. These comments, in turn, have been made against the background of the Pharisee’s scoffing at Him (for they were lovers of money), and earlier teaching about mammon (Luke ch. 16). But, as Jesus has already said, that which is impossible with men is decidedly possible with God. Zaccheus’ story stands as eloquent testimony to the working of God’s grace, even in the heart of a rich and powerful man. This story brings together a number of themes in Luke, such as the gathering of the outcast of Israel, the rationale for Jesus’ ministry, repentance, the relationship between riches and the Kingdom, and the response of gratitude to the grace of that Kingdom.

**19:1–4** The location is given as Jericho which ‘he entered and was passing through’ (19:1). Zaccheus is described as ‘a chief tax-gatherer, and he was rich’ (19:2). This ascription indicates that he was more than a simple tax-gatherer like Levi. While we do not know the exact significance of the title here given to him, we can guess that he had regional responsibilities, probably with others under him, thus providing a wider base of income. Jericho was an important trading city, and it also produced balsam that was much in demand, so there would have been no shortage of tax to be had. This man ‘was trying to see who Jesus was’, but because of the crowd and his own small stature he could not see (19:3). Being full of desire,

and not being ashamed of possible ridicule (after all he was a tax-gatherer), ‘he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way’ (19:4).

**19:5–10** This action did not go unnoticed by Jesus, and when He came to the place, ‘He looked up and said to him, “Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house”’ (19:5). The statement is unusually strong. Jesus *must* stay with him. The word is *dei*, which we have seen before (e.g. 9:22), thus indicating the indispensable nature of the action for Jesus’ mission. For his part Zaccheus ‘hurried and came down, and received Him gladly’ (19:6), but the action drew much complaint and grumbling for they were saying, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner’ (19:7). While there can be no doubt that the ‘they’ here mentioned includes the scribes and Pharisees, the grumbling would not be confined to them alone. Tax-gatherers were not popular with anyone, least of all with the common people who felt themselves preyed upon by them on behalf of the Romans. Zaccheus’ response of generosity and recompense (19:8) is evident proof of his change of heart. He had been received by Christ, not rejected, and his heart overflowed in gratitude. The recompense indicated far outstripped that which was required by the Law. It was a reflexive response to salvation, not a work gauged to earn it. Thus Jesus was able to say to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’ (19:9, 10). Jesus again demonstrates the love of His Father in seeking out and finding one such as Zaccheus (cf. Luke ch. 15). He was not only a son of Abraham by virtue of his ancestry, but was so in reality by faith (cf. Gal. 3:6, 7).

### 3. The Parable of the Minas (19:11–27).

**19:11** While there are certain similarities between this parable and the one in Matthew (Matt. 25:14–30), the differences are so great as to suggest that we are dealing with two different parables which have similar themes. The setting of this parable, and thus the key to its interpretation, is given to us. Luke tells us that ‘while they were listening to these things, He went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately’ (19:11). The elements we need to note are:

- (a) the parable was told in the context of Jesus’ teaching (both by precept and by example) that he had come to seek and to save the lost, of whom Zaccheus was the latest example;
- (b) that He was heading to Jerusalem was plain, but the point of the journey had not been understood by the disciples, be they the twelve or the larger group of followers, for they thought His return to Jerusalem would usher in the Kingdom of God. In Jesus’ action of the Cross, the Kingdom was secured and sealed, but such action was not political, social or nationalistic, all elements that the disciples were looking for in their understanding of the Kingdom; and
- (c) the Kingdom’s consummation would not be immediate. There would be a delay between the Jerusalem events, now immediately at hand, and the consummation of the Kingdom secured by those events. The issue in the intervening time is: ‘How does one live?’, i.e. with what goal and with what objective does one live? The whole is an allegory of Christ’s coming appearing and the interim delay, though clearly not every point should be allegorized.

**19:12** The parable is as follows. ‘A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return.’ The situation thus described was not uncommon, and in fact had occurred both with Herod the Great and with his three sons, all of whom went to Rome to officially be installed by the Emperor of the day. The Jews had even sent representatives to Rome in order to plead against such proceedings as they related to Archelaus (Herod’s son),

and with some success. In the parable, Jesus is the One who will receive the Kingdom, but His receiving of it is not without opposition.

**19:13** The nobleman of the parable called his servants (i.e. people in the position of the steward of Luke ch. 16) and gave them ten minas each, one mina being the equivalent of about one hundred days' wages, instructing them to do business with the money until he returned (19:13). That he was going to a 'far country' would have indicated a rather lengthy delay, but action such as this was with a twofold purpose. On the one hand he wished to secure his money, but on the other hand the receiving of a kingdom involved greater responsibility and greater areas of jurisdiction. The monetary amounts were not huge, especially for one in such a position, so the secondary purpose is more important. The man would be able to judge the calibre of his servants by their actions, and thus order the administration of the newly bestowed kingdom accordingly.

**19:14–20** The nobleman was unpopular with his citizens, however, who sent a delegation after him to the one who was giving the kingdom to the nobleman, protesting about his reign over them (19:14). When the nobleman returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered the servants who had been given the money to come to him in order to give account of their dealings (19:15). The first came to him bringing a tenfold increase (19:16), to which the master replied, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities' (19:17). The second came bringing a fivefold increase (19:18) and so this one was given charge over five cities (19:19). Note that both these servants are reluctant to accept personal praise, with them indicating that the money itself had made the increase. No mention is made of the other servants, the point being illustrated by these two plus one other.

**19:20–27** The third one came, however, having made no use of the master's money. He had kept it safe '... in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow' (19:20–21). The practice of keeping money in a kerchief tied around the neck or head was not unknown, but it was regarded as an unsafe and unwise practice. At least the servant in Matthew 25:25 buried the money where it could not be reached! This one received no reward, but rather is punished by the loss of his one mina. He is designated as a worthless slave who was judged out of his own mouth (19:22–23). As Morris comments, 'If the servant really believed what he had said about his master, he ought to have done something. Without risk he could have put the money into the bank, where it would have earned interest.'<sup>1</sup> Out of his own mouth he was judged, for if the master was really as harsh as he made out, he should have been all the more galvanized for action. As a result, the one mina he had was to be taken away and given to the one who had ten (19:24). Those standing by protested that this one already had ten minas, why should he receive more? (19:25), to which the master replied, 'I tell you, that to everyone who has shall more be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away' (19:26). The point is simple: Do we live for the Kingdom or do we not? If we do, then more will be given to us, if not, then that which we think we have will be taken away (cf. Luke 8:18; 9:23f.; 17:33; Mark 8:43ff.; John 12:25f.). As for the enemies who opposed the master's rule, they were to be executed in his presence (19:27; cf. Josh. 10:24ff.; I Sam. 15:33; Rev. 14:10).

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to Luke*, p. 275f. Godet has an insightful comment, *A Commentary on The Gospel of St. Luke*, Vol. II, p. 222:

He [i.e. the last servant] is a believer who has not found the state of grace offered by Jesus so brilliant as he had hoped,—a legal Christian, who has not tasted grace, and knows nothing of the gospel but its severe morality. It seems to him that the Lord has given very little to exact so much. With such a feeling the least possible only will be done. God should be satisfied with us if we abstain from doing ill, from squandering our talent. Such would have been the language of a Judas dissatisfied with the poverty of Christ's spiritual kingdom . . . The fear of doing ill is no reason for doing nothing, especially when there are means of action, the use of which covers our entire responsibility.



The parable as a whole relates to the ministry of the Messiah. He has come to clear His threshing floor and burn up the chaff, i.e. to get rid of that which is useless. His Kingdom will be great and have no end (cf. 1:30ff.) and those who are His will share in His reign. But such sharing is not simply bestowed at the end of the age without preparation, which is the point Paul makes, though from a different angle, in Romans 8:16f. Note that the faithless servant is not finally destroyed along with the enemies. He suffers loss in the manner of I Corinthians 3:10–15. Nevertheless, the vengeance on the enemies is real (cf. I Thess. 5:3; Phil 3:19; II Thess. 1:5ff.; Rev. 14:10). True relationship to Christ is, in reality, the life and death issue of eternity.

## VI. Jesus In Jerusalem (19:28—23:56)

### A. Jesus' Entry Into Jerusalem (19:28–48)

#### 1. Approaching Jerusalem and the Procurement of a Colt (19:28–35).

Luke's special section has now come to an end. With the entry into Jerusalem, the journey begun in 9:51 has concluded. Before us lies the climax of Luke's 'orderly account'.

**19:28–35** Having come from Jericho, Jesus would have been literally 'ascending to Jerusalem' (19:28), the former city being some hundreds of feet lower than the latter. 'Bethphage and Bethany, near the mount that is called Olivet', were two small towns about two miles outside the city, though we only know the location of Bethany with certainty. They were obviously close together. Here He sent two of the disciples into the village with the instruction, 'Go into the village opposite you, in which as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it, and bring it here' (19:30). It was to be, therefore, an animal sacred to the use of the Messiah-King (cf. Num. 19:2f.; Deut. 21:3f.; I Sam. 6:7; II Sam. 6:3; where animals set aside for sacred purposes must not be used for anything else). If anyone were to ask the reason for the action, they were to reply simply, 'The Lord has need of it' (19:31). Luke tells us that the ones commissioned for the task 'found it just as He had told them' (19:32). They were indeed asked by no one less than the colt's owners about their action (19:33), yet the prescribed answer satisfied them (19:34). The whole incident thus serves to reaffirm the underlying authority of the Messiah and the fact that all was unfolding according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (cf. Acts 2:23). Having brought the animal to Jesus, 'they threw their garments on the colt, and put Jesus on it' (19:35), actions which in themselves were signs of honour (cf. I Kings 1:5).

#### 2. The Adulation of the Crowds (19:36–40).

**19:36–38** The entry itself is described in vivid terms. As He was riding along the crowds 'were spreading their garments in the road' as a sign of honour, respect and worship (19:36; cf. II Kings 9:13). Matthew and Mark both add the fact that they were cutting down branches to spread before Him, while John tells us that they were using palm branches. As He came closer to the city the excitement grew so that 'near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, saying "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"' (19:37–38; cf. Ps. 118:26; Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9; John 12:13). Both Matthew and Mark quote Zechariah 9:9, a reference which speaks of the King coming into Jerusalem on an asses' colt. The rejoicing must be understood against this OT background. Here at last people saw the Messiah coming into His own city, notwithstanding the fact that His Messiahship was misunderstood by them. The phrase 'peace in heaven' is unusual. In Luke 2:14 we have seen the effect of His coming to be peace on earth. Here is the other side of the coin. There can be no peace on earth till there is peace in heaven, i.e. between God and man (Rom. 5:1f.; cf. Eph. 2:11–22).

**19:39, 40** Meanwhile the Pharisaic element of the crowds thought such action unbecoming and asked Him to rebuke His followers (19:39). The reason for this was that they understood

the ascriptions to be Messianic, something they could not and would not ascribe to Jesus themselves. Jesus, however, 'answered and said, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"' (19:40). What was happening was inevitable, and God would assure true praise would be given to His Son.

### 3. Jesus Weeps Over Jerusalem (19:41–44).

**19:41** Jesus was not deceived by the crowds' reaction. He knew the hardness of heart that underlay the city, yet was full of compassion such that 'when He approached, he saw the city and wept over it' (19:41). The word here used for 'weeping' is a strong one. Geldenhuys quotes Morgan:

The word does not mean merely that tears forced themselves up and fell down his face. It suggests rather the heaving of the bosom, and the sob and cry of a soul in agony. We could have no stronger word than the word that is used here . . . for while He wept over the city, the city was merely the crystallized centre of human attitudes towards Him, and of human sin; and in the presence of it He wept.<sup>1</sup>

**19:42–44** The reason for the weeping is then made plain. He said, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation' (19:42–44; cf. 11:47ff.; 13:33ff.; 23:28ff.; and also cf. Jer. 8:18ff.; 15:4ff.). If the city had known and received the truth, things would have been different. In what way and for what reason? Had it accepted truly His ministry as Messiah, the nation could have been free, even under Roman rule. They could have been 'free indeed', rather than simply independent. But because they would not accept such a Messiah, false quests for temporal freedom under false messiahs would lead to destruction. The Jewish revolt that began in AD 66 ended in bloody carnage in AD 70 under Emperor Vespasian's son, Titus. The Romans laid siege to the city for five months and when the rebels occupying it were finally overcome, the whole city, including the Temple, was destroyed. All that remains to this day of Old Jerusalem is the famous 'wailing wall'. Rome was the instrument of God's judgement upon a hard-hearted people.

### 4. Jesus Cleanses the Temple (19:45, 46).

Luke has an abbreviated account of Matthew's version. The casting out (19:45) is not described in any detail, yet the rationale given for the action is the same, viz. 'It is written, "AND MY HOUSE SHALL BE A HOUSE OF PRAYER", but you have made it a robbers' den' (19:46). Jesus knew that this was His Father's house (Luke 2:49) and that it would be a house of prayer for all nations (Isa. 56:7). The Temple is cleansed by the Son, who Himself was going to bring about a new Temple, one not made with human hands, but the copy of the true Temple must not be subject to sacrilege because of its prophetic role.

### 5. Jesus Teaches in the Temple (19:47, 48).

Having cleansed the Temple, it now became His Father's house of instruction. Jesus 'was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him, and they could not find anything that they might do, for all the people were hanging upon His words'. How would His authority be overcome? The following chapters tell us.

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<sup>1</sup> N. Geldenhuys, *A Commentary on The Gospel of St. Luke*, p. 484.

## B. Various Plots Against Jesus (20:1–47)

In Luke chapter 19 Jesus has cleansed the Temple and begun teaching in it. This action occurred after His entry into Jerusalem which in itself had been a time of great tension, at least as far as the leaders of Israel had been concerned. From now on things quickly come to a head. In Luke chapter 20 we see the main religious groups within Israel at the time. We have commented on all except the ‘chief priests’ and the ‘elders’.<sup>1</sup> The chief priests, as a group, consisted of the current ruling chief priest (in this case Caiaphas) and others who had held the office previously. The elders would have been the (lay) ruling body of the city of Jerusalem, as each town had its own elders. When we put all of these groups together we can only assume that the questioners portrayed in this chapter were representing the Sanhedrin itself.

The Sanhedrin was the Jewish parliament which operated despite Roman rule and the Herodian dynasty’s kingship. It was formally recognized by the Romans, and it worked in conjunction with them, as was the usual practice in the Roman Empire. It consisted of seventy members, with the High Priest acting as its president. The most powerful element traditionally had been the Sadducees, but by the NT times the Pharisaic party had come to a position of more influence. Its powers were quite substantial. It was able to keep its own police force and arrest Jewish citizens on both religious and civil grounds. It could pass judgement on many matters (both religious and civil) and acted as a sort of supreme court to hear cases that could not be decided under local jurisdictions. According to John 18:31 the group had no authority to inflict capital punishment, but against this we must hold the evidence of Stephen’s stoning in Acts chapter 7. In all probability the issue of Jesus’ death was so important, given His popularity with the people generally, that had the Sanhedrin acted apart from Roman authority they would have received a strong public, and thence Roman, backlash that would have endangered their power. The group coming to Him on this particular occasion therefore represented a formidable force.

### 1. The Question of Authority (20:1–8).

**20:1** The teaching activity of Jesus was consistent throughout the time leading up to the Cross. He had established Himself in the Temple in order for it to be used for its proper function. But ‘on one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel . . . the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him’. Facing the hour of the Cross, He was bringing God’s Gospel to the people, i.e. the good news of His reign and rule (cf. Isa. 52:7).

**20:2** The question was straight to the point. ‘Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?’ They were asking Jesus to justify Himself and His actions in their sight. Probably there was also another purpose. They wished to know whether Jesus was acting alone or with the support of other powerful elements within (or outside of) Jewish society. They no doubt hoped that the answer to the question would give them an indication of what Jesus planned to do, having made such a deliberate and public entry into the city in general and the Temple in particular.

**20:3–8** Rather than answer the question as it was expressed to Him, Jesus Himself questioned them saying, ‘I shall also ask you a question, and you tell Me: “Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?”’ (20:3–4). This was indeed a question of great moment and

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<sup>1</sup> See notes on 5:17, p. 38.

it exposed them at their point of weakness. If they were to answer that it was from heaven then they would have no excuse not to have believed John and the One to whom he pointed (20:5), but if they were to say that it was simply from men (i.e. not ordained by God), then they would be out of favour with the people who held John to be a prophet (20:6). Here is the great dilemma of all who would seek to serve themselves in the name of God. Their position can only be maintained by political manoeuvring and popular support, both of which quash true spiritual insight or prophetic proclamation.

Being thus exposed they were unable to answer (20:7), ‘And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things”’ (20:8). If they, the leaders of Israel, would not see what was plainly evident before them, no amount of debate would have been beneficial. They were asking questions with no intention of listening to the answers, therefore they would receive no answer at all.

## 2. The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (20:9–18).

**20:9–12** The parable that is here given to us is set against the background of unbelieving opposition outlined above. The picture given in 20:9 would not have been an unusual one culturally speaking, for many of the largest estates were owned by foreigners, but the reference to the vineyard is without doubt allegorical of Israel (cf. Isa. 5:1–7; Ps. 80:8–11; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 17:6; 19:10). The sending of the three servants (20:10–12) would have been normal practice, but the reception they received would definitely not have been normative! Each servant would have come in the name of the owner, and with his authority. To reject them was to reject him, and such an attitude would have been culturally unthinkable. The ones pictured as the husbandmen were the leaders of Israel (cf. 20:19b), the servants being a picture of the prophets (cf. Luke 6:23; 11:49–51; 13:31–35; Matt. 23:29–37; Acts 7:52).

**20:13–16a** Finally the owner decided to send his son, whom he reasoned the tenants might respect, given the rejection of the servants (20:13; cf. John 3:16; Rom. 8:32; Gal. 4:4; II Cor. 9:15). When they saw him, however, ‘they reasoned with one another, saying, “This is the heir; let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours.” And they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him’ (20:14–15a). The casting out of the vineyard may well refer to Jesus being cast out of Israel, being crucified as a criminal under foreign law. Be this as it may, the attempt to gain the inheritance was a futile and impossible task. Inheritance could not be taken, it could only be bestowed. Hence the question, ‘What, therefore, will the owner of the vineyard do to them?’ (20:15b). The one who had shown such great patience with recalcitrant tenants now comes in wrath to destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others (20:16). In Matthew the ‘others’ is clearly other nations (Matt. 21:43), but here the identity of the others is left unspecified.

**20:16b–18** This brought an unbelievable reaction from the hearers: ‘And when they heard it, they said, “May it never be!”’ (20:16b). The reason for such a reaction could only be that they knew the parable was talking about Israel and her leaders, and the removal of God’s covenantal promises. They had a false sense of security (cf. Jer. 7:1–15) which trusted in the promised blessings of the Covenant, but which did not heed its curses. In the face of this reaction Jesus quoted from Psalm 118:22 with reference to the stumbling stone (20:17), concluding that ‘Every one who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust’ (20:18; cf. Isa. 8:13–15; Dan. 2:44–45). This is one of a number of passages in the NT where the so-called ‘stumbling stone testimonia’ appear (Matt. 21:33–46; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:18; Acts 4:5–12 and Rom. 9:30–33). In the OT, Isaiah 8:14; 28:16 and Psalm 118:22 give clear indication of Christ’s function in this way. Simeon gives the sense of it in Luke 2:34—Jesus was appointed for the rise and fall of many. Godet comments:

A man's dashing himself against this stone laid on the earth means rejecting Him during the time of His earthly humiliation. In the second part of the verse, where this stone is represented as falling from the top of the building, the subject is the glorified Messiah crushing all earthly oppositions by the manifestation of His wrath.<sup>1</sup>

Psalm 2:12 summarizes the whole thought well.

### 3. The Question of Tribute to Caesar (20:19–26).

**20:19, 20** Both Matthew and Mark indicate that the purpose of the question about paying tribute to Caesar was to try and entangle Jesus in His words, i.e. to get Him to make a false move, to give an answer that would have given grounds for decisive action against Him. If He were to answer that taxes should not be paid, He could have been charged with treason. If He were to support the paying of them He would have been speaking against much popular sentiment in Israel, thus providing for great disaffection amongst His followers.

Luke tell us that 'the scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them' (20:19). Being exposed by the parable related above they knew that their power was in jeopardy, but being unable to act because of the possibility of a riotous reaction from the crowd (and all that such an action would mean for the Roman authorities' attitude toward them) '... they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so as to deliver Him up to the rule and the authority of the governor' (20:20).

**20:21–26** The question, 'Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' (20:21–22), is framed in a fawning and ingratiating way. 'But He detected their trickery and said to them, "Show Me a denarius. Whose head and inscription does it have?" And they said, "Caesar's"' (20:23–24). The reply, 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's' (20:25), is faultless. They were seeking to bring a charge of treason against Him, but He would not be trapped because He knew the true seat of authority (cf. John 19:11; Rom. 12:17–13:8; I Pet. 2:13f.; Titus 3:1f.; I Tim. 2:1f.). To render to God what was God's was the way to true liberty, even under Roman rule. Obedience to authority is not opposed to service of God!

The result of the encounter is given to us: '... they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and marveling at His answer, they became silent' (20:26).

### 4. Testing About the Resurrection (20:27–44).

**20:27–33** The question of the Sadducees in this paragraph is again designed to ensnare Jesus, but this time on religious rather than political grounds. The 'Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection)' (20:27) questioned Him about the law of levirate marriage (20:28–33). The provision of the Law to which they referred can be seen in Deuteronomy 25:5f. (cf. Ruth 4:1–8). It was designed to protect women who were widowed but who had no other family to cover them. It was a gracious provision for their welfare in a non-welfare state. The question betrays the Sadducees mean-hearted spirit, such a provision being turned into an occasion for theological point scoring.

**20:34–40** In reply, Jesus 'said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die any more, for they are

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<sup>1</sup> *A Commentary on The Gospel of St. Luke, Vol. II, p. 241.*

like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him.” (20:34–38). This answer has three parts:

- (1) The sons of God are destined for the resurrection, in which resurrection state they will not marry or be given in marriage.
- (2) That the dead are raised is given testimony to even in the OT, for God is spoken of *presently* being the God of the Patriarchs (but also see Ps. 16:9ff.; cf. Acts 2:27, 31; Dan. 12:2; Job 14:14; 19:25–27; Ps. 17:15; 73:24f.; Isa. 26:19; Hosea 6:2; etc., where there are some indications of the doctrine of resurrection).
- (3) That God is the God of the living, not the dead.

The answer thus achieves two things. On the one hand it refutes the Saducean rejection of the resurrection, setting it forth as always being attested and, on the other hand, it indicates something of the manner of life in the resurrection time. Now sexuality is needed to fulfil the creational mandate and to fulfil the number of God’s elect. Then such functions will not be needed, though there will doubtless be true masculinity and femininity, yet without sexuality and the need for procreation.

As a result, ‘some of the scribes answered and said, “Teacher, You have spoken well.” For they did not have courage to question Him any longer about anything’ (20:39–40).

**20:41–44** The question put forward by Jesus in these verses was designed to force His questioners and others in general to think about His true identity. That the Messiah would be from David’s line is seen in such places as II Samuel chapter 7; Psalm 89:20ff.; Isaiah 9:2ff.; 11:1ff.; Jeremiah 23:5f.; 33:14ff. Ezekiel 34:23f.; 37:24; et. al. How, then, could He be called Lord in Psalm 110:1, which was a Davidic Psalm.<sup>1</sup> Very simply, He could not be David’s Lord without being the Son of God. This conclusion is even more stunning given the Parable of the Tenants told above.

### 5. A Warning Against the Pharisees (20:45–47).

Luke tells us that ‘while all the people were listening’ (and we presume this includes the scribes and Pharisees themselves), ‘He said to the disciples, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honour at banquets, who devour widow’s houses and for appearance’s sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation.”’ The issues addressed here have all been taken up elsewhere. The love of money, the love of honour, the search for occasions to be seen and esteemed by men and the whole underlying attitude of self-righteousness, have all been commented on by way of parable or outright condemnation, or both. The closing clause, however, again takes on greater weight in the light of the preceding parable. These ones were indeed the false shepherds of Ezekiel chapter 34, and bear greater responsibility because of their position of leadership and their free and open access to the Scriptures. Greater position always involves greater responsibility (cf. 10:12–14; 12:47f.; Matt. 11:22–24; James 3:1).

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<sup>1</sup> For other uses of Psalm 110 in the NT see Mark 14:26; Acts 2:34; 7:56; Rom. 8:34; I Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 5:6; 7:17, 21; 8:1; 10:12f.; I Pet. 3:22; Rev. 3:21.

## C. Teaching Regarding the End of the Age (21:1–38)

Luke chapter 21 consists mainly of Jesus' prophecies of things to come (21:5–38). These words are prefaced by the story of the widow's gift in the Temple (21:1–4). She, above all else, knows that which is of true worth and value. Others standing by comment on the magnificence of the Temple itself, but Jesus' prophecy about its destruction indicates that magnificence of outward show can never be a replacement for a pure-hearted devotion to God. Despite the Temple, God will bring Jerusalem to judgement for the continual rejection of His Word, as has happened before (cf. Jer. 7:1–15). The prophecies have an interweaving of elements immediately at hand and more distantly removed in time. They are, however, aspects of the one action of God in history in bringing every knee to the foot of His Son. In the judgement of the one city, Jerusalem, we see the judgement of the whole city of man.

### 1. True Giving (21:1–4).

According to Mark, Jesus' action in watching those giving to the treasury on this occasion was quite deliberate. While this aspect of the event is not explicitly mentioned by Luke, neither is it necessarily absent. Certainly Luke has recorded a number of instances where Jesus directly addressed the love of money. This message has been brought home through parable (e.g. the rich fool, the unjust steward, the rich man and Lazarus, et. al.), example (e.g. the rich young ruler, Zaccheus), and other teaching (e.g. Luke 12:22–34; 16:14f.). Jesus was very interested in the matter of money, for our attitude to it betrays perhaps more than anything else whether we are seeking treasure in heaven or on the earth. In this small incident we see the nature of true giving beautifully set out.

**21:1, 2** Jesus 'looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins'. The treasury was attached to the Temple. In Joshua 6:19, 24 and I Chronicles 26:20ff., it is clear that the Tabernacle had its treasury and this was also the case with the later Temple of Solomon (I Kings 7:51) and the second Temple of Zerubbabel (Neh. 10:37ff.; 13:13). In times of great national distress the treasury was sometimes plundered to increase Israel's bargaining power (e.g. I Kings 14:25f.; 15:18; II Kings 12:17f.; 14:14; 16:8; 18:15; 24:12f.). The Temple of Herod of Jesus' day included in the treasury 'thirteen trumpet shaped receptacles for receiving the free will offerings of the people; each receptacle carried a sign indicating the use of the money placed therein'.<sup>1</sup>

**21:3, 4** Having observed the activity, 'He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."' Widows were often poor because they had no one to provide for them (cf. Job 22:8f.; 24:2f.; Isa. 10:1f.; I Kings 17:20), and to specify this woman as being a *poor* widow deliberately identifies her as the poorest of the poor. Her giving was real giving, for it was tantamount to giving away her own life. The rich had plenty to fall back on, she had nothing except God. Her gift thus represents the giving of her whole self to Him, while the giving of the rich was conscience money offered from a self-righteous heart. However generous it appeared, it was therefore useless.

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<sup>1</sup> D. W. Burdick, 'Treasury' in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Vol. IV, p. 900.



## 2. The Destruction of the Temple Foretold (21:5, 6).

The Herodian Temple was a magnificent structure. It had taken over forty years to build and was very richly decorated. It truly was the pride of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Now, ‘while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts’ (21:5), Jesus prophesied its total destruction (21:6). The fulfilment of this prophecy came in AD 70, as we have seen elsewhere. The devastation was so complete that each stone was literally removed from the others in an attempt to retrieve the gold plate, and gold and silver leaf which had melted in the heat of the fires accompanying the Roman overthrow of the city and which had run down between the joints and cracks in the stonework.

## 3. Signs of the End (21:7–19).

**21:7–9** Those standing by questioned Him as to the time of these events (21:7). In response Jesus indicated that before the end there would be a number of false messiahs who would seek to mislead many (21:8; cf. II Pet. 2:1ff.; 3:1ff.; II Tim. 4:3ff.; 3:1ff.; I Tim. 4:1ff.), and there would be ‘wars and disturbances’ (cf. Isa. 19:2; II Chron. 15:6; Dan. 11:44; Rev. 6:8; 11:13) which were to herald the time of the end and which must come, but would not be the end itself (12:9). In the light of these things, His followers must ‘take heed’ on the one hand, and ‘not be terrified’ on the other. That these things must (*dei*) come is because through them God’s plan is being worked out. They are inevitable, given the sin of man and the forces of evil, but indispensable in that through them the elect are brought to repentance and the finally impenitent come to judgement.

**21:10–13** Further signs are then given. ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven’ (21:10–11; cf. Isa. 13:13; 14:30; Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 18:8; etc.). Such things as these reflect universal, cataclysmic and dreadful upheaval. Yet these things themselves must be preceded by the arrest and trial of many for the sake of His name (21:12; cf. Mark 13:9ff.; Luke 21:16; Acts 8:3; 12:4; 21:11; 22:4; 27:1; 28:17), which will be an opportunity for witness (21:13).

**21:14–19** In the light of these events, the disciples were not to ‘. . . prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all on account of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your perseverance you will win your souls’ (21:14–19). Those who believe in Him never die (John 11:25–26), and even in the face of death they are given wisdom (e.g. Stephen in Acts 6:10 and ch. 7; Peter and John in Acts 4:13ff.; Paul in Acts 23:1–10; 24:22–27; and ch. 26; cf. II Tim. 16–18). Such wisdom is God Himself speaking through them, and is thus irresistible. His Word will not return void. It does not mean, however, that His people will be less hated than He is Himself (cf. John 15:18–27).

<sup>1</sup> Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 926, quotes Josephus:

The exterior of the building lacked nothing that could astonish either soul or eyes. For being covered on every side with massive plates of gold, the sun had no sooner risen than it radiated so fiery a flash that those straining to look at it were forced to avert their eyes from the solar rays. To approaching strangers it appeared from a distance like a snow-clad mountain, the reason being that whatever was not overlain with gold was purest white.

#### 4. The Fate of Jerusalem (21:20–24).

While much of that which appears above has a general (i.e. universal) application, the immediate focus here is the city itself and its current inhabitants. Those who were to see the besieging armies around Jerusalem were to recognize that ‘her desolation is at hand’ (21:20), and in so seeing they were to flee the city or stay out of it (21:21), ‘because these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled’ (21:22; cf. Jer. 18:9–11; Dan. 9:27; Zech. 11:6; Mal. 3:1–2). Certainly the time would be one of great terror and distress (21:23), with the end that ‘Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled’ (21:24; cf. Ps. 79:1; Isa. 63:18; Dan. 8:13; 9:27; 12:7; Zech. 12:3; Rom. 11:25). Some see the creation of the Jewish State of Israel in 1948 as the beginning of this prophecy’s fulfilment, but this may not necessarily be the case. Godet points out, by analogy with 19:44 and the use of *kairos* there, that the times of the Gentiles ‘should designate the whole period during which God shall approach with His grace the Gentiles who have hitherto been strangers to His kingdom’.<sup>1</sup> Such an approach seems to be reflected in Paul’s teaching in Romans chapter 11.

#### 5. The Coming of the Son of Man (21:25–28).

Whatever the case, following the destruction of the city there would be another event to look to. This is the end not simply of one city, but of the whole City of Man. This is the coming of the Son of Man. The fact that ‘there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken’ (21:25–26), indicates that the coming of the Son on the Last Day will be of cosmic dimensions. All of this should be of great encouragement to the disciples for the distress of the nations will herald the great day in which ‘they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near’ (21:27–28).

#### 6. A Parable on the Need to be Alert (21:29–36).

**21:29–33** All that Jesus has been saying above He now reinforces by way of a parable. The fact that the fig tree (and all the trees) begins to shoot, heralds the arrival of summer (21:29–30), and in like manner ‘when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away’ (21:31–33). What Jesus has spoken about will surely come to pass, for it is the word of God Himself. This is why the language used here reflects that about the Law in the OT (e.g. Ps. 102:25ff.; 119:160; Isa. 40:6–8; et.al.).

**21:34–36** In the view of all that He has said, Jesus now warns them to ‘be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.’ The warning here is reflected in other places such as Luke 12:45, Ephesians 5:18, and I Thessalonians 5:7, among others. The thrust is to be alert, looking for the coming day, having treasure in heaven rather than on the earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Godet, *A Commentary on The Gospel of St. Luke*, Vol. II, p. 267.

**7. Summary of the Jerusalem Ministry (21:37, 38).**

Luke 21:37–38 concludes Luke's narrative on His teaching during this time. Still the Temple was being used by Him and still the people kept coming to Him.

## **D. The Last Supper (22:1–23)**

### **1. Further Plots and the Role of Judas (22:1–6).**

**22:1** Luke tells us that ‘the feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover’. Technically these were two initially distinct but related events. The Passover referred to the eating of the Passover meal, while the feast of the Unleavened Bread, which followed immediately and lasted for seven days, was a time of instruction about the great history of salvation God had shown in and to Israel. By the NT times the terms were used almost interchangeably.

The Passover was instituted at the time of the exodus from Egypt (Exod. 12–13:6). Because of the immense significance of the exodus for the nation, Passover was the main festival of the Jewish religious year. It recounted and celebrated God’s deliverance of His people after more than four hundred years of bondage in Egypt. In NT times Jerusalem’s population more than trebled as pilgrims from all over the country came to offer sacrifices in the Temple and to celebrate the feast in accordance with the Law. From its very inception Passover was linked with the sacrifice of a lamb. In the Exodus account, the homes on which the blood of the lamb were sprinkled were those which were delivered from the angel of death as it moved through Egypt. The homes of the Israelites were ‘passed over’. Jesus, in deliberately aligning Himself with the sacrificial lamb (22:19–20; cf. John 1:29, 36; Rev. 5:12; I Pet. 1:18f.; I Cor. 5:7; and also see John 19:36; cf. Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12), indicated that through His impending death, Death itself would pass over His people.

**22:2** Luke also tells us that the chief priests and the scribes were seeking to put Him to death ‘for they feared the people’, i.e. they were seeking a secret way to trap Him because of the popularity He had with the people. That they wished to act in the absence of the multitude is also reflected in Matthew 26:4f. and Mark 14:1–2 (cf. Luke 19:47; 20:19; John 5:18; 7:1, 19, 25; 8:37; et.al.). The thought here is that they intended to wait until the crowds had lessened following the Passover, but God’s timing was different. Jesus was delivered up ‘according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God’ (Acts 2:23), and Passover was to be the time for the Lamb of God to die.

**22:3–6** We are left in no doubt as to the energizing force for the betrayal. Luke tells us plainly that ‘Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them’ (22:3–4). This action on Satan’s part was not without Judas’ co-operation, as John makes clear (John 13:2; cf. 13:27). Why did he betray Jesus? Certainly there seems to have been a good deal of avarice in Judas (Matt. 26:14f.; cf. John 12:1–8) and he did receive money for the betrayal. It could be that he had become disaffected with Jesus’ ministry for it seemed not to be going the way he wanted it to, and some suggest that he was seeking to force Jesus’ hand to either bring in the Kingdom or die. Whatever the reason, the betrayal was energized by Satan as the ancient prophecy of Genesis 3:15 began to be fulfilled.

For their own part the leaders of Israel ‘were glad, and engaged to give him money’ (22:5). We are not here given detail of how the occasion was to be sought out against Jesus, or the amount of money. Judas ‘agreed, and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of the multitude’ (22:6).

### **2. Preparations for the Feast (22:7–13).**

**22:7–9** The requirements for the preparation of and sacrifice of the Passover lamb were quite exacting. This task Jesus gave to Peter and John, who had seen Jesus on the Mount of

Transfiguration talking with Moses and Elijah about His *exodos* from Jerusalem. Not only were they His closest disciples, but also they were the ones on whom much responsibility would rest following the events of Pentecost. Having been asked to prepare the meal (22:7–8), Peter and John enquired about the location of the feast (22:9).<sup>1</sup> This was an important question since the meal had to be eaten over an extended period and it needed quite an amount of food, so it could not be simply presented in an *ad hoc* manner.

**22:10–13** Jesus told them what to look for when entering the city and what to say on seeing the persons He described to them (22:10–12). While it is true that the sight of a *man* carrying a water jar would have been quite unusual (as water jars normally were carried by women), it is not necessary to assume, as do a number of commentators, that this was a pre-arranged sign. The whole event reflects the occasion of the finding of the donkey's colt in Luke 19:29ff. The final comment of 22:13—'And they went, and found it as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover'—points to the Divine arrangement of these events. Indeed the Son of Man *must* suffer.

### 3. The Lord's Supper Itself (22:14–23).

**22:14–16** In the presence of all the apostles (22:14) Jesus said, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God' (22:15–16). There are a number of interesting elements to this statement. Firstly, He says that He has earnestly desired to eat the meal with them. The thought here is seen also in Luke 12:50—Jesus has been shut up to this time from the outset. The eating of the meal, and all it represented and prefigured, was *the* focus of His ministry. Secondly, Jesus saw that the meal was with a view to something else. It was, in one sense, an incomplete meal. He looked for the consummation of the Kingdom, and the unfinished meal pointed to it. We have seen elsewhere (e.g. Luke 14:15ff.) the image of a meal used to portray the great day of the Messianic Banquet, and in other places (e.g. Luke 19:11ff.) we have seen that there would be a delay between the death of the Son of Man and His final appearing. Here both these elements come together.

**22:17, 18** In Jesus' day the Passover was celebrated in a carefully fixed order. In the common practice of the day there were four (and sometimes five) 'cups' of which the celebrants partook, as well as the eating of bitter herbs, unleavened bread and the sacrificial lamb. Many of these steps had their own particular opening or closing prayers or songs. What we see in the Gospel accounts is an incomplete version of a full Passover. This may be simply because the writers felt it unnecessary to relate the detail of a full Passover, or it may be because this Passover was not like a normal one. Indeed, if Jesus had come to seal the New Covenant, and if we keep in mind His earlier teaching of the wine and wineskins, it is most likely that He transformed the traditional feast into something new in order to match His own impending death. Hence we cannot be sure which cup is meant here. It may have been the first of four,

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<sup>1</sup> One of the most perplexing problems of NT exegesis is that of the exact timing of the Passover. The NT contains four accounts of what happened at the time of the Last Supper (Matt. 26:26–30; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20; and I Cor. 11:23–26). In addition to these there is John's account of the event in John ch. 13, which makes no mention of the institution of the Lord's Supper, but which clearly refers to the same occasion as the Synoptics.

John 18:28 and 19:14, 31, all indicate that Jesus died on the afternoon immediately prior to the slaying of the Passover lambs in the Temple, i.e. that He died before the official celebration of Passover was held. This means that the meal described in John would have been a *kiddush*, i.e. a simple meal of preparation held before a main religious festival or a Sabbath. However, Luke 22:15, Matthew 26:17–19, and Mark 14:1, 12, 16, seem to indicate that a full Passover meal was being held, and at the time that was truly that of Passover.

One solution to the problem is that there were in fact two different calendars on operation, but while this may have been possible, there are still outstanding problems with reconciling the accounts even if this were the case. What we can say with certainty is that both the meal recorded in John and that in the Synoptics is of a paschal character.

or it may not have been. What is important is that in the taking of it Jesus tells the disciples to ‘divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ The significance of this cup is therefore specifically and pointedly related to the eschatological nature of *His* approaching death rather than the Passover generally.

**22:19** After this ‘he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me”’ (22:19). The bread used was unleavened bread, and the breaking of the bread and the giving of thanks would have been a common event. His words, however, would certainly not have been heard at a Passover meal before! What do these words mean? Much debate in the history of the Church has centred on the word ‘is’. Did Jesus mean that the bread literally was His body? The answer would appear to be ‘No’, especially as we see similar constructions in other places (e.g. ‘the seven good cows are seven years’, ‘the field is the world’, ‘The Rock was Christ’, ‘The seven lampstands are the seven churches’, ‘these women are the two covenants’, etc). But that the bread represented His body is beyond doubt, though folk may argue about the manner of the representation. The important point is that bread is the staple of life. Just as physical life is dependent upon it, there can be no true life apart from the body of the Son being given up ‘for’ us (cf. John 6:34–35, 46–51, 53–59). That He was to be given up is plain (e.g. Isa. 53:6, 10, 12), but this giving up had a substitutionary character (cf. Lev. 5:7; 6:23; Ezek. 43:21). He was given up for, i.e. on behalf of, the world. This is what must be held in ‘remembrance’.

**22:20** In similar manner after supper He took another cup saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’ Some translations omit these verses, but the grounds for doing so are not universally accepted and the longer version is best kept. The cup is designated as the New Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31ff.; 32:40; 33:14ff.; Ezek. 37:26; I Cor. 11:25; II Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8; 9:15). This is to say that the cup is the sign and seal of the New Covenant which is formed in the blood of the Son. The New Covenant is established in His sacrifice, and this is symbolized in the cup.

**22:21–23** In a number of OT passages (e.g. Job 19:19; Ps. 41:9; Micah 7:5f.), the pain of betrayal is clearly expressed. Jesus has already indicated that this would be the fate of some of His disciples (Luke 21:16), and here He identifies the fact that the one to betray Him was there at table with them (22:21), adding ‘the Son of man goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!’ Here we see the meeting point of Divine will and human responsibility (cf. Acts 2:23; 4:27–28). Judas was culpable for his action and Jesus was being delivered up in accordance with God’s plan.

That the disciples ‘began to question one another, which of them it was that would do this’, is a most interesting fact. It may indicate that each one of them knew themselves to be subject to weakness, temptation and doubt about His Messiahship, but more likely it indicates that each one felt he would not do it, but doubted the veracity of the others. Certainly none appears to have suspected Judas before this point.

## E. Jesus' Final Words to the Disciples (22:24–38)

### 1. Who is the Greatest? (22:24–30).

**22:24** We have seen earlier (Luke 9:46ff.) that the disciples were interested in identifying their status in the Kingdom. That the same dispute should arise here seems incredible. But, if the prophecy of the betrayal had led to a flurry of self-justification and affirmations of loyalty, which is most likely especially in view of Simon's comments a little later, then the debate about greatness in the Kingdom could have followed on most naturally.

**22:25–27** By way of reply to their foolish debate Jesus said, 'the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves.' The Kingdom is not that which operates on the precepts and assumptions of man. This has been the constant message of Jesus to the twelve and the crowds generally. That the first shall be last and the last first has been explained a number of times. Ultimately, however, the truth of the Kingdom's *modus operandi* is seen in the King Himself. He Himself is One who serves. Such service was soon to culminate on the Cross, but the event of the Cross—the laying down of His life for His friends—was only the end point of a whole life which was laid down for them.

**22:28–30** By way of assurance and comfort Jesus told them, 'you are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' These words were needed for the disciples. Despite all their misunderstandings of Jesus' ministry, and despite their own fears and sometimes petty concerns, they had indeed continued with Jesus (cf. John 17:6). Now they faced the Cross, though they did not realize it, and the shattering of all their (wrong) dreams. Elsewhere He has told them that they were not to fear in view of the fact that it was the Father's delight to give them the Kingdom (12:32; cf. Matt. 25:34; Rom. 8:28–32; II Thess. 1:5; Heb. 12:28; James 2:5; I Pet. 1:3–5; II Pet. 1:11; Rev. 1:6; etc.). We have already seen the reference to the Messianic banquet earlier in the meal. The words here were deliberately designed to remind them of these things. Note that the Kingdom given to the disciples is none other than the Son's! We reign in His Kingdom for we are in Him!

### 2. Peter's Denial Foretold (22:31–34).

Jesus next addressed Peter directly, but through him the others also. In saying, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have *you*, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren,' there is a change of subject that is not immediately obvious in English. While the sentence begins by addressing Simon specifically, the *you* is plural. The sifting will be for all the disciples, but with special focus on Peter. He was to find his own weakness more powerfully confronting than the others as he was all the more confident of his own strength, which is probably why Jesus addressed him with his 'pre-disciple' name, reminding him of his own natural presumption. But having been assured that Jesus had prayed for him(!), he was to minister to the others once he himself had been restored.

Peter's reply was typically brash, assuring Jesus of his unqualified and unflinching support (22:33). But Jesus knew the true picture for He knew the frailty of human hearts. Hence,

‘He said, “I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you three times deny that you know me”’ (22:34). Peter’s reaction is unrecorded. We might assume that it was a denial of his denial!

### **3. The Saying About the Sword (22:35–38).**

On another occasion we have seen how the twelve (and the seventy) were sent out with nothing (Luke 9:2ff; 10:2ff.). Jesus reminded them of this (22:35) and then said, ‘But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me, “AND HE WAS RECKONED WITH TRANSGRESSORS”; for what is written about me has its fulfilment’ (22:36–37). The thrust seems to be that found in Zechariah 13:17ff. where the death of the Shepherd was for the scattering of the sheep. When they were first sent out they were sent out to return to Him who was a popular figure with the people. This time they would be scattered because of the nation turning against Him. They must be on the alert and prepared for all emergencies, as the various garments and pieces of equipment mentioned above symbolize.

Their reply about the swords (22:38) is indicative of the fact that they had still not understood the nature of the Kingdom or of Jesus. He said to them simply, ‘It is enough,’ i.e. enough of this talk rather than two swords are enough.



## **F. Jesus' Arrest (22:39–65)**

### **1. Gethsemane (22:39–46).**

**22:39, 40** Luke tells us that after the meal, 'He came out, and went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed Him' (22:39). The action indicates that His habitual manner was one of prayer. That He came out after the meal in this way seems to be the practice He had adopted since coming into Jerusalem. Having arrived at the place of prayer, 'He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation"' (22:40; cf. 22:46). The thought of this statement has been echoed in the Lord's prayer in Luke 11:2–4. There we said that the phrase about not being led into temptation meant 'cause us not to succumb to temptation', i.e. a prayer of dependence upon God's keeping power (cf. Eph. 5:15f.; II Thess. 1:11f.; I Tim. 6:11–16), and there is no need to view the situation differently here.

**22:41–46** Once the disciples were settled, 'He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done"' (22:41–42). There are basically two positions that one can adopt with this passage. The first is that here Jesus was praying to be delivered from the Cross, asking that another way could be found, if it were possible. If not, then He would be resigned to doing God's will. We are sometimes prone to say that this was a time where His true humanity came to the fore, as He recoiled from the thought of the Cross now looming large before Him. There is probably a better solution, however. We know that from the beginning of His ministry Jesus knew that its end point and culmination was the Cross (cf. also John 12:27). We also know that He was in a time of immense physical agony in the garden (22:44), so much so that He was able to say His soul was exceedingly grieved to the point of death itself (Mark 14:34) and that an angel was sent to strengthen Him (22:43). The writer to the Hebrews tells us that in the days of His flesh, when He prayed to be delivered from death, He was heard and His prayer was answered (Heb. 5:7), and we know that such a prayer did not take place on the cross itself. If we put all of these factors together, it seems as though He was asking to be delivered from death in the garden itself, i.e. He was literally dying in the garden and this is the cup which He asked to be delivered from in order that He might be able to drink the true cup of the Cross (cf. Ps. 11:6; 75:8; Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15, 17, 28; Lam. 4:21; Ezek. 23:31ff.; Hab. 2:16; for other uses of the image of the cup). But whatever interpretation is adopted, the most important point is that He willingly went to that Cross, in accord with the Father's will for Him. He indeed laid down His life of His own initiative (cf. John 10:18).

Only Luke tells us that Jesus found the twelve 'sleeping for sorrow' (22:45), evidently overcome physically by the agony of soul they were themselves beginning to feel as the impact of the night's events began to take its effect.

### **2. Judas' Betrayal and the Arrest Itself (22:47–53).**

**22:47, 48** Things move quickly from now on. While Jesus was still speaking to the disciples, 'there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?"' The kiss of greeting, which was normal social custom, was on this occasion a pre-arranged sign (cf. Matt. 26:48). The normal significance of the kiss of greeting was one of friendship and acceptance, so its use as a sign of betrayal was particularly ironic (cf. II Sam. 20:9f.).

**22:49–53** Now it suddenly dawned on the disciples what was happening. When they ‘saw what would follow, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear’ (22:49–50). Still they did not understand, but in a beautiful demonstration of His own words about loving your enemies and doing good to those who hate you, Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him’ (22:51). By the action just performed, and by the word recorded in 22:52, Jesus indicates that He knew the whole procedure was trumped up. Had He not healed the man there would have been some justification for them bringing Jesus to Pilate as a seditious element. Now they were without excuse—they were condemning an innocent man. They could have arrested Him in the Temple in the light of day (22:53), but they did not do so for fear of the crowds. Now, however, He said to them, ‘this is your hour, and the power of darkness’ (cf. John 8:44; 14:30). Though the Evil One had no legitimate power by which to hold Jesus, for He had no guilt by which He could be held captive, the powers of darkness were given the opportunity to do their worst. This indeed was their hour, but how brief it turned out to be!

### **3. Peter’s Denial (22:54–62).**

**22:54, 55** Jesus was seized and led to the house of the high priest (22:54). This was an unusual action, but these were unusual times. Peter ‘followed at a distance; and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them’ (22:55).

**22:56–62** During the course of the following hours, first a maid (22:56), and then two other unidentified men (22:58, 59), sought to link Peter with Jesus. Each one’s comment brought a strong denial from Peter (22:57, 58, 60). Both Matthew and Mark add that the last occasion was a very vehement denial for he invoked a curse on himself and swore that he did not know Jesus, i.e. ‘May I die if I know Him’. As soon as the last denial had been uttered, and ‘while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter’ (22:60–61a). Only Luke adds that Jesus looked at Him. We can barely imagine what went through Peter’s heart at the sight of those blessed eyes fixed upon Him, and in love rather than judgement. The horrible realization broke out upon him and in his conscience. Shame swallowed him up as ‘Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly’ (22:61b–62).

### **4. Jesus’ Beating (22:63–65).**

There seems to be a delay in the trial proceedings here, probably as the members of the Sanhedrin were roused from their beds and summoned to the house of the high priest. During this time Jesus was held in custody, and those holding Him were ‘mocking and beating Him’ (22:63), blindfolding Him and asking Him to prophesy as to the identity of His assailants (22:64). In short they were ‘blaspheming’ (22:65).

## **G. Jesus on Trial (22:66—23:25)**

### **1. Before the Sanhedrin (22:66–71).**

**22:66–69** At dawn He was led to the assembly of the Sanhedrin in its official chamber (22:66) and there He was questioned. The Sanhedrin was looking to pin a charge of blasphemy on Him, so they asked Him directly, ‘If you are the Christ, tell us’ (22:67). Jesus, however, knew that they were not looking to have their question answered, at least not seriously. Hence he said, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF the power OF GOD’ (22:67b–69). We have seen the significance of this title elsewhere, and here it has its full eschatological weight, a fact that did not escape the attention of His questioners.

**22:70, 71** In response they asked, ‘Are you the Son of God then?’ for that is what Jesus’ reply had clearly implied. ‘And He said to them, “Yes, I am”’ (22:70). For the Sanhedrin this was enough. They had no further need of testimony (22:71) and in any case, as Matthew and Mark make clear, the false testimonies they had organized were not holding together. Having, to their way of thinking, condemned Himself out of His own mouth, they could now proceed to Pilate.

### **2. Before Pilate (23:1–7).**

**23:1** The fact that the ‘whole body of them arose and brought Him before Pilate’ (23:1) indicates that, despite the long-standing differences between the various elements of the Sanhedrin, its action was a united one at this point. The Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes and elders all saw Jesus as their common enemy, but for different reasons. To some He was a blasphemer, to others He was a threat to their power, and perhaps to others He was a threat to their financial arrangements (after all He had cleansed the Temple!). No doubt there was a good amount of jealousy involved from all sides (cf. Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10). Pilate’s presence in Jerusalem must be attributed to the Passover feast. The administrative centre of the province of Judea was Caesarea, and visits to Jerusalem were made only for special functions or at times when the Roman oversight needed to be particularly close.

**23:2** Having brought Him before Pilate, ‘they began to accuse Him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.”’ The charges are an interesting mixture. The first charge is one relating to civil unrest, an occurrence well known throughout Rome’s troubled occupation of Palestine, and this through false teaching, i.e. causing the nation to be misled. The charge relating to taxes is more specific and is here included in direct contrast to the fact that Jesus did not advocate the non-payment of taxes to Caesar, as we have already seen in 20:25. The charge relating to kingship has both religious and civil import. That the Christ (i.e. the Messiah) would be King is thoroughly attested to in many OT messianic prophecies, and this point would have been clearly understood by those handing Him up. They, however, in failing to believe that He was Messiah, sought to use the attendant concept of kingship wrongly. He was indeed the Christ, and therefore the King of all kings, but rather than believe this they sought this a pretext for His death.

**22:3, 4** Pilate’s response is also very interesting. Honing in on the accusation of kingship, as this would have been the most serious one as far as Pilate was concerned, he ‘asked Him,

saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And He answered him and said, “It is as you say” (23:3). Though the wording of Jesus’ reply is tolerant of a number of translations, it is clear that Jesus does not deny that He is King. The manner of reply here, as in 22:70, probably reflects an idiomatic answer that affirms the truth of the statement while accepting all that is implied by it. But His Kingship is not of any earthly order (as Pilate was clearly told in John 18:36f.) and Pilate did not see Him as a dangerous insurrectionist. Perhaps he saw Him as one who was hopelessly deluded, or he may have dismissed the whole matter as simply a localized religious argument of no interest to the State. Whatever the case, ‘Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, “I find no guilt in this man”’ (23:4).

**23:5–7** The Sanhedrin, however, could not let the matter rest. Indeed, if it failed to gain a conviction now, its whole power base would have been undone. They would have been seen to have failed, and Jesus, at least in the eyes of the people, would have been seen to be vindicated, thus boosting His already huge following. The leaders could not afford to let Him live, having taken the action they had, but they could not simply murder Him without risking a rebellion. They had to dispose of Him ‘legally’ or not at all. Hence, ‘they kept on insisting, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee, even as far as this place”’ (23:5). The charge here is of creating civil unrest. ‘But when Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that He belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time’ (23:6–7). Doubtless Pilate saw in Herod the opportunity to divest himself of a problem.

### 3. Before Herod (23:8–12).

The account of Jesus before Herod is unique to Luke. Pilate was governor of Judea, which province was bordered by Herod Antipas’ tetrarchy in the north. Since trials could be conducted either under the jurisdiction of the province to which the accused belonged or in the province where the alleged offence took place, Pilate saw in the fact that Jesus had begun teaching in Galilee a double reason to send Him to Herod, who would also have been in Jerusalem for the Passover.

**23:8, 9** Herod, Luke tells us, ‘was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him’. Herod has already been mentioned in 3:1, 19; 9:7 and 13:31; and thus is in the background as a curious but faithless hearer of all that was being accomplished through Jesus. Herod ‘questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing’ (23:9). Why the silence? There is doubtless a reference here to the prophecy of Isaiah 53:7, but the silence itself was to do with the constituted authority structures of which Jesus was aware, and the *must* of the Cross. Pilate at least was asking questions with a view to justice, at least to a point. Herod was a total sceptic.

**23:10–12** As in the encounter with Pilate, ‘the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently’ (23:10). Though we are not told the nature of their accusations we can assume that they were of similar substance to those brought before Pilate, though possibly with a more religious and nationalistic streak to them. Seeing that Herod was making no progress with the interrogation, and in view of the fact that he was not even going to see a miracle, ‘Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate’ (23:11). Luke adds, ‘Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been at enmity with each other’ (23:12). We have no other account of the enmity which existed previously, though we should not doubt that this was the case. Now there was a friendship born out of mutual inability to deal with the problem of a mendicant preacher.

#### 4. Before Pilate Again (23:13–25).

**23:13–16** Having been brought back to Pilate the situation for the Sanhedrin became even more desperate. Pilate ‘summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. I will therefore punish Him and release Him.”’ While the identity of ‘the people’ mentioned here is uncertain, the point is made that the rejection of Jesus was not simply one at a leadership level, though doubtless the leaders were the prime movers in the action. For their part such a response as Pilate is here reported to have given threatened to ruin the plans of the Sanhedrin totally, for nothing less than Jesus’ destruction would suffice, from their point of view. Such an overt statement of innocence (also seen in 23:4 and 22; cf. John 18:38; 19:4, 6) makes Pilate’s later actions even more reprehensible. The fact that Jesus, despite being declared to be innocent was still to be punished, was not unusual. It was common practice to punish even acquitted prisoners in some way, in order to act as a warning to them and to others to be more careful in the future. The released prisoner and all the populace thus knew that Roman justice was always a thing tinged with fear, that it should never be trifled with.

**23:17–19** Luke 23:17 (cf. Matt. 27:15; Mark 15:21) does not appear in the earliest manuscripts of Luke’s Gospel, and has probably been added later in order to clarify the situation that obtained during Luke’s day, but which may not have been general knowledge elsewhere. In accordance with the custom, ‘they cried out all together, saying, “Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!” (He was one who had been thrown in prison for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for murder)’ (23:18–19). The ‘they’ here is undefined. According to Matthew 27:20 the crowd was calling for Barabbas’ release, after being whipped up by various elements of the Sanhedrin. Later in Matthew they are called ‘the multitude’ (27:24) and the numbers were such that there was danger of a riot. Such a turn about in attitude as evidenced here should not be thought of as impossible. Many welcomed Him as Messiah, but He was obviously not the sort of Messiah they wanted. The political situation was tense, and the presence of Roman troops in Jerusalem during such a significant event as Passover was especially likely to fuel anger against a seemingly ineffective Messiah. Given all this, as well as the abiding anger in fallen human hearts, we should not be surprised that the leaders could work on the ‘raw material’ so effectively. To be sure, not all who welcomed Him on Palm Sunday would have shouted for His blood, and even in the Sanhedrin there were men such as Joseph. But all the Gospel writers are united in the fact that Jesus died in the main deserted by friends, disciples and multitude alike. For some the desertion was out of fear, for others it was much more sinister.

**23:20–25** At this time Pilate was still concerned that justice be done, so Luke tells us, ‘Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, but they kept on calling out, saying, “Crucify, crucify Him!” And he said to them the third time, “Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; I will therefore punish Him and release Him.” But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail. And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand should be granted. And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he turned Jesus over to their will.’ What prompted the change? Pilate was a man who had not had an easy governorship. He had unwisely, and possibly deliberately, provoked the Jews on a number of occasions, so the threat of a riot that could quickly escalate to a rebellion was very much before him. According to all that is implied in John 19:12, Pilate’s own position was at stake, and so justice gave way to expediency on the one hand and self-protection on the other. Every man has his price, and Pilate was no exception.

## H. Calvary (23:26–56)

### 1. Simon of Cyrene (23:26).

After sentencing and scourging by the Roman soldiers (cf. Matt. 27:26) the condemned man was given his own cross to carry to the place of execution, which was usually outside the built up area of the town but yet on a road or in some other prominent position. The piece of timber being carried would not have been a whole cross, but a cross piece (Lat. *antenna*) that would be fixed to an upright in a ‘T’ or ‘†’ shape. The resulting cross was probably not very high, with a man of average height having the victim’s knees at eye level. It appears that having someone else carry the timber was not normal practice, but provision for such an action could be made depending on the nature of the beating the victim had already received and his consequent physical state. John tells us that Jesus set out carrying His own cross, but He evidently collapsed along the way. The fact that Simon of Cyrene (23:26) is mentioned in all the Synoptics may indicate that he was a well known personage in the early church (cf. Mark 15:21; Rom. 16:13).

### 2. Jesus’ Comments to the Daughters of Jerusalem (23:27–31).

Behind Jesus ‘there were following a great multitude of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him’ (23:27). The mention of the women is interesting. That they are later referred to as ‘daughters of Jerusalem’ probably indicates that they were not Jesus’ followers from Galilee, but local women ‘who turned out to witness executions and provide opiates for the condemned men’.<sup>1</sup> In this sense they were akin to the professional mourners seen in the account of the raising of Jairus’ daughter.

‘But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, ‘FALL ON US,’ AND TO THE HILLS, ‘COVER US’. For if they do these things in the green tree, what will happen in the dry?”’ (23:27–31). The comments here reiterate the prophecies of Jerusalem’s destruction as seen in Luke 21:20ff. (cf. 11:49–51; 13:1–5, 34f.; 19:41–44). The last verse seems to be a proverbial saying that is patient of a number of interpretations. The underlying thought may well be this: Green grass or wood does not burn well, but that which is dry is fitted for the furnace. If such a thing as this crucifixion happens in such forced circumstances, what will be the case when the time of judgement has arrived?

### 3. The Crucifixion (23:32–38).

**23:32, 33** Both Matthew and Mark indicate that there were others crucified with Him, but only Luke gives the more detailed account of the thief found in this section. Despite the heinous nature of the punishment and the mind numbing physical agony that it must have produced in the victim, none of the Gospel writers make much of the physical suffering itself. Indeed they are most restrained in their accounting of the events. The burden of them all is the significance of the event rather than the event itself.

‘And two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 864.

criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.’ According to Isaiah 53:12 He would be numbered with the transgressors in His death, as indeed He was. Crucifixion was reserved only for the most dangerous of criminals to the state, and for slaves. The designation of the place as ‘The Skull’ is the Greek translation of the Semetic ‘Golgotha’ (we get our ‘Calvary’ from the Latin translation *calvarius*). We are not now able to identify the site.

**23:34** ‘But Jesus was saying, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”’ The tense suggests the prayer being uttered more than once, doubtless being repeated in the midst of the physical act of crucifixion and the fixing of the beam to the scaffold. That His betrayers and those performing the execution itself knew what they were doing (cf. Luke 22:70), yet the deceit of sin is so great they did not understand what they were doing, otherwise Paul tells us, ‘they would not have crucified the Lord of glory’ (I Cor. 2:8). The prayer of forgiveness is again in keeping with Isaiah 53:12 and indicates that the whole matter of the Cross is for sinners. He was abandoned up for sinful men, who through blindness and deceit of sin, did not recognize the Son of God in their midst.

Also we are told that ‘they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves’ (23:34b). This verse quotes Psalm 22:18. Jesus was stripped of everything for our sakes. Whereas the first Adam sought to cover himself and hide from the judgement of God in the knowledge of his nakedness, the second Adam nakedly bore all of the judgement of God, confessing His holiness for the sake of Adam’s race. Indeed, ‘for our sakes He was made poor that through His poverty we might become rich’.

**23:35–38** The mocking of the crowds was great, and is somewhat muted in Luke when compared with both Matthew and Mark. He tells us that ‘the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, “He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.”’ And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine and saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!”’ (23:35–37). That Jesus was the Chosen One is a synonym for Him being the Messiah (lit. the anointed one). The phrase is also seen in Luke 9:35, I Peter 2:4 and Isaiah 42:1. The cry to vindicate His chosen status by deliverance was in essence the same accusation which faced Job. There is a principle which equates ‘choice’ with ease and comfort, not with suffering.

‘Now there was also an inscription above Him, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.’ (23:38). This ascription is mentioned by all four Gospel writers. It was normal practice to display the nature of a person’s offence in this way, but Jesus’ Kingship is a great theme in Luke and here the ascription stands as the great indictment of all history. Humanity, not just the Jews (cf. Acts 4:27), has committed regicide.

#### 4. The Repentant Criminal (23:39–43).

**23:39–41** According to Matthew 27:44, both of the criminals who were crucified with Him were reviling Him, but one of them ceased to do so. Luke alone gives us the fuller account: ‘One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”’ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”’ What caused the change in this man? He evidently saw the manner of Christ’s submission to the Cross, and he would have heard His prayer of forgiveness for His executioners, especially as prefaced with the word ‘Father’. This thief recognized the reality of the situation. A man facing his death with anger, even though his death was just, saw a man facing His death with peace, even though His death was unjust.

**23:42, 43** Recognizing who He was, and no doubt having heard much about Him beforehand, the thief was saying, ‘Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!’ And He

said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise’ (23:42–43). The one thief dies in his anger and full of anguish, the other dies in peace! Marshall comments:

Jesus acts as the Messiah who has the kingly right to open the doors of paradise to those who come into fellowship with Him. The criminal’s petition expresses the hope that he will attain life at the parousia; Jesus’ reply assures him of immediate entry into paradise.<sup>1</sup>

‘Paradise’ is from the Persian word for a garden and is equivalent to Eden. In Isaiah 51:3 the future paradisaical state of the Israel of God is identified with the garden of Eden, as is the imagery of the Book of the Revelation.

### 5. Jesus’ Death (23:44–49).

The time spent on the cross varied before death released the sufferer. It was most common for victims to live for about twelve hours, but it was not unknown for some to linger on for two or three days. Jesus’ physical death was surprisingly rapid (cf. Mark 15:44), but this was so not for physical reasons simply. The crushing weight of sin and the emotional and physical energy needed to defeat it all as it was laid upon Him was the thing that hastened His end.

**22:44, 45** Luke tells us that ‘it was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, the sun being obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two’. The darkness was not an eclipse of the sun, as such a thing is impossible during a full moon, and it was the full moon that governed the time of the Passover. This was a supernatural darkness that reflected the darkness of sin, the terror of judgement and the eclipse of glory. It is the great darkness prefigured in the judgement on Egypt (Exod. 10:21ff.). Just as the first exodus could not occur without judgement and thus deliverance, so the second and greater *exodos* was one out of judgement and through judgement. The veil of the Temple (which in Matthew and Mark was torn in two from top to bottom) is the dividing curtain between the Holy of Holies and the rest of the Temple. The significance of the event is the opening, by God Himself, of the way into His very presence through the death of His Son (cf. Heb. 10:20).

**22:46** ‘And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, “FATHER, INTO THY HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT”’, here quoting from Psalm 31:5. The second half of the verse from the Psalm indicates the reason for such confident self-commitment: ‘Thou hast ransomed me O Lord God of truth.’ Jesus had indeed been made the sin of the world, and indeed had borne all the wrath of God’s holy love, but had accepted the judgement, and thus overcome the sin, enabling Him to commend Himself confidently into the Father’s arms.

**22:47–49** ‘And having said this, He breathed His last. Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent.” And all the multitudes who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts. And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee, were standing at a distance, seeing these things.’ The beating of the breast may be a sign of repentance, but more likely it is here a sign of immense sorrow and grief as the innocence of the Man and the power of His death broke in upon them.

### 6. Jesus’ Burial (23:50–56).

As mentioned above, not all had abandoned Him. ‘Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; this man went

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall, p. 873.



to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain' (23:50–53). Only the rich could afford tombs such as this. Because of lack of sites near to the city, tombs were 'recycled' after a certain time. No one had lain in this one, however. Like the donkey's colt on which He rode into the city, this tomb was consecrated by Divine plan to the burial of Jesus.

'And it was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed after, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. And they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment' (23:54–56).

## VII. The Risen Jesus (24:1–53)

### A. Discovery of the Empty Tomb (24:1–12)

The accounts of the visit(s) to the empty tomb vary in the four Gospels. A number of commentators (e.g. Arndt and Geldenhuys) have worked out a harmony of these events, and these have been variously received. While it may be difficult for us to establish the exact sequence of events, we should not be diverted from the fact that all the Gospel writers are united in their affirmation of the Resurrection. The Resurrection is God's Amen to the Crucifixion, and is the basis of the Church's proclamation of Jesus as Lord.

**24:1–3** The Crucifixion had taken place on the day before the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a day of rest, so no one came near the tomb to treat the body which was the custom (cf. 23:55–56). Such treatment with spices and aromatic herbs was not embalming *per se*, but a mark of honour and reverence for the one who had died. The large amount of aromatics mentioned in John 19:39 and Mark 16:1 was a sign of great respect. When the Sabbath was over, 'on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus'. The tomb was one hewn out of the rock which would have had a large disk shaped rolling stone that rested in stone 'tracks' at its entrance. Such tombs can still be seen, but they were not usually used by the common folk. The 'they' is undefined until 24:10, where Luke tells us that they were 'Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them'. The ministry of women at this point was common. The stone has not been mentioned by Luke until now, but both Matthew and Mark mention it earlier (27:60 and 15:46 respectively). Matthew includes the fact that sentries were posted in order to prevent the removal of Jesus' body by His followers (Matt. 27:62ff.), but that they were overcome by fear at the sight of the angel who appeared to roll away the stone (Matt. 28:2ff.).

**24:4–8** The empty tomb proved to be a puzzle for the women, and we are told that they were 'perplexed' (24:4). While they were in this state, 'behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling apparel; and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He isn't here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again"' (24:5–7). Matthew mentions only one angel, as does Mark, but there need not be any inherent contradiction as one would have acted as the spokesman for them both. The angelic messengers reminded the women of Jesus' own teaching while He was yet in Galilee (see 9:22, et. al.), thus emphasizing to them that the Resurrection which Jesus had spoken about was not figurative, nor was it to be seen at the Last Day (cf. John 11:24).

**24:9–12** As a result of the meeting with the angels, the women 'remembered His words, and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest' (24:9). In keeping with the lack of understanding that the apostles had shown on many earlier occasions, Luke tells us that 'these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them' (24:11). The women would not have remembered the words of Jesus had they not been reminded of them, and it is evident that the disciples, left to their own devices, would not comprehend either what had happened, or the significance of what had happened.

While 24:12—‘But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at that which had happened’—is not included in some of the earliest manuscripts of Luke, there is no good reason for its omission either there or in our text. Peter typically ‘ran’ to see what had happened, but left as perplexed as the women. The mention of the empty bandages confirms the absence of the body, but the truth of the Resurrection had not yet ‘hit home’.

## B. The Road to Emmaus (24:13–35)

**24:13, 14** In a story unique to Luke (except for a brief mention in the longer ending of Mark 16:12–13), we are given the account of Jesus' appearance to a pair of disciples who, from comparison with 24:33, evidently came from the wider group of Jesus' followers. The time of the appearance is given as 'that very day', i.e. the same day of the week as the visit to the tomb by the women. Emmaus was a village 'which was about seven miles from Jerusalem' (24:13), but we are unable to identify the site of the village any longer. As the travellers walked, 'they were conversing with each other about all these things which had taken place' (24:14). As the story unfolds we can gather that their conversation was more than tinged with pessimism.

**24:15, 16** 'And it came about that while they were conversing and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.' The theme of hiddenness and revelation we have seen elsewhere in Luke (2:26; 9:45; 10:21f.; 18:34; cf. Matt. 11:25ff.; 16:17; I Cor. 2:10; 3:13; II Cor. 4:3ff.). Here Jesus appears to them as an unknown traveller, and he remains unknown until the very end of the story. The whole episode underlines the fact that it is God who reveals Himself to people, a theme that is taken up in the proclamation throughout the later volume of Luke's work—the Book of Acts.

**24:17–21** Having drawn alongside them, Jesus began by drawing out of them (and thus them out of) the conversation they were having. 'He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad' (24:17; cf. 6:3; 8:30; 9:18; 18:40 20:3; et. al., for similar use of questions by Jesus). One of them, Cleopas by name, 'answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?"' (24:18), to which He answered, 'What things?' With a brief question He was able to bring out of them all that was on their hearts. In reply they told Him their version of the story of Jesus the Nazarene, who, despite being a prophet 'mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people' (cf. Deut. 18:15ff.; Luke 7:16; John 4:19, 44; Acts 3:22; 7:37), was handed over by the rulers to be crucified (24:19–20). The real point of their disillusionment is then given. They were 'hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened' (24:21). The redemption of Israel now seemed impossible, for with Jesus dead and gone no one could continue.

**24:22–27** But yet there may be a glimmer of hope. They had heard reports that the body was gone, but Jesus Himself had not been seen. It was indeed the third day, and Jesus had made some comments about the sign of Jonah and so on, but there was no explanation for the disappearance of the body. They had heard that some women had found the tomb empty and 'that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that He was alive. And some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.' To these two everything was a confusing mystery of misery and disappointment with nothing but hearsay to fuel what seemed to be a vain hope. Having heard their story Jesus said to them, "'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures' (24:25–27). That the Messiah's glory was to be secured through suffering is also seen in 9:26; 21:27; Philippians 2:5–11; I Timothy 3:16; I Peter 1:11, 18ff.; and such was the burden of the whole of the Old Testament. It all pointed to Christ in His suffering and His glory, as He showed it to them.

**24:28–35** All the while they were talking they were also walking, so soon they were near their destination. Jesus ‘acted as though He would go farther. And they urged Him, saying, “Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over.” And He went in to stay with them’ (24:28–29). The action here reported would not have been uncommon. To act as if to go further was normal social custom, lest one appear to be rude or presumptuous. Likewise, the entreaty to stay was earnest, if somewhat elaborate, but sincere nonetheless. Having settled into their lodgings, ‘it came about that when He had reclined at table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them’ (24:30). At that time suddenly ‘their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”’ (24:31–32). Two things strike us. That their eyes were opened at the time of breaking the bread and blessing should not be unexpected. Fellowship meals were the most intimate of times, and Jesus was again intimately present with His disciples. Secondly, we note how the response of their hearts accorded with the revelation of Christ in the Scriptures. Their hearts were warmed because they recognized the truth of Christ in the Scriptures as He spoke to them. While it is doubtful that we should read into this encounter any reference to the Lord’s Supper, we should not miss the fact that the presence of Jesus is intimate and is in connection with, and conformity to, His Word.

After all of these events, ‘they arose that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, “The Lord has really risen, and has appeared to Simon.” And they began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread’ (24:33–35). That the two travellers found the rest already speaking of His appearing to Simon was confirmation to them of all they had seen and heard, while their story was no doubt one of confirmation to the rest. When did he appear to Simon? We are not told, though it was a well known event in the early Church (cf. I Cor. 15:5).

### **C. Jesus and the Disciples (24:36–43).**

**24:23–40** While they were still recounting the story of the Emmaus' appearance, 'He Himself stood in their midst. But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit' (24:36–37). Some manuscripts include the greeting 'Peace be with you' (cf. 2:14; 7:50; Acts 10:36; Rom.5:1f.; etc.). The appearance was both sudden and unexpected (cf. John 20:19) and the consternation it caused is understandable. To reassure them as to the reality of the Resurrection, and to ally their fear, 'He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have"' (24:38–39). It is clear that Jesus' resurrection body does not have the same characteristics of His pre-resurrection body, but it is a body nonetheless. Paul tells us that we too will have a 'heavenly body' which is also called 'an imperishable body' or a 'spiritual body' (I Cor. 15:40, 42, 44). Here the point is to reassure the disciples that they were not seeing a ghost. They were invited to 'touch' Him to put their minds at ease (cf. John 20:27), and 'when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet' (24:40, which verse is best retained in the text).

**23:41–43** But even this demonstration left them wondering and in wonderment. Luke tells us 'they still could not believe it for joy' (24:41). As we would say, 'It is too good to be true!' Jesus asked for something to eat 'And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it in their sight' (24:41–43), thus furnishing further evidence of His reality.

### **D. Jesus' Final Comments (24:44–49)**

This paragraph is not set in a definite time frame for us. At some time subsequent to His appearing, or perhaps on the same occasion, 'He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled"' (24:44). All the way through Luke we have seen that the fulfilment of Scripture was a divine necessity, and here, at the consummation of his Gospel, the same point is made. But also it is again emphasized that the knowledge of these things is linked to revelation, for 'Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures' (24:45). But such understanding was not with a view to self-gratification. The understanding of the Scriptures was for proclamation, and so it is still. Hence, 'He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high"' (24:46–49). We note that the proclamation, as much as the suffering, of the Messiah is in accordance with the Scriptures (cf. Isa. 49:6; 42:6; Joel 2:1; also see Rom. 9:24f.; 10:12f.; 15:9–12; Acts 2:5; 10:35; 15:17; 17:26; Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19), and that such proclamation must be empowered from on high. Just as their minds had to be opened to understand the Scriptures, so must the minds of those to whom they preach, but such opening is beyond human power to effect. They must tarry until endued with power to preach (cf. Joel 2:28f.; Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 39:29).

**E. The Ascension (24:50–53).**

Having given His instructions to the disciples, ‘He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them’ (24:50; cf. Num. 6:22ff.). While this was happening Luke tells us simply, ‘He parted from them’ (cf. 1:38; 2:15; 9:33; 24:31; Acts 10:7; 12:10), but the fuller theology and significance of the Ascension he leaves till the Book of Acts. For their part the disciples ‘returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising God’ (24:52–53). Thus the Gospel ends, but the rest of the story is just beginning!

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