

LUKE

OUTLINE

Key theme: Our Lord's journeys as the Son of man

Key verse: Luke 19:10

- I. JOURNEY FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH—1:5–4:13**
 - A. Birth announcements—1:5–56
 - B. The babies are born—1:57–2:20
 - C. Jesus' childhood and youth—2:21–52
 - D. Jesus' baptism and temptation—3:1–4:13
- II. THE JOURNEY THROUGHOUT GALILEE—4:14–9:17**
- III. THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM—9:18–19:27**
- IV. THE MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM—19:28–24:53**

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CHAPTER ONE

HEAR THE GOOD NEWS!

Luke 1

If ever a man wrote a book filled with good news for everybody, Dr. Luke is that man. His key message is, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He presents Jesus Christ as the compassionate Son of man, who came to live among sinners, love them, help them, and die for them.

In this Gospel you meet individuals as well as crowds, women and children as well as men, poor people as well as rich people, and sinners along with saints. It's a book with a message for *everybody*, because Luke's emphasis is on the universality of Jesus Christ and His salvation: "good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10).

Dr. Luke is named only three times in the New Testament: in Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; and Philemon 24. He wrote Acts (compare Luke 1:1–4 with Acts 1:1) and traveled with Paul (note the "we" sections in Acts 16:10–17; 20:4–15; 21:1–18, and 27:1–28:16). He was probably a Gentile (compare Colossians 4:11 and 14) and was trained as a physician. No wonder he began his book with detailed accounts of the births of two important babies! No wonder he emphasized Christ's sympathy for hurting people! He wrote with the mind of a careful historian and with the heart of a loving physician.

The Gospel of Luke was written for Theophilus ("lover of God"), probably a Roman official who had trusted Christ and now needed to be established in the faith. It's also possible that Theophilus was a seeker after truth who was being taught the Christian message, because the word translated *instructed* in Luke 1:4 gives us our English word *catechumen*, "someone who is being taught the basics of Christianity."

The life and message of Christ were so important that many books had already been written about Him, but not everything in them could be trusted. Luke wrote his Gospel so that his readers might have an accurate and orderly narrative of the life, ministry, and message of Jesus Christ. Luke had carefully researched his material, interviewed eyewitnesses, and listened to those who had ministered the Word. Most important, he had the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The phrase *from the very first* (Gk. *anōthen*) can be translated "from above," as it is in John 3:31 and 19:11. It speaks of the inspiration of the Spirit of God on the message that Luke wrote.

In this first chapter, Luke tells us how God's wonderful news came to different people and how they responded to it. You will discover four different responses.

Unbelief (Luke 1:5–25)

It was indeed a dark day for the nation of Israel. The people had heard no prophetic Word from God for 400 years, not since Malachi had promised the coming of Elijah (Mal. 4:5–6). The spiritual leaders were shackled by tradition and, in some instances, corruption; and their king, Herod the Great, was a tyrant. He had nine (some say ten) wives, one of whom he had executed for no apparent reason. But no matter how dark the day, God always has His devoted and obedient people.

A faithful priest (vv. 5–7). Zacharias ("Jehovah has remembered") and Elizabeth ("God is my oath") were a godly couple who both belonged to the priestly line. The priests were divided into twenty-four courses (1 Chron. 24), and each priest served in the temple two weeks out of the year. In spite of the godlessness around them, Zacharias and Elizabeth were faithful to obey the Word of God and live blamelessly.

Their only sorrow was that they had no family, and they made this a matter of constant prayer. Little did they know that God would answer their prayers and give them, not a priest, but a prophet! And no ordinary prophet, for their son would be the herald of the coming King!

A fearful priest (vv. 8–17). The priests on duty drew lots to see which ministries they would perform, and Zacharias was chosen to offer incense in the holy place. This was a high honor that was permitted to a priest but once in a lifetime. The incense was offered daily before the morning sacrifice and after the evening sacrifice, about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. It was probably the evening offering that was assigned to Zacharias.

You have probably noticed that God often speaks to His people and calls them while they are busy doing their daily tasks. Both Moses and David were caring for sheep, and Gideon was threshing wheat. Peter and his partners were mending nets when Jesus called them. It is difficult to steer a car when the engine is not running. When we get busy, God starts to direct us.

Luke mentions angels twenty-three times in his Gospel. There are innumerable angels (Rev. 5:11), only two of which are actually named in Scripture: Michael (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7) and Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26). When Gabriel appeared by the altar, Zacharias was frightened, for the angel's appearance could have meant divine judgment.

"Fear not" is a repeated statement in the Gospel of Luke (1:13, 30; 2:10; 5:10; 8:50; 12:7, 32). Imagine how excited Zacharias must have been when he heard that he and Elizabeth were to have a son! "Rejoicing" is another key theme in Luke, mentioned at least nineteen times. Good news brings joy!

Gabriel instructed him to name his son John ("Jehovah is gracious") and to dedicate the boy to God to be a Nazarite all of his life (Num. 6:1–21). He would be filled with the Spirit before birth (Luke 1:41) and would be God's prophet to present His Son to the people of Israel (see John 1:15–34). God would use John's ministry to turn many people back to the Lord, just as Isaiah had promised (Isa. 40:1–5).

A faithless priest (vv. 18–22). You would think that the presence of an angel and the announcement of God's Word would encourage Zacharias' faith, but they did not. Instead of looking to God by faith, the priest looked at himself and his wife and decided that the birth of a son was impossible. He wanted some assurance beyond the plain word of Gabriel, God's messenger, perhaps a sign from God.

This, of course, was unbelief, and unbelief is something God does not accept. Zacharias was really questioning God's ability to fulfill His own Word! Had he forgotten what God did for Abraham and Sarah? (Gen. 18:9–15; Rom. 4:18–25) Did he think that his physical limitations would hinder Almighty God? But before we criticize Zacharias too much, we should examine ourselves and see how strong our own faith is.

Faith is blessed, but unbelief is judged; and Zacharias was struck dumb (and possibly deaf, Luke 1:62) until the Word was fulfilled. "I believed, and therefore have I spoken" (2 Cor. 4:13). Zacharias did not believe; therefore he could not speak. When he left the holy place, he was unable to give the priestly benediction to the people (Num. 6:22–27) or even tell them what he had seen. Indeed, God had given him a very personal "sign" that he would have to live with for the next nine months.

A favored priest (vv. 23–25). Zacharias must have had a difficult time completing his week of ministry, not only because of his handicap, but also because of his excitement. He could hardly wait to return "to the hill country" (Luke 1:39) where he lived, to tell his wife the good news.

God kept His promise and Elizabeth conceived a son in her old age. "There is nothing too hard for the Lord" (Jer. 32:17). Apparently the amazement and curiosity of

the people forced her to hide herself even as she praised the Lord for His mercy. Not only was she to have a son, but the birth of her son was evidence that *the Messiah was coming!* These were exciting days indeed!

Faith (Luke 1:26–38)

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, Gabriel brought a second birth announcement, this time to a young virgin in Nazareth named Mary. At least there was variety in his assignments: an old man, a young woman; a priest, a descendent of David, the king; the temple, a common home; Jerusalem, Nazareth; unbelief, faith.

The people in Judah disdained the Jews in Galilee and claimed they were not "kosher" because of their contacts with the Gentiles there (Matt. 4:15). They especially despised the people from Nazareth (John 1:45–46). But God in His grace chose a girl from Nazareth in Galilee to be the mother of the promised Messiah!

When it comes to Mary, people tend to go to one of two extremes. They either magnify her so much that Jesus takes second place (Luke 1:32), or they ignore her and fail to give her the esteem she deserves (Luke 1:48). Elizabeth, filled with the Spirit, called her "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43); and that is reason enough to honor her.

What do we know about Mary? She was a Jewess of the tribe of Judah, a descendant of David, and a virgin (Isa. 7:14). She was engaged to a carpenter in Nazareth named Joseph (Matt. 13:55), and apparently both of them were poor (Lev. 12:8; Luke 2:24). Among the Jews at that time, engagement was almost as binding as marriage and could be broken only by divorce. In fact, the man and the woman were called "husband" and "wife" even before the marriage took place (compare Matt. 1:19 and Luke 2:5). Since Jewish girls married young, it is likely that Mary was a teenager when the angel appeared to her.

Mary's surprise (vv. 26–33). When you consider Gabriel's greeting, you can well understand why Mary was perplexed and afraid: "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you!" (The phrase *Blessed art thou among women* is not found here in many Greek manuscripts. You find it in Luke 1:42.) Why would an angel come to greet *her*? In what way was she "highly favored" ("greatly graced") by God? How was God with her?

Mary's response reveals her humility and honesty before God. She certainly never expected to see an angel and receive special favors from heaven. There was nothing unique about her that such things should happen. If she had been different from other Jewish girls, as some theologians claim she was, then she might have said, "Well, it's about time! I've been expecting you!" No, all of this was a surprise to her.

Gabriel then gave her the good news: she would become the mother of the promised Messiah whom she would name *Jesus* ("Jehovah is salvation"; see Matt. 1:21). Note that Gabriel affirmed both the deity and the humanity of Jesus. As Mary's son, He would be human; as Son of the Highest (Luke 1:32), He would be the Son of God (Luke 1:35). "For unto us a Child is born [His humanity], unto us a Son is given [His deity]" (Isa. 9:6). The emphasis is on the greatness of the Son (cf. Luke 1:15), not the greatness of the mother.

But He would also be a King, inherit David's throne, and reign over Israel forever! If we interpret literally what Gabriel said in Luke 1:30–31, then we should also interpret

literally what he said in Luke 1:32–33. He was referring to God's covenant with David (2 Sam. 7) and His kingdom promises to the people of Israel (Isa. 9:1–7; 11–12; 61; 66; Jer. 33).

Jesus came to earth to be the Saviour of the world, but He also came to fulfill the promises God made to the Jewish fathers (Rom. 15:14). Today, Jesus is enthroned in heaven (Acts 2:29–36), but it is not on *David's* throne. One day Jesus will return and establish His righteous kingdom on earth, and then these promises will be fulfilled.

Mary's surrender (vv. 34–38). Mary knew *what* would happen, but she did not know *how* it would happen. Her question in Luke 1:34 was not an evidence of unbelief (cf. Luke 1:18); rather, it was an expression of faith. She believed the promise, but she did not understand the performance. How could a virgin give birth to a child?

First, Gabriel explained that this would be a miracle, the work of the Holy Spirit of God. Joseph, her betrothed, would not be the father of the child (Matt. 1:18–25), even though Jesus would be legally identified as the son of Joseph (Luke 3:23; 4:22; John 1:45; 6:42). It's possible that some people thought Mary had been unfaithful to Joseph and that Jesus was “born of fornication” (John 8:41). This was a part of the pain that Mary had to bear all her life (Luke 2:35).

Gabriel was careful to point out that the Baby would be a “holy thing” and would not share the sinful human nature of man. Jesus knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21), He did no sin (1 Peter 2:22), and He had no sin (1 John 3:5). His body was prepared for Him by the Spirit of God (Heb. 10:5) who “overshadowed” Mary. That word is applied to the presence of God in the holy of holies in the Jewish tabernacle and temple (Ex. 40:35). Mary's womb became a holy of holies for the Son of God!

The angel ended his message by giving Mary a word of encouragement: her aged relative Elizabeth was with child, proving that “with God nothing shall be impossible.” God gave a similar word to Abraham when He announced the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). That our God can do anything is the witness of many, including Job (Job 42:2), Jeremiah (Jer. 32:17), and even our Lord Jesus (Matt. 19:26). I personally like the translation of this verse found in the 1901 *American Standard Version*: “For no word of God shall be void of power.” God accomplishes His purposes through the power of His Word (Ps. 33:9).

Mary's believing response was to surrender herself to God as His willing servant. She experienced the grace of God (Luke 1:30) and believed the Word of God, and therefore she could be used by the Spirit to accomplish the will of God. A “handmaid” was the lowest kind of female servant, which shows how much Mary trusted God. She belonged totally to the Lord, body (Luke 1:38), soul (Luke 1:46), and spirit (Luke 1:47). What an example for us to follow! (Rom. 12:1–2)

Joy (Luke 1:39–56)

Now that Mary knew she was to become a mother, and that her kinswoman Elizabeth would give birth in three months, she wanted to see Elizabeth so they could rejoice together. “Joy” is the major theme of this section as you see three persons rejoicing in the Lord.

The joy of Elizabeth (vv. 39–45). As Mary entered the house, Elizabeth heard her greeting, was filled with the Spirit, and was told by the Lord why Mary was there. The

one word that filled her lips was “blessed.” Note that she did not say that Mary was blessed *above* women but *among* women, and certainly this is true. While we don't want to ascribe to Mary that which only belongs to God, neither do we want to minimize her place in the plan of God.

The thing that Elizabeth emphasized was Mary's *faith*: “Blessed is she that believed” (Luke 1:45). We are saved “by grace ... through faith” (Eph. 2:8–9). Because Mary believed the Word of God, she experienced the power of God.

The joy of the unborn son, John (vv. 41, 44). This was probably the time when he was filled with the Spirit as the angel had promised (Luke 1:15). Even before his birth, John rejoiced in Jesus Christ, just as he did during his earthly ministry (John 3:29–30). As John the Baptist, he would have the great privilege of introducing the Messiah to the Jewish nation.

The joy of Mary (vv. 46–56). Hers was a joy that compelled her to lift her voice in a hymn of praise. The fullness of the Spirit should lead to joyful praise in our lives (Eph. 5:18–20), and so should the fullness of the Word (Col. 3:16–17). Mary's song contains quotations from and references to the Old Testament Scriptures, especially the Psalms and the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1–10. Mary hid God's Word in her heart and turned it into a song.

This song is called “The Magnificat” because the Latin version of Luke 1:46 is *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*. Her great desire was to magnify the Lord, not herself. She used the phrase “He hath” eight times as she recounted what God had done for three recipients of His blessing.

What God did for Mary (vv. 46–49). To begin with, God had saved her (Luke 1:47), which indicates that Mary was a sinner like all of us and needed to trust the Lord for her eternal salvation. Not only had He saved her, but He had also chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah (Luke 1:48). He had “regarded” her, which means He was mindful of her and looked with favor on her. No doubt there were others who could have been chosen, but God chose her! The Lord had indeed showered His grace on her (see 1 Cor. 1:26–28).

Not only was God mindful of her, but He was also mighty for her, working on her behalf (Luke 1:49). Mary would have no problem singing “Great Things He Hath Done!” (see Luke 8:39; 1 Sam. 12:24; 2 Sam. 7:21–23; and Ps. 126:2–3) Because she believed God and yielded to His will, He performed a miracle in her life and used her to bring the Saviour into the world.

What God did for us (vv. 50–53). In the second stanza of her song, Mary included *all* of God's people who fear Him from generation to generation. We have all received His mercy and experienced His help. Mary named three specific groups to whom God had been merciful: the helpless (Luke 1:51), the humble (Luke 1:52), and the hungry (Luke 1:53).

The common people of that day were almost helpless when it came to justice and civil rights. They were often hungry, downtrodden, and discouraged (Luke 4:16–19), and there was no way for them to “fight the system.” A secret society of patriotic Jewish extremists called “the zealots” used violent means to oppose Rome, but their activities made matters only worse.

Mary saw the Lord turning everything upside down: the weak dethrone the mighty, the humble scatter the proud, the nobodies are exalted, the hungry are filled, and the

rich end up poor! The grace of God works contrary to the thoughts and ways of this world system (1 Cor. 1:26–28). The church is something like that band of men that gathered around David (1 Sam. 22:2).

What God did for Israel (vv. 54–55). “He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). In spite of Israel’s destitute condition, the nation was still God’s servant and He would help the people fulfill His purposes. God was on Israel’s side! He would remember His mercy and keep His promises (Ps. 98:1–3; also see Gen. 12:1–3; 17:19; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Were it not for Israel, Jesus Christ could not have been born into the world.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth until John was born, and then she returned to Nazareth. By then, it was clear that she was pregnant, and no doubt the tongues began to wag. After all, she had been away from home for three months; and why, people were likely asking, had she left in such a hurry? It was then that God gave the good news to Joseph and instructed him what to do (Matt. 1:18–25).

Praise (Luke 1:57–80)

God’s blessing was resting abundantly on Zacharias and Elizabeth. He sent them a baby boy, just as He promised; and they named him “John” just as God had instructed. The Jews looked on children as a gift from God and a “heritage from the Lord” (Pss. 127:3–5; 128:1–3), and rightly so, for they are. Israel would not follow the practices of their pagan neighbors by aborting or abandoning their children. When you consider that 1–1/2 million babies are aborted each year in the United States alone, you can see how far we have drifted from the laws of God.

“The greatest forces in the world are not the earthquakes and the thunderbolts,” said Dr. E.T. Sullivan. “The greatest forces in the world are babies.”

Traditionally, a baby boy would be named after his father or someone else in the family; so the relatives and neighbors were shocked when Elizabeth insisted on the name *John*. Zacharias wrote “His name is John” on a tablet, and that settled it! Immediately God opened the old priest’s mouth, and he sang a hymn that gives us four beautiful pictures of what the coming of Jesus Christ to earth really means.

The opening of a prison door (v. 68). The word *redeem* means “to set free by paying a price.” It can refer to the releasing of a prisoner or the liberating of a slave. Jesus Christ came to earth to bring “deliverance to the captives” (Luke 4:18), salvation to people in bondage to sin and death. Certainly we are unable to set ourselves free; only Christ could pay the price necessary for our redemption (Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18–21).

The winning of a battle (vv. 69–75). In Scripture, a horn symbolizes power and victory (1 Kings 22:11; Ps. 89:17, 24). The picture here is that of an army about to be taken captive, but then help arrives and the enemy is defeated. In the previous picture, the captives were set free; but in this picture, the enemy is defeated *so that he cannot capture more prisoners*. It means total victory for the people of God.

The word *salvation* (Luke 1:69, 71) carries the meaning of “health and soundness.” No matter what the condition of the captives, their Redeemer brings spiritual soundness. When you trust Jesus Christ as Saviour, you are delivered from Satan’s power, moved into God’s kingdom, redeemed, and forgiven (Col. 1:12–14).

Where did the Redeemer come from? He came from the house of David (Luke 1:69), who himself was a great conqueror. God had promised that the Saviour would be a Jew (Gen. 12:1–3), from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), from the family of David (2 Sam. 7:12–16), born in David's city, Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Both Mary (Luke 1:27) and Joseph (Matt. 1:20) belonged to David's line. The coming of the Redeemer was inherent in the covenants God made with His people (Luke 1:72), and it was promised by the prophets (Luke 1:70).

Note that the results of this victory are sanctity and service (Luke 1:74–75). He sets us free, not to do our own will, because that would be bondage, but to do His will and enjoy His freedom.

The canceling of a debt (vv. 76–77). *Remission* means “to send away, to dismiss, as a debt.” All of us are in debt to God because we have broken His law and failed to live up to His standards (Luke 7:40–50). Furthermore, all of us are spiritually bankrupt, unable to pay our debt. But Jesus came and paid the debt for us (Ps. 103:12; John 1:29).

The dawning of a new day (vv. 78–79). *Dayspring* means “sunrise.” The people were sitting in darkness and death, and distress gripped them when Jesus came; but He brought light, life, and peace. It was the dawn of a new day because of the tender mercies of God (see Matt. 4:16).

The old priest had not said anything for nine months, but he certainly compensated for his silence when he sang this song of praise to God! And how joyful he was that his son was chosen by God to prepare the way for the Messiah (Isa. 40:1–3; Mal. 3:1). John was “prophet of the Highest” (Luke 1:76), introducing to Israel “the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32) who was conceived in Mary's womb by “the power of the Highest” (Luke 1:35).

Instead of enjoying a comfortable life as a priest, John lived in the wilderness, disciplining himself physically and spiritually, waiting for the day when God would send him out to prepare Israel for the arrival of the Messiah. People like Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25–38) had been waiting for this day for many years, and soon it would come.

God calls us today to believe His Good News. Those who believe it experience His joy and want to express their praise to Him. It is not enough for us to say that Jesus is a *Saviour*, or even *the Saviour*. With Mary, we must say, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God *my Saviour*” (Luke 1:47, italics mine).

CHAPTER TWO

THE LORD IS COME!

Luke 2

Luke 2 may well be the most familiar and beloved portion in Luke's Gospel. My wife and I still read the first twenty verses together each Christmas Eve, just as we did when our children were growing up. The story is old, but it is ever new; and God's people never tire of it.

Dr. Luke gives us three glimpses into the early years of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Newborn Baby (Luke 2:1–20)

"As weak as a baby!" is a common expression that could not be applied to the Baby Jesus in the manger. While He was as weak as any other baby humanly speaking, He was also the center of power as far as heaven was concerned.

His birth drew Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem (vv. 1–7). Augustus Caesar was ruling, but God was in charge, for He used Caesar's edict to move Mary and Joseph eighty miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill His Word. Rome took a census every fourteen years for both military and tax purposes, and each Jewish male had to return to the city of his fathers to record his name, occupation, property, and family.

When Mary said "Be it unto me according to Thy word" (Luke 1:38), it meant that from then on, her life would be a part of the fulfillment of divine prophecy. God had promised that the Saviour would be a human, not an angel (Gen. 3:15; Heb. 2:16), and a Jew, not a Gentile (Gen. 12:1–3; Num. 24:17). He would be from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), and the family of David (2 Sam. 7:1–17), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) in Bethlehem, the city of David (Micah 5:2).

All of this occurred just as the Scriptures said, and Caesar unknowingly played an important part. A.T. Pierson used to say, "History is His story," and President James A. Garfield called history "the unrolled scroll of prophecy." If God's Word controls our lives, then the events of history only help us fulfill the will of God. "I am watching over My word to perform it," promises the Lord (Jer. 1:12, nasb).

Mary and Joseph were already husband and wife but since they did not consummate the marriage until after Jesus was born, she is called his "espoused wife" (Matt. 1:18–25). The journey must have been very trying for her, but she rejoiced in doing the will of God, and she was no doubt glad to get away from the wagging tongues in Nazareth.

Mothers in that day wrapped their infants in long bands of cloth to give the limbs strength and protection. The word translated "manger" (Luke 2:7, 12, 16) is translated "stall" in Luke 13:15, and can mean either a feeding trough or an enclosure for animals. You see ancient stone troughs even today as you travel in the Holy Land, and it is probable that such a trough cradled the Infant Jesus. Many scholars believe that our Lord was born in a cave where animals were sheltered and not in a wooden shed such as you see in modern manger scenes.

Bethlehem means "house of bread," the ideal birthplace for the Bread of Life (John 6:35). Its rich historic heritage included the death of Rachel and the birth of Benjamin (Gen. 35:16–20; also see Matt. 2:16–18), the marriage of Ruth, and the exploits of David. It is worth noting that the name *Benjamin* means "son of my right hand," and the name *David* means "beloved." Both of these names apply to our Lord, for He is the Beloved Son (Luke 3:22) at God's right hand (Ps. 110:1).

His birth drew the angels from heaven (vv. 8–14). How amazed the angels must have been when they saw the Creator born as a creature, the Word coming as a speechless baby. The best commentary on this is 2 Corinthians 8:9, and the best response from our hearts is wonder and worship. “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16).

The first announcement of the Messiah's birth was given by an angel to some anonymous shepherds. Why shepherds? Why not to priests or scribes? By visiting the shepherds, the angel revealed the grace of God toward mankind. Shepherds were really outcasts in Israel. Their work not only made them ceremonially unclean, but it kept them away from the temple for weeks at a time so that they could not be made clean. God does not call the rich and mighty; He calls the poor and the lowly (Luke 1:51–53; 1 Cor. 1:26–29).

The Messiah came to be both the Good Shepherd (John 10) and the Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world (John 1:29). Perhaps these shepherds were caring for the flocks that would provide sacrifices for the temple services. It was fitting that the good news about God's Shepherd and Lamb be given first to humble shepherds.

Shepherds are not easily fooled. They are practical men of the world who have little to do with fantasy. If they said that they saw angels and went and found the Messiah, then you could believe them. God selected hardworking men to be the first witnesses that His Son had come into the world.

First, one angel appeared (Gabriel?) and gave the glad announcement; and then a chorus of angels joined him and gave an anthem of praise. For the first time in centuries, the glory of God returned to earth. If brave shepherds were afraid at what they saw and heard, then you can be sure it was real!

“Fear not!” is one of the key themes of the Christmas story (Luke 1:13, 30, 74; and see Matt. 1:20). Literally the angel said, “I announce to you good news, a great joy which shall be to all the people.” He used the word which means “to preach the Good News,” a word Luke uses often in both his Gospel and in the Book of Acts. We see here Luke's emphasis on a worldwide Gospel: the Good News is for everybody, not just the Jews.

What was the Good News? Not that God had sent a soldier or a judge or a reformer, but that He had sent a Saviour to meet man's greatest need. It was a message of peace to a world that had known much war. The famous “Pax Romana” (Roman Peace) had been in effect since 27 b.c. but the absence of war doesn't guarantee the presence of peace.

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus said, “While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He cannot give peace of heart for which man yearns more than even for outward peace.”

The Jewish word *shalom* (peace) means much more than a truce in the battles of life. It means well-being, health, prosperity, security, soundness, and completeness. It has to do more with character than circumstances. Life was difficult at that time just as it is today. Taxes were high, unemployment was high, morals were slipping lower, and the military state was in control. Roman law, Greek philosophy, and even Jewish religion could not meet the needs of men's hearts. Then, God sent His Son!

The angels praised God at Creation (Job 38:7), and now they praised Him at the beginning of the new creation. The whole purpose of the plan of salvation is “glory to

God" (see Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). God's glory had dwelt in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34) and in the temple (2 Chron. 7:1–3), but had departed because of the nation's sin (1 Sam. 4:21; Ezek. 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:22–23). Now God's glory was returning to earth in the person of His Son (John 1:14). That lowly manger was a holy of holies because Jesus was there!

His birth drew the shepherds from the fields (vv. 15–20). The phrase "even unto Bethlehem" suggests that these men were located some distance away, but they were willing to make the trip in order to see the newborn Messiah. Certainly they arranged for others to care for their flocks while they hastened to Bethlehem. Halford Luccock called this "the first Christmas rush," but it was certainly different from the Christmas rushes we see today!

The verb *found* in Luke 2:16 means "found after a search." The shepherds knew what to look for: a newborn Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And they found Him! They worshiped Him and marveled at God's grace and goodness and the miracle He had wrought for them.

These shepherds are good examples for us to imitate today. They received by faith the message God sent them and then responded with immediate obedience. After finding the Baby, they reported the good news to others, "glorifying and praising God." *They took the place of the angels!* (Luke 2:13–14) Then they humbly returned to their duties, new men going back to the same old job.

For some reason, shepherds were not permitted to testify in court, but God used some humble shepherds to be the first human witnesses that prophecy had been fulfilled and the Messiah had been born. The angels have never experienced the grace of God, so they can't bear witness as we can. Telling others about the Saviour is a solemn obligation as well as a great privilege, and we who are believers must be faithful.

The Child (Luke 2:21–38)

Dr. Luke now tells us about three important meetings in the temple in Jerusalem: the child Jesus met Moses (Luke 2:20–24), Simeon (Luke 2:25–35), and Anna (Luke 2:36–38).

Moses (vv. 21–24). Note that the word *law* is used five times in Luke 2:21–40. Though He came to deliver His people from the bondage of the Law, Jesus was "made under the Law" and obeyed its commands (Gal. 4:1–7). He did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17–18).

Jesus' parents obeyed the Law first by having the child circumcised when He was eight days old. This was the sign and seal of the covenant that God made with Abraham (Gen. 17), and it was required of every Jewish male who wanted to practice the faith. The Jews were proud to be God's covenant people, and they scornfully called the Gentiles "the uncircumcision" (Eph. 2:11–12). It is unfortunate that circumcision became an empty ritual for many Jews, because it proclaimed an important spiritual truth (Deut. 10:15–20; Rom. 2:28–29).

"His circumcision was His first suffering for us," said the late Donald Grey Barnhouse, a Philadelphia minister and author. It symbolized the work the Saviour did on the cross in dealing with our sin nature (Gal. 6:15; Phil. 3:1–3; Col. 2:10–11). In

obedience to the Lord, Mary and Joseph gave Him the name *Jesus*, which means "Jehovah is salvation" (Matt. 1:21).

But circumcision was only the beginning. When the child was forty days old, Mary and Joseph had to come to the temple for the purification rites described in Leviticus 12. They also had to "redeem" the boy since He was Mary's firstborn (Ex. 13:1–12). They had to pay five shekels to redeem the Redeemer who would one day redeem us with His precious blood (1 Peter 1:18–19). Their humble sacrifice would suggest that they were too poor to bring a lamb (2 Cor. 8:9). But He was the Lamb!

Our Lord's relationship to the Law is an important part of His saving ministry. He was made under the Law (Gal. 4:4); and though He rejected man's religious traditions, He obeyed God's Law perfectly (John 8:46). He bore the curse of the Law for us (Gal. 3:13) and set us free from bondage (Gal. 5:1).

Simeon (vv. 25–35). Simeon and Anna, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, were a part of the faithful Jewish remnant that eagerly looked for their Messiah (Mal. 3:16). Because of his readiness and eagerness to die (Luke 2:29), Simeon is usually pictured as a very old man, but nothing in Scripture supports this. Tradition says he was 113 years old, but it is only tradition.

"The consolation of Israel" means the messianic hope. One of the traditional Jewish prayers is, "May I see the consolation of Israel!" That prayer was answered for Simeon when he saw Jesus Christ in the temple. He was a man who was led by the Spirit of God, taught by the Word of God, and obedient to the will of God; and therefore he was privileged to see the salvation of God. How important it is for people to see God's salvation, Jesus Christ, before they see death.

In Luke 2:29–32 we find Simeon's response to seeing Jesus. This is the fifth and last of the "Christmas songs" in Luke. (Elizabeth, 1:42–45; Mary, 1:46–56; Zacharias, 1:67–79; the angels, 2:13–14). It is first of all a *worship* hymn as he blesses God for keeping His promise and sending the Messiah. He joyfully praises God that he has been privileged to see the Lord's Christ.

But his song is also a *salvation* hymn: "For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation" (Luke 2:30). Now he is ready to die! The word *depart* in the Greek has several meanings, and each of them tells us something about the death of a Christian. It means to release a prisoner, to untie a ship and set sail, to take down a tent (see 2 Cor. 5:1–8), and to unyoke a beast of burden (see Matt. 11:28–30). God's people are not afraid of death because it only frees us from the burdens of this life and leads into the blessings of the next life.

Simeon's song is a *missionary* hymn, which is something unusual for a devout Jew standing in the temple. He sees this great salvation going out to the Gentiles! Jesus has restored the glory to Israel and brought the light to the Gentiles so that all people can be saved (see Luke 2:10). Remember that the compassion of Christ for the whole world is one of Luke's major themes.

Then Simeon stopped praising and started prophesying (Luke 2:34–35), and in his message used three important images: the stone, the sign, and the sword.

The stone is an important Old Testament image of God (Gen. 49:24; Pss. 18:2; 71:3; Deut. 32:31). Messiah would be a "rejected cornerstone" (Ps. 118:22; Luke 20:17–18; Acts 4:11), and the nation of Israel would stumble over Him (Isa. 8:14; Rom. 9:32). Because of Jesus Christ, many in Israel would fall in conviction and then rise in

salvation. (Simeon seems to be speaking about one group, not two.) Even today, God's people Israel stumble over the Cross (1 Cor. 1:23) and do not understand that Jesus is their Rock (1 Peter 2:1–6).

The word *sign* means “a miracle,” not so much as a demonstration of power but as a revelation of divine truth. Our Lord's miracles in John's Gospel are called “signs” because they reveal special truths about Him (John 20:30–31). Jesus Christ is God's miracle; and yet, instead of admiring Him, the people attacked Him and spoke against Him. His birth was a miracle, yet they slandered it (John 8:41). They said His miracles were done in the power of Satan (Matt. 12:22–24) and that His character was questionable (John 8:48, 52; 9:16, 24). They slandered His death (Ps. 22:6–8; Matt. 27:39–44) and lied about His resurrection (Matt. 27:62–66). Today, people are even speaking against His coming again (2 Peter 3).

But the way people speak about Jesus Christ is evidence of what is in their hearts. He is not only the “salvation stone” and the “judgment stone” (Dan. 2:34, 45), but He is also the “touchstone” that exposes what people are really like. “What think ye of Christ?” (Matt. 22:42) is still the most important question for anybody to answer (1 John 4:1–3).

The image of the sword was for Mary alone, and it spoke of the suffering and sorrow she would bear as the mother of the Messiah. (This suggests that Joseph was dead when Jesus began His ministry thirty years later, or Joseph would have been included.) The Greek word means a large sword such as Goliath used (1 Sam. 17:51), and the verb means “constantly keep on piercing.”

During our Lord's life and ministry, Mary did experience more and more sorrow until one day she stood by His cross and saw Him suffer and die (John 19:25–27). However, without minimizing her devotion, Mary's personal pain must not in any way be made a part of Christ's redemptive work. Only He could die for the sins of the world (1 Tim. 2:5–6).

How much did Mary and Joseph understand of God's great plan for this miracle Child? We don't know, but we do know that Mary stored up all these things and pondered them (Luke 2:19, 51). The word means “to put things together”; Mary sought for some pattern that would help her understand God's will. There were times when Mary misunderstood Him (Mark 3:31–35), and this would add to her suffering. The last time you find Mary named in Scripture, she is in the Upper Room, praying with the other believers (Acts 1:14).

Anna (vv. 36–38). Her name means “grace,” and she was a godly widow of great age. There are forty-three references to women in Luke's Gospel, and of the twelve widows mentioned in the Bible, Luke has three (Luke 2:36–40; 7:11–15; 21:1–4; and note 18:1–8). It isn't difficult to see the heart of a physician in Luke's presentation.

Widows didn't have an easy time in that day; often they were neglected and exploited in spite of the commandment of the Law (Ex. 22:21–22; Deut. 10:17–18; 14:29; Isa. 1:17). Anna devoted herself to “serving God by worship” through fastings and prayers. She moved from the tribe of Asher and remained in the temple, waiting for the appearing of God's promised Messiah (see 1 Tim. 5:3–16).

God's timing is always perfect. Anna came up just as Simeon was praising the Lord for the Child Jesus, so she joined in the song! I would like to have heard these elderly people singing in the temple! Their praise was inspired by the Spirit of God, and God accepted it. But Anna did much more than sing; she also spread the Good News among

the other faithful members of “the remnant” who were waiting for the redemption of Israel. The excitement began to spread as more and more people heard the Good News.

Anna was a prophetess, which meant she had a special gift of declaring and interpreting God's message. Other prophetesses in Scripture are Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Hulduh (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), and the wife of Isaiah (Isa. 8:3). The evangelist Philip had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:8–9).

The Youth (Luke 2:39–52)

Having obeyed the Law in everything, Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth, which would be our Lord's home until He started His official ministry. There were many Jewish men with the name *Jesus* (Joshua), so He would be known as “Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 2:22); and His followers would be called “Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5; see Matt. 2:23). His enemies used the name scornfully and Pilate even hung it on the cross (Matt. 21:11), but Jesus was not ashamed to use it when He spoke from heaven (Acts 22:8). That which men scorned (John 1:46), Jesus Christ took to heaven and made glorious!

What did Jesus do during the “hidden years” at Nazareth? Dr. Luke reports that the lad developed physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually (Luke 2:40, 52). In His incarnation, the Son of God set aside the independent use of His own divine attributes and submitted Himself wholly to the Father (Phil. 2:1–11). There are deep mysteries here that no one can fully understand or explain, but we have no problem accepting them by faith.

Jesus did not perform any miracles as a Boy, traditions notwithstanding, because the turning of water into wine was the beginning of His miracles (John 2:1–11). He worked with Joseph in the carpenter shop (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3) and apparently ran the business after Joseph died. Joseph and Mary had other children during those years (Matt. 13:55–56; John 7:1–10), for the “until” of Matthew 1:25 indicates that the couple eventually had normal marital relations.

Luke gives us only one story from our Lord's youthful years. Joseph and Mary were devout Jews who observed Passover in Jerusalem every year. Three times a year the Jewish men were required to go to Jerusalem to worship (Deut. 16:16), but not all of them could afford to do so. If they chose one feast, it was usually the Passover; and they tried to take their family with them, for it was the most important feast on the Jewish calendar.

People traveled to the feasts in caravans, the women and children leading the way and setting the pace, and the men and young men following behind. Relatives and whole villages often traveled together and kept an eye on each other's children. At the age of twelve, Jesus could easily have gone from one group to another and not been missed. Joseph would think Jesus was with Mary and the other children, while Mary would suppose He was with Joseph and the men, or perhaps with one of their relatives.

They had gone a day's journey from Jerusalem when they discovered that Jesus was missing. It took a day to return to the city and another day for them to find Him. During those three days, Joseph and Mary had been “greatly distressed” (Luke 2:48,

“sorrowing”). This word is used to describe Paul’s concern for lost Israel (Rom. 9:2) as well as the pain of lost souls in hades (Luke 16:24–25).

It is worth noting that Luke’s phrase “Joseph and His mother” (Luke 2:43) suggests the Virgin Birth, while the phrase “Thy father and I” (Luke 2:48) indicates that Joseph was accepted as the legal father of Jesus (see Luke 3:23). To use Luke 2:48 to disprove the Virgin Birth is stretching a point.

Whether Jesus had spent the entire time in the temple, we don’t know. It certainly would have been safe there and the Heavenly Father was watching over Him. We do know that when Joseph and Mary found Him, He was in the midst of the teachers, asking them questions and listening to their answers; and the teachers were amazed at both His questions and His answers.

Mary’s loving rebuke brought a respectful but astonished reply from Jesus: “Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49, nasb) It can also be translated “in the things of My Father” (nasb margin), but the idea is the same. Jesus was affirming His divine sonship and His mission to do the will of the Father.

The word *must* was often on our Lord’s lips: “I must preach” (Luke 4:43); “The Son of man must suffer” (Luke 9:22); the Son of man “must be lifted up” (John 3:14). Even at the age of twelve, Jesus was moved by a divine compulsion to do the Father’s will.

Since Jesus “increased in wisdom” (Luke 2:52), we wonder how much He understood God’s divine plan at that time. We must not assume that at the age of twelve He was omniscient. Certainly He grew in His comprehension of those mysteries as He communed with His Father and was taught by the Spirit.

One thing is sure: Joseph and Mary didn’t understand! This was a part of the pain from “the sword” that Simeon had promised her (Luke 2:35), and no doubt it happened again and again as the boy matured. Years later, during His ministry, our Lord’s family didn’t understand Him (Luke 8:19–21; John 7:1–5).

Jesus is a wonderful example for all young people to follow. He grew in a balanced way (Luke 2:52) without neglecting any part of life, and His priority was to do the will of His Father (see Matt. 6:33). He knew how to listen (Luke 2:46) and how to ask the right questions. He learned how to work, and He was obedient to His parents.

The Boy Jesus grew up in a large family, in a despised city, nurtured by parents who were probably poor. The Jewish religion was at an all-time low, the Roman government was in control, and society was in a state of fear and change. Yet when Jesus emerged from Nazareth, eighteen years later, the Father was able to say of Him, “Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22).

May the Father be able to say that about us!

CHAPTER THREE

THIS IS THE SON OF GOD!

Luke 3–4

If Socrates would enter the room, we should rise and do him honor,” said Napoleon Bonaparte. “But if Jesus Christ came into the room, we should fall down on our knees and worship Him.”

Dr. Luke would have agreed with the famous French general, for in these two chapters, he makes it clear that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is indeed the Son of God. Notice the witnesses that he presents, all of whom declare that Jesus is God's Son.

John the Baptist (Luke 3:1–20)

When he came (vv. 1–2). When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, no prophetic voice had been heard in Israel for 400 years. His coming was a part of God's perfect timing, for everything that relates to God's Son is always on schedule (Gal. 4:4; John 2:4; 13:1). The fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar was a.d. 28/29.

Luke named seven different men in Luke 3:1–2, including a Roman emperor, a governor, three tetrarchs (rulers over a fourth part of an area), and two Jewish high priests. But God's Word was not sent to any of them! Instead, the message of God came to John the Baptist, a humble Jewish prophet.

How he came (v. 3). Resembling the Prophet Elijah in manner and dress (Luke 1:17; Matt. 3:4; 2 Kings 1:8), John came to the area near the Jordan River, preaching and baptizing. He announced the arrival of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 3:3) and urged the people to repent. Centuries before, Israel had crossed the Jordan (a national baptism) to claim their Promised Land. Now God summoned them to turn from sin and enter His spiritual kingdom.

Keep in mind that John did much more than preach against sin; he also proclaimed the Gospel. The word *preached* in Luke 3:18 gives us the English word *evangelize* (“to preach the Good News”). John introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and told people to trust in Him. John was only the best man at the wedding: Jesus was the Bridegroom (John 3:25–30). John rejoiced at the opportunity of introducing people to the Saviour, and then getting out of the way.

A unique feature about John's ministry was baptism (Luke 20:1–8; John 1:25–28). Baptism was nothing new to the people, for the Jews baptized Gentile proselytes. But John baptized *Jews*, and this was unusual. Acts 19:1–5 explains that John's baptism *looked forward* to the coming of the Messiah, while Christian baptism *looks back* to the finished work of Christ.

But there was something even beyond John's baptism, and that was the baptism that the Messiah would administer (Luke 3:16). He would baptize believers with the Holy Spirit, and this began at Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1ff). Today, the moment a sinner trusts Christ, he or she is baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

What is the “baptism of fire”? It does not refer to the “tongues of fire” at Pentecost, for tongues over a person's head could hardly be called a “baptism.” John's use of the symbol of “fire” in Luke 3:9 and 17 indicates that he is talking about *judgment* and not blessing. In a.d. 70 the nation experienced a baptism of fire when Titus and the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the people. All unbelievers will experience a baptism of judgment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11–15).

Why he came (vv. 4–20). The illustrations used in the chapter help us understand the ministry God gave to John.

To begin with, John the Baptist was *a voice* “crying in the wilderness” (Luke 3:4; also see Isa. 40:1–5 and John 1:23). He was like the herald who went before the royal procession to make sure the roads were ready for the king. Spiritually speaking, the nation of Israel was living in a “wilderness” of unbelief, and the roads to spiritual reality were twisted and in disrepair. The corruption of the priesthood (instead of one, there were *two* high priests!) and the legalistic hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees had weakened the nation spiritually. The people desperately needed to hear a voice from God, and John was that faithful voice.

It was John's task to prepare the nation for the Messiah and then present the Messiah to them (Luke 1:16–17, 76–77; John 1:6–8, 15–34). He rebuked their sins and announced God's salvation, for without conviction there can be no conversion.

John is also compared to *a farmer* who chops down useless trees (Luke 3:9) and who winnows the grain to separate the wheat from the chaff (Luke 3:17). Like some “religious sinners” today, many of the Jews thought they were destined for heaven simply because they were descendants of Abraham (see John 8:31–34; Rom. 4:12–17; Gal. 3:26–29). John reminded them that God gets to the *root* of things and is not impressed with religious profession that does not produce fruit. In the last judgment, the true believers (wheat) will be gathered by God, while the lost sinners (chaff) will be burned in the fire.

In Luke 3:7, John pictured the self-righteous sinners as snakes that slithered out of the grass because a fire was coming! Jesus compared the Pharisees to vipers (Matt. 23:33) because their self-righteousness and unbelief made them the children of the devil (John 8:44–45; Rev. 20:2). How tragic that the religious leaders refused to obey John's message and submit to his baptism (Luke 20:1–8). They not only failed to enter the kingdom themselves, but their bad example and false teaching kept other people from entering.

John the Baptist was also *a teacher* (Luke 3:12). He not only preached publicly, but he also had a personal ministry to the people, telling them how to practice their new faith (Luke 3:10–14). He told them not to be selfish but to share their blessings with others (see Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37).

Even the tax collectors came to John for counsel. These men were despised by their fellow Jews because they worked for the Romans and usually extorted money from the people. Luke emphasized the fact that Jesus was the friend of tax collectors (Luke 5:27ff; 15:1–2; 19:1–10). John did not tell them to quit their jobs but to do their work honestly.

Likewise, the soldiers were not condemned for their vocation. Rather, John told them to refrain from using their authority to get personal gain. These were probably Jewish soldiers attached to the temple or to the court of one of the Jewish rulers. It was not likely that Roman soldiers would ask a Jewish prophet for counsel.

John was faithful in his ministry to prepare the hearts of the people and then to present their Messiah to them. He clearly stated that Jesus was “the Lord” (Luke 3:4) and the Son of God (John 1:34). Because John rebuked Herod Antipas for his adulterous marriage to Herodias, he was imprisoned by the king and finally beheaded.

However, he had faithfully finished his God-given assignment and prepared the people to meet the Messiah, the Son of God.

The Father and the Spirit (Luke 3:21–38)

One day, after all the others had been baptized, Jesus presented Himself for baptism at the Jordan; and John at first refused to comply (Matt. 3:13–15). He knew that Jesus of Nazareth was the perfect Son of God who had no need to repent of sin. Why then was the sinless Son of God baptized?

To begin with, in His baptism He identified with the sinners that He came to save. Also, His baptism was the official start of His ministry (Acts 1:21–22; 10:37–38). He was “about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23), and the Jewish Levites began their work at age thirty (see Num. 4:3, 35). But our Lord’s words tell us the main reason for His baptism: “for in this way it is fitting for Us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15, nasb). In what way? In the way pictured by His baptism in the Jordan. Many Bible scholars agree that New Testament baptism was by immersion, which is a picture of death, burial, and resurrection. *Our Lord’s baptism in water was a picture of His work of redemption* (Matt. 20:22; Luke 12:50). It was through His baptism of suffering on the cross that God “fulfilled all righteousness.” (The “Us” in Matthew 3:15 does not mean John and Jesus. It means the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.)

When our Lord came up from the water, the Father spoke from heaven and identified Him as the beloved Son of God, and the Spirit visibly came upon Jesus in the form of a dove. Those who deny the Trinity have a difficult time explaining this event.

This is the first of three recorded occasions when the Father spoke from heaven. The second was when Jesus was transfigured (Luke 9:28–36), and the third was during His last week before the cross (John 12:28).

Only Luke mentions that Jesus was praying, and this was only one of many occasions (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28–29; 11:1; 23:34, 46). As the perfect Son of man, Jesus depended on His Father to meet His needs, and that was why He prayed.

Luke interrupted his narrative at this point to give us a genealogy of Jesus. Matthew’s genealogy (Matt. 1:1–17) begins with Abraham and moves forward to Jesus, while Luke’s begins with Jesus and moves backward to Adam. Matthew gives us the genealogy of Joseph, the legal foster-father of Jesus, while Luke gives us the genealogy of His mother Mary. Luke 3:23 can be translated: “When He began His ministry, Jesus was about thirty years old (being supposedly the son of Joseph), the son of Heli [an ancestor of Mary].” Mary herself would not be mentioned because it was unusual for women to be named in the official genealogies, though Matthew names four of them (Matt. 1:3, 5, 16).

By putting the genealogy here, Luke reminded his readers that the Son of God was also the Son of man, born into this world, identified with the needs and problems of mankind. And, since Joseph and Mary were both in David’s line, these genealogies prove that Jesus of Nazareth has the legal right to David’s throne (Luke 1:32–33).

Satan (Luke 4:1–13)

Even the enemy must admit that Jesus is the Son of God. "If Thou be the Son of God" (Luke 4:3, 9) is not a supposition but an affirmation. It means "in view of the fact that You are the Son of God" (wuest). In fact, the fact of His deity was the basis for the first of the three temptations. "Since You are the Son of God," Satan argued, "why be hungry? You can change stones into bread!" Satan wanted Jesus to disobey the Father's will by using His divine power for His own purposes.

Why was Jesus tempted? For one thing, it was proof that the Father's approval was deserved (Luke 4:22). Jesus is indeed the "beloved Son" who always does whatever pleases His Father (John 8:29). Also, in His temptation, Jesus exposed the tactics of the enemy and revealed to us how we can overcome when we are tempted. This experience helped prepare our Lord for His present ministry as our sympathetic High Priest, and we may come to Him for the help we need to overcome the tempter (Heb. 2:16–18; 4:14–16). The first Adam was tempted in a beautiful Garden and failed. The Last Adam was tempted in a dangerous wilderness (Mark 1:13) and succeeded.

We have at our disposal the same spiritual resources that Jesus used when He faced and defeated Satan: prayer (Luke 3:22), the Father's love (Luke 3:23), the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:1), and the Word of God ("It is written"). Plus, we have in heaven the interceding Saviour who has defeated the enemy completely. Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us, but God can use these difficult experiences to put the best into us. Temptation is Satan's weapon to defeat us, but it can become God's tool to build us (see James 1:1–8, 13–17).

In the first temptation, Satan suggested that there must be something wrong with the Father's love since His "beloved Son" was hungry. In years past Israel hungered in the wilderness, and God sent them bread from heaven; so surely Jesus could use His divine power to feed Himself and save His life. Satan subtly used this same approach on Eve: "God is holding out on you! Why can't you eat of every tree in the Garden? If He really loved you, He would share everything with you!"

But the test was even more subtle than that, for Satan was asking Jesus to *separate the physical from the spiritual*. In the Christian life, eating is a spiritual activity, and we can use even our daily food to glorify God (Rom. 14:20–21; 1 Cor. 10:31). Whenever we label different spheres of our lives "physical," "material," "financial," or "spiritual," we are bound to leave God out of areas where He rightfully belongs. Christ must be first in *everything*, or He is first in nothing (Matt. 6:33). It is better to be hungry in the will of God than satisfied out of the will of God.

When our Lord quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, He put the emphasis on the word *man*. As the eternal Son of God, He had *power* to do anything; but as the humble Son of man, He had *authority* to do only that which the Father willed. (Note carefully John 5:17, 30; 8:28; 10:17–18; 15:10, 15.) As the Servant, Jesus did not use His divine attributes for selfish purposes (Phil. 2:5–8). Because He was man, He hungered; but He trusted the Father to meet His needs in His own time and His own way.

You and I need bread for the body (Matt. 6:11), but we must not live by physical bread alone. We also need food for the inner person to satisfy our spiritual needs. This food is the Word of God (Ps. 119:103; Jer. 15:16; 1 Peter 2:2). What digestion is to the body, meditation is to the soul. As we read the Word and meditate on it, we receive spiritual health and strength for the inner person, and this enables us to obey the will of God.

We do not know why Luke reversed the second and third temptations, but since he did not claim to record the events in order, he is not contradicting Matthew 4:1–11. The word *then* in Matthew 4:5 indicates that Matthew's order is the correct one. We do seem to have in Luke's order a parallel to 1 John 2:16: the lust of the flesh (stones into bread), the lust of the eyes (the world's kingdoms and glory), and the pride of life (jump from the pinnacle of the temple); but it's doubtful that Luke had this in mind.

The Father had already promised to give the Son all the kingdoms of the world (Ps. 2:7–8), but first the Son had to suffer and die (John 12:23–33; Rev. 5:8–10). The suffering must come first, then the glory (Luke 24:25–27). The adversary offered Jesus these same kingdoms if He would *once* worship him, and this would eliminate the necessity of His going to the cross (note Matt. 16:21–23). Satan has always wanted to take God's place and receive worship (Isa. 14:13–14).

As the prince of this world, Satan has a certain amount of delegated authority from God (John 12:31; 14:30). One day he will share this authority with the Antichrist, the man of sin, who will rule the world for a brief time (Rev. 13). Satan's offer to Christ was valid, but his terms were unacceptable; and the Saviour refused.

Again, Jesus quoted God's Word, this time Deuteronomy 6:13. Satan had said nothing about *service*, but Jesus knew that whatever we worship, we will serve. Service to the Lord is true freedom, but service to Satan is terrible bondage. God's pattern is to start with suffering and end with glory (1 Peter 5:10), while Satan's pattern is to start with glory and end with suffering. Satan wants us to sacrifice the eternal for the temporary and take the "easy way."

There are no "shortcuts" in the Christian life, and there is no easy way to spiritual victory and maturity. If the perfect Son of God had to hang on a tree before He could sit on the throne, then His disciples should not expect an easier way of life (see Luke 9:22–26; Acts 24:22).

Satan questioned the Father's love when he tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread. He questioned His hope when he offered Jesus the world's kingdoms this side of the Cross (see Heb. 12:1–3). Satan questioned the Father's faithfulness when he asked Jesus to jump from the temple and prove that the Father would keep His promise (Ps. 91:11–12). Thus, the enemy attacked the three basic virtues of the Christian life—faith, hope, and love.

The pinnacle was probably a high point at the southeast corner of the temple, far above the Kidron Valley. Satan can tempt us even in the Holy City at the highest part of the holy temple! Following the example of Jesus, Satan decided to quote Scripture, and he selected Psalm 91:11–12. Of course, he misquoted the promise and besides he omitted "in all thy ways."

When a child of God is in the will of God, he can claim the Father's protection and care. But if he willfully gets into trouble and expects God to rescue him, then he is tempting God. (For an example of this, see Ex. 17:1–7.) We tempt God when we "force" Him (or dare Him) to act contrary to His Word. It is a dangerous thing to try God's patience, even though He is indeed long-suffering and gracious.

Our Lord's reply was, "on the other hand, it is written" (Matt. 4:7, NASB); and He quoted Deuteronomy 6:16. *Jesus balanced Scripture with Scripture to get the total expression of God's will.* If you isolate verses from their contexts, or passages from the total revelation of Scripture, you can prove almost anything from the Bible. Almost every

false cult claims to be based on the teachings of the Bible. When we get our orders from God by picking out verses from here and there in the Bible, we are not living by faith. We are living by chance and tempting the Lord. "For whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23), and "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17, NKJV).

Jesus came out of the wilderness a victor, but Satan did not give up. He watched for other opportunities to tempt the Saviour away from the Father's will. "Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle," said Andrew Bonar; and he was right.

The Scriptures (Luke 4:14–30)

The events recorded in John 1:19–4:45 took place at this time, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke did not record them. They moved right into the Lord's ministry in Galilee, and Luke alone reports His visit to His hometown of Nazareth. By now, the news had spread widely about the miracle-worker from Nazareth; so His family, friends, and neighbors were anxious to see and hear Him.

It was our Lord's custom to attend public worship, a custom His followers should imitate today (Heb. 10:24–25). He might have argued that the "religious system" was corrupt, or that He didn't need the instruction; but instead, He made His way on the Sabbath to the place of prayer.

A typical synagogue service opened with an invocation for God's blessing and then the recitation of the traditional Hebrew confession of faith (Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–21). This was followed by prayer and the prescribed readings from the Law and from the Prophets, with the reader paraphrasing the Hebrew Scriptures in Aramaic.

This was followed by a brief sermon given by one of the men of the congregation or perhaps by a visiting rabbi (see Acts 13:14–16). If a priest was present, the service closed with a benediction. Otherwise, one of the laymen prayed and the meeting was dismissed.

Jesus was asked to read the Scripture text and to give the sermon. The passage He read included Isaiah 61:1–2, and He selected it for His "text." The Jewish rabbis interpreted this passage to refer to the Messiah, and the people in the synagogue knew it. You can imagine how shocked they were when Jesus boldly said that it was written about Him and that He had come to usher in the "acceptable year of the Lord."

The reference here is the "Year of Jubilee" described in Leviticus 25. Every seventh year was a "Sabbatical year" for the nation, when the land was allowed to rest; and every fiftieth year (after seven Sabbaticals) was set apart as the "Year of Jubilee." The main purpose of this special year was the balancing of the economic system: slaves were set free and returned to their families, property that was sold reverted to the original owners, and all debts were canceled. The land lay fallow as man and beast rested and rejoiced in the Lord.

Jesus applied all of this to His own ministry, not in a political or economic sense, but in a physical and spiritual sense. He had certainly brought Good News of salvation to bankrupt sinners and healing to brokenhearted and rejected people. He had delivered many from blindness and from bondage to demons and disease. Indeed, it was a spiritual "Year of Jubilee" for the nation of Israel!

The problem was that His listeners would not believe in Him. They saw Him only as the son of Mary and Joseph, the Boy they had watched grow up in their own city. Furthermore, they wanted Him to perform in Nazareth the same miracles He had done in Capernaum, but He refused. That's the meaning of the phrase, "Physician, heal thyself." Do a miracle!

At first, they admired the way He taught, but it didn't take long for their admiration to turn into antagonism. Why? *Because Jesus began to remind them of God's goodness to the Gentiles!* The Prophet Elijah bypassed all the Jewish widows and helped a Gentile widow in Sidon (1 Kings 17:8–16), and his successor Elisha healed a Gentile leper from Syria (2 Kings 5:1–15). Our Lord's message of grace was a blow to the proud Jewish exclusivism of the congregation, and they would not repent. Imagine this hometown Boy saying that Jews had to be saved by grace just like the pagan Gentiles!

The congregation was so angry, they took action to kill Jesus! St. Augustine said, "They love truth when it enlightens them, but hate truth when it accuses them." That applies well to many congregations today, people who want "gracious words" (Luke 4:22) but who don't want to face the truth (see John 1:17).

In spite of the unbelief of the people in Nazareth, the Scriptures declared that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Son, the Messiah sent to fulfill His promises. The people who do not want Him and who reject "the acceptable year of the Lord" will one day face "the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. 61:2). How significant that Jesus stopped reading at that very place!

The Demons (Luke 4:31–44)

Jesus left Nazareth and set up His headquarters in Capernaum (Matt. 4:13–16), the home of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. He taught regularly in the synagogue and astonished the people by the authority of His message (see Matt. 7:28–29). He further astonished them by His authority over the demons.

Why would a demonized man attend the synagogue? Did he know Jesus would be there? Our Lord did not want the demons to bear witness to Him, so He told, them to be still and He cast them out. Of course, the demons know that Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 4:34, 41); and knowing this, they tremble (James 2:19).

After the service, Jesus went to Peter's house, and there He healed Peter's mother-in-law. (Dr. Luke noted that she had a "great fever.") At sundown, when the Sabbath had ended and healing was permissible, a host of people brought their sick and afflicted to Peter's house and asked Jesus to help them. Again, He silenced the demons who confessed Him to be the Son of God.

The Lord must have been weary after such a demanding day, and yet He was up early the next morning to pray (Mark 1:35). It was in prayer that He found His strength and power for service, and so must we.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DIFFERENCE JESUS MAKES

Luke 5

Jesus was concerned about individuals. He preached to great crowds, but His message was always to the individual; and He took time to help people personally. His purpose was to transform them and then send them out to share His message of forgiveness with others. Luke describes in this chapter our Lord's meetings with four individuals and the changes they experienced because they trusted Him.

From Failure to Success (Luke 5:1–11)

This event is not parallel to the one described in Matthew 4:18–22 and Mark 1:16–20. In those accounts, Peter and Andrew were busy fishing, but in this account they had fished all night and caught nothing and were washing their nets. (If nets are not washed and stretched out to dry, they rot and break.) Jesus had enlisted Peter, Andrew, James, and John earlier, and they had traveled with Him in Capernaum and Galilee (Mark 1:21–39), but then they went back to their trade. Now He would call them to a life of full-time discipleship.

It is possible that at least seven of the disciples were fishermen (John 21:1–3). Consider the fact that fishermen generally have the qualities that make for success in serving the Lord. It takes courage and daring, patience and determination to work on the seas; and it also takes a great deal of faith. Fishermen must be willing to work together (they used nets, not hooks) and help one another. They must develop the skills necessary to get the job done quickly and efficiently.

If I had fished all night and caught nothing, I would probably be *selling* my nets, not washing them to get ready to go out again! But true fishermen don't quit. Peter kept on working while Jesus used his ship as a platform from which to address the huge crowd on the shore. "Every pulpit is a fishing boat," said Dr. J. Vernon McGee, "a place to give out the Word of God and attempt to catch fish."

But there was another side to this request: Peter was a "captive audience" as he sat in the ship listening to the Word of God. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17, nkjv). In a short time, Peter would have to exercise faith, and Jesus was preparing him. First He said, "Thrust out a little"; and then, when Peter was ready, He commanded, "Launch out into the deep." If Peter had not obeyed the first seemingly insignificant command, he would never have participated in a miracle.

Peter must have been surprised when Jesus took command of the ship and its crew. After all, Jesus was a carpenter by trade (Mark 6:3), and what do carpenters know about fishing? It was a well-known fact that, in the Sea of Galilee, you caught fish at night in the shallow water, not in the daytime in the deep water. What Jesus asked Peter to do was contrary to all of his training and experience, but Peter obeyed. The key was his faith in the Word of God: "Nevertheless, at Thy word" (Luke 5:5).

The word translated "Master" (Luke 5:5) is used only by Luke and it has a variety of meanings, all of which speak of authority: chief commander, magistrate, governor of a city, and president of a college. Peter was willing to submit to the authority of Jesus, even though he did not understand all that the Lord was doing. And remember, a great crowd was watching from the shore.

How people respond to success is one indication of their true character. Instead of claiming the valuable catch for themselves, Peter and Andrew called their partners to share it. We are not reservoirs, but channels of blessing, to share with others what God has graciously given to us.

From Sickness to Health (Luke 5:12–16)

Here was a man who *needed to be changed*, for he was a leper. Among the Jews, several skin diseases were classified as leprosy, including our modern Hansen's disease. In spite of modern medical advances, an estimated 10 million people around the world have leprosy. One form of leprosy attacks the nerves so that the victim cannot feel pain. Infection easily sets in, and this leads to degeneration of the tissues. The limb becomes deformed and eventually falls off.

It was the task of the Jewish priest to examine people to determine whether they were lepers (Lev. 13). Infected people were isolated and could not return to normal society until declared "cleansed." Leprosy was used by Isaiah as a picture of sin (Isa. 1:4–6), and the detailed instructions in Leviticus 13–14 would suggest that more was involved in the procedure than maintaining public health.

Like sin, leprosy is deeper than the skin (Lev. 13:3) and cannot be helped by mere "surface" measures (see Jer. 6:14). Like sin, leprosy spreads (Lev. 13:7–8); and as it spreads, it defiles (Lev. 13:44–45). Because of his defilement, a leprous person had to be isolated outside the camp (Lev. 13:46), and lost sinners one day will be isolated in hell. People with leprosy were looked on as "dead" (Num. 12:12), and garments infected with leprosy were fit only for the fire (Lev. 13:52). How important it is for lost sinners to trust Jesus Christ and get rid of their "leprosy"!

This man not only needed to be changed, but *he wanted to be changed*. Lepers were required to keep their distance, but he was so determined that he broke the Law and approached the Lord Jesus personally. Throughout his Gospel, Luke makes it clear that Jesus was the Friend of the outcast, and they could come to Him for help. The man humbled himself before the Lord and asked for mercy.

By the grace and power of God, this man *was changed!* In fact, Jesus even touched the man, which meant that He became unclean Himself. This is a beautiful picture of what Jesus has done for lost sinners: He became sin for us that we might be made clean (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). Jesus is not only willing to save (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9), but He is also able to save (Heb. 7:25); and He can do it now (2 Cor. 6:2).

Jesus encouraged the man to see the priest and to obey the rules for restoration given in Leviticus 14. The ceremony is a picture of the work of Jesus Christ in His incarnation, His death, and His resurrection. All of this was done over running water, a symbol of the Holy Spirit of God. This sacrifice reminds us that Jesus had to die for us in order to deliver us from our sins.

Jesus instructed the man not to reveal who had healed him, but the cleansed leper became an enthusiastic witness for the Lord. (Jesus commands us to tell everybody, and we keep quiet!) Because of this witness, great multitudes came to Jesus for help, and He graciously ministered to them. But Jesus was not impressed by these great crowds, for He knew that most of the people wanted only His healing power and not His salvation. He often left the crowds and slipped away into a quiet place to pray and seek the Father's help. That's a good example for all of God's servants to follow.

From Guilt to Forgiveness (Luke 5:17–26)

Jesus returned to Capernaum, possibly to Peter's house, and the crowd gathered to see Him heal and to hear Him teach. But a new element was added: some of the official religious leaders from Jerusalem were present to investigate what He was doing. They had every right to do this since it was the responsibility of the elders to prevent false prophets from leading the people astray (Deut. 13; 18:15–22). They had interrogated John the Baptist (John 1:19–34) and now they would examine Jesus of Nazareth.

Since this is the first time the scribes and Pharisees are mentioned in Luke's Gospel, it would be good for us to get acquainted with them. The word *Pharisee* comes from a Hebrew word that means "to divide, to separate." The scribes and Pharisees probably developed out of the ministry of Ezra, the priest, who taught the Jewish people to obey the Law of Moses and be separate from the heathen nations around them (Ezra 9–10; Neh. 8–9). The great desire of the scribes and Pharisees was to understand and magnify God's Law and apply it in their daily lives.

However, the movement soon became quite legalistic and its leaders laid so many burdens on the people that it was impossible to "serve the Lord with gladness" (Ps. 100:2). Furthermore, many of the Pharisees were hypocrites and did not practice what they preached (see Matt. 15:1–20; 23:1–36). In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), Jesus exposed the shallowness of pharisaical religion. He explained that true righteousness is a matter of the heart and not external religious practices alone.

The scribes and Pharisees picked a good time to attend one of our Lord's meetings, because God's power was present in a special way and Jesus would heal a man with palsy. If leprosy illustrates the corruption and defilement of sin, then palsy is a picture of the paralysis that sin produces in a life. But Jesus would do more than heal the man; He would also forgive his sins and teach the crowd a lesson in forgiveness.

The paralytic was unable to come to Jesus himself, but he was fortunate enough to have four friends who were able to get him to Jesus. These four men are examples of how friends ought to minister to one another and help needy sinners come to the Saviour.

To begin with, they had faith that Jesus would heal him (Luke 5:20); and it is faith that God honors. Their love for the man united them in their efforts so that nothing discouraged them, not even the crowd at the door. (How tragic it is when spectators stand in the way of people who want to meet Jesus. Zaccheus would have this problem. See Luke 19:3.) When they could not get in at the door, they went on the roof, removed the tiling, and lowered the man on his mat right in front of the Lord!

Jesus could have simply healed the man and sent him home, but instead, He used the opportunity to teach a lesson about sin and forgiveness. Certainly it was easier to

say to the man, "Your sins be forgiven!" than it was to say, "Rise up and walk!" Why? *Because nobody could prove whether or not his sins really were forgiven!* Jesus took the harder approach and healed the man's body, something everybody in the house could witness.

Was the man's affliction the result of his sin? We do not know, but it is probable (see John 5:1–14). The healing of his body was an outward evidence of the spiritual healing within. Jesus astounded the religious leaders by claiming to have authority both to heal the body and to forgive sins. The people had already acknowledged His authority to teach and to cast out demons (Luke 4:32, 36), but now He claimed authority to forgive sins as well. The scribes and Pharisees could not deny the miracle of healing, but they considered His claim to forgive sins nothing less than blasphemy, for only God can forgive sins. For making that kind of statement, Jesus could be stoned, because He was claiming to be God.

In Luke 5:24, we have the first recorded use of the title Son of man in Luke's Gospel, where it is found twenty-three times. Our Lord's listeners were familiar with this title. It was used of the Prophet Ezekiel over eighty times, and Daniel applied it to the Messiah (Dan. 7:13, 18). "Son of man" was our Lord's favorite name for Himself; this title is found at least eighty-two times in the Gospel record. Occasionally He used the title "Son of God" (Matt. 27:43; Luke 22:70; John 5:25; 9:35; 10:36; 11:4), but "Son of man" was used more. Certainly the Jewish people caught the messianic character of this title, but it also identified Him with the people He came to save (Luke 19:10). Like Ezekiel, the Old Testament "son of man," Jesus "sat where they sat" (Ezek. 3:15).

The healing was immediate and the people glorified God. But even more than receiving healing, the man experienced forgiveness and the start of a whole new life. Our Lord's miracles not only demonstrated His deity and His compassion for needy people, but they also revealed important spiritual lessons about salvation. They were "object lessons" to teach spiritually blind people what God could do for them if only they would believe in His Son.

From the Old to the New (Luke 5:27–39)

When Jesus called Levi, He accomplished three things: He saved a lost soul; He added a new disciple to His band; and He created an opportunity to explain His ministry to Levi's friends and to the scribes and Pharisees. This event probably took place shortly after Jesus healed the palsied man, for the "official committee" was still there (Luke 5:17). And it is likely that Jesus at this time gave Levi his new name—"Matthew, the gift of God" (Luke 6:15; see also Matt. 9:9).

Matthew sat at the toll booth and levied duty on the merchandise that was brought through. Since the tax rates were not always clear, it was easy for an unscrupulous man to make extra money for himself. But even if a tax collector served honestly, the Jews still despised him for defiling himself by working for the Gentiles. John the Baptist had made it clear that there was nothing innately sinful in collecting taxes (Luke 3:12–13), and we have no evidence that Matthew was a thief. But to the Jews, Levi was a sinner, and Jesus was suspect for having anything to do with him and his sinner friends.

We wonder how much Matthew knew about Jesus. Our Lord's friendship with Peter and his partners would put Him in touch with the businessmen of Capernaum, and

certainly Matthew had heard Jesus preach by the seaside. Matthew instantly obeyed the Lord's call, left everything, and followed Jesus. He was so overjoyed at his salvation experience that he invited many of his friends to rejoice with him (see Luke 15:6, 9, 23).

The scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus because they did not understand either His message or His ministry. Jesus simply did not fit into their traditional religious life. It is unfortunate when leaders resist change and refuse to try to understand the new things that God is doing. In order to help them understand, Jesus gave four illustrations of what He was doing.

The Physician (vv. 31–32). The scribes and Pharisees saw Matthew and his friends as condemned sinners, but Jesus saw them as spiritually sick “patients” who needed the help of a physician. In fact, He had illustrated this when He cleansed the leper and healed the paralytic. Sin is like a disease: it starts in a small and hidden way; it grows secretly; it saps our strength; and if it is not cured, it kills. It is tragic when sickness kills the body, but it is even more tragic when sin condemns the soul to hell.

The scribes and Pharisees were quick to diagnose the needs of others, but they were blind to their own needs, for they were sinners like everyone else. They appeared righteous on the outside but were corrupt within (Matt. 23:25–28). They may not have been “prodigal sons” who were guilty of sins of the flesh, but they were certainly “elder brothers” who were guilty of sins of the spirit (Luke 15:11–32; 2 Cor. 7:1).

As I was writing this chapter, I received a phone call from a woman in Canada who disagreed with my radio ministry and repeatedly condemned “the judgmental fundamentalists.” I tried to reason with her from the Word, but she would not accept it. According to her, there was no hell and I had no right to preach about it. As I quoted Scripture to her, she hung up; all I could do was pause to pray for her, and I did it with a heavy heart.

The first step toward healing sin sickness is admitting that we have a need and that we must do something about it. False prophets give a false diagnosis that leads to a false hope (Jer. 6:14); but the servant of God tells the truth about sin, death, and hell, and offers the only remedy: faith in Jesus Christ. The religion of the scribes and Pharisees could offer no hope to Matthew's friends, but Jesus could.

What a wonderful Physician Jesus is! He comes to us in love; He calls us; He saves us when we trust Him; *and He “pays the bill.”* His diagnosis is always accurate and His cure is perfect and complete. No wonder Matthew was so happy and wanted to share the Good News with his friends!

The Bridegroom (vv. 33–35). The scribes and Pharisees were not only upset at the disciples' friends, but also at their obvious joy as they fellowshiped with Jesus and the guests. We get the impression that the Pharisees experienced little if any joy in the practice of their religion (see Matt. 6:16; Luke 15:25–32). Jesus was “a Man of Sorrows” (Isa. 53:3), but He was also filled with joy (Luke 10:21; John 15:11; 17:13).

Jewish weddings lasted a week and were times of great joy and celebration. By using this image, Jesus was saying to His critics, “I came to make life a wedding feast, not a funeral. If you know the Bridegroom, then you can share His joy.” He said that one day He would be “taken away,” which suggested rejection and death; but meanwhile, there was good reason for joy, for sinners were coming to repentance.

Fasting is found often in the Old Testament, but nowhere is it commanded in the New Testament. However, the example of the prophets and the early church is certainly

significant for believers today. Our Lord's words in Matthew 6:16–18 assume that we will fast ("when," not "if"), and passages like Acts 13:1–3 and 14:23 indicate that fasting was a practice of the early church (see also 1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27).

The garment (v. 36). Jesus did not come to patch up the old; He came to give the new. The Pharisees would admit that Judaism was not all it could be, and perhaps they hoped that Jesus would work with them in reviving the old religion. But Jesus showed the foolishness of this approach by contrasting two garments, an old one and a new one. If you take a patch from a new garment and sew it to an old garment, you ruin both of them. The new garment has a hole in it, and the old garment has a patch that does not match and that will tear away when the garment is washed.

In Scripture, garments are sometimes used to picture character and conduct (Col. 3:8–17). Isaiah wrote about a "robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10; see also 2 Cor. 5:21), and he warned against our trusting our own good works for salvation (Isa. 64:6). Many people have a "patchwork" religion of their own making, instead of trusting Christ for the robe of salvation that He gives by grace.

The wineskins (vv. 37–39). If unfermented wine is put into brittle old wineskins, the gas will burst the skins and both the skins and the wine will be lost. The new life of the Spirit could not be forced into the old wineskins of Judaism. Jesus was revealing that the ancient Jewish religion was getting old and would soon be replaced (see Heb. 8:13). Most of the Jews preferred the old and refused the new. It was not until a.d. 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and scattered the people, that the Jewish religion *as described in the Law* came to an end. Today, the Jews do not have a priesthood, a temple, or an altar; so they cannot practice their religion as their ancestors did (see Hosea 3:4).

The things in the ceremonial Law were fulfilled by Jesus Christ, so there is no need today for sacrifices, priests, temples, and ceremonies. All of God's people are priests who bring spiritual sacrifices to the Lord (1 Peter 2:5, 9). The tables of Law have been replaced by the tables of the human heart, where God's Spirit is writing the Word and making us like Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:1–3, 18).

Jesus Christ still offers "all things new" (Rev. 21:5). As the Physician, He offers sinners new life and spiritual health. As the Bridegroom, He brings new love and joy. He gives us the robe of righteousness and the wine of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18; also see Acts 2:13). Life is a feast, not a famine or a funeral; and Jesus Christ is the only one who can make that kind of a difference in our lives.

CHAPTER FIVE

SO WHAT'S NEW? EVERYTHING!

Luke 6

For over a year, Jesus ministered as a popular itinerant Teacher and Healer, and multitudes followed Him. But now the time had come for Him to “organize” His followers and declare just what His kingdom was all about.

In this chapter, we see the Lord Jesus establishing three new spiritual entities to replace that which was now “worn out” in the Jewish religion: a new Sabbath, a new nation, and a new blessing in the new spiritual kingdom.

A New Sabbath (Luke 6:1–11)

The sanctity of the seventh day was a distinctive part of the Jewish faith. God gave Israel the Sabbath law at Sinai (Neh. 9:13–14) and made it a sign between Him and the nation (Ex. 20:8–11; 31:12–17). The word *Sabbath* means “rest” and is linked with God’s cessation of work after the six days of Creation (Gen. 2:2–3). Some of the rabbis taught that Messiah could not come until Israel had perfectly kept the Sabbath, so obeying this law was very important both personally and nationally.

To call Sunday “the Sabbath” is to confuse the first day and the seventh day and what each signifies. The Sabbath is a reminder of the completion of “the old Creation,” while the Lord’s Day is a reminder of our Lord’s finished work in “the new Creation” (2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 2:10; 4:24). The Sabbath speaks of rest *after* work and relates to the Law, while the Lord’s Day speaks of rest *before* work and relates to grace. The Lord’s Day commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as well as the coming of the Holy Spirit and the “birthday” of the church (Acts 2).

The early church met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1–2). However, some Jewish believers kept the Sabbath, and this sometimes led to division. Paul addressed this problem in Romans 14:1–15:13 where he gave principles to promote both liberty and unity in the church. But Paul always made it clear that *observing special days had nothing to do with salvation* (Gal. 4:1–11; Col. 2:8–17). We are not saved from sin by faith in Christ *plus* keeping the Sabbath. We are saved by faith in Christ alone.

By their strict and oppressive rules, the Pharisees and scribes had turned the Sabbath Day into a burden instead of the blessing God meant it to be, and Jesus challenged both their doctrine and their authority. He had announced a new “Year of Jubilee” (Luke 4:19), and now He would declare a new Sabbath. He had already healed a lame man on the Sabbath, and the religious leaders had determined to kill Him (John 5:18; also note John 5:16). Now He was to violate their Sabbath laws on two more occasions.

In the field (vv. 1–5). It was lawful for a Jew to eat from a neighbor’s vineyard, orchard, or field, provided he did not fill a container or use a harvesting implement (Deut. 23:24–25). The disciples were hungry, so they picked the heads of wheat, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. But in so doing, according to the rabbis, they broke the Sabbath law, because they were harvesting, winnowing, and preparing food!

Always alert for something to criticize, some of the Pharisees asked Jesus why He permitted His disciples to violate the Sabbath laws. This was His second offense, and they were sure they had a case against Him. How tragic that their slavish devotion to religious rules blinded them to the true ministry of the Law as well as the very presence of the Lord who gave them the Law.

Jesus did not argue with them; instead, He took them right to the Word of God (1 Sam. 21:1–6). The “showbread” was comprised of twelve loaves, one for each tribe in Israel; and it stood on the table in the holy place in the tabernacle and then in the temple (Ex. 25:23–30; Lev. 24:5–9). Fresh bread was put on the table each Sabbath, and only the priests were allowed to eat the loaves.

But David and his men ate the loaves, and what Jew would condemn Israel's great king? “He was God's anointed!” they might argue, *but that was exactly what Jesus claimed for Himself* (Luke 4:18). Not only was He God's Anointed, but He was also the Lord of the Sabbath! When Jesus made that statement, He was claiming to be Jehovah God, because it was the Lord who established the Sabbath. If Jesus Christ is indeed Lord of the Sabbath, then He is free to do *on* it and *with* it whatever He pleases. The Pharisees did not miss His meaning, you can be sure.

God is more concerned about meeting human needs than He is about protecting religious rules. Better that David and his men receive strength to serve God than that they perish only for the sake of a temporary law. God desires compassion, not sacrifice (Matt. 12:7, quoting Hosea 6:6). The Pharisees, of course, had a different view of the Law (Matt. 23:23).

In the synagogue (vv. 6–11). The Pharisees knew that it was our Lord's practice to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath, so they were there to watch Him and to gather more evidence against Him. Did they know that the handicapped man would also be there? Did they “plant” him there? We do not know, and Jesus probably did not care. His compassionate heart responded to the man's need, and He healed him. Jesus could have waited a few hours until the Sabbath was over, or He could have healed the man in private, but He did it openly and immediately. It was a deliberate violation of the Sabbath traditions.

Our Lord's defense in the field was based on the Old Testament Scriptures, but His defense in the synagogue was based on *the nature of God's Sabbath law*. God gave that law to help people, not to hurt them. “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Every man in the synagogue would rescue a sheep on the Sabbath, so why not rescue a man made in the image of God? (Matt. 12:11–12) The scribes and Pharisees had turned God's gift into a heavy yoke that nobody could bear (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1).

This miracle illustrates the power of faith in God's Word. Jesus commanded the man to do the very thing he could not do, and yet *he did it!* “For no word from God shall be void of power” (Luke 1:37, asv). God's commandments are always God's enablements.

The scribes and Pharisees were filled with fury. It certainly did not do them any good to worship God in the synagogue that morning. So angry were they that they even joined forces with the Herodians (the Jews who supported Herod) in a plot to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6). Jesus knew their thoughts (Matt. 12:15; Luke 6:8); so He merely withdrew to the Sea of Galilee, ministered to the multitudes, and then went up to a mountain alone to pray.

Jesus gives a spiritual “Sabbath rest” that is in the heart all the time (Matt. 11:28–30). Unlike the galling yoke of the Law, the yoke that Jesus gives is “well-fitting,” and His “burden is light.” When the sinner trusts the Saviour, he has peace with God because his sins are forgiven and he is reconciled to God (Rom. 5:1–11). As the believer yields

to Christ in daily experience, he enjoys “the peace of God” in his heart and mind (Phil. 4:6–7).

A New Nation (Luke 6:12–19)

Jesus spent the whole night in prayer, for He was about to call His 12 Apostles from among the many disciples who were following Him. A *disciple* is a learner, an apprentice; while an *apostle* is a chosen messenger sent with a special commission. Jesus had many disciples (see Luke 10:1) but only twelve handpicked Apostles.

Why did He pray all night? For one thing, He knew that opposition against Him was growing and would finally result in His crucifixion; so He prayed for strength as He faced the path ahead. Also, He wanted the Father's guidance as He selected His 12 Apostles, for the future of the church rested with them. Keep in mind that one of the Twelve would betray Him, *and Jesus knew who he was from the beginning* (John 6:64). Our Lord had real human emotions (Luke 22:41–44; Heb. 5:7–8), and it was through prayer that He made this difficult choice.

The names of the Apostles are also given in Matthew 10:1–4; Mark 3:16–19; Acts 1:13 (minus Judas). In all the lists, Peter is named first and, except in Acts 1:13, Judas is named last. The Judas in Acts 1:13 is Judas the brother [more likely “the son”] of James, who is also called Thaddeus in Mark 3:18. It was not unusual for one man to have two or more names.

Simon received the name *Peter* (stone) when Andrew brought him to Jesus (John 1:40–42). Bartholomew is the same as Nathanael (John 1:45–49). The other Simon in the group was nicknamed “Zelotes,” which can mean one of two things. It may mean that he belonged to a group of fanatical Jewish patriots known as “the Zealots,” whose purpose was to deliver Israel from the tyranny of Rome. They used every means at hand, including terror and assassination, to accomplish their purposes. Or, perhaps the word *Zelotes* translates from the Hebrew word *qanna* which means “jealous for God, zealous for God's honor.” (It is transliterated in Matt. 10:4 as “Simon the Canaanite” [*qanna*].) Whether Simon was known for his zeal to honor God, or his membership in a subversive organization, we cannot be sure—possibly both.

Nor are we sure of the origin of the word *Iscaiot*. It probably means “man [*ish* in Hebrew] of Kerieth,” a town in southern Judah (Josh. 15:25). Some connect it with the Aramaic word *seqar* which means “falsehood.” Thus, “Judas the false one.” The geographical explanation is probably right.

What an interesting group of men! They illustrate what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:26–29, and they are an encouragement to us today. After all, if God could use them, can He not use us? Perhaps seven of them were fishermen (see John 21:1–3), one was a tax collector, and the other four are anonymous as far as their vocations are concerned. They were ordinary men; their personalities were different; yet Jesus called them to be with Him, to learn from Him, and to go out to represent Him (Mark 3:14).

Why 12 Apostles? Because there were twelve tribes in Israel, and Jesus was forming the nucleus for a new nation (see Matt. 21:43; 1 Peter 2:9). The first Christians were Jews because the Gospel came “to the Jew first” (Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16). Later, the Gentiles were added to the church through the witness of the scattered Jewish believers (Acts 11:19ff) and the ministry of Paul, apostle to the Gentiles. In the church,

there is no difference between Jew and Gentile; we are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

It is significant that after Jesus called His 12 Apostles, and before He preached this great sermon, He took time to heal many needy people. This was a demonstration of both His power and His compassion. It was also a reminder to His newly appointed assistants that their job was to share His love and power with a needy world. It is estimated that there were 300 million people in the world in Jesus' day, while there are over 5 billion today, four fifths of them in the less-developed nations. What a challenge to the church!

A New Blessing (Luke 6:20–49)

This sermon is probably a shorter version of what we call "The Sermon on the Mount" (Matt. 5–7), though some fine evangelical scholars believe these were two different events. If they are the same event, the fact that Matthew locates it on a mountain (Matt. 5:1), while Luke puts it "in the plain" (Luke 6:17), creates no problem. Dr. D.A. Carson points out that the Greek word translated "plain" can mean "a plateau in a mountainous region" (*Exegetical Fallacies*, Baker, p. 43).

Jesus went "into the hill country" with His disciples. After a night of prayer, He came down to a level place, ordained the Twelve, ministered to the sick, and then preached this sermon. It was His description of what it means to have a life of "blessing."

To most Jewish people, the word "blessing" evoked images of a long life, wealth, a large, healthy family, a full barn, and defeated enemies. God's covenant with Israel did include such material and physical blessings (Deut. 28; Job 1:1–12; Prov. 3:1–10), for this was how God taught and disciplined them. After all, they were "little children" in the faith, and we teach children by means of rewards and punishments. With the coming of Jesus, Israel's childhood period ended, and the people had to mature in their understanding of God's ways (Gal. 4:1–6).

Jesus was preaching to His disciples as well as to the multitudes (Luke 6:27, 47), for even the Twelve had to unlearn many things before they could effectively serve Him. Furthermore, they had left everything to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11, 28), and no doubt were asking themselves, "What is in store for us?" (see Matt. 19:27) The Lord explained in this sermon that the truly blessed life comes not from *getting*, or from *doing*, but from *being*. The emphasis is on Godlike character.

This sermon is not "the Gospel" and nobody goes to heaven by "following the Sermon on the Mount." Dead sinners cannot obey the living God; they must first be born again and receive God's life (John 3:1–7, 36).

Nor is this sermon a "constitution" for the kingdom God will one day establish on earth (Matt. 20:21; Luke 22:30). The Sermon on the Mount applies to life today and describes the kind of godly character we should have as believers in this world. Certainly our Lord describes a life situation quite unlike that of the glorious kingdom, including hunger, tears, persecution, and false teachers.

What Jesus did was to focus on *attitudes*: our attitude toward circumstances (Luke 6:20–26), people (Luke 6:27–38), ourselves (Luke 6:39–45), and God (Luke 6:46–49). He emphasized four essentials for true happiness: faith in God, love toward others, honesty with ourselves, and obedience toward God.

Circumstances (vv. 20–26). Life was difficult for the people of that day and there was not much hope their circumstances would be improved. Like people today, many of them thought that happiness came from having great possessions, or holding an exalted position, or enjoying the pleasures and popularity that money can buy. Imagine how surprised they were when they heard Jesus describe happiness in terms *just the opposite of what they expected!* They discovered that what they needed most was not a change in circumstances but a change in their relationship to God and in their outlook on life.

Jesus was not teaching that poverty, hunger, persecution, and tears were blessings *in themselves*. If that were true, He would never have done all He did to alleviate the sufferings of others. Rather, Jesus was describing the *inner attitudes* we must have if we are to experience the blessedness of the Christian life. We should certainly do what we can to help others in a material way (James 2:15–17; 1 John 3:16–18), but we must remember that no amount of “things” can substitute for a personal relationship with God.

Matthew's account makes this clear: “Blessed are the poor *in spirit* ... Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst *after righteousness*” (Matt. 5:3, 6, italics mine). Jesus was not glorifying material poverty; rather, He was calling for that brokenness of heart that confesses spiritual poverty within (Luke 18:9–14; Phil. 3:4–14). The humble person is the only kind the Lord can save (Isa. 57:15; 66:2; 1 Peter 5:6). If you compare “The Beatitudes” with Isaiah 61:1–3 and Luke 4:18, you will see that our Lord's emphasis was on the condition of the heart and not the outward circumstances. Mary expressed this same insight in her song of praise (Luke 1:46–55).

Jesus Himself would experience the persecution described in Luke 6:22, and so would His disciples. How can we rejoice when men attack us? By remembering that it is a privilege to suffer for His sake (Phil. 3:10). When they treat us the way they treated Him, it is evidence that we are starting to live as He lived, and that is a compliment. All of the saints of the ages were treated this way, so we are in good company! Furthermore, God promises a special reward for all those who are faithful to Him; so the best is yet to come!

The four “woes” all share a common truth: you take what you want from life and you pay for it. If you want immediate wealth, fullness, laughter, and popularity, you can get it; but there is a price to pay: *that is all you will get*. Jesus did not say that these things were wrong. He said that *being satisfied with them is its own judgment*.

H.H. Farmer wrote that “to Jesus the terrible thing about having wrong values in life and pursuing wrong things is not that you are doomed to bitter disappointment, but that you are *not*; not that you do not achieve what you want, but that you *do*” (*Things Not Seen*, Nishbet [London], p. 96). When people are satisfied with the lesser things of life, the good instead of the best, then their successes add up only as failures. These people are spiritually bankrupt and do not realize it.

Life is built on character, and character is built on decisions. But decisions are based on values, *and values must be accepted by faith*. Moses made his life-changing decisions on the basis of values that other people thought were foolish (Heb. 11:24–29), but God honored his faith. The Christian enjoys all that God gives him (1 Tim. 6:17) because he lives “with eternity's values in view.”

People (vv. 27–38). Jesus assumed that anybody who lived for eternal values would get into trouble with the world's crowd. Christians are the “salt of the earth” and “the light

of the world" (Matt. 5:13–16), and sometimes the salt stings and the light exposes sin. Sinners show their hatred by avoiding us or rejecting us (Luke 6:22), insulting us (Luke 6:28), physically abusing us (Luke 6:29), and suing us (Luke 6:30). This is something we must expect (Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:12).

How should we treat our enemies? We must love them, do them good, and pray for them. Hatred only breeds more hatred, "for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (James 1:20, niv). This cannot be done in our own strength, but it can be done through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22–23).

We must not look at these admonitions as a series of rules to be obeyed. They describe an attitude of heart that expresses itself positively when others are negative, and generously when others are selfish, all to the glory of God. It is an inner disposition, not a legal duty. We must have wisdom to know when to turn the other cheek and when to claim our rights (John 18:22–23; Acts 16:35–40). Even Christian love must exercise discernment (Phil. 1:9–11).

Two principles stand out: we must treat others as we would want to be treated (Luke 6:31), which assumes we want the very best spiritually for ourselves; and we must imitate our Father in heaven and be merciful (Luke 6:36). The important thing is not that we are vindicated before our enemies but that we become more like God in our character (Luke 6:35). This is the greatest reward anyone can receive, far greater than riches, food, laughter, or popularity (Luke 6:24–26). Those things will one day vanish, but character will last for eternity. We must believe Matthew 6:33 and practice it in the power of the Spirit.

Luke 6:37–38 reminds us that we reap what we sow and in the amount that we sow. If we judge others, we will ourselves be judged. If we forgive, we shall be forgiven, but if we condemn, we shall be condemned (see Matt. 18:21–35). He was not talking about eternal judgment but the way we are treated in this life. If we live to give, God will see to it that we receive; but if we live only to get, God will see to it that we lose. This principle applies not only to our giving of money, but also to the giving of ourselves in ministry to others.

Self (vv. 39–45). The four striking figures in this section teach us some important lessons about ministry. To begin with, as His disciples, we must be sure that we see clearly enough to guide others in their spiritual walk. While there are blind people who have a keen sense of direction, it is not likely any of them will be hired as airplane pilots or wilderness guides. Jesus was referring primarily to the Pharisees who were leading the people astray (Matt. 15:14; 23:16). If we see ourselves as excellent guides, but do not realize our blindness, we will only lead people into the ditch (see Rom. 2:17–22).

Luke 6:40 reminds us that we cannot lead others where we have not been ourselves, nor can we be all that our Master is. In fact, the more we strive to be like Him, the more we realize how far short we fall. This is a warning against pride, for nothing blinds a person like pride.

Continuing the image of "the eye," Jesus taught that we must be able to see clearly enough to help our brother see better. It certainly is not wrong to help a brother get a painful speck of dirt out of his eye, *provided we can see what we are doing*. The crowd must have laughed out loud when Jesus described an "eye doctor" with a *plank* in his eye, performing surgery on a patient with a *speck* in his eye!

The emphasis here is on being honest with ourselves and not becoming hypocrites. It is easy to try to help a brother with his faults *just so we can cover up our own sins!* People who are constantly criticizing others are usually guilty of something worse in their own lives.

The illustration of the tree reminds us that fruit is always true to character. An apple tree produces apples, not oranges; and a good person produces good fruit, not evil. Believers do sin, but the witness of their words and works is consistently good to the glory of God. In terms of ministry, servants of God who are faithful will reproduce themselves in people who are in turn true to the Lord (2 Tim. 2:2).

The last image, the treasury, teaches us that what comes out of the lips depends on what is inside the heart. The human heart is like a treasury, and what we speak reveals what is there. A man who apologized for swearing by saying, "It really wasn't in me!" heard a friend say, "It had to be in you or it couldn't have come out of you!"

We must be honest with ourselves and admit the blind spots in our lives, the obstacles that blur our vision, and the areas within that must be corrected. Then we can be used of the Lord to minister to others and not lead them astray.

God (vv. 46–49). Our Lord's emphasis here is on obedience. It is not enough merely to hear His Word and call Him "Lord." We must also obey what He commands us to do. All of us are builders and we must be careful to build wisely. To "build on the rock" simply means to obey what God commands in His Word. To "build on the sand" means to give Christ lip service, but not obey His will. It may look as if we are building a strong house, but if it has no foundation, it cannot last. The storm here is not the last judgment but the tests of life that come to every professing Christian. Not everybody who professes to know the Lord has had a real experience of salvation. They may have been active in church and other religious organizations, but if they are not saved by faith, they have no foundation to their lives. When difficulties come, instead of glorifying the Lord, they desert Him; and their house of testimony collapses.

Nobody can really call Jesus Christ "Lord" except by the Holy Spirit of God (Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 12:3). If Christ is in our hearts, then our mouths must confess Him to others (Rom. 10:9–10). If we are "rooted and built up in Him" (Col. 2:7), then our fruits will be good and our house will withstand the storms. We may have our faults and failures, but the steady witness of our lives will point to Christ and honor Him.

This is the "new blessing" that Jesus offered His nation and that He offers us today. We can experience the "heavenly happiness" and true blessedness which only He can give. The basis for all of this is personal saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for, as Dr. H.A. Ironside once said, "We cannot live the life until first we possess it."

CHAPTER SIX

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Luke 7

Compassion has been defined as “your pain in my heart.” What pain our Lord must have felt as He ministered from place to place! In this chapter alone, Jesus is confronted with the miseries of a dying servant, a grieving widow, a perplexed prophet, and a repentant sinner; and He helped them all. If a “hardship committee” had been asked to decide which of these persons was “deserving,” we wonder who would have been chosen.

Jesus helped them all, because compassion does not measure: it ministers. Bernard of Clairvaux said, “Justice seeks out only the *merits* of the case, but pity only regards the *need*.” It was compassion, not justice, that motivated the Great Physician who came “not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). Let’s meet these four hurting people and see our Lord’s responses to their needs.

The Servant: His Response to Faith (Luke 7:1–10)

In the Gospels and the Book of Acts, Roman centurions are presented as quality men of character, and this one is a sterling example. The Jewish elders had little love for the Romans in general and Roman soldiers in particular, and yet the elders commended this officer to Jesus. He loved the Jewish people in Capernaum and even built them a synagogue. He loved his servant and did not want him to die. This centurion was not a Stoic who insulated himself from the pain of others. He had a heart of concern, even for his lowly servant boy who was dying from a paralyzing disease (Matt. 8:6).

Matthew’s condensed report (Matt. 8:5–13) does not contradict Luke’s fuller account. The centurion’s friends represented him to Jesus and then represented Jesus to him. When a newscaster reports that the President or the Prime Minister said something to Congress or Parliament, this does not necessarily mean that the message was delivered by them in person. It was probably delivered by one of their official representatives, but the message would be received as from the President or Prime Minister personally.

We are impressed not only with this man’s great love, but also his great humility. Imagine a Roman officer telling a poor Jewish rabbi that he was unworthy to have Him enter his house! The Romans were not known for displaying humility, especially before their Jewish subjects.

But the characteristic that most impressed Jesus was the man’s faith. Twice in the Gospel record we are told that Jesus marveled. Here in Capernaum, He marveled at the faith of a Gentile; and in Nazareth, He marveled at the unbelief of the Jews (Mark 6:6). The only other person Jesus commended for having “great faith” was a Gentile woman whose daughter He delivered from a demon (Matt. 15:28). It is worth noting that in both of these instances, Jesus healed *at a distance* (see Ps. 107:20; Eph. 2:11–13).

The centurion’s faith certainly was remarkable. After all, he was a Gentile whose background was pagan. He was a Roman soldier, trained to be self-sufficient, and we have no evidence that he had ever heard Jesus preach. Perhaps he heard about Jesus’ healing power from the nobleman whose son Jesus had healed, also at a distance

(John 4:46–54). His soldiers may also have brought him reports of the miracles Jesus had performed, for the Romans kept close touch with the events in Jewish life.

The important word in Luke 7:8 is “also.” (It should be in Matt. 8:9 as well, but the kjv omits it for some reason. The nasb has “too” in both places.) The officer saw a parallel between the way he commanded his soldiers and the way Jesus commanded diseases. Both the centurion and Jesus were under authority, and because they were under authority, they had the right to exercise authority. *All they had to do was say the word and things happened.* What tremendous faith this man exhibited! No wonder Jesus marveled.

If this Roman, with very little spiritual instruction, had that kind of faith in God's Word, how much greater *our* faith ought to be! We have an entire Bible to read and study, as well as nearly 2,000 years of church history to encourage us, and yet we are guilty of “no faith” (Mark 4:40) or “little faith” (Matt. 14:31). Our prayer ought to be, “Lord, increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5)

The Widow: Jesus' Response to Despair (Luke 7:11–17)

Nain was about twenty-five miles from Capernaum, a good day's journey away, yet Jesus went there even though He was not *requested* to come. Since the Jews buried their dead the same day (Deut. 21:23; Acts 5:5–10), it is likely that Jesus and His disciples arrived at the city gate late in the afternoon of the day the boy died. Four special meetings took place at the city gate that day.

Two crowds met. We can only marvel at the providence of God when we see Jesus meet that funeral procession just as it was heading for the burial ground. He lived on a divine timetable as He obeyed the will of His Father (John 11:9; 13:1). The sympathetic Saviour always gives help when we need it most (Heb. 4:16).

What a contrast between the crowd that was following Jesus and the crowd following the widow and her dead son. Jesus and His disciples were rejoicing in the blessing of the Lord, but the widow and her friends were lamenting the death of her only son. Jesus was heading for the city while the mourners were heading for the cemetery.

Spiritually speaking, each of us is in one of these two crowds. If you have trusted Christ, you are going to the city (Heb. 11:10, 13–16; 12:22). If you are “dead in sin,” you are already in the cemetery and under the condemnation of God (John 3:36; Eph. 2:1–3). You need to trust Jesus Christ and be raised from the dead (John 5:24; Eph. 2:4–10).

Two only sons met. One was alive but destined to die, the other dead but destined to live. The term *only begotten* as applied to Jesus means “unique,” “the only one of its kind.” Jesus is not a “son” in the same sense that I am, having been brought into existence by conception and birth. Since Jesus is eternal God, He has always existed. The title *Son of God* declares Christ's divine nature and His relationship to the Father, to whom the Son has willingly subjected Himself from all eternity. All the Persons of the Godhead are equal, but in the “economy” of the Trinity, each has a specific place to fill and task to fulfill.

Two sufferers met. Jesus, “the Man of Sorrows,” could easily identify with the widow's heartache. Not only was she in sorrow, but she was now left alone in a society

that did not have resources to care for widows. What would happen to her? Jesus felt the pain that sin and death have brought into this world, and He did something about it.

Two enemies met. Jesus faced death, “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). When you consider the pain and grief that it causes in this world, death is indeed an enemy, and only Jesus Christ can give us victory (see 1 Cor. 15:51–58; Heb. 2:14–15). Jesus had only to speak the word and the boy was raised to life and health.

The boy gave two evidences of life: he sat up and he spoke. He was lying on an open stretcher, not in a closed coffin; so it was easy for him to sit up. We are not told what he said, but it must have been interesting! What an act of tenderness it was for Jesus to take the boy and give him to his rejoicing mother. The whole scene reminds us of what will happen when the Lord returns, and we are reunited with our loved ones who have gone to glory (1 Thes. 4:13–18).

The response of the people was to glorify God and identify Jesus with the Prophet the Jews had been waiting for (Deut. 18:15; John 1:21; Acts 3:22–23). It did not take long for the report of this miracle to spread. People were even more enthusiastic to see Jesus, and great crowds followed Him (Luke 8:4, 19, 42).

John the Baptist: His Response to Doubt (Luke 7:18–35)

Confusion (vv. 18–20). John had been in prison some months (Luke 3:19–20), but he knew what Jesus was doing because his own disciples kept him informed. It must have been difficult for this man, accustomed to a wilderness life, to be confined in a prison. The physical and emotional strain were no doubt great, and the long days of waiting did not make it easier. The Jewish leaders did nothing to intercede for John, and it seemed that even Jesus was doing nothing for him. If He came to set the prisoners free (Luke 4:18), then John the Baptist was a candidate!

It is not unusual for great spiritual leaders to have their days of doubt and uncertainty. Moses was ready to quit on one occasion (Num. 11:10–15), and so were Elijah (1 Kings 19) and Jeremiah (Jer. 20:7–9, 14–18); and even Paul knew the meaning of despair (2 Cor. 1:8–9).

There is a difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is a matter of the mind: we cannot understand what God is doing or why He is doing it. Unbelief is a matter of the will: we refuse to believe God's Word and obey what He tells us to do. “Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong,” said Oswald Chambers; “it may be a sign that he is thinking.” In John's case, his inquiry was not born of willful unbelief, but of doubt nourished by physical and emotional strain.

You and I can look back at the ministry of Christ and understand what He was doing, but John did not have that advantage. John had announced judgment, but Jesus was doing deeds of love and mercy. John had promised that the kingdom was at hand, but there was no evidence of it so far. He had presented Jesus as “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29), so John must have understood something about Jesus' sacrifice; yet how did this sacrifice relate to the promised kingdom for Israel? He was perplexed about God's plan and his place in it. But let's not judge him harshly, for even the prophets were perplexed about some of these things (1 Peter 1:10–12).

Confirmation (vv. 21–23). Jesus did not give the two men a lecture on theology or prophecy. Instead, He invited them to watch as He healed many people of many different afflictions. Certainly these were His credentials as the promised Messiah (Isa.

29:18–19; 35:4–6; 42:1–7). He had not established a political kingdom, but the kingdom of God was there in power.

The Greek word translated “offended” gives us our English word *scandalize*, and it referred originally to the “bait stick” in a trap. John was in danger of being trapped because of his concern about what Jesus was *not* doing. He was stumbling over his Lord and His ministry. Jesus gently told him to have faith, for his Lord knew what He was doing.

There are many people today who criticize the church for not “changing the world” and solving the economic, political, and social problems of society. What they forget is that God changes His world by changing individual people. History shows that the church has often led the way in humanitarian service and reform, but the church’s main job is to bring lost sinners to the Saviour. Everything else is a by-product of that. Proclaiming the Gospel must always be the church’s first priority.

Commendation (vv. 24–30). What we think of ourselves, or what others think of us, is not as important as what God thinks. Jesus waited until the messengers had departed and then He publicly commended John for his ministry. At the same time, He exposed the sinful hearts of those who rejected John’s ministry.

John the Baptist was not a *compromiser*, a reed blowing in the wind (note Eph. 4:14); nor was he a popular *celebrity*, enjoying the friendship of great people and the pleasures of wealth. John did not waver or weaken, no matter what people did to him. John was not only a prophet, but he was a prophet whose ministry was prophesied! (see Isa. 40:3 and Mal. 3:1) The last of the Old Testament prophets, John had the great privilege as God’s messenger of introducing the Messiah to Israel.

How is the least person in the kingdom of God greater than John? In position, not in character or ministry. John was the herald of the King, announcing the kingdom; believers today are children of the kingdom and the friends of the King (John 15:15). John’s ministry was a turning point in both the nation’s history and in God’s plan of redemption (Luke 16:16).

Luke 7:29–30 are the words of Jesus, not an explanation from Luke (see Matt. 21:32). They answer the question some of the people were asking, “If John is such a great prophet, why is he in prison?” The answer is: because of the willful unbelief of the religious leaders. The common people accepted John’s message and were baptized by him as proof of their repentance. They “justified God,” which means they agreed with what God said about them (Ps. 51:4). But the religious leaders justified themselves (Luke 16:15), not God, and rejected John and his message.

Condemnation (vv. 31–35). Jesus compared that generation to people who were childish, not childlike, and nothing pleased them. He was probably referring to the scribes and Pharisees in particular. John was an individual who declared a stern message of judgment, and they said, “He has a demon!” Jesus mingled with the people and preached a gracious message of salvation, and they said, “He’s a glutton, a winebibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners!” They wanted neither the funeral nor the wedding, because nothing pleased them.

People who want to avoid the truth about themselves can always find something in the preacher to criticize. This is one way they “justify themselves.” But God’s wisdom is not frustrated by the arguments of the “wise and prudent.” *It is demonstrated in the changed lives of those who believe.* This is how true wisdom is “justified.”

A Sinful Woman: His Response to Love (Luke 7:36–50)

Jesus not only accepted hospitality from the publicans and sinners but also from the Pharisees. They needed the Word of God too, whether they realized it or not. We trust that Simon's invitation was a sincere one and that he did not have some ulterior motive for having Jesus in his home. If he did, his plan backfired, because he ended up learning more about himself than he cared to know!

The repentant woman (vv. 36–38). It was customary in that day for outsiders to hover around during banquets so they could watch the "important people" and hear the conversation. Since everything was open, they could even enter the banquet hall and speak to a guest. This explains how this woman had access to Jesus. He was not behind locked doors. In that day women were not invited to banquets.

Jewish rabbis did not speak to women in public, nor did they eat with them in public. A woman of this type would not be welcomed in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Her sins are not named, but we get the impression she was a woman of the streets with a bad reputation.

Do not confuse this event with a similar one involving Mary of Bethany (John 12:1–8), and do not identify this woman with Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2) as many continue to do.

The woman admitted she was a sinner and gave evidence that she was a *repentant* sinner. If you check a harmony of the Gospels, you will discover that just before this event, Jesus had given the gracious invitation, "Come unto Me ... and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28–30). Perhaps that was when the woman turned from her sin and trusted the Saviour. Her tears, her humble attitude, and her expensive gift all spoke of a changed heart.

The critical host (vv. 39–43). Simon was embarrassed, both for himself and for his guests. People had been saying that Jesus was a great Prophet (Luke 7:16), but He certainly was not exhibiting much prophetic discernment if He allowed a sinful woman to anoint His feet! He must be a fraud.

Simon's real problem was *blindness*: he could not see himself, the woman, or the Lord Jesus. It was easy for him to say, "*She* is a sinner!" but impossible for him to say, "I am also a sinner!" (see Luke 18:9–14) Jesus proved that He was indeed a prophet by reading Simon's thoughts and revealing his needs.

The parable does not deal with the *amount* of sin in a person's life but the *awareness* of that sin in his heart. How much sin must a person commit to be a sinner? Simon and the woman were both sinners. Simon was guilty of sins of the spirit, especially pride, while the woman was guilty of sins of the flesh (see 2 Cor. 7:1). Her sins were known, while Simon's sins were hidden to everyone except God. *And both of them were bankrupt and could not pay their debt to God.* Simon was just as spiritually bankrupt as the woman, only he did not realize it.

Forgiveness is a gift of God's grace; the debt was paid in full by Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18–19). The word *frankly* means "graciously and freely." The woman accepted God's free offer of salvation and expressed her love openly. Simon rejected that offer and remained unforgiven. He was not only blind to himself, but he was blind to the woman and to his honored guest!

The forgiving Saviour (vv. 44–50). The woman was guilty of sins of commission, but Simon was guilty of sins of omission. He had not been a gracious host to the Lord Jesus. (For a contrast, see Abraham in Gen. 18:1–8.) Everything that Simon neglected to do, the woman did—and she did it better!

There are two errors we must avoid as we interpret our Lord's words. First, we must not conclude that this woman was saved by her tears and her gift. Jesus made it clear that it was *her faith* alone that saved her (Luke 7:50), for no amount of good works can pay for salvation (Titus 3:4–7).

Nor should we think that lost sinners are saved by love, either God's love for them or their love for God. God loves the whole world (John 3:16), yet the whole world is not saved. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9, nkjv). Grace is love that pays a price, and that price was the death of the Son of God on the cross.

Jesus did not reject either the woman's tears or her gift of ointment, because her works were the evidence of her faith. "Faith without works is dead" (see James 2:14–26). We are not saved by faith plus works; we are saved by a faith that leads to works. This anonymous woman illustrates the truth of Galatians 5:6, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (niv).

How did the woman know that her sins were forgiven? *Jesus told her.* How do we know today that we have been forgiven? *God tells us so in His Word.* Here are just a few verses to consider: Isaiah 1:18; 43:25–26; 55:6–7; Acts 13:38–39; Romans 4:7–8; Ephesians 4:32; and Hebrews 8:12. Once you understand the meaning of God's grace you have no trouble receiving His free and full forgiveness and rejoicing in it.

Of course, the legalistic critics at the dinner were shocked when Jesus said, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." By saying this, Jesus was claiming to be God! (see Luke 5:21) But He *is* God, and He died for the sins that she committed. His words of forgiveness were not cheap words; they cost Him dearly on the cross.

How was this woman saved? She repented of her sins and put her faith in Jesus Christ. How did she know she was truly forgiven? She had the assurance of His word. What was the proof of her salvation? Her love for Christ expressed in sacrificial devotion to Him. For the first time in her life, she had peace with God (Luke 7:50). Literally it reads, "Go *into* peace," for she had moved out of the sphere of enmity toward God and was now enjoying peace with God (Rom. 5:1; 8:7–8).

When Jesus healed the centurion's servant, it was a great miracle. An even greater miracle was His raising the widow's son from the dead. But in this chapter, the greatest miracle of all was His saving this woman from her sins and making her a new person. The miracle of salvation has to be the greatest miracle of all, for it meets the greatest need, brings the greatest results (and they last forever), and cost the greatest price.

Simon was blind to the woman and blind to himself. He saw her past, but Jesus saw her future. I wonder how many rejected sinners have found salvation through the testimony of this woman in Luke's Gospel. She encourages us to believe that Jesus can take any sinner and make him or her into a child of God.

But God's forgiveness is not automatic; we can reject His grace if we will. In 1830, a man named George Wilson was arrested for mail theft, the penalty for which was hanging. After a time, President Andrew Jackson gave Wilson a pardon *but he refused to accept it!* The authorities were puzzled: should Wilson be freed or hanged?

They consulted Chief Justice John Marshall, who handed down this decision: "A pardon is a slip of paper, the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged."

If you have never accepted God's pardon, now is the time to believe and be saved.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LESSONS ABOUT FAITH

Luke 8

One of the major themes in Luke 8 is how to get faith and use it in the everyday experiences of life. In the first section, Jesus laid the foundation by teaching His disciples that faith comes through receiving the Word of God into an understanding heart. In the second part, He put them through a series of "examinations" to see how much they had really learned. Most of us enjoy Bible study, but we wish we could avoid the examinations that often follow the lessons! However, it is in the tests of life that faith really grows and we get closer to Christ.

The cynical American editor H.L. Mencken defined faith as "an illogical belief in the occurrence of the impossible," and Mark Twain said (through one of his characters) that faith is "believin' what you know ain't so." Of course, these men are describing superstition, not faith; for the faith of a Christian rests on solid foundations.

Everybody lives by faith in something or someone. The difference between the Christian believer and the unsaved person is not that one has faith and the other does not. They *both* have faith. The difference is in *the object of their faith*, for faith is only as good as the object. The Christian believer has put his faith in Jesus Christ, and he bases that faith on the Word of God.

Teaching: Hearing God's Word (Luke 8:1–21)

The Lord continued His itinerant ministry in Galilee, assisted by His disciples and partially supported by some godly women. It was not unusual for Jewish rabbis to receive gifts from grateful people, and these women had certainly benefited from Jesus' ministry. The New Testament church leaders were supported by gifts from friends (2 Tim. 1:16–18) and from churches (Phil. 4:15–17), and Paul supported himself by his own labor (2 Thes. 3:6–10).

The word *hear* is used nine times in this section. It means much more than simply listening to words. "Hearing" means listening with spiritual understanding and receptivity. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). With this in mind, we can understand the three admonitions Jesus gave His followers.

Hear and receive the Word (vv. 4–15). Initially, the Sower is Jesus Christ, but the sower represents any of God's people who share the Word of God (John 4:35–38). The seed is the Word of God, for, like seed, the Word has life and power (Heb. 4:12) and can produce spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22–23). But the seed can do nothing until it is planted (John 12:24). When a person hears and understands the Word, then the seed is planted in the heart. What happens after that depends on the nature of the soil.

Jesus called this parable “The Parable of the Sower” (Matt. 13:18), but it could also be called “The Parable of the Soils.” The seed without the soil is fruitless, and the soil without the seed is almost useless. The human heart is like soil: if it is prepared properly, it can receive the seed of the Word of God and produce a fruitful harvest.

Jesus described four different kinds of hearts, three of which did not produce any fruit. The proof of salvation is *fruit* and not merely hearing the Word or making a profession of faith in Christ. Jesus had already made that clear in His “Sermon on the Mount” (Luke 6:43–49; also note Matt. 7:20).

The hard soil (vv. 5, 12). This soil represents the person who hears the Word but immediately allows the devil to snatch the seed away. How did the heart become hard? The “wayside” was the path that ran through the common field, separating the plots; and the foot traffic hardened the soil. Whatever goes into the ear or eye finally enters the heart, so be careful who is allowed to “walk on your heart.”

The shallow soil (vv. 6, 13). This soil illustrates the emotional hearer who quickly responds to the message, but his interest wanes and he does not continue (see John 8:31–32). In many parts of the Holy Land you find a substratum of limestone covered with a thin layer of soil. The shoot can grow up, but the roots cannot go down, and the sun withers the rootless plant. The sun represents the testing that comes to all professing believers to prove their faith. Sun is good for plants *if they have roots*. Persecution can deepen the roots of a true Christian, but it only exposes the shallowness of the false Christian.

The crowded soil (vv. 7, 14). This soil illustrates the person who does not repent and “weed out” the things that hinder the harvest. There is enough soil so the roots can go down, but not enough room for the plant to grow up and produce fruit. The plant is crowded out and the fruit is choked. “Cares, riches, and the pleasures of this life” are like weeds in a garden that keep the soil from being fruitful. The person with the “crowded heart” comes closest to salvation, but he still does not bring forth “fruit to perfection.”

The good soil (vv. 8, 15). This soil alone is fruitful. It illustrates the individual who hears the Word, understands it, receives it within, is truly saved, and proves it by patiently producing fruit (see 1 Thes. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:22–25). Not everybody produces the same amount of fruit (Matt. 13:8), but all true believers will produce some fruit as evidence of spiritual life. That fruit may include winning others to Christ (Rom. 1:13), money given to God's work (Rom. 15:25–28), good works (Col. 1:10), Christian character (Gal. 5:22–23), and praise to the Lord (Heb. 13:15).

This parable shows that Jesus was not impressed by the great crowds that followed Him. He knew that most of the people did not really “hear” the Word and receive it in their hearts. He gave this story to encourage the disciples in their future ministry, and to encourage us today. When you consider how much teaching, preaching, and witnessing goes on in the course of a month or a year, you wonder why there is such a small

harvest. The fault does not lie with the sower or the seed. The problem is with the soil. The human heart will not submit to God, repent and receive the Word, and be saved.

"Faith comes first to the hearing ear, not to the cogitating mind," said A.W. Tozer, the much-quoted pastor and author. Faith is not a matter of IQ or education; it is a matter of humbly preparing the heart to receive God's truth (James 1:19–21). The wise and prudent are blind to truths that are easy for the babes to understand (Matt. 11:20–26).

Hear and share the Word (vv. 16–18). The disciples were perplexed because Jesus taught in parables, so they asked Him for an explanation (Luke 8:9–10; also see Matt. 13:10–17). His reply seems to suggest that He used parables in order to *hide* the truth from the crowds, but just the opposite is true, and Luke 8:16–18 makes that clear. His teaching is a light that must be allowed to shine so that sinners may be saved.

The word *parable* means "to cast alongside." A parable is a story that teaches something new by putting the truth alongside something familiar. The people knew about seeds and soil, so the Parable of the Sower interested them. Those who were indifferent or proud would shrug it off. Our Lord's parables aroused the interest of the concerned.

A parable starts off as a *picture* that is familiar to the listeners. But as you carefully consider the picture, it becomes a *mirror* in which you see yourself, and many people do not like to see themselves. This explains why some of our Lord's listeners became angry when they heard His parables, and even tried to kill Him. But if we see ourselves as needy sinners and ask for help, then the mirror becomes a *window* through which we see God and His grace. To understand a parable and benefit from it demands honesty and humility on our part, and many of our Lord's hearers lacked both.

It is a serious thing to hear and understand the Word of God, because this puts on us the obligation to share that Word with others. Everyone who receives the seed then becomes a sower, a light-bearer, and a transmitter of God's truth (see 1 Thes. 1:5–8). If we keep it to ourselves, we will lose it; but if we share it, we will receive more.

Hear and obey the Word (vv. 19–21). Our Lord's mother, Mary, and His half brothers (Matt. 13:55–56; Acts 1:14) were worried about Jesus and wanted to talk with Him. Some of His friends had already said that He was out of His mind (Mark 3:21), and perhaps His family agreed with them. Jesus took this as an opportunity to teach another spiritual lesson: being a part of His spiritual family is much more important than any human relationship and is based on obedience to the Word of God. It is not enough to "hear" the Word of God; we must also "keep it" (Luke 8:15).

In one of my radio series, I emphasized the importance of *doing* the Word of God, putting it into practice in daily life (James 1:22–25). I warned listeners that it is easy to think we are "spiritual" because we listen to one preacher after another, take notes, mark our Bibles, *but never really practice what we learn*. We are only fooling ourselves.

A listener wrote that my words had made her angry, but then she faced up to the fact that she was indeed guilty of being an "auditor" and not a doer of the Word. She began to listen to fewer radio preachers, to listen more carefully, and to practice what she heard. "This new approach to Bible study has transformed me!" she wrote. "The Bible has become a new Book to me and my life has changed!"

As His disciples, we must take heed *what we hear* (Mark 4:24) and *how we hear* (Luke 8:18), because God will hold us accountable. Listening to the wrong things, or listening to the right things with the wrong attitude, will rob us of truth and blessing. If we

are faithful to receive the Word and share it, God will give us more; but if we fail to let our light shine, we will lose what we have. It is a solemn thing to hear the Word of God.

Testing: Heeding God's Word (Luke 8:22–56)

By the time the Lord had finished giving “the Parables of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:1–52), the disciples must have felt like postgraduate students in the School of Faith! They now understood mysteries that were hidden from the scribes and rabbis and even from the Old Testament prophets. What they did not realize (and we are so like them!) is that *faith must be tested before it can be trusted*. It is one thing to learn a new spiritual truth, but quite something else to practice that truth in the everyday experiences of life.

Satan does not care how much Bible truth we learn so long as we do not live it. Truth that is only in the head is purely academic and never will get into the heart until it is practiced by the will. “Doing the will of God from the heart” is what God wants from His children (Eph. 6:6). Satan knows that academic truth is not dangerous, but *active* truth is.

Watch the Lord Jesus Christ as He meets four challenges to faith and comes forth the Victor. His people face these same challenges today and can also overcome by faith.

Dangerous circumstances (vv. 22–25). Jesus was weary from a long day of teaching and went to sleep as the ship left Capernaum for the opposite shore. But before He did, He gave them a word of command that was also a word of promise: they were going to the opposite shore. This word should have encouraged and strengthened the disciples during the storm, but their faith was still small (Matt. 8:26).

While our tour group was sailing from Tiberias to Capernaum, I asked our guide if he had even been in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. His eyes opened wide and he said, “Yes, and I hope it never happens to me again!” The situation is such that sudden squalls occur as winds from the mountains funnel to the lake located 600 feet below sea level. When the cold air and warm air meet in this natural basin, a storm is sure to develop.

The disciples were afraid, *but Jesus was not!* He kept on sleeping, confident that His Father was completely in control (Ps. 89:8–9). The disciples became so frightened that they awakened Him and begged Him to rescue them. The title *Master* is the same one Peter used in Luke 5:5. Of course, their problem was not the storm around them but the unbelief within them. Actually, their unbelief was more dangerous than the storm!

The word *rebuked* was used by Jesus when dealing with demons (Luke 4:35, 41; 9:42). It is possible that Satan was behind this severe storm, attempting to destroy Jesus or at least hinder Him from reaching the demonized men at Gadara. But Jesus calmed both the wind and the sea by simply speaking the word. Usually after the winds die down, the waves remain rough for hours; but in this instance, everything became calm immediately and stayed that way (Ps. 148:8).

The disciples failed this test of faith because they did not lay hold of His word that He was going to the other side. It has well been said that faith is not believing in spite of circumstances; it is obeying in spite of feelings and consequences. The disciples looked around and saw danger, and looked within and saw fear; but they failed to look up by faith and see God. Faith and fear cannot dwell together in the same heart.

A woman said to D.L. Moody, "I have found a wonderful promise!" and she quoted Psalm 56:3, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee."

"Let me give you a better one," said Moody; and he quoted Isaiah 12:2, "Behold God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid."

Satan (vv. 26–39). Two demonized men met Jesus when He landed at Gadara (Matt. 8:28), but one of them was the more forward and did all the speaking. Both were pitiful cases: naked, living in the tombs, violent, dangerous, a menace to the area, and controlled by a legion of demons. (A Roman legion could have as many as 6,000 men!) Satan is the thief (John 10:10) who robs his people of everything good and then tries to destroy them. No amount of man-made authority or restraint can control or change the devil's servants. Their only hope is in the Saviour.

Demons have faith (James 2:19), but it is not saving faith. They believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God with authority to command them. They believe in a future judgment (Matt. 8:29) and in the existence of a place of torment to which Jesus could send them ("the abyss," Luke 8:31). They also believe in prayer, for the demons begged Jesus not to send them to the abyss. They asked to be sent into the pigs, and Jesus granted their request.

Did Jesus have the right to permit the legion of demons to destroy a herd of 2,000 swine and perhaps put the owners out of business? God owns everything (see Ps. 50:10–11) and can dispose of it as He pleases. Furthermore, these two men were worth far more than many pigs (see Matt. 12:12). The community should have thanked Jesus for ridding their neighborhood of these two menaces, but instead, *they begged Him to leave!*

What a transformation in these two men! You would have expected the people who saw the miracle to ask Jesus to stay and heal others who were sick and afflicted. Apparently money was more important to them than mercy, and they asked Jesus to leave.

The one former demoniac kept pleading with Jesus to be allowed to travel with Him and help Him. What a noble desire from a newly converted man! He had more spiritual discernment than all the other citizens put together. The man was not yet ready to become a disciple, but he could serve Jesus as a witness, starting at home among his Gentile relatives and friends. Jesus did not want Jews who had been healed to say too much about it, but it was safe for the Gentiles to tell others what Jesus had done for them, and that is what he did.

Sickness (vv. 40–48). When Jesus returned to Capernaum, the people welcomed Him, particularly a man and a woman who each had heavy burdens to share with Jesus. The contrast here is interesting, for it shows the variety of people who came to Jesus for help. The man's name is given (Jairus) but the woman is anonymous. Jairus was a wealthy leading citizen, but the woman was a lowly person who had spent all her money trying to get well. Here was a man interceding for his child and a woman hoping to get help for herself, and both came to the feet of Jesus. Jairus had been blessed with twelve years of joy with his daughter, and now might lose her, while the woman had experienced twelve years of misery because of her affliction, and now she was hoping to get well.

This woman had a hidden need, a burden she had lived with for twelve long years. It affected her physically and made life difficult. But it also affected her spiritually, because

the hemorrhage made her ceremonially defiled and unable to participate in the religious life of the nation (Lev. 15:19–22). She was defiled, destitute, discouraged, and desperate; but she came to Jesus and her need was met.

Her faith was almost superstitious, but the Lord honored it. She knew that He had healed others and she wanted Him to heal her. She could have used many excuses—the crowd was pressing around Him; nothing had worked for twelve years; it was not right to come to Jesus as a last resort; she was not an important person; He was on His way to heal Jairus' daughter—but she allowed nothing to stand in her way.

Jewish men wore tassels of blue twisted cords on the corners of their outer garments, as a reminder that they were to obey God's commandments (Num. 15:37–40; Deut. 22:12). The Pharisees went to extremes in obeying this rule to impress people with their sanctity (Matt. 23:5). Why the woman chose to touch this part of His garment, we do not know, but Jesus knew somebody with faith had touched Him and had been healed by His power. The healing was immediate and complete.

Why did the Lord ask her to give witness publicly? Was this not an embarrassment to her? Not in the least. To begin with, this public confession was for her sake. It was an opportunity for her to confess Christ and glorify God. Had she stolen away in the crowd, she would not have met Jesus personally or heard His words of assurance and comfort (Luke 8:48).

But her confession was also an encouragement to Jairus, who would soon hear that his daughter had died. (Perhaps he wanted to blame the woman for the delay!) The woman's twelve years of trial were ended, and the same Christ who helped her would help Jairus. She was a testimony to the power of faith. True, she did not exercise "great faith," but Christ honored it and healed her body.

Finally, her witness was a rebuke to the multitude. You can be a part of the crowd and never get any blessing from being near Jesus! It is one thing to "press Him" and another thing to "touch Him" by faith. We may not have strong faith, but we do have a strong Saviour, and He responds even to a touch at the hem of His garment.

When the inventor of chloroform, Sir James Simpson, was dying, a friend said to him, "You will soon be resting on His bosom." Simpson humbly replied, "I don't know as I can do that, but I think I have hold of the hem of His garment."

Death (vv. 49–56). The ruler of a synagogue was the elder in charge of the public services and the care of the facilities. He saw to it that people were appointed to pray, read the Scriptures, and give the sermon. He presided over the elders of the synagogue and was usually a man of reputation and wealth. It took a great deal of humility and courage for Jairus to approach Jesus and ask His help, for by this time the Jewish religious leaders were plotting to kill Him.

When Jairus left home, his daughter was so sick she was ready to die. By the time Jesus got away from the crowd to go with him, the girl had died. Jairus' friends thought that Jesus could help only living people, so they advised Jairus to drop the matter and come home. But Jesus encouraged the distraught father with a word of hope.

The scene at the home would have discouraged anybody! The professional mourners were already there, weeping and wailing; and a crowd of friends and neighbors had gathered. Jewish people in that day lost no time or energy in showing and sharing their grief. The body of the deceased would be buried that same day, after being washed and anointed.

Jesus took command of the situation and told the crowd to stop weeping because the girl was not dead but asleep. Of course she was dead, for her spirit had left her body (compare Luke 8:55 with James 2:26); but to Jesus, death was only sleep. This image is often used in the New Testament to describe the death of believers (John 11:11–14; Acts 7:59–60; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thes. 4:13–18). Sleep is a normal experience that we do not fear, and we should not fear death. It is the body that sleeps, not the spirit, for the spirit of the believer goes to be with Christ (Phil. 1:20–24; 2 Cor. 5:6–8). At the resurrection, the body will be “awakened” and glorified, and God’s people will share the image of Christ (1 John 3:1–2).

The mourners laughed at Jesus because they knew the girl was dead and that death was final. But they failed to realize that Jesus is “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25–26). Had He not raised the widow’s son from the dead? Did He not tell John the Baptist that the dead were being raised? (Luke 7:22) Apparently the mourners did not believe these reports and thought Jesus was a fool.

So He put them all out! This situation was much too tender and special for Him to allow dozens of unbelieving spectators to watch. He took the parents and three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John; and together they entered the room where the little girl lay dead.

He took her by the hand and spoke in Aramaic, “Talitha cumi! Little girl, arise!” (Peter would one day say “Tabitha cumi!”—Acts 9:40.) This was not a magic formula but a word of command from the Lord of life and death (Rev. 1:17–18). Her spirit returned to her body and she arose and began to walk around the room! Jesus told them to give her something to eat, for it is likely that during her illness she had eaten little or nothing. Jesus also instructed them not to spread the news, but still the word got around (Matt. 9:26).

Resurrection is a picture of the way Jesus Christ saves lost sinners and raises them from spiritual death (John 5:24; Eph. 2:1–10). The Gospels record three such resurrections, though Jesus probably performed more. In each instance, the person raised gave evidence of life. The widow’s son began to speak (Luke 7:15), Jairus’ daughter walked and ate food, and Lazarus was loosed from the graveclothes (John 11:44). When a lost sinner is raised from the dead, you can tell it by his speech, his walk, his appetite, and his “change of clothes” (Col. 3:1ff). You cannot hide life!

Peter, James, and John accompanied Jesus on three special occasions; and this was the first. The second was on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:28ff), and the third was in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33ff). Campbell Morgan has pointed out that each of these events has something to do with death and that the three disciples learned from these experiences some valuable lessons about Jesus and death.

In the home of Jairus, they learned that Jesus is victorious over death. On the Mount of Transfiguration, they discovered that He would be glorified in His death; and in the Garden, they saw that He was surrendered to death. James was the first of the Twelve to die (Acts 12:1–2), John the last to die, and Peter’s death was predicted by Jesus (John 21:18–19; 2 Peter 1:13–21). All three men needed these lessons, and we need them today.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A MANY-SIDED MINISTRY

Luke 9

It was an exasperating evening. I was studying and writing, and the phone was ringing every half hour. Had the calls been from friends, I would have enjoyed taking a break and chatting, but they came from people wanting to sell me everything from dance tickets to investments. By the time I got to bed that night, I had just about decided to get an unlisted number and start protecting my privacy.

At 11 o'clock, a man phoned who was contemplating committing suicide; and with the Lord's help, I was able to encourage him to get a new grip on life. When I hung up, I gave thanks that I did not have an unlisted number. As I lay down to go back to sleep, I thought of the Lord Jesus and the kind of schedule He must have had. He was available to all kinds of people at all times, and He did not turn anyone away. He probably would not have had an unlisted number.

In this chapter, Dr. Luke described the busy life of the compassionate Son of man as He performed four ministries.

Sending (Luke 9:1–11)

The commission (vv. 1–6). The Twelve had been ordained some months before (Luke 6:13–16) and had been traveling with Jesus as His helpers. Now He was going to send them out in pairs (Mark 6:7) to have their own ministry and to put into practice what they had learned. This was their “solo flight.”

But before He sent them out, He gave them the equipment needed to get the job done, as well as the instructions to follow. The parallel passage in Matthew 10 reveals that the Twelve were sent only to the people of Israel (Matt. 10:5–6). Luke does not mention this since he wrote primarily for the Gentiles and emphasized the worldwide outreach of the Gospel.

Power is the ability to accomplish a task, and *authority* is the right to do it, and Jesus gave both to His Apostles. They were able to cast out demons and heal the sick, but the most important ministry He gave them was that of preaching the Gospel. The word *preach* in Luke 9:6 describes a herald proclaiming a message from the king, and in Luke 9:6 it means “to preach the Good News.” They were heralds of the Good News!

The Apostles' ability to heal was a special gift that authenticated their ministry (see Rom. 15:18–19; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:1–4). Miracles were one evidence that the Lord had sent them and was working through them (Mark 16:20). Today we test a person's ministry by the truth of the Word of God (1 John 2:18–29; 4:1–6). Miracles alone are not proof that a person is truly sent of God, for Satan can enable his false ministers to do amazing things (Matt. 24:24; 2 Cor. 11:13–15; 2 Thes. 2:9–10).

Jesus told the Apostles what to take on their journey, with an emphasis on urgency and simplicity. They were not to take a “begging bag” along but were to trust God to open up homes for their hospitality. Matthew 10:11–15 tells how they were to select these homes. If they were refused, they should shake off the dust from their feet, a

familiar act performed by orthodox Jews whenever they left Gentile territory (see Luke 10:10–11; Acts 13:51).

The confusion (vv. 7–9). When the disciples left, Jesus also departed and ministered for a time in Galilee (Matt. 11:1); and together they attracted a great deal of attention. In fact, their work was even discussed in the highest levels of government! Herod Antipas (Luke 3:1) was a son of Herod the Great and the man who had John the Baptist killed (Matt. 14:1–12; Luke 3:19–20).

Who was this miracle worker? John the Baptist had done no miracles (John 10:41), but that might change if he were raised from the dead. The Jews expected Elijah to come, so perhaps the prophecy was being fulfilled (see Mal. 4:5; Matt. 11:10–14; 17:11–13; Luke 1:17). Herod's conscience was no doubt convicting him, and he was wondering if perhaps God had sent John back to judge him.

Herod kept trying to see Jesus; but Jesus, unlike some modern "religious celebrities," did not make it a point to go out of His way to mingle with the high and mighty. Jesus called the evil king a "fox" and was not intimidated by his threats (Luke 13:31–32). When Herod and Jesus did finally meet, the king hoped to see a miracle, but the Son of God did nothing and said nothing to him. Evil King Herod had silenced God's voice to him (Luke 23:6–12).

The conclusion (vv. 10–11). The Apostles returned and gave a glowing report of their ministry, and Jesus suggested that they all take some time off for rest (Mark 6:30–32). As the popular speaker Vance Havner used to say, "If we don't come apart and rest, we'll just come apart." Their mission of preaching and healing had been demanding and they all needed time alone for physical and spiritual renewal. This is a good example for busy (and sometimes overworked) Christian workers to imitate.

Attracted by the signs Jesus was doing, the crowds would not leave Him alone, but followed Him from the cities. When Jesus and the Twelve landed, the crowd was already there to meet them, and Jesus had compassion on them and ministered to them (Matt. 14:13–14). The Son of man could not even take a day off!

Feeding (Luke 9:12–17)

Our Lord was not the kind of person who could teach the Word and then say to hungry people, "Depart in peace, be ye warm and filled" (James 2:16). The disciples were only too eager to see the crowd leave (Luke 18:15; see Matt. 15:23). They had not yet caught the compassion of Christ and the burden He had for the multitudes, but one day they would.

When you combine all four accounts of this miracle, you find that Jesus first asked Philip where they could buy enough bread to feed such a great crowd. (There could well have been 10,000 people there.) He was only testing Philip, "for He Himself knew what He was intending to do" (John 6:6, nasb). In the crisis hours of life, when your resources are low and your responsibilities are great, it is good to remember that God already has the problem solved.

Jesus started with what they had, a few loaves and fishes that were generously donated by a lad found by Andrew (John 6:8–9). Did Andrew know the boy? Or did the boy offer his little lunch without being asked? Before we ask God to do the impossible,

let's start with the possible and give Him what we have. And while we are at it, let's give thanks for mothers who give their sons something to give to Jesus.

The Lord looked up to heaven, the source of our daily bread (Matt. 6:11), gave thanks, and blessed the food; and then He multiplied the few loaves and fishes. Jesus was the "producer" and His disciples were the "distributors." The amazing thing is that *everybody* was served and satisfied, and there were twelve baskets of leftovers, one for each of the disciples. Jesus takes good care of His servants.

This miracle was more than an act of mercy for hungry people, though that was important. It was also a sign of our Lord's messiahship and an illustration of God's gracious provision for man's salvation. The next day, Jesus preached a sermon on "the bread of life" and urged the people to receive Him just as they had received the bread (John 6:22–59). But the people were more interested in their stomachs than their souls, and completely missed the spiritual impact of the miracle. Their desire was to make Jesus King so He could give them bread for the rest of their lives! (John 6:14–15)

After Jesus returned to heaven, the disciples must often have been encouraged by remembering this miracle. It teaches us to have compassion, to look on problems as opportunities for God to work, and to give Him all that we have and trust Him to meet the needs. If we do all we can, He will step in and do the rest. "Let God's promises shine on your problems," said Corrie Ten Boom, and that is good counsel for us.

Teaching (Luke 9:18–36)

In Luke's Gospel, the feeding of the 5,000 marks the end of what is called the "Great Galilean Ministry" (Luke 4:14–9:17). Jesus now begins His journey to Jerusalem (see Luke 9:51; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; and 19:11, 28). This would be a time of relative retirement with His disciples as He prepared them for what lay ahead. There is a parallel between this account and the account in Acts of Paul's last journey to Jerusalem. In both books we have "a tale of two cities": in Luke, from Nazareth to Jerusalem; and in Acts, from Jerusalem to Rome.

In this section, you see Jesus teaching them three basic lessons about His person, His sacrifice, and His kingdom.

His person (vv. 18–21). If any of us asked our friends what people were saying about us, it would be an evidence of pride, but not so with Jesus Christ. People had better know who He is, because what we think about Jesus determines our eternal destiny (John 8:24; 1 John 4:1–3). It is impossible to be wrong about Jesus and right with God.

Jesus had prayed all night before choosing His disciples (Luke 6:12–13), and now He prayed before asking for their personal confession of faith. The crowd would have its opinions (see Luke 9:7–8), but His disciples must have convictions. Peter was the spokesman for the group and gave a clear witness to the deity of Jesus Christ. This was the second time that he confessed Christ publicly (John 6:68–69). Except for Judas (John 6:70–71), all of the Twelve had faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus commanded them (the word means "an order from a military officer") not to spread this truth openly. To begin with, the message of His messiahship could not be divorced from the fact of His death and resurrection, and He was now going to teach this to the Twelve. They had a difficult time grasping this new lesson and did not really

understand it until after He was raised from the dead (Luke 24:44–48). The Jewish people saw Jesus primarily as a healer and a potential deliverer. If the Apostles began preaching that He was indeed the Messiah, it might cause a popular uprising against Rome.

His sacrifice (vv. 22–26). Jesus had already given a number of “hints” about His sacrificial death, but now He began to teach this truth clearly to His disciples. John the Baptist had presented Him as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29), and Jesus had predicted the “destruction” of the temple of His body (John 2:19). When He compared Himself to the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14) and to Jonah (Matt. 12:38–40), Jesus was making statements about His suffering and death.

This is the first of three statements in Luke about His coming passion in Jerusalem (Luke 9:43–45; 18:31–34). It is clear that the Twelve did not understand, partly because of their unbelief and immaturity, and partly because it was “hidden” from them by God. Jesus taught them as they were able to receive the truth (John 16:12). It must have shocked the men to hear that their own religious leaders would kill their Master.

But Jesus did not stop with a private announcement of His own death. He also made a public declaration about a cross for every disciple. In his Gospel, Matthew tells us that this was necessary because of Peter's desire to protect Jesus from suffering (Matt. 16:22ff). Keep in mind that Jesus is talking about *discipleship* and not *sonship*. We are not saved from our sins because we take up a cross and follow Jesus, but because we trust the Saviour who died on the cross for our sins. After we become children of God, then we become disciples.

The closest contemporary word to “disciple” is probably “apprentice.” A disciple is more than a student who learns lessons by means of lectures and books. He is one who learns by living and working with his teacher in a daily “hands on” experience. Too many Christians are content to be listeners who gain a lot of knowledge but who have never put that knowledge into practice.

In the Roman world, the cross was a symbol of shame, guilt, suffering, and rejection. There could be no more despicable way to die. Crucifixion was not mentioned in polite conversation, and the people would no more think of wearing crosses on their person than we would think of wearing gold or silver electric chairs.

Jesus laid down the stern requirements for discipleship. We must first say no to ourselves—not simply to pleasures or possessions, but to *self*—and then take up *our* cross and follow Christ daily. This means to be identified with Him in surrender, suffering, and sacrifice. You cannot crucify yourself; you can only yield your body (Rom. 12:1–2) and let God do the rest.

Of course, this kind of life seems foolish to the world; but to the Christian, it is wisdom. To save your life is to lose it, and how can you ever get it back again? But to give your life to Christ is to save it and to live it in fullness. If a person owned the whole world, he would still be too poor to buy back a lost life.

Discipleship is a daily discipline: we follow Jesus a step at a time, a day at a time. A weary cleaning woman said to a friend of mine, “The trouble with life is that it's so daily!” But she was wrong. One of the *best* things about life is that we can take it a day at a time (Deut. 33:25).

Our motive should be to glorify Christ. Anyone who is ashamed of Christ will never take up a cross and follow Him. But if we are ashamed of Him now, He will be ashamed

of us when He comes again (Mark 8:38; 2 Tim. 2:11–13) and we will be ashamed before Him (1 John 2:28).

His kingdom (vv. 27–36). As far as the Gospel record is concerned, the Transfiguration was the only occasion during Christ's earthly ministry when He revealed the glory of His person. Luke did not use the word *transfigure* but he described the same scene (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2). The word means "a change in appearance that comes from within," and it gives us the English word *metamorphosis*.

What were the reasons behind this event? For one thing, it was God's seal of approval to Peter's confession of faith that Jesus is the Son of God (John 1:14). It was also the Father's way of encouraging the Son as He began to make His way to Jerusalem. The Father had spoken at the baptism (Luke 3:22) and would speak again during that final week of the Son's earthly ministry (John 12:23–28). Beyond the suffering of the cross would be the glory of the throne, a lesson that Peter emphasized in his first epistle (1 Peter 4:12–5:4).

Our Lord's own words in Luke 9:27 indicate that the event was a demonstration (or illustration) of the promised kingdom of God. This seems logical, for the disciples were confused about the kingdom because of Jesus' words about the cross. (We must not be too hard on them because the prophets were also confused—1 Peter 1:10–12.) Jesus was reassuring them that the Old Testament prophecies would be fulfilled, but first He had to suffer before He could enter into His glory (note especially 2 Peter 1:12–21).

But there is also a practical lesson here, for we can have a spiritual "transfiguration" experience each day as we walk with the Lord. Romans 12:1–2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 tell us how. As we surrender body, mind, and will, the Lord transforms us from within so that we are not conformed to the world. As we behold Him in the Word (the mirror), we are "transfigured" by the Spirit "from glory to glory." The theological name for this experience is *sanctification*, the process by which we become more like the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the Father's goal for each of His children (Rom. 8:19; 1 John 3:2). Note that our Lord was once again praying, which suggests that prayer is one of the keys to a transformed life.

Peter, James, and John had accompanied Jesus when He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (Luke 8:51ff), and they would accompany Him when He prayed in the Garden (Matt. 26:36–46). These three occasions remind me of Philippians 3:10, "That I may know Him [the Transfiguration], and the power of His resurrection [raising the girl], and the fellowship of His sufferings [in the Garden]."

This may well have been the greatest "Bible conference" ever held on earth! Even apart from the great glory that was involved, here you certainly had the greatest speakers: Moses, the Law; Elijah, the Prophets; and Jesus, who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. You had the greatest topic: Jesus' "decease" (the Greek is *exodus*) that He would accomplish at Jerusalem. Moses had led Israel out of bondage to Egypt, and Elijah had delivered them from bondage to false gods; but Jesus would die to set *a sinful world* free from bondage to sin and death (Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13; Heb. 2:14–15).

And while all of this was going on, the three privileged disciples were sleeping! (They would repeat this failure in the Garden.) Peter's suggestion reminds us of the Jewish "Feast of Booths" that in the Bible is related to the future kingdom (Lev. 23:33–44; Zech. 14:16–21). Peter wanted Jesus to hold on to the glory *apart from the suffering*, but this is not God's plan.

The Father interrupted Peter by bathing the scene in a cloud of glory (Ex. 13:21–22; 40:35, 38) and speaking out of the cloud. (Peter would one day be interrupted by the Son [Matt. 17:24–27] and by the Spirit [Acts 10:44].) These arresting words from heaven remind us of Deuteronomy 18:15; Psalm 2:7; and Isaiah 42:1. When the cloud was gone, Elijah and Moses were also gone.

As wonderful as these experiences are, they are not the basis for a consistent Christian life. That can come only through the Word of God. Experiences come and go, but the Word remains. Our recollection of past experiences will fade, but God's Word never changes. The farther we get from these events, the less impact they make on our lives. That was why the Father said, "Hear Him!" and why Peter made this same emphasis on the Word in his report (2 Peter 1:12–21). Our own personal "transfiguration" comes from inner renewal (Rom. 12:1–2), and that comes from the Word (2 Cor. 3:18).

Enduring (Luke 9:37–62)

"How long shall I stay with you and put up with you?" (Luke 9:41, niv.) You might expect that lament to come from an overworked kindergarten teacher, or an impatient army drill instructor, but it was made by the sinless Son of God! We are prone to forget how long-suffering our Lord had to be while He was ministering on earth, especially with His own disciples.

When you analyze this section of Luke's Gospel, you can better understand why Jesus spoke those words: *He was grieved over the failures of His followers*. He had given His Apostles authority over Satan, yet they were too weak to cast out a demon (Luke 9:37–45). In feeding the 5,000, Jesus gave them an example of compassion, yet they persisted in manifesting selfishness and lack of love (Luke 9:46–56). He taught clearly what it meant to follow Him, yet the volunteers turned out to be "me first" disciples (Luke 9:57–62). No wonder He was grieved!

Lack of power (vv. 37–45). We dare not stay on the glorious mountaintop when there are battles to fight in the valley below. Here was another "only child" needing the help of the Lord (Luke 7:12; 8:42), and even more so because His own disciples had failed. They had the power and the authority (Luke 9:1) but they did not have the success. Why?

When you study all three reports (Matt. 17; Mark 9), you discover what was lacking in their lives. First on the list was *faith* (Matt. 17:19–20); they were part of an unbelieving generation and had lost the confidence that they needed in order to use their power. But *prayer* and *fasting* were also lacking (Mark 9:29), which indicates that the nine men had allowed their devotional disciplines to erode during their Lord's brief absence. No matter what spiritual gifts we may have, their exercise is never automatic.

The devil tried one last throw (a wrestling term in the Greek), but Jesus rebuked the demon and cast him out. The Lord lovingly gave the boy back to his father (see Luke 7:15) and then took the Twelve aside for another lesson about the cross. After all, it was at the cross that Jesus would give Satan that final blow of defeat (John 12:31–32; Col. 2:15).

Lack of love (vv. 46–56). The disciples did not have much love for each other, or they would not have argued over who was the greatest (Luke 9:46–48). Perhaps this

debate started because of envy (three of the disciples had been with Jesus on the mount), or because of pride (the other nine had failed to cast out the demon). Also, just before this, Jesus had paid Peter's temple tax for him (Matt. 17:24–27); and this may have aroused some envy.

In His kingdom, the example of greatness is a little child—helpless, dependent, without status, living by faith. The only thing worse than a child trying to act like an adult is an adult acting like a child! There is a great difference between being childlike and childish! (see 1 Cor. 13:4–5; 14:20)

They also showed a lack of love for believers outside their own group (Luke 9:49–50). This is what we would expect from a “son of thunder”! (Mark 3:17) Perhaps John was trying to impress Jesus with his zeal for protecting His name, but the Lord was not impressed. Believers who think that their group is the only group God recognizes and blesses are in for a shock when they get to heaven.

Nor did the Apostles love their enemies (Luke 9:51–56). James and John had seen the Prophet Elijah on the mount, so they thought they might imitate him and call down fire from heaven! (2 Kings 1) The Samaritans and Jews had been enemies for centuries (2 Kings 17:24–41), so it was understandable that this village would reject Jesus as He traveled toward Jerusalem (John 4:9, 20). Jesus rebuked their vengeful spirit and simply went to another village (Matt. 5:37–48). Later, Samaria would be reached with the Gospel (Acts 8).

Lack of discipline (vv. 57–62). Three men could have become disciples, but they would not meet the conditions that Jesus laid down. The first man was a scribe (Matt. 8:19) who volunteered to go until he heard the cost: he had to deny himself. Apparently he was accustomed to a comfortable home.

The second man was called by Jesus (what an honor!), but he was rejected because he would not take up the cross and die to self. He was worried about somebody else's funeral when he should have been planning his own! Jesus is not suggesting here that we dishonor our parents, but only that we not permit our love for family to weaken our love for the Lord. We should love Christ so much that our love for family would look like hatred in comparison (Luke 14:26).

The third man also volunteered, but he could not follow Christ because he was looking back instead of ahead. There is nothing wrong with a loving farewell (1 Kings 19:19–21), but if it gets in the way of obedience, it becomes sin. Jesus saw that this man's heart was not wholly with Him, but that he would be plowing and looking back (see Gen. 19:17, 26; Phil. 3:13–14).

No wonder the laborers are few! (Luke 10:2)

It would appear that what Jesus taught His disciples and the multitudes had done them little good. They lacked power, love, and discipline, and they grieved His heart. If we today lack these spiritual essentials, we can never truly be His disciples, but they are available to us from the Lord. “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7, niv).

Are we a joy to Jesus Christ, or are we breaking His heart?

CHAPTER NINE

WHAT IN THE WORLD DOES A CHRISTIAN DO?

Luke 10

The three scenes in Luke 10 illustrate the threefold ministry of every Christian believer, and they answer the question, "What in the world does a Christian do?"

To begin with, we are the Lord's *ambassadors*, sent to represent Him in this world (Luke 10:1–24). We are also *neighbors*, looking for opportunities to show mercy in the name of Christ (Luke 10:25–37). But at the heart of all our ministry is devotion to Christ, so we must be *worshippers* who take time to listen to His Word and commune with Him (Luke 10:38–42).

Whether we are in the harvest field, on the highway, or in the home, our highest privilege and our greatest joy is to do the will of God.

Ambassadors: Representing the Lord (Luke 10:1–24)

This event should not be confused with the sending out of the Twelve (Matt. 10; Luke 9:1–11). There are similarities in the charges given, but this is to be expected since both groups were sent by the same Master to do the same basic job. The 12 Apostles ministered throughout Galilee, but these men were sent into Judea, and the men in this chapter are not called Apostles. They were anonymous disciples.

Why is this event recorded only by Luke, and why did Jesus select seventy men instead of some other number? (Some texts say seventy-two, and the textual evidence is about even.) Just as the Twelve were associated in number with the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel, so the Seventy may be associated with the seventy nations listed in Genesis 10. Luke's emphasis is on the universality of the Gospel message, so it seems reasonable that he would be led by the Holy Spirit to include this event. It was a symbolic way of saying, "Jesus wants the message spread to all nations."

Explanation (vv. 1–12). These men were not called "apostles," but they were still "sent [*apostello*] with a commission" to represent the Lord. They were therefore truly ambassadors of the King. Not only were they sent *by* Him, but they were also sent *before* Him to prepare the way for His coming. Their calling was certainly a dignified one.

It was also a difficult calling (Luke 10:2). Harvesting is hard work, even when there are many people helping you, but these men were sent into a vast field with very few workers to help them reap a great harvest. Instead of praying for an easier job, they were to pray for more laborers to join them, and we today need to pray that same prayer. (Please note that it is *laborers*, not spectators, who pray for more laborers! Too many Christians are praying for somebody else to do a job they are unwilling to do themselves.)

Their calling was a dangerous one. As they invaded enemy territory (Luke 10:17), they would be like "lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3). But as long as they relied on the

Lord, they would win the battle. "Any man who takes Jesus Christ seriously becomes the target of the devil," Vance Havner often told audiences. "Most church members do not give Satan enough trouble to arouse his opposition."

It would require discipline and faith for them to do the job (Luke 10:4–8). There was an urgency about the work, and the Lord did not want them to be overburdened with extra supplies or be delayed on the road by elaborate Eastern greetings. They had to trust God to provide homes and food for them, and they were not to be embarrassed to accept hospitality. After all, they were laboring for the Lord and bringing blessing into the home, and "the laborer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7; see also 1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Tim. 5:18).

They were ambassadors of peace, bringing healing to the sick, deliverance to the possessed, and the Good News of salvation to lost sinners. Like Joshua's army of old, they first proclaimed peace to the cities. If a city rejected the offer of peace, then it chose judgment (Deut. 20:10–18). It is a serious thing to reject the ambassadors God sends.

It is important to note that the special power that Jesus gave to His Apostles (Luke 9:1) and to the Seventy is not ours to claim today. These two preaching missions were very special ministries, and God did not promise to duplicate them in our age. Our Lord's commission to us emphasizes the proclamation of the message, not the performing of miracles (Matt. 28:19–20; Luke 24:46–49).

Denunciation (vv. 13–16). This seems like harsh language from the lips of the Son of God, but we dare not ignore it or try to explain it away. He named three ancient cities that had been judged by God—Sodom (Gen. 19), and Tyre and Sidon (Ezek. 26–28; Isa. 23)—and used them to warn three cities of His day: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. These three cities had been given more privileges than the three ancient cities, and therefore they had more responsibility. If Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon were destroyed, how could Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum escape?

To hear Christ's ambassadors means to hear Him, and to despise His representatives means to despise Him. "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20:21; see also 2 Cor. 5:18–21). The way a nation treats an ambassador is the way it treats the government the ambassador represents. For an interesting illustration of this truth, read 2 Samuel 10.

Jubilation (vv. 17–24). There is a threefold joy here: the joy of service (Luke 10:17–19), the joy of salvation (Luke 10:20), and the joy of sovereignty (Luke 10:21–24).

We can well understand the joy of the Seventy as they returned to report their victories to Jesus. He had given them power and authority to heal, to cast out demons, and to preach the Word, and they were successful! In the midst of their great joy, they were careful to give God the glory ("in Thy name").

They had seen individual victories from city to city, but Jesus saw these victories as part of a war that dethroned and defeated Satan (note Isa. 14:4–23; John 12:31–32; and Rev. 12:8–9). As believers, we are weak in ourselves, but we can be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10ff). Each victory is important to the Lord, no matter how insignificant it may seem in our eyes. Satan will not finally be judged until Jesus casts him into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10), but God's people can today claim Christ's Calvary victory by faith (Col. 2:15).

But the enemy will not give up! Satan would certainly attack Christ's servants and seek to destroy them. That is why our Lord added the words of encouragement in Luke 10:19. He assured them that their authority was not gone now that the preaching mission had ended, and that they could safely tread on the "old serpent" without fear (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:9).

The Lord cautioned them not to "go on rejoicing" over their victories but to rejoice because their names had been written in heaven. (The verb means "they have been written and they stand written." It is a statement of assurance. See Phil. 4:3; Rev. 20:12–15.) As wonderful as their miracles were, the greatest miracle of all is still the salvation of a lost soul. The Greek word translated "written" means "to inscribe formally and solemnly." It was used for the signing of a will, a marriage document, or a peace treaty, and also for the enrolling of a citizen. The perfect tense in the Greek means "it stands written."

But our highest joy is not found in service or even in our salvation, but in being submitted to the sovereign will of the Heavenly Father, for this is the foundation for both service and salvation. Here we see God the Son rejoicing through God the Holy Spirit because of the will of God the Father! "I delight to do Thy will, O my God" (Ps. 40:8).

Jesus was not rejoicing because sinners were blind to God's truth, for God is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). He rejoiced because *the understanding of that truth* did not depend on natural abilities or education. If that were the case, most of the people in the world would be shut out of the kingdom. When the Twelve and the Seventy were preaching, they did not see the "wise and learned" humbling themselves to receive God's truth and grace, but they saw the "common people" trusting the Word (Luke 7:29–30; 1 Cor. 1:26–29). In His sovereign will, God has ordained that sinners must humble themselves before they can be lifted up (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:6).

Christ's ambassadors were indeed privileged people. They were able to see and hear things that the greatest saints in the Old Testament ages yearned to see and hear but could not. The Messiah was at work, and they were a part of His work!

Neighbors: Imitating the Lord (Luke 10:25–37)

It was expected that rabbis would discuss theological matters in public, and the question this scribe (lawyer) asked was one that was often debated by the Jews. It was a good question asked with a bad motive, because the lawyer hoped to trap our Lord. However, Jesus trapped the lawyer!

Our Lord sent the man back to the Law, not because the Law saves us (Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:21), but because the Law shows us that we need to be saved. There can be no real conversion without conviction, and the Law is what God uses to convict sinners (Rom. 3:20).

The scribe gave the right answer, but he would not apply it personally to himself and admit his own lack of love for both God and his neighbor. So, instead of *being justified* by throwing himself on the mercy of God (Luke 18:9–14), he tried to *justify himself* and wriggle out of his predicament. He used the old debating tactic, "Define your terms! What do you mean by 'neighbor'? Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus did not say that this story was a parable, so it could well be the report of an actual occurrence. For Jesus to tell a story that made the Jews look bad and the

Samaritans look good would either be dangerous or self-defeating. "You just made that up!" they could say. "We all know that nothing like that would ever happen!" So it is possible that some of His listeners, including the lawyer, knew that such a thing had really happened. Either way, the account is realistic.

The worst thing we can do with any parable, especially this one, is turn it into an allegory and make everything stand for something. The victim becomes the lost sinner who is half dead (alive physically, dead spiritually), helplessly left on the road of life. The priest and Levite represent the Law and the sacrifices, neither of which can save the sinner.

The Samaritan is Jesus Christ who saves the man, pays the bill, and promises to come again. The inn stands for the local church where believers are cared for, and the "two pence" are the two ordinances, baptism and Communion. If you take this approach to Scripture, you can make the Bible say almost anything you please, and you are sure to miss the messages God wants you to get.

The road from Jerusalem down to Jericho was indeed a dangerous one. Since the temple workers used it so much, you would have thought the Jews or Romans would have taken steps to make it safe. It is much easier to maintain a religious system than it is to improve the neighborhood.

Most of us can think up excuses for the priest and Levite as they ignored the victim. (Maybe we have used them ourselves!) The priest had been serving God at the temple all week and was anxious to get home. Perhaps the bandits were still lurking in the vicinity and using the victim as "bait." Why take a chance? Anyway, it was not his fault that the man was attacked. The road was busy, so somebody else was bound to come along and help the man. The priest left it to the Levite, and then the Levite did what the priest did—nothing! Such is the power of the bad example of a religious man.

By using a Samaritan as the hero, Jesus disarmed the Jews, for the Jews and Samaritans were enemies (John 4:9; 8:48). It was not a Jew helping a Samaritan but a Samaritan helping a Jew *who had been ignored by his fellow Jews!* The Samaritan loved those who hated him, risked his own life, spent his own money (two days' wages for a laborer), and was never publicly rewarded or honored as far as we know.

What the Samaritan did helps us better understand what it means to "show mercy" (Luke 10:37), and it also illustrates the ministry of Jesus Christ. The Samaritan identified with the needs of the stranger and had compassion on him. There was no logical reason why he should rearrange his plans and spend his money just to help an "enemy" in need, but mercy does not need reasons. Being an expert in the Law, the scribe certainly knew that God required His people to show mercy, even to strangers and enemies (Ex. 23:4–5; Lev. 19:33–34; Micah 6:8).

See how wisely Jesus "turned the tables" on the lawyer. Trying to evade responsibility, the man asked, "Who is my neighbor?" But Jesus asked, "Which of these three men was neighbor to the victim?" The big question is, "To whom can I be a neighbor?" and this has nothing to do with geography, citizenship, or race. Wherever people need us, there we can be neighbors and, like Jesus Christ, show mercy.

The lawyer wanted to discuss "neighbor" in a general way, but Jesus forced him to consider a specific man in need. How easy it is for us to talk about abstract ideals and fail to help solve concrete problems. We can discuss things like "poverty" and "job

opportunities” and yet never personally help feed a hungry family or help somebody find a job.

Of course, the lawyer wanted to make the issue somewhat complex and philosophical, but Jesus made it simple and practical. He moved it from *duty* to *love*, from *debating* to *doing*. To be sure, our Lord was not condemning discussions or debates; He was only warning us not to use these things as excuses for doing nothing. Committees are not always committed!

One of my favorite D.L. Moody stories illustrates this point. Attending a convention in Indianapolis, Mr. Moody asked singer Ira Sankey to meet him at 6 o'clock one evening at a certain street corner. When Sankey arrived, Mr. Moody put him on a box and asked him to sing, and it was not long before a crowd gathered. Moody spoke briefly, inviting the crowd to follow him to the nearby opera house. Before long, the auditorium was filled, and the evangelist preached the Gospel to the spiritually hungry people.

When the delegates to the convention started to arrive, Moody stopped preaching and said, “Now we must close as the brethren of the convention wish to come and to discuss the question, ‘How to Reach the Masses.’ ” *Touche!*

We may read this passage and think only of “the high cost of caring,” but it is far more costly *not* to care. The priest and the Levite lost far more by their neglect than the Samaritan did by his concern. They lost the opportunity to become better men and good stewards of what God had given them. They could have been a good influence in a bad world, but they chose to be a bad influence. *The Samaritan's one deed of mercy has inspired sacrificial ministry all over the world.* Never say that such ministry is wasted! God sees to it that no act of loving service in Christ's name is ever lost.

It all depends on your outlook. To the thieves, this traveling Jew was a victim to exploit, so they attacked him. To the priest and Levite, he was a nuisance to avoid, so they ignored him. But to the Samaritan, he was a neighbor to love and help, so he took care of him. What Jesus said to the lawyer, He says to us: “Go and *keep on doing it likewise*” (literal translation).

Worshippers: Listening to the Lord (Luke 10:38–42)

Worship is at the heart of all that we are and all that we do in the Christian life. It is important that we be busy ambassadors, taking the message of the Gospel to lost souls. It is also essential to be merciful Samaritans, seeking to help exploited and hurting people who need God's mercy. But before we can represent Christ as we should, or imitate Him in our caring ministry, we must spend time with Him and learn from Him. We must “take time to be holy.”

Mary of Bethany is seen three times in the Gospel record, and on each occasion, she is in the same place: at the feet of Jesus. She sat at His feet and listened to His Word (Luke 10:39), fell at His feet and shared her woe (John 11:32), and came to His feet and poured out her worship (John 12:3). It is interesting to note that in each of these instances, there is some kind of fragrance: in Luke 10, it is food; in John 11, it is death (John 11:39); and in John 12, it is perfume.

Mary and Martha are often contrasted as though each believer must make a choice: be a *worker* like Martha or a *worshiper* like Mary. Certainly our personalities and gifts

are different, but that does not mean that the Christian life is an either/or situation. Charles Wesley said it perfectly in one of his hymns:

Faithful to my Lord's commands,
I still would choose the better part;
Serve with careful Martha's hands,
And loving Mary's heart.

It seems evident that the Lord wants each of us to imitate Mary in our worship and Martha in our work. Blessed are the balanced!

Consider Martha's situation. She received Jesus into her home *and then neglected Him as she prepared an elaborate meal that He did not need!* Certainly a meal was in order, but what we do *with* Christ is far more important than what we do *for* Christ. Again, it is not an either/or situation; it is a matter of balance. Mary had done her share of the work in the kitchen and then had gone to "feed" on the Lord's teachings. Martha felt neglected after Mary left the kitchen, and she began to complain and to suggest that neither the Lord nor Mary really cared!

Few things are as damaging to the Christian life as trying to work for Christ without taking time to commune with Christ. "For without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Mary chose the better part, the part that could not be taken from her. She knew that she could not live "by bread alone" (Matt. 4:4).

Whenever we criticize others and pity ourselves because we feel overworked, we had better take time to examine our lives. Perhaps in all of our busyness, we have been ignoring the Lord. Martha's problem was not that she had too much work to do, but that she allowed her work to distract her and pull her apart. She was trying to serve two masters! If serving Christ makes us difficult to live with, then something is terribly wrong with our service!

The key is to have the right priorities: Jesus Christ first, then others, then ourselves. It is vitally important that we spend time "at the feet of Jesus" every single day, letting Him share His Word with us. *The most important part of the Christian life is the part that only God sees.* Unless we meet Christ personally and privately each day, we will soon end up like Martha: busy but not blessed.

Often in my pastoral ministry, I have asked people with serious problems, "Tell me about your devotional life." The usual response has been an embarrassed look, a bowed head, and the quiet confession, "I stopped reading my Bible and praying a long time ago." And they wondered why they had problems!

According to John 12:1–2, Martha must have learned her lesson, for she prepared a feast for Jesus, the Twelve, and her brother and sister—that's fifteen people—*and did not utter one word of complaint!* She had God's peace in her heart because she had learned to sit at the feet of Jesus.

We are ambassadors, neighbors, and worshipers, these three; and the greatest of these is worshipers.

CHAPTER TEN

LEARNING LIFE'S LESSONS

Luke 11

Our Lord's teaching in Luke 11 grew out of a prayer meeting, a miracle, and an invitation to dinner. Jesus used these occasions to give instructions about four important topics: prayer, Satan, spiritual opportunity, and hypocrisy. It is important that we today understand these topics and apply these truths to our own lives.

Prayer (Luke 11:1–13)

The priority of prayer (v. 1). We usually think of John the Baptist as a prophet and martyr, and yet our Lord's disciples remembered him as a man of prayer. John was a "miracle baby," filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born, and yet he had to pray. He was privileged to introduce the Messiah to Israel, and yet he had to pray. Jesus said that John was the greatest of the prophets (Luke 7:28), and yet John had to depend on prayer. If prayer was that vital to a man who had these many advantages, how much more important it ought to be to us who do not have these advantages!

John's disciples had to pray and Jesus' disciples wanted to learn better how to pray. They did not ask the Master to teach them how to preach or do great signs; they asked Him to teach them to pray. We today sometimes think that we would be better Christians if only we had been with Jesus when He was on earth, but this is not likely. The disciples were with Him and yet they failed many times! They could perform miracles, and yet they wanted to learn to pray.

But the greatest argument for the priority of prayer is the fact that our Lord was a Man of prayer. Thus far we have seen that He prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21), before He chose the Twelve (Luke 6:12), when the crowds increased (Luke 5:16), before He asked the Twelve for their confession of faith (Luke 9:18), and at His Transfiguration (Luke 9:29). The disciples knew that He often prayed alone (Mark 1:35), and they wanted to learn from Him this secret of spiritual power and wisdom.

If Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, had to depend on prayer during "the days of His flesh" (Heb. 5:7), then how much more do you and I need to pray! Effective prayer is the provision for every need and the solution for every problem.

Pattern for prayer (vv. 2–4). We call this "The Lord's Prayer," not because Jesus prayed it (He never had to ask for forgiveness), but because Jesus taught it. There is nothing wrong with praying this prayer personally or as part of a congregation, so long as we do it from a believing heart that is sincere and submitted. How easy it is to "recite" these words and not really mean them, but that can happen even when we sing and preach! The fault lies with us, not with this prayer.

This is a "pattern prayer," given to guide us in our own praying (see Matt. 6:9–15 for the parallel). It teaches us that true prayer depends on a spiritual relationship with God that enables us to call Him "Father," and this can come only through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:1–7).

Lyndon Johnson's press secretary, Bill Moyers, was saying grace at a staff lunch, and the President shouted, "Speak up, Bill! I can't hear a thing!" Moyers quietly replied, "I wasn't addressing you, Mr. President." It is good to remind ourselves that when we pray, we talk to God.

True prayer also involves *responsibilities*: honoring God's kingdom and doing God's will (Luke 11:2). It has well been said that the purpose of prayer is not to get man's will done in heaven, but to get God's will done on earth. Prayer is not telling God what we want and then selfishly enjoying it. Prayer is asking God to use us to accomplish *what He wants* so that His name is glorified, His kingdom is extended and strengthened, and His will is done. I must test all of my personal requests by these overruling concerns if I expect God to hear and answer my prayers.

It is important for Christians to know the Word of God, for there we discover the will of God. We must never separate prayer and the Word (John 15:7). During my ministry, I have seen professing Christians disobey God and defend themselves by saying, "I prayed about it and God said it was all right!" This includes a girl who married an unsaved man (2 Cor. 6:14–18), a fellow living with a girl who was not his wife (1 Thes. 4:1–8), and a preacher who started his own church because all the other churches were wrong and only he had true "spiritual insight" (Phil. 2:1–16).

Once we are secure in our relationship with God and His will, then we can bring our *requests* to Him (Luke 11:3–4). We can ask Him to provide our needs (not our greeds!) for today, to forgive us for what we have done yesterday, and to lead us in the future. All of our needs may be included in these three requests: material and physical provision, moral and spiritual perfection, and divine protection and direction. If we pray this way, we can be sure of praying in God's will.

Persistence in prayer (vv. 5–8). In this parable, Jesus did not say that God is like this grouchy neighbor. In fact, He said just the opposite. If a tired and selfish neighbor finally meets the needs of a bothersome friend, how much more will a loving Heavenly Father meet the needs of His own dear children! He is arguing from the lesser to the greater.

We have already seen that prayer is based on *sonship* ("Our Father"), not on friendship; but Jesus used friendship to illustrate persistence in prayer. God the Father is not like this neighbor, for He never sleeps, never gets impatient or irritable, is always generous, and delights in meeting the needs of His children. The friend at the door had to keep on knocking in order to get what he needed, but God is quick to respond to His children's cries (Luke 18:1–8).

The argument is clear: If persistence finally paid off as a man beat on the door of a reluctant friend, how much more would persistence bring blessing as we pray to a loving Heavenly Father! After all, we are the children *in the house with Him!*

The word translated "importunity" means "shamelessness" or "avoidance of shame." It can refer to the man at the door who was not ashamed to wake up his friend, but it can also refer to the friend in the house. Hospitality to strangers is a basic law in the East (Gen. 18:1ff). If a person refused to entertain a guest, he brought disgrace on the whole village and the neighbors would have nothing to do with him. The man in the house knew this and did not want to embarrass himself, his family, or his village; so he got up and met the need.

Why does our Father in heaven answer prayer? Not just to meet the needs of His children, but to meet them in such a way that it brings glory to His name. "Hallowed be Thy name." *When God's people pray, God's reputation is at stake.* The way He takes care of His children is a witness to the world that He can be trusted. Phillips Brooks said that prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is laying hold of His highest willingness. Persistence in prayer is not an attempt to change God's mind ("Thy will be done") but to get ourselves to the place where He can trust us with the answer.

Promises for prayer (vv. 9–13). The tenses of the verbs are important here: "Keep on asking ... keep on seeking ... keep on knocking." In other words, *don't come to God only in the midnight emergencies, but keep in constant communion with your Father.* Jesus called this "abiding" (John 15:1ff), and Paul exhorted, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes. 5:17). As we pray, God will either answer or show us why He cannot answer. Then it is up to us to do whatever is necessary in our lives so that the Father can trust us with the answer.

Note that the lesson closes with an emphasis on God as Father (Luke 11:11–13). Because He knows us and loves us, *we never need to be afraid of the answers that He gives.* Again, Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater: if an earthly father gives what is best to his children, surely the Father in heaven will do even more. This even includes "the good things of the Holy Spirit" (compare Luke 11:13 with Matt. 7:11), blessings that in the Old Testament were reserved only for a special few.

Satan (Luke 11:14–28)

Accusation (vv. 14–16). This is the third miracle of deliverance our Lord performed that elicited from His enemies the accusation that He was in league with Satan (see Matt. 9:32–34; 12:22–37). Instead of rejoicing that God had sent a Redeemer, the religious leaders were rebelling against the truth of God's Word and seeking to discredit Christ's work and character. Imagine people being so blind that they could not distinguish a work of God from a work of Satan!

"Beelzebub" was one of the names of the Philistine god Baal (2 Kings 1:1–3); it means "lord of flies." A variant is "Beelzebul" which means "lord of the dwelling" and ties in with Christ's illustrations in Luke 11:18–26. The Jews often used this name when referring to Satan.

The request in Luke 11:16 was a part of the accusation. "If you are really working for God," they were saying in effect, "prove it by giving us a sign from heaven, not just a miracle on earth." They were tempting God, which is a dangerous thing to do.

Refutation (vv. 17–22). Jesus answered their charges with three arguments. First, their accusation was illogical. Why would Satan fight against himself and divide his own kingdom? (Note that Jesus believed in a real devil who has a kingdom that is strong and united. See Eph. 2:1–3; 6:10ff.) Second, their charges were self-incriminating: by what power were the Jews casting out demons? How do their works differ from Christ's works? On the contrary, Christ's miracles show that the kingdom of *God* is present, not the kingdom of *Satan*!

Finally, their accusation was really an admission of His power, for He could not defeat Satan unless He were stronger than Satan. Jesus pictured Satan as a strong man in armor, guarding his palace and his goods. But Jesus invaded Satan's territory, destroyed his armor and weapons, and claimed his spoils! (see John 12:31–33; Col.

2:15; 1 John 3:8) Our Lord has “led captivity captive” (Eph. 4:8) and set the prisoners free (Luke 4:18). Though he is permitted limited authority, Satan is a defeated enemy.

Application (vv. 23–28). It is impossible to be neutral in this spiritual war (Luke 11:23; also see 9:50), for neutrality means standing against Him. There are two spiritual forces at work in the world, and we must choose between them. Satan is scattering and destroying, but Jesus Christ is gathering and building. We must make a choice, and if we choose to make *no* choice, we are really choosing against Him.

Jesus illustrated the danger of neutrality by telling the story of the man and the demon. The man's body was the demon's “house” (Luke 11:24, and note vv. 17 and 21). For some unknown reason, the demonic tenant decided to leave his “house” and go elsewhere. The man's condition improved immediately, *but the man did not invite God to come and dwell within*. In other words, the man remained neutral. What happened? The demon returned with seven other demons worse than himself, and the man's condition was abominable.

“Neutrality in religion is always cowardice,” wrote Oswald Chambers. “God turns the cowardice of a desired neutrality into terror.”

Taking sides with Jesus means much more than saying the right things, like the woman who cried, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You” (Luke 11:27, nkjv). She was certainly sincere, but that was not enough. *We take sides with Jesus Christ when we hear His Word and obey it* (see Luke 6:46–49; 8:19–21).

Opportunity (Luke 11:29–36)

Because He knew what was in their hearts, Jesus was not impressed by the big crowds, but the disciples were. In order to keep the Twelve from being swayed by “success,” Jesus gave them some insights into what was really happening as they ministered the Word. He used three illustrations to show the seriousness of spiritual opportunities.

Jonah (vv. 29–30, 32). The leaders kept asking Jesus for a sign to prove that He was the Messiah. The only sign He promised was “the sign of Jonah the prophet,” which is *death, burial, and resurrection*. It is the resurrection of our Lord that proves He is the Messiah, the Son of God (Rom. 1:4), and this is what Peter preached to Israel on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22ff). The witness of the early church was centered on Christ's resurrection (Acts 1:22; 3:15; 5:30–32; 13:32–33). Jonah was a living miracle and so is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Solomon (v. 31). The emphasis here is on the wisdom of a king, not the works of a prophet. The Queen of Sheba traveled many miles to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 10), but here was the very Son of God *in their midst*, and the Jews would not believe His words! Even if Jesus had performed a sign, it would not have changed their hearts. They needed the living wisdom of God, but they were content with their stale religious tradition.

The important thing about these illustrations is that *they involved Gentiles*. When Jonah preached to the Gentiles in Nineveh, they repented and were spared. When a Gentile queen heard Solomon's wisdom, she marveled and believed. If, with all their privileges, the Jews did not repent, then the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba

would bear witness against them in the last judgment. The Lord gave Israel so many opportunities, yet they would not believe (Luke 13:34–35; John 12:35–41).

Light (vv. 33–36). The third illustration was from daily life, not from history, and was one Jesus had used before (Matt. 6:22–23). God's Word is a light that shines in this dark world (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23). But it is not enough that the light be shining *externally*; it must enter our lives before it can do any good. "The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Ps. 119:130). The brightest sun cannot enable a blind man to see.

When we trust Jesus Christ, our eyes are opened, the light shines in, and we become children of light (John 8:12; 2 Cor. 4:3–6; Eph. 5:8–14). The important thing is that we take advantage of the light and have a *single outlook of faith*. If we keep one eye on the things of God and the other eye on the world (1 John 2:16), the light will turn into darkness! There is no "twilight living" for the Christian, for God demands total submission and obedience (Luke 11:23).

Three men in the Bible illustrate this truth. They began in the light and ended up in the darkness because they were double-minded. The name *Samson* probably means "sunny," yet he ended up a blind slave in a dark dungeon because he yielded to the "lust of the flesh" (Judg. 16). Lot began as a pilgrim with his uncle Abraham. He ended as a drunk in a cave, committing incest (Gen. 19:30–38), because he yielded to "the lust of the eyes" (Gen. 13:10–11). Lot wanted to serve two masters and look in two directions!

King Saul began his reign as a humble leader but his pride led him to a witch's cave (1 Sam. 28), and he died of suicide on the field of battle (1 Sam. 31). His sin was "the pride of life"; he would not humble himself and obey the will of God.

Each of us is controlled either by light or darkness. The frightening thing is that some people have so hardened themselves against the Lord that *they cannot tell the difference!* They think they are following the light when, in reality, they are following the darkness. The scribes and Pharisees claimed to "see the light" as they studied the Law, but they were living in the darkness (see John 12:35–50).

Hypocrisy (Luke 11:37–54)

At this stage in Christ's ministry, when the religious leaders were bent on destroying Him, why would a Pharisee invite Him to his home for a meal? If he had been sincerely seeking truth, he would have talked with our Lord privately. It seems obvious that he was looking for an opportunity to accuse Jesus, and he thought he had it when Jesus did not practice the ceremonial washing before eating (Mark 7:2–3). Knowing what the host was thinking, Jesus responded by giving a "spiritual analysis" of the Pharisees.

He exposed their folly (vv. 37–41). The basic error of the Pharisees was thinking that righteousness was only a matter of external actions, and they minimized internal attitudes. They were very careful to keep the outside clean, but they ignored the wickedness within. They seemed to forget that the same God who created the outside also created the inside, the "inner person" that also needs cleansing (Ps. 51:6, 10).

The Pharisees boasted of their giving (Matt. 6:1–4; Luke 18:11–12), but they did not give *what was within* to the Lord. The way to make the *outside* pure is to make the *inside* pure (Luke 11:41). Kenneth Wuest translates this verse, "Rather, the things which

are inside give as alms, and behold, all things are clean to you" (wuest). The way to clean up a dirty vocabulary is not to brush your teeth but to cleanse your heart.

He denounced their sins (vv. 42–52). These six "woes" parallel the "woes" in Matthew 23. Jesus started with the sins of the Pharisees (Luke 11:42–44) and then turned to the sins of the scribes, for it was their interpretations of the Law that formed the basis for the whole pharisaical system (Luke 11:45–52).

The first three "woes" denounce the Pharisees for their *wrong priorities*. They were careful about tithing even the tiny leaves and seeds from the herbs, but they forgot about important things like justice and love (Micah 6:7–8). They majored on the minors! Jesus did not say they should stop tithing but that they should put their religious activities into proper perspective.

They also put *reputation* above *character*. They thought that sitting in the right seats and being acknowledged by the right people would make them spiritual. Reputation is what people think we are; character is what God knows we are.

The comparison in Luke 11:44 must have infuriated the host and the other Pharisees who were present. The Jews had to be especially careful about ceremonial defilement from dead bodies (Num. 19:11–22; note especially v. 16), so they made sure the graves were carefully marked. But the Pharisees were like *unmarked graves* that did not look like graves at all! This meant that they were *unconsciously defiling others when they thought they were helping them become holier!* Instead of helping people, the Pharisees were harming them.

The scribes felt the sting of our Lord's words and tried to defend themselves. Jesus used three vivid illustrations in answering them: burdens, tombs, and keys.

The scribes were good at adding to the burdens of the people, but they had no heart for helping them carry those burdens. What a tragedy when "ministers" of God's Word create more problems for people who already have problems enough! A pastor friend of mine prays daily, "Lord, help me today not to add to anybody's problems." Jesus had these "religious burdens" in mind when He gave the gracious invitation recorded in Matthew 11:28–30.

The scribes were also good at "embalming" the past and honoring the prophets who had been martyred by the religious establishment *to which they belonged*. Both Bible history and church history reveal that true servants of God are usually rejected by the people who most need their ministry, but the next generation will come along and honor these people. The Pharisees were like "hidden graves," but the scribes built elaborate tombs!

The first recorded martyrdom in the Old Testament is that of Abel, and the last is that of Zechariah (see Gen. 4:1–15; 2 Chron. 24:20–27, and remember that 2 Chron. is the last book in the Hebrew Bible). Jesus did not suggest that the scribes and Pharisees were *personally* responsible for killing the Old Testament prophets. Rather, He was affirming that *people just like the scribes and Pharisees* did these terrible things to God's servants. Their ultimate crime would be the crucifixion of the Son of God.

Finally, the scribes were guilty of robbing the common people of the knowledge of the Word of God. It was bad enough that they would not enter the kingdom themselves, but they were hindering others from going in! It is a serious thing to teach God's Word and not everyone is supposed to do it (James 3:1). Unfortunately, what some people

call "Bible study" is too often just a group of unprepared people exchanging their ignorance.

But there is another side to this: the scribes convinced the people that nobody could understand and explain the Law except the trained and authorized teachers. We have some of that arrogant attitude showing itself today. Teachers who overemphasize the Bible languages give people the impression that the Holy Spirit cannot teach anyone who does not know Greek and Hebrew. There are so many "study Bibles" these days (and many of them are helpful) that you wonder if a student can learn anything from a simple text Bible. We must not despise true Christian scholarship, but we must also keep things in balance.

Jesus is the key to the Scriptures (Luke 24:44–48). When you take away that key, you cannot understand what God has written. As helpful and necessary as theological studies are, the most important requirements for Bible study are a yielded heart and an obedient will. Some of the best Bible teachers I have known in my own ministry were men and women who learned the truth of God's Word on their knees and on the battlefield of life. They were Spirit-taught, not man-taught.

He aroused their anger (vv. 53–54). Hypocrites do not want their sins exposed; it hurts their reputation. Instead of opposing the Lord, these men should have been seeking His mercy. They deliberately began to attack Him with "catch questions" in hopes they could trap Him in some heresy and then arrest Him. What a disgraceful way to treat the Son of God.

But there are religious systems today that are very much like the system defended by the scribes and Pharisees. The leaders interpret and apply the Word for the followers and you are not permitted to ask embarrassing questions or raise objections. The leaders exploit the people and do little or nothing to ease their burdens. Worst of all, the leaders use the system to cover up their own sins. God's truth should set us free, but these groups only lead people into more and more bondage.

God has given teachers to His church (Eph. 4:11), and we should listen to them. But we should also test what we hear by the Scriptures to make sure they are teaching the truth (1 Thes. 5:19–21), and we should not permit anyone to bring us into bondage and exploit us (2 Cor. 11:20).

It is a privilege to have the light of the Word of God and the privilege of prayer. The enemy wants to rob us of the blessings of spiritual growth and freedom. His plan is to substitute hypocrisy for reality and to encourage us to be more concerned about the outside than the inside: reputation and not character.

So serious is this danger that Jesus will have more to say about it in Luke 12. Meanwhile, let us beware!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BELIEVER, BEWARE!

Luke 12

Our Lord's disciples may not have realized it, but they were in great danger. For one thing, they were surrounded by immense crowds of people whose major concern was not to hear spiritual truth but to see Jesus do a miracle or meet some personal need. At the same time, the scribes and Pharisees were plotting against Jesus and trying to get Him out of the way. The snare of popularity and the fear of man has brought ruin to more than one servant of God.

In Luke 12, Luke recorded five warnings from our Lord. Four of these warnings must be heeded by God's people today if we are to be faithful disciples; and the fifth warning should be heeded by a lost world.

Beware of Hypocrisy (Luke 12:1–12)

The word *hypocrite* comes from a Greek word that means "an actor," "one who plays a part." There are hypocrites in every walk of life, people who try to impress others in order to hide their real selves. In the Christian life, a hypocrite is somebody who tries to appear more spiritual than he or she really is. These people know that they are pretending, and they hope they will not be found out. Their Christian life is only a shallow masquerade.

It is easy to see why Jesus gave this warning at this particular time. The disciples might be tempted either to gain popularity by pleasing the crowds, or avoid trouble by pleasing the scribes and Pharisees. All of us want people to like us, and it seems such an easy thing to "act the part" that others want to see.

How can we keep hypocrisy out of our lives?

We must understand what hypocrisy really is (v. 1). Jesus compared it to leaven (yeast), something that every Jew would associate with evil. (See Ex. 12:15–20. Paul also used leaven to symbolize sin. See 1 Cor. 5:6–8; Gal. 5:9.) Like yeast, hypocrisy begins very small but grows quickly and quietly. As it grows, it infects the whole person. Hypocrisy does to the ego what yeast does to bread dough: it puffs it up (see 1 Cor. 4:6, 18–19; 5:2). Soon pride takes over and the person's character deteriorates rapidly.

If we want to keep hypocrisy out of our lives, we must avoid that first bit of "leaven." Once we start to pretend, the process goes on quickly; and the longer we wait, the worse it gets. Sir Walter Scott wrote:

O what a tangled web we weave
When first we practice to deceive.

Hypocrisy is foolish and futile (vv. 2–3). Why? Because nothing can really be hidden. Jesus referred here primarily to His own teachings, but the principle applies to other areas of life. The Twelve might be tempted to cover or compromise the truth so that neither the crowds nor the Pharisees would be offended (see Luke 8:16–18; 11:33). God's truth is like light, not leaven, and it must not be hidden. The lies of the hypocrite will one day be revealed, so why go on pretending? Let your light shine!

We must understand what causes hypocrisy (vv. 4–7). Jesus mentioned "fear" five times in these verses, so He is teaching us that a basic cause of hypocrisy is *the*

fear of man. When we are afraid of what others may say about us or do to us, then we try to impress them in order to gain their approval. If necessary, we will even lie to accomplish our purposes, and this is hypocrisy. Unfortunately, many of the scribes and Pharisees were more concerned about reputation than character, what people *thought* about them than what God *knew* about them. The fear of man always brings a snare (Prov. 29:25), and Jesus wanted His disciples to avoid that snare.

The remedy for hypocrisy is to forget about what people may say and do and *fear God alone*. The fear of God is the fear that conquers all other fears, for the person who truly fears God need fear nothing else. All that men can do is kill the body, but God can condemn the soul! Since He is the final Judge, and He judges for eternity, it is logical that we put the fear of God ahead of everything else. Our God knows us and cares for us. He cares for the sparrows, and we are of more value than they; so what do we have to fear from men?

We must confess Christ openly (vv. 8–9). Once we have done this, we will have an easier time living the truth and avoiding hypocrisy. How can we fear men when we know Jesus Christ is confessing us before the Father in heaven? It is not important that men praise our names on earth, but it is important that God acknowledges us in heaven (see 2 Tim. 2:8–14).

We must depend on the Holy Spirit (vv. 10–12). Jesus appears to be contradicting Himself. In Luke 12:8–9, He demands that we openly confess Him, but in Luke 12:10, He says we can speak against Him and be forgiven. However, if we speak against the Spirit, there is no forgiveness! Does this mean that the Holy Spirit is more important than the Son of God?

Note that this statement is connected with the ministry of the Spirit in and through the Apostles (Luke 12:11–12). The Jewish nation rejected *God the Father* when they refused to obey John the Baptist and repent, for John was sent by the Father. They rejected *God the Son* when they asked Pilate to crucify Him. But that sin could be forgiven because there was still the ministry of the Spirit.

God did not judge the nation immediately. Instead, Jesus prayed for them as He hanged on the cross (Luke 23:34; see also Acts 3:17). Then God sent the Holy Spirit who ministered through the Apostles and other believers in the church. *This was the last opportunity for the nation, and they failed by rejecting the witness of the Spirit* (Acts 7:51). Luke 12:11–12 was fulfilled during the first chapters of Acts when the message went “to the Jew first” (Acts 3:26; 13:46; Rom. 1:16). Israel’s third “national sin” was the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7), after which the message went out to the Samaritans (Acts 8), and then the Gentiles (Acts 10). Note that Stephen said, “You always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51).

I do not believe that the “sin against the Holy Spirit” is committed by people today as it was by Israel centuries ago. I believe that the only “unpardonable sin” today is the final rejection of Jesus Christ (John 3:36). The Spirit of God witnesses through the Word, and it is possible for sinners to reject that witness and resist the Spirit. But the Spirit bears witness to Christ (John 16:7–15); so the way people treat the Spirit is the way they treat the Son of God.

Beware of Covetousness (Luke 12:13–21)

At this point, a man in the crowd interrupted Jesus and asked Him to solve a family problem. Rabbis were expected to help settle legal matters, but Jesus refused to get involved. Why? Because He knew that no answer He gave would solve the *real* problem, which was covetousness in the hearts of the two brothers. (The “you” in Luke 12:14 is plural.) As long as both men were greedy, *no* settlement would be satisfactory. Their greatest need was to have their hearts changed. Like too many people today, they wanted Jesus to serve them but not to save them.

Covetousness is an unquenchable thirst for getting more and more of something we think we need in order to be truly satisfied. It may be a thirst for money or the things that money can buy, or even a thirst for position and power. Jesus made it clear that true life does not depend on an abundance of possessions. He did not deny that we have certain basic needs (Matt. 6:32; 1 Tim. 6:17). He only affirmed that we will not make life richer by acquiring *more* of these things.

Mark Twain once defined “civilization” as “a limitless multiplication of unnecessary necessities,” and he was right. In fact, many Christians are infected with covetousness and do not know it. They think that Paul’s admonition in 1 Timothy 6 applies only to the “rich and famous.” Measured by the living standards of the rest of the world, most believers in America are indeed wealthy people.

Jesus told this parable to reveal the dangers that lurk in a covetous heart. As you read it, test your own responses to this farmer’s various experiences.

How do you respond to the wealthy farmer’s *dilemma*? Here was a man who had a problem with too much wealth! If we say, “I certainly wish I had that problem!” we may be revealing covetousness in our hearts. If suddenly you inherited a great deal of wealth, would it create a problem for you? Or would you simply praise God and ask Him what He wanted you to do with it?

There are perils to prosperity (Prov. 30:7–9). Wealth can choke the Word of God (Matt. 13:22), create snares and temptations (1 Tim. 6:6–10, 17–19), and give you a false sense of security. People say that money does not satisfy, but it does satisfy *if you want to live on that level*. People who are satisfied only with the things that money can buy are in great danger of losing the things that money cannot buy.

This farmer saw his wealth as an opportunity to please himself. He had no thoughts of others or of God.

How do you respond to the *decisions* of the rich man? Are you saying, “Now that is shrewd business! Save and have it ready for the future!” But Jesus saw selfishness in all that this man did (note the eleven personal pronouns), and He said the man was a fool. The world’s philosophy is “Take care of Number One!” But Jesus does not endorse that philosophy.

There is certainly nothing wrong with following good business principles, or even with saving for the future (1 Tim. 5:8). Jesus does not encourage waste (John 6:12). But neither does He encourage selfishness motivated by covetousness.

How do you respond to the farmer’s *desires*? Are you saying, “This is the life! The man has success, satisfaction, and security! What more could he want?” But Jesus did not see this farmer enjoying life; He saw him facing death! Wealth cannot keep us alive when our time comes to die, nor can it buy back the opportunities we missed while we were thinking of ourselves and ignoring God and others.

Jesus made it clear that true life does not come from an abundance of things, nor do true success or security. This man had a false view of both life and death. He thought that life came from accumulating things, and that death was far away. On March 11, 1856, Henry David Thoreau wrote in his journal, "That man is the richest whose pleasures are cheapest." He also said, "A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone."

Finally, how do you respond to the *death* of the boastful farmer? We are prone to say, "Too bad this fellow died just when he had everything going for him! How tragic that he could not finish his great plans." But the greatest tragedy is not what the man left behind but what lay *before* him: eternity without God! The man lived without God and died without God, and his wealth was but an incident in his life. God is not impressed with our money.

What does it mean to be "rich toward God"? It means to acknowledge gratefully that everything we have comes from God, and then make an effort to use what He gives us for the good of others and the glory of God. Wealth can be *enjoyed* and *employed* at the same time if our purpose is to honor God (1 Tim. 6:10ff). To be rich toward God means spiritual enrichment, not just personal enjoyment. How tragic when people are rich in this world but poor in the next! (see Matt. 6:19–34)

Beware of Worrying (Luke 12:22–34)

The rich farmer worried because he had too much, but the disciples might be tempted to worry because they did not have enough! They had given up all they had in order to follow Christ. They were living by faith, and faith is always tested.

Worry is destructive. The word translated "anxious" in Luke 12:22 means "to be torn apart," and the phrase "doubtful mind" (Luke 12:29) means "to be held in suspense." It is the picture of a ship being tossed in a storm. Our English word *worry* comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word that means "to strangle." "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow," said Corrie Ten Boom; "it empties today of its strength."

Worry is also deceptive. It gives us a false view of life, of itself, and of God. Worry convinces us that life is made up of what we eat and what we wear. We get so concerned about *the means* that we totally forget about *the end*, which is to glorify God (Matt. 6:33). There is a great difference between making a living and making a life.

Worry blinds us to the world around us and the way God cares for His creation. God makes the flowers beautiful, and He even feeds the unclean ravens who have no ability to sow or reap. He ought to be able to care for men *to whom He has given the ability to work*. Jesus was not suggesting that we sit around and let God feed us, for the birds themselves work hard to stay alive. Rather, He encourages us to trust Him and cooperate with Him in using the abilities and opportunities that He gives us (2 Thes. 3:6–15).

But worry even blinds us to itself. We can get to the place where we actually think that worry accomplishes good things in our lives! In Luke 12:25, Jesus pointed out that our worries do not add one extra minute to our lives (Ps. 39:5) or one extra inch to our height. The rich farmer's fretting certainly did not lengthen his life! Instead of adding to our lives, our worries take away from our lives. People can worry themselves into the hospital or into the grave!

Once again, Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater. If God feeds the birds, He will surely feed His children. If He beautifies the plants that grow up one day and are cut down the next, surely He will clothe His own people. The problem is not His little power, for He can do anything; the problem is our little faith.

Worry is deformative. It keeps us from growing and it makes us like the unsaved in the world (Luke 12:30). In short, worry is unchristian; worry is a sin. How can we witness to a lost world and encourage them to put faith in Jesus Christ if we ourselves are doubting God and worrying? Is it not inconsistent to preach faith and yet not practice it? The late chaplain of the United States Senate, Peter Marshall, once prayed “that ulcers would not become the badge of our faith.” Too often they are!

How do we win over worry? The first step is to realize that *God knows our needs*, so we can trust Him to meet them. We are sheep in His little flock, children in His family, and servants in His kingdom; and He will see to it that our needs are fully met. It is His *pleasure* to give us His kingdom, so will He not give us everything that we need? (see Rom. 8:32)

But God's pleasures and our treasures must go together. We must look at earth from heaven's point of view and make sure that we put God's kingdom first in everything. The main question is, “Where is your heart?” If our hearts are fixed on the transient things of earth, then we will always worry. But if we are fixed on the eternal, then God's peace will guard our minds and hearts (Phil. 4:6–9). We must “hang loose” when it comes to this world's goods, and be willing even to sell what we have in order to help others (Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–35). It is not wrong to own things so long as things do not own us.

Beware of Carelessness (Luke 12:35–53)

Jesus shifted the emphasis from being worried about the present to being watchful about the future. The themes in Luke 12 all go together, for one of the best ways to conquer hypocrisy, covetousness, and worry is to look for the Lord's return. When you are “living in the future tense,” it is difficult for the things of the world to ensnare you. In this section, Jesus explained how we can be ready for His return.

Waiting and watching (vv. 35–40). Jewish weddings were held at night, and a bridegroom's servants would have to wait for their master to come home with his bride. The new husband would certainly not want to be kept waiting at the door with his bride! But the servants had to be sure they were ready to go to work, with their robes tucked under their girdles so they were free to move (see 1 Peter 1:13ff).

But the remarkable thing in this story is that the master serves the servants! In Jewish weddings, the bride was treated like a queen and the groom like a king; so you would not expect the “king” to minister to his staff. Our King will minister to His faithful servants when He greets us at His return, and He will reward us for our faithfulness.

To “watch” means to be alert, to be ready, not to be caught by surprise. That is the attitude we must have toward the second coming of Jesus Christ. His coming will be like that of a thief: unannounced and unexpected (Matt. 24:43; 1 Thes. 5:2; Rev. 16:15). We must be ready!

The saintly Presbyterian pastor Robert Murray McCheyne sometimes asked people, “Do you believe that Jesus is coming today?” If they replied in the negative, he would say, “Then you had better be ready, for He is coming at an hour when you think not!”

Working (vv. 41–48). Lest we get the idea that watching and waiting are all that He requires, Jesus added this parable to encourage us to be working when He comes. The Apostles had a special responsibility to feed God's household, His church; but each of us has some work to do in this world, assigned to us by the Lord. Our responsibility is to be faithful when He comes. We may not appear successful in our own eyes, or in the eyes of others; but that is not important. The thing God wants is faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2).

Once a believer starts to think his Master is *not* coming back, his life begins to deteriorate. Our relationship with others depends on our relationship to the Lord; so if we stop looking for Him, we will stop loving His people. The motive for Christian life and service must be a desire to please the Lord and be found faithful at His return.

I do not think that Luke 12:46 teaches that unfaithful believers lose their salvation, because our going to heaven depends on faith in Jesus Christ and not good works (Eph. 2:8–10; 2 Tim. 2:11–13). The phrase “cut him in sunder” means “cut him off, separate him”; and “unbelievers” can also be translated “unfaithful.” Our Lord will separate the faithful believers from the unfaithful; He will reward the faithful, but the unfaithful servants will lose their rewards (1 Cor. 3:13–15).

God's judgment will be fair. It will be based on what the servants know of God's will. This is not to suggest that the more ignorant we are, the easier time we will have at the Judgment Seat of Christ! We are admonished to know God's will (Rom. 12:2; Col. 1:9) and to grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). Jesus is stating a general principle: the more we have from God, the greater our accountability before God.

Warring (vv. 49–53). As we wait, watch, and work, we will not have an easy time, because we are aliens in enemy territory. The images Jesus used—fire, baptism, division—speak of opposition and conflict. To the Jews, fire was a symbol of judgment; and our Lord's coming into this world did bring judgment (John 9:39–41).

Our Lord's “baptism” in Luke 12:50 refers to His suffering and death, which was pictured by His baptism in the Jordan. (See Ps. 42:7 and Jonah 2:3, and note His reference to Jonah in Luke 11:29–30.) The Apostles certainly received a baptism of suffering as they witnessed for Christ after Pentecost.

Luke opened his book announcing “peace on earth” (Luke 2:14), but now he has the Lord seemingly contradicting this promise. Jesus does give peace to those who trust Him (Rom. 5:1), but often their confession of faith becomes a declaration of war among their family and friends. Jesus is a cause of division (see John 7:12, 43; 9:16; 10:19). But even if there is not “peace on earth,” there is “peace in heaven” (Luke 19:38) because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

After instructing His disciples, Jesus turned and gave a final warning to the people around Him.

Beware of Spiritual Dullness (Luke 12:54–59)

Jesus used two illustrations to impress on the crowds the importance of discernment and diligence in spiritual matters. First, He talked about the weather, and then He talked about a lawsuit.

Discernment (vv. 54–57). If people were as discerning about spiritual things as they are about the weather, they would be better off! The crowd could predict a storm, but it could not foresee the coming judgment. It knew that the temperature was about to

change, but it could not interpret the “signs of the times.” The Jewish nation had the prophetic Scriptures for centuries and should have known what God was doing, but their religious leaders led them astray.

How tragic that men today can predict the movements of the heavenly bodies, split atoms, and even put men on the moon; but they are blind to what God is doing in the world. They know how to get to the stars, but they do not know how to get to heaven! Our educated world possesses a great deal of scientific knowledge but not much spiritual wisdom.

Diligence (vv. 58–59). Anyone will do whatever is necessary to stay out of prison, but how many people will apply that same concern and diligence to stay out of hell? If lawyers and judges would examine God's Word as diligently as they examine their law books, they will gain a wisdom that the law cannot give.

The nation of Israel was marching to judgment, and the Judge was Almighty God, yet they would not seek for terms of peace (Luke 13:34–35). Jesus knew that the Roman armies would come to destroy the city and the temple (Luke 19:41–44), but He could not convince the people to repent. Their debt was mounting up and they would pay the last mite.

We must apply these truths to our own lives personally. If we knew a storm was coming, we would prepare for it. If we knew the officer was coming to take us to court, we would get a lawyer and try to settle the case out of court. The storm of God's wrath is coming, and the Judge is already standing before the door (James 5:9).

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

CHAPTER TWELVE

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Luke 13

A Jewish student asked his teacher, “Rabbi, why is it that when I ask you a question, you always reply by asking me another question?”

The rabbi replied, “So why shouldn't I?”

As Jesus continued His journey toward Jerusalem, He encountered four situations involving questions that had to be answered. “To question a wise man is the beginning of wisdom,” says a German proverb. Not everyone who questioned the Lord did so from a right motive, but that did not stop Jesus from teaching them what they needed to know. As you study His replies in Luke 13, you can learn more about Him and His ministry, and also more about living the Christian life so as to please Him.

A Political Question about Justice (Luke 13:1–9)

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, did not get along with the Jews because he was insensitive to their religious convictions. For example, he brought the official Roman ensigns into Jerusalem and infuriated the Jews who resented having Caesar's image in the Holy City. Pilate threatened to kill the protestors *and they were willing to die!* Seeing their determination, the governor relented and moved the ensigns to Caesarea, but that did not stop the hostilities.

The atrocity mentioned in Luke 13:1 may have taken place when Pilate "appropriated" money from the temple treasury to help finance an aqueduct. A large crowd of angry Jews gathered in protest; so Pilate had soldiers *in civilian clothes* mingle with the mob. Using concealed weapons, the soldiers killed a number of innocent and unarmed Jews, and this only added to the Jews' hatred for their governor.

Since Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, anything He said about Pilate was sure to get there before Him. If He ignored the issue, the crowd would accuse Him of being pro-Roman and disloyal to His people. If He defended the Jews and accused Pilate, He would be in trouble with the Romans, and the Jewish leaders would have a good excuse to get Him arrested.

Our Lord moved the whole issue to a higher level and avoided politics completely. Instead of discussing *Pilate's* sins, He dealt with the sins of the people questioning Him. He answered their question by asking a question!

To begin with, He made it clear that human tragedies are not always divine punishments and that it is wrong for us to "play God" and pass judgment. Job's friends made this mistake when they said that Job's afflictions were evidence that he was a sinner. If we take that approach to tragedy, then we will have a hard time explaining the sufferings of the Prophets and Apostles, and even of our Lord Himself.

"How would you explain the deaths of the people on whom the tower in Siloam fell?" He asked. "That was not the fault of Pilate. Was it God's fault? Shall we blame Him? The eighteen who were killed were just doing their job, yet they died. They were not protesting or creating trouble."

When the blind English poet John Milton was old and obscure, he was visited one day by Charles II, son of the king that the Puritans had beheaded. "Your blindness is a judgment from God for the part you took against my father," said the king. Milton replied, "If I have lost my *sight* through God's judgment, what can you say of your father who lost his *head*?"

Jesus went on to show the logical conclusion of their argument: if God *does* punish sinners in this way, then they themselves had better repent because all men are sinners! The question is not, "Why did these people die?" but, "What right do you have to live?" None of us is sinless, so we had all better get prepared.

It is easier to talk about other people's deaths than it is to face our own sin and possible death. The American publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst would not permit anyone to mention death in his presence, *yet he died*. I asked a friend of mine what the death rate was in his city, and he replied, "One apiece." Then he added, "People are dying who never died before."

According to Leviticus 19:23–25, fruit from newly planted trees was not eaten the first three years, and the fourth year the crops belonged to the Lord. A farmer would not get any figs for himself until the fifth year, but this man had now been waiting for *seven* years! No wonder he wanted to cut down the fruitless tree!

The parable has an application to individuals and to the nation of Israel. God is gracious and long-suffering toward people (2 Peter 3:9) and does more than enough to encourage us to repent and bear fruit (Matt. 3:7–10). He has had every right to cut us down, but in His mercy, He has spared us. Yet we must not presume upon the kindness and long-suffering of the Lord, for the day of judgment will finally come.

But the tree also reminds us of God's special goodness to Israel (Isa. 5:1–7; Rom. 9:1–5) and His patience with them. God waited three years during our Lord's earthly ministry, but the nation did not produce fruit. He then waited about forty years more before He allowed the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem and the temple; and during those years, the church gave to the nation a powerful witness of the Gospel message. Finally, the tree was cut down.

It is significant that the parable was "open-ended," so that the listeners had to supply the conclusion. (The Book of Jonah is another example of this approach.) Did the tree bear fruit? Did the special care accomplish anything? Was the tree spared or cut down? We have no way to know the answers to these questions, *but we can answer as far as our own lives are concerned!* Again, the question is not "What happened to the tree?" but "What will happen to *me*?"

God is seeking fruit. He will accept no substitutes, and the time to repent is NOW. The next time you hear about a tragedy that claims many lives, ask yourself, "Am I just taking up space, or am I bearing fruit to God's glory?"

A Legal Question about the Sabbath (Luke 13:10–21)

Liberation (vv. 10–13). If I had been crippled for eighteen years, I wonder if I would be faithful to worship God week after week in the synagogue? Surely this woman had prayed and asked God for help, and yet she was not delivered. However, God's seeming unconcern did not cause her to become bitter or resentful. There she was in the synagogue.

Ever sensitive to the needs of others, Jesus saw the woman and called her to come forward. It may have seemed heartless to the congregation for Him to do this and expose her handicap publicly (see Matt. 12:13), but He knew what He was doing. For one thing, Satan was in the synagogue and He wanted to expose him and defeat him. But He also wanted the woman to help Him teach the people an important lesson about freedom.

Not only does Satan bow people down, but so do sin (Ps. 38:6), sorrow (Ps. 42:5), and suffering (Ps. 44:25). Jesus Christ is the only One who can set the prisoner free. He spoke the word, laid His hands on her, and she was healed and gave glory to God! That was a synagogue service the people never forgot.

Indignation (v. 14). Instead of rejoicing and giving God the glory, the ruler of the synagogue (see Luke 8:41) became very angry. He did not have the courage to express his anger to Jesus, so he scolded the congregation! But the more you ponder his tirade, the more laughable it becomes. Suppose they *did* bring their sick to be healed; who would heal them? Did *he* have that kind of power; and, if he did, why had he not used it to help people before? What a cowardly hypocrite!

The bondage of the ruler of the synagogue was worse than that of the woman. Her bondage affected only her body, but his bondage shackled his mind and heart. He was so bound and blinded by tradition that he ended up opposing the Son of God! Elbert

Hubbard called tradition "a clock that tells us what time it was." The ruler of the synagogue could not "discern this time" (Luke 13:12, 5, 6) and he stood condemned.

Vindication (vv. 15–17). Jesus could have healed this woman on any other day of the week. After all, she had been bound for eighteen painful years, and one more day would have made little difference. But He deliberately chose the Sabbath Day because He wanted to teach a lesson about freedom. Note the repetition of the word "loose" (Luke 13:12, 15–16).

First, the Lord defended the woman and rebuked the ruler of the synagogue. Jesus reminded him that he treated his animals far better than he treated this poor woman. This indictment included the people in the congregation as well. Our Lord was arguing from the lesser to the greater: if God permits people to help their thirsty animals on the Sabbath, would He not want us to care for needy people made in the image of God? Any tradition that keeps us from helping others is not from God. In fact, it is easy to use tradition as an excuse for not caring for others.

Jesus said that the woman was a "daughter of Abraham," referring to her spiritual condition and not her physical birth (Luke 19:9; Gal. 3:7). All the Jewish women present would have been "daughters of Abraham." Does this mean that she was a converted person *before* the Lord healed her? If so, then she is the only *believer* in the New Testament who was physically afflicted because of demonic attack. (We are not sure what Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was or exactly how Satan used it to buffet Paul. See 2 Cor. 12.)

Perhaps it is a matter of semantics, but I prefer to speak of demonic work in believers as "demon oppression" rather than "demon possession." In fact, the Greek word is "demonized," so we need not think of "possession" in spatial terms. Certainly Satan can and does attack the bodies and minds of God's people. Some satanic oppression could last for many years until someone detects that Satan is at work. Not all sickness is caused by demons (Luke 6:17–19), so we must not blame everything on Satan.

There were people in the congregation who hoped to use this Sabbath violation to accuse Jesus, but He left them so ashamed that they said nothing. The lesson that He taught was clear: Satan puts people into bondage, but true freedom comes from trusting Christ. The Sabbath that God wants to give us is a "heart rest" that comes through His grace and not from obeying traditions (Matt. 11:28–30).

The parables in Luke 13:18–21 were probably spoken to the congregation just before Jesus and the Twelve departed from the synagogue. He had used these parables before and the disciples understood them (Matt. 13:31–33, 51). Some see in them a picture of the visible outward growth of the kingdom (the mustard seed) and the invisible inward influence of the kingdom (the leaven). By using these parables, Jesus was saying, "You Jewish religious leaders may hold to your dead traditions and oppose the truth, but God's living kingdom will still increase. Satan will be defeated!"

But, we must keep two other considerations in mind. First, Jesus had already used leaven as a picture of evil (Luke 12:1), and He was not likely to contradict Himself. Second, the context of Matthew 13 indicates opposition and seeming defeat for God's kingdom, not worldwide conquest. Yes, there will be ultimate victory; but meanwhile, much of the seed sown will bear no fruit, Satan will sow counterfeits, and the net will catch all kinds of fish, good and bad. I cannot find either in church history or in

contemporary reports any proof that the kingdom of God has “permeated the whole world.” In view of the population increase, we are losing ground!

The Jews knew their Scriptures and recognized the images that Jesus used. Leaven represented evil (Ex. 12:14–20), and a mighty tree pictured a great world kingdom (Ezek. 17:22–24; 31:3–9; Dan. 4:20–22). A mustard seed produces a shrub, not a great tree. The kingdom would be infected with false teaching (Gal. 5:1–9), and the small seed (“little flock,” Luke 12:32) would grow into an organization that would be a home for Satan. (The birds represent the evil one, Matt. 13:19.) The professing church today fits both descriptions.

A Theological Question about Salvation (Luke 13:22–30)

The events recorded in John 9–10 fit between Luke 13:21 and 22. Note in John 10:40–42 that Jesus then left Judea and went beyond the Jordan into Perea. The events of Luke 13:22–17:10 took place in Perea as the Lord gradually moved toward Jerusalem.

The scribes often discussed the question of how many people would be saved, and somebody asked Jesus to give His thoughts on the issue. As with the question about Pilate, Jesus immediately made the matter personal. “The question is not how many will be saved, but whether or not *you* will be saved! Get that settled first, and then we can discuss what you can do to help get others saved.”

I sometimes receive “theological letters” from radio listeners who want to argue about predestination, election, and other difficult doctrines. When I reply, I usually ask them about their prayer life, their witnessing, and their work in the local church. That often ends the correspondence. Too many professed Christians want to discuss these profound doctrines, but they do not want to put them into practice by seeking to win people to Jesus Christ! D.L. Moody prayed, “Lord, save the elect, and then elect some more!”

“Many ... will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24). Why? The parable tells us why, and it focuses primarily on the Jewish people of that day. However, it has a personal application to all of us today.

Jesus pictured the kingdom as a great feast, with the patriarchs and prophets as honored guests (Luke 13:28). But many of the people who were invited waited too long to respond; and, when they arrived at the banquet hall, it was too late and the door was shut (see Matt. 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24).

But why did they wait so long? The parable suggests several reasons. To begin with, salvation is not easy; the sinner must enter a narrow gate and walk a narrow way (Luke 13:24; also see 9:23ff). The world’s crowd is on the easy way, the way that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13–14), and it is much easier to walk with them.

Another reason for their delay was their false sense of security. Jesus had been among them; they had even eaten with Him and enjoyed His fellowship, *yet they had never trusted Him*. God gave the nation many privileges and opportunities, but they wasted them (see Luke 10:13–16). God is long-suffering; however, there comes a time when even God shuts the door.

Pride also played a big part: they would not humble themselves before God. In their own eyes, they were first, but in God’s eyes, they were last—*and the Gentiles would*

come and take their place! (see Matt. 21:43) Imagine the “unclean Gentile dogs” sitting at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the unbelieving Jews were outside!

These people were lost because they depended on their ancient religion to save them; but Jesus saw them as “workers of iniquity,” not doers of righteousness (Isa. 64:4; Titus 1:16). It takes more than reverence for tradition to get into God's kingdom!

But the major reason was given by Jesus Himself: “Ye would not” (Luke 13:34). Their minds had been instructed by the Word (Luke 13:26), and their hearts had been stirred by His mighty works, but their wills were stubborn and would not submit to Him. *This is the deadly consequence of delay.* The longer sinners wait, the harder their hearts become. “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb. 4:7).

The Spanish composer Manuel de Falla was notorious for not answering his mail. When he heard that a friend had died, the composer said, “What a pity! He died before I answered his letter, which he sent me five years ago!”

When sinners fail to answer *God's* invitation to His feast, *they are the ones who die.* They are “thrust out” of the joys of the kingdom and are punished with “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Luke 13:28). It is a picture of people who are overwhelmed with regret because they see how foolish they were to delay; but, alas, it is too late. One of the agonies of hell will be the remembrance of opportunities wasted.

What is the answer? “Strive to enter in at the narrow gate!” (Luke 13:24) The word *strive* comes from the sports arena and describes an athlete giving his best to win the contest. Our English word *agonize* comes from this word. If people today would put as much effort into things spiritual as they do things athletic, they would be much better off.

A Personal Question about Danger (Luke 13:31–35)

Jesus was in Perea, which was ruled by Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. The Pharisees wanted to get Jesus back into Judea where the religious leaders could watch Him and ultimately trap Him, so they tried to frighten Him away.

Herod had been perplexed by our Lord's ministry and was afraid that John the Baptist, whom he murdered, had come back from the dead (Luke 9:7–9). In fact, at one point, Herod wanted to meet Jesus so he could see Him perform a miracle! (Luke 23:8) But it appears that Herod's heart was getting harder, for now he threatened to kill Jesus. The warning the Pharisees gave (Luke 13:31) was undoubtedly true or Jesus would not have answered as He did.

Our Lord was not afraid of danger. He followed a “divine timetable” and nothing could harm Him. He was doing the will of God according to the Father's schedule (see John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 13:1; 17:1). It had been decreed from eternity that the Son of God would be crucified in Jerusalem at the Passover (1 Peter 1:20; Rev. 13:8), and even Herod Antipas could not hinder the purposes of God. Quite the contrary, our Lord's enemies only helped *fulfill* the will of God (Acts 2:23; 3:13–18).

Jesus used a bit of “holy sarcasm” in His reply. He compared Herod to a fox, an animal that was not held in high esteem by the Jews (Neh. 4:3). Known for its cunning, the fox was an apt illustration of the crafty Herod. Jesus had work to do and He would accomplish it. After all, Jesus walked in the light (John 9:4; 11:9–10), and foxes went hunting in the darkness!

But Jesus also had a word to say about His nation: "It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33). This parallels what He had said to the scribes and Pharisees in Luke 11:47–51. The nation not only rejected God's loving invitation to His feast, but they even killed the servants who brought them the invitation! (see Acts 13:27)

Our Lord's heart was grieved as He saw the unbelief and rebellion around Him, and He broke out in a lamentation over the sad plight of the Jewish nation. It was a sob of anguish, not an expression of anger. His compassionate heart was broken.

The image of the hen and her chicks would be a familiar one to an agricultural people like the Jews (see Ps. 91:4). Some of the Old Testament references to "wings" refer to the wings of the cherubim in the holy of holies in the tabernacle or temple (see Ex. 25:20; Ruth 2:12; Pss. 36:7–8; 61:4). The hen gathers her chicks when she sees danger is coming. The Pharisees told Jesus that He was in danger, when in reality *they* were in danger!

In this lament, Jesus was addressing the whole nation and not just the Pharisees who had tried to provoke Him. The people had been given many opportunities to repent and be saved, but they had refused to heed His call. "House" refers both to the "family" of Jacob ("the house of Israel") and to the temple ("the house of God"), both of which would be "left desolate." The city and temple were destroyed and the people were scattered.

But there is a future for Israel. The time will come when their Messiah will return and be recognized and received by the people. They will say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Luke 13:35; also see Ps. 118:26). Some of the people would use these words at His "triumphal entry" (Luke 19:38), but they will not have their fulfillment until His coming in glory (see Zech. 12:10; 14:4ff; Matt. 24:30–31).

Israel's house has been left desolate. The nation has no king or priest, no temple or sacrifice (Hosea 3:4–5). But the nation has God's promise that she has not been forsaken (Rom. 11:1ff). There can be no peace on earth until the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6) is seated on David's throne (Isa. 11:1ff).

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! (Ps. 122:6)

Strive to enter in at the narrow gate!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER

Luke 14

Sabbath Day hospitality was an important part of Jewish life, so it was not unusual for Jesus to be invited to a home for a meal after the weekly synagogue service. Sometimes the host invited Him sincerely because he wanted to learn more of God's

truth. But many times Jesus was asked to dine only so His enemies could watch Him and find something to criticize and condemn. That was the case on the occasion described in Luke 14 when a leader of the Pharisees invited Jesus to dinner.

Jesus was fully aware of what was in men's hearts (John 2:24–25), so He was never caught off guard. In fact, instead of hosts or guests judging Jesus, it was Jesus who passed judgment on them when they least expected it. Indeed, in this respect, He was a dangerous person to sit with at a meal or to follow on the road! In Luke 14, we see Jesus dealing with five different kinds of people and exposing what was false in their lives and their thinking.

The Pharisees: False Piety (Luke 14:1–6)

Instead of bringing them to repentance, Jesus' severe denunciation of the Pharisees and scribes (Luke 11:39–52) only provoked them to retaliation, and they plotted against Him. The Pharisee who invited Jesus to his home for dinner also invited a man afflicted with dropsy. This is a painful disease in which, because of kidney trouble, a heart ailment, or liver disease, the tissues fill with water. How heartless of the Pharisees to "use" this man as a tool to accomplish their wicked plan, but if we do not love the Lord, neither will we love our neighbor. Their heartless treatment of the man was far worse than our Lord's "lawless" behavior on the Sabbath.

This afflicted man would not have been invited to such an important dinner were it not that the Pharisees wanted to use him as "bait" to catch Jesus. They knew that Jesus could not be in the presence of human suffering very long without doing something about it. If He ignored the afflicted man, then He was without compassion; but if He healed him, then He was openly violating the Sabbath and they could accuse Him. They put the dropsied man right in front of the Master so He could not avoid him, and then they waited for the trap to spring.

Keep in mind that Jesus had already "violated" their Sabbath traditions on at least seven different occasions. On the Sabbath Day, He had cast out a demon (Luke 4:31–37), healed a fever (Luke 4:38–39), allowed His disciples to pluck grain (Luke 6:1–5), healed a lame man (John 5:1–9), healed a man with a paralyzed hand (Luke 6:6–10), delivered a crippled woman who was afflicted by a demon (Luke 13:10–17), and healed a man born blind (John 9). Why our Lord's enemies thought that one more bit of evidence was necessary, we do not know, but we do know that their whole scheme backfired.

When Jesus asked what their convictions were about the Sabbath Day, He used on them the weapon they had forged for Him. To begin with, they couldn't heal anybody on *any* day, and everybody knew it. But even more, if the Pharisees said that nobody should be healed on the Sabbath, the people would consider them heartless; if they gave permission for healing, their associates would consider them lawless. The dilemma was now theirs, not the Lord's, and they needed a way to escape. As they did on more than one occasion, the scribes and Pharisees evaded the issue by saying nothing.

Jesus healed the man and let him go, knowing that the Pharisee's house was not the safest place for him. Instead of providing evidence against *Jesus*, the man provided

evidence against the *Pharisees*, for he was “exhibit A” of the healing power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord knew too much about this legalistic crowd to let them escape. He knew that on the Sabbath Day they would deliver their farm animals from danger, so why not permit Him to deliver a man who was made in the likeness of God? Seemingly, they were suggesting that animals were more important than people. (It is tragic that some people even today have more love for their pets than they do for their family members, their neighbors, or even for a lost world.)

Jesus exposed the false piety of the Pharisees and the scribes. They claimed to be defending God's Sabbath laws, when in reality they were denying God by the way they abused people and accused the Saviour. There is a big difference between protecting God's truth and promoting man's traditions.

The Guests: False Popularity (Luke 14:7–11)

Experts in management tell us that most people wear an invisible sign that reads, “Please make me feel important”; if we heed that sign, we can succeed in human relations. On the other hand, if we say or do things that make others feel insignificant, we will fail. Then people will respond by becoming angry and resentful, because everybody wants to be noticed and made to feel important.

In Jesus' day, as today, there were “status symbols” that helped people enhance and protect their high standing in society. If you were invited to the “right homes” and if you were seated in the “right places,” then people would know how important you really were. The emphasis was on reputation, not character. It was more important to sit in the right places than to live the right kind of life.

In New Testament times, the closer you sat to the host, the higher you stood on the social ladder and the more attention (and invitations) you would receive from others. Naturally, many people rushed to the “head table” when the doors were opened because they wanted to be important.

This kind of attitude betrays a false view of success. “Try not to become a man of success,” said Albert Einstein, “but try to become a man of value.” While there may be some exceptions, it is usually true that valuable people are eventually recognized and appropriately honored. Success that comes only from self-promotion is temporary, and you may be embarrassed as you are asked to move down (Prov. 25:6–7).

When Jesus advised the guests to take the lowest places, He was not giving them a “gimmick” that guaranteed promotion. The false humility that takes the lowest place is just as hateful to God as the pride that takes the highest place. God is not impressed by our status in society or in the church. He is not influenced by what people say or think about us, because He sees the thoughts and motives of the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). God still humbles the proud and exalts the humble (James 4:6).

British essayist Francis Bacon compared fame to a river that easily carried “things light and swollen” but that drowned “things weighty and solid.” It is interesting to scan old editions of encyclopedias and see how many “famous people” are “forgotten people” today.

Humility is a fundamental grace in the Christian life, and yet it is elusive; if you know you have it, you have lost it! It has well been said that humility is not thinking meanly of

ourselves; it is simply not thinking of ourselves at all. Jesus is the greatest example of humility, and we would do well to ask the Holy Spirit to enable us to imitate Him (Phil. 2:1–16).

The Host: False Hospitality (Luke 14:12–14)

Jesus knew that the host had invited his guests for two reasons: (1) to pay them back because they had invited him to past feasts, or (2) to put them under his debt so that they would invite him to future feasts. Such hospitality was not an expression of love and grace but rather an evidence of pride and selfishness. He was “buying” recognition.

Jesus does not prohibit us from entertaining family and friends, but He warns us against entertaining *only* family and friends exclusively and habitually. That kind of “fellowship” quickly degenerates into a “mutual admiration society” in which each one tries to outdo the others and no one dares to break the cycle. Sad to say, too much church social life fits this description.

Our motive for sharing must be the praise of God and not the applause of men, the eternal reward in heaven and not the temporary recognition on earth. A pastor friend of mine used to remind me, “You can’t get your reward twice!” and he was right (see Matt. 6:1–18). On the day of judgment, many who today are first in the eyes of men will be last in God’s eyes, and many who are last in the eyes of men will be first in the eyes of God (Luke 13:30).

In our Lord’s time, it was not considered proper to ask poor people and handicapped people to public banquets. (The women were not invited either!) But Jesus commanded us to put these needy people at the top of our guest list *because they cannot pay us back*. If our hearts are right, God will see to it that we are properly rewarded, though getting a reward must not be the motive for our generosity. When we serve others from unselfish hearts, we are laying up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20) and becoming “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21).

Our modern world is very competitive, and it is easy for God’s people to become more concerned about profit and loss than they are about sacrifice and service. “What will I get out of it?” may easily become life’s most important question (Matt. 19:27ff). We must strive to maintain the unselfish attitude that Jesus had and share what we have with others.

The Jews: False Security (Luke 14:15–24)

When Jesus mentioned “the resurrection of the just,” one of the guests became excited and said, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” The Jewish people pictured their future kingdom as a great feast with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets as the honored guests (Luke 13:28; see Isa. 25:6). This anonymous guest was confident that he would one day be at the “kingdom feast” with them! Jesus responded by telling him a parable that revealed the sad consequences of false confidence.

In Jesus’ day when you invited guests to a dinner, you told them the day but not the exact hour of the meal. A host had to know how many guests were coming so he could butcher the right amount of animals and prepare sufficient food. Just before the feast was to begin, the host sent his servants to each of the guests to tell them the banquet

was ready and they should come (see Es. 5:8; 6:14). In other words, *each of the guests in this parable had already agreed to attend the banquet*. The host expected them to be there.

But instead of eagerly coming to the feast, all of the guests insulted the host by refusing to attend, and they all gave very feeble excuses to defend their change in plans.

The first guest begged off because he had to “go and see” a piece of real estate he had purchased. In the East, the purchasing of property is often a long and complicated process, and the man would have had many opportunities to examine the land he was buying. Anybody who purchases land that he has never examined is certainly taking a chance. Since most banquets were held in the evening, the man had little daylight left even for a cursory investigation.

The second man had also made a purchase—ten oxen that he was anxious to prove. Again, who would purchase that many animals without first testing them? Not many customers in our modern world would buy a used car that they had not taken out for a “test drive.” Furthermore, how could this man really put these oxen to the test when it was so late in the day? His statement “I go to prove them!” suggests that he was already on his way to the farm when the servant came with the final call to the dinner.

The third guest really had no excuse at all. Since they involved so much elaborate preparation, Jewish weddings were never surprises, so this man knew well in advance that he was taking a wife. That being the case, he should not have agreed to attend the feast in the first place. Since only Jewish men were invited to banquets, the host did not expect the wife to come anyway. Having a new wife could have kept the man from the battlefield (Deut. 24:5) but not from the festive board.

Of course, these were only excuses. I think it was Billy Sunday who defined an excuse as “the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie.” The person who is good at excuses is usually not good at anything else. These three guests actually expected to get another invitation in the future, *but that invitation never came*.

Having prepared a great dinner for many guests, the host did not want all that food to go to waste, so he sent his servant out to gather a crowd and bring them to the banquet hall. What kind of men would be found in the streets and lanes of the city or in the highways and hedges? The outcasts, the loiterers, the homeless, the undesirables, *the kind of people that Jesus came to save* (Luke 15:1–2; 19:10). There might even be some Gentiles in the crowd!

These men may have had only one reason for refusing the kind invitation: they were unprepared to attend such a fine dinner. So, the servant constrained them to accept (see 2 Cor. 5:20). They had no excuses. The poor could not afford to buy oxen; the blind could not go to examine real estate; and the poor, maimed, lame, and blind were usually not given in marriage. This crowd would be hungry and lonely and only too happy to accept an invitation to a free banquet.

Not only did the host get other people to take the places assigned to the invited guests, but he also *shut the door so that the excuse-makers could not change their minds and come in* (see Luke 13:22–30). In fact, the host was angry. We rarely think of God expressing judicial anger against those who reject His gracious invitations, but verses like Isaiah 55:6 and Proverbs 1:24–33 give a solemn warning that we not treat His calls lightly.

This parable had a special message for the proud Jewish people who were so sure they would “eat bread in the kingdom of God.” Within a few short years, the Gospel would be rejected by the official religious leaders, and the message would go out to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10; 13ff).

But the message of this parable applies to all lost sinners today. God still says, “All things are now ready. Come!” Nothing more need be done for the salvation of your soul, for Jesus Christ finished the work of redemption when He died for you on the cross and arose from the dead. The feast has been spread, the invitation is free, and you are invited to come.

People today make the same mistake that the people in the parable made: they delay in responding to the invitation *because they settle for second best*. There is certainly nothing wrong with owning a farm, examining purchases, or spending an evening with your wife. But if these *good* things keep you from enjoying the *best* things, then they become *bad* things. The excuse-makers were actually successful people in the eyes of their friends, but they were failures in the eyes of Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is a feast, not a funeral, and all are invited to come. Each of us as believers must herald abroad the message, “Come, for all things are now ready!” God wants to see His house filled, and “yet there is room.” He wants us to go home (Mark 5:19), go into the streets and lanes (Luke 14:21), go into the highways and hedges (Luke 14:23), and go into all the world (Mark 16:15) with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This parable was the text of the last sermon D.L. Moody preached, “Excuses.” It was given on November 23, 1899 in the Civic Auditorium in Kansas City, and Moody was a sick man as he preached. “I must have souls in Kansas City,” he told the students at his school in Chicago. “Never, never have I wanted so much to lead men and women to Christ as I do this time!”

There was a throbbing in his chest, and he had to hold to the organ to keep from falling, but Moody bravely preached the Gospel; and some fifty people responded to trust Christ. The next day, Moody left for home, and a month later he died. Up to the very end, Moody was “compelling them to come in.”

The Multitudes: False Expectancy (Luke 14:25–35)

When Jesus left the Pharisee's house, great crowds followed Him, but He was not impressed by their enthusiasm. He knew that most of those in the crowd were not the least bit interested in spiritual things. Some wanted only to see miracles, others heard that He fed the hungry, and a few hoped He would overthrow Rome and establish David's promised kingdom. They were expecting the wrong things.

Jesus turned to the multitude and preached a sermon that deliberately thinned out the ranks. He made it clear that, when it comes to personal discipleship, He is more interested in *quality* than *quantity*. In the matter of saving lost souls, He wants His house to be filled (Luke 14:23); but in the matter of personal discipleship, He wants only those who are willing to pay the price.

A “disciple” is a learner, one who attaches himself or herself to a teacher in order to learn a trade or a subject. Perhaps our nearest modern equivalent is “apprentice,” one who learns by watching and by doing. The word *disciple* was the most common name

for the followers of Jesus Christ and is used 264 times in the Gospels and the Book of Acts.

Jesus seems to make a distinction between salvation and discipleship. Salvation is open to all who will come by faith, while discipleship is for believers willing to pay a price. Salvation means coming to the cross and trusting Jesus Christ, while discipleship means carrying the cross and following Jesus Christ. Jesus wants as many sinners saved as possible ("that My house may be filled"), but He cautions us not to take discipleship lightly; and in the three parables He gave, He made it clear that there is a price to pay.

To begin with, we must love Christ supremely, even more than we love our own flesh and blood (Luke 14:26–27). The word *hate* does not suggest positive antagonism but rather "to love less" (see Gen. 29:30–31; Mal. 1:2–3; and Matt. 10:37). Our love for Christ must be so strong that all other love is like hatred in comparison. In fact, we must hate our own lives and be willing to bear the cross after Him.

What does it mean to "carry the cross"? It means daily identification with Christ in shame, suffering, and surrender to God's will. It means death to self, to our own plans and ambitions, and a willingness to serve Him as He directs (John 12:23–28). A "cross" is something we willingly accept from God as part of His will for our lives. The Christian who called his noisy neighbors the "cross" he had to bear certainly did not understand the meaning of dying to self.

Jesus gave three parables to explain why He makes such costly demands on His followers: the man building a tower, the king fighting a war, and the salt losing its flavor. The usual interpretation is that believers are represented by the man building the tower and the king fighting the war, and we had better "count the cost" before we start, lest we start and not be able to finish. But I agree with Campbell Morgan that the builder and the king represent not the believer but Jesus Christ. *He is the One who must "count the cost" to see whether we are the kind of material He can use to build the church and battle the enemy.* He cannot get the job done with halfhearted followers who will not pay the price.

As I write this chapter, I can look up and see on my library shelves hundreds of volumes of Christian biographies and autobiographies, the stories of godly men and women who made great contributions to the building of the church and the battle against the enemy. They were willing to pay the price, and God blessed them and used them. They were people with "salt" in their character.

Jesus had already told His disciples that they were "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). When the sinner trusts Jesus Christ as Saviour, a miracle takes place and "clay" is turned into "salt." Salt was a valued item in that day; in fact, part of a soldier's pay was given in salt. (The words *salt* and *salary* are related; hence, the saying, "He's not worth his salt.")

Salt is a preservative, and God's people in this world are helping to retard the growth of evil and decay. Salt is also a purifying agent, an antiseptic that makes things cleaner. It may sting when it touches the wound, but it helps to kill infection. Salt gives flavor to things and, most of all, makes people thirsty. By our character and conduct, we ought to make others thirsty for the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation that He alone can give.

Our modern salt is pure and does not lose its flavor, but the salt in Jesus' day was impure and could lose its flavor, especially if it came in contact with earth. Once the

saltiness was gone, there was no way to restore it, and the salt was thrown out into the street to be walked on. When a disciple loses his Christian character, he is “good for nothing” and will eventually be “walked on” by others and bring disgrace to Christ.

Discipleship is serious business. If we are not true disciples, then Jesus cannot build the tower and fight the war. “There is always an *if* in connection with discipleship,” wrote Oswald Chambers, “and it implies that we need not [be disciples] unless we like. There is never any compulsion; Jesus does not coerce us. There is only one way of being a disciple, and that is by being devoted to Jesus.”

If we tell Jesus that we want to take up our cross and follow Him as His disciples, then He wants us to know exactly what we are getting into. He wants no false expectancy, no illusions, no bargains. He wants to use us as stones for building His church, soldiers for battling His enemies, and salt for bettering His world; *and He is looking for quality.*

After all, He was on His way to Jerusalem when He spoke these words, and look what happened to Him there! He does not ask us to do anything for Him that He has not already done for us.

To some, Jesus says, “You cannot be My disciples!” Why? Because they will not forsake all for Him, bear shame and reproach for Him, and let their love for Him control them.

And they are the losers.

Will *you* be His disciple?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE JOYS OF SALVATION

Luke 15

When D.L. Moody was directing his Sunday School in Chicago, one boy walked several miles to attend; and somebody asked him, “Why don’t you go to a Sunday School closer to home?”

His reply might have been used by the publicans and sinners in Jesus’ day: “Because they love a feller over there.”

It is significant that Jesus *attracted* sinners while the Pharisees *repelled* them. (What does this say about some of our churches today?) Lost sinners came to Jesus, not because He catered to them or compromised His message, but because He cared for them. He understood their needs and tried to help them, while the Pharisees criticized them and kept their distance (see Luke 18:9–14). The Pharisees had a knowledge of the Old Testament Law and a desire for personal purity, yet they had no love for lost souls.

Three words summarize the message of this chapter: *lost*, *found*, and *rejoice*. Jesus spoke these parables to answer the accusations of the Pharisees and scribes who were scandalized at His behavior. It was bad enough that Jesus *welcomed* these outcasts and taught them, but He went so far as to *eat with them!* The Jewish religious leaders did not yet understand that the Son of man had “come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Even more, they were still blind to the fact that *they themselves were among the lost*.

This chapter makes it clear that there is one message of salvation: God welcomes and forgives repentant sinners. But these parables also reveal that there are *two aspects to this salvation*. There is *God's* part: the shepherd seeks the lost sheep, and the woman searches for the lost coin. But there is also *man's* part in salvation, for the wayward son willingly repented and returned home. To emphasize but one aspect is to give a false view of salvation, for both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man must be considered (see John 6:37; 2 Thes. 2:13–14).

Since one of the major themes of this chapter is joy, let's consider the three different joys that are involved in salvation. C.S. Lewis wrote, “Joy is the serious business of heaven,” and it is a joy in which you and I can share.

The Joy of Finding (Luke 15:1–10)

The story about the lost sheep would touch the hearts of the men and boys in the crowd, and the women and girls would appreciate the story about the coin that was lost from the wedding necklace. Jesus sought to reach everybody's heart.

The lost sheep (vv. 3–7). The sheep was lost because of foolishness. Sheep have a tendency to go astray, and that is why they need a shepherd (Isa. 53:6; 1 Peter 2:25). The scribes and Pharisees had no problem seeing the publicans and sinners as “lost sheep,” but they would not apply that image to themselves! And yet the prophet made it clear that all of us have sinned and gone astray, and that includes religious people.

The shepherd was responsible for each sheep; if one was missing, the shepherd had to pay for it unless he could prove that it was killed by a predator (see Gen. 31:38–39; Ex. 22:10–13; Amos 3:12). This explains why he would leave the flock with the other shepherds, go and search for the missing animal, and then rejoice when he found it. Not to find the lost sheep meant money out of his own pocket, plus the disgrace of being known as a careless shepherd.

By leaving the ninety-nine sheep, the shepherd was not saying they were unimportant to him. They were safe but the lost sheep was in danger. The fact that the shepherd would go after *one* sheep is proof that each animal was dear to him. Jesus was not suggesting that the scribes and Pharisees were not in need of salvation, for they certainly were. We must not make every part of the parable mean something, otherwise we will turn it into an allegory and distort the message.

There is a fourfold joy expressed when a lost sinner comes to the Saviour. Though nothing is said in the story about how the sheep felt, there is certainly joy in the heart of the *person found*. Both Scripture (Acts 3:8; 8:39) and our own personal experience verify the joy of salvation.

But there is also the joy of the person who does the finding. Whenever you assist in leading a lost soul to faith in Christ, you experience a wonderful joy within. Others join

with us in rejoicing as we share the good news of a new child of God in the family, and there is also joy in heaven (Luke 15:7, 10). The angels know better than we do what we are saved *from* and *to*, and they rejoice with us.

The lost coin (vv. 8–10). The sheep was lost because of its foolishness, but the coin was lost because of the carelessness of another. It is a sobering thought that our carelessness *at home* could result in a soul being lost.

When a Jewish girl married, she began to wear a headband of ten silver coins to signify that she was now a wife. It was the Jewish version of our modern wedding ring, and it would be considered a calamity for her to lose one of those coins. Palestinian houses were dark, so she had to light a lamp and search until she found the lost coin; and we can imagine her joy at finding it.

We must not press parabolic images too far, but it is worth noting that the coin would have on it the image of the ruler (Luke 20:19–25). The lost sinner bears the image of God, even though that image has been marred by sin. When a lost sinner is “found,” God begins to restore that divine image through the power of the Spirit; and one day, the believer will be like Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10; 1 John 3:1–2).

These two parables help us understand something of what it means to be lost. To begin with, it means being *out of place*. Sheep belong with the flock, coins belong on the chain, and lost sinners belong in fellowship with God. But to be lost also means *being out of service*. A lost sheep is of no value to the shepherd, a lost coin has no value to the owner, and a lost sinner cannot experience the enriching fulfillment God has for him in Jesus Christ.

But to turn this around, to be “found” (saved) means that you are back in place (reconciled to God), back in service (life has a purpose), and out of danger. No wonder the shepherd and the woman rejoiced and invited their friends to rejoice with them!

It is easy for us today to read these two parables and take their message for granted, but the people who first heard them must have been shocked. *Jesus was saying that God actually searches for lost sinners!* No wonder the scribes and Pharisees were offended, for there was no place in their legalistic theology for a God like that. They had forgotten that God had sought out Adam and Eve when they had sinned and hidden from God (Gen. 3:8–9). In spite of their supposed knowledge of Scripture, the scribes and Pharisees forgot that God was like a father who pitied his wayward children (Ps. 103:8–14).

There are few joys that match the joy of finding the lost and bringing them to the Saviour. “The church has nothing to do but to save souls,” said John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. “Therefore, spend and be spent in this work.”

The Joy of Returning (Luke 15:11–24)

We call this story “The Parable of the Prodigal Son” (the word *prodigal* means “wasteful”), but it could also be called “The Parable of the Loving Father,” for it emphasizes the graciousness of the father more than the sinfulness of the son. Unlike the shepherd and the woman in the previous parables, the father did not go out to seek the son, but it was the memory of his father’s goodness that brought the boy to repentance and forgiveness (see Rom. 2:4). Note in the story the three experiences of the younger son.

Rebellion—he went to the far country (vv. 11–16). According to Jewish law, an elder son received twice as much as the other sons (Deut. 21:17), and a father could distribute his wealth during his lifetime if he wished. It was perfectly legal for the younger son to ask for his share of the estate and even to sell it, but it was certainly not a very loving thing on his part. It was as though he were saying to his father, “I wish you were dead!” Thomas Huxley said, “A man’s worst difficulties begin when he is able to do just as he likes.” How true!

We are always heading for trouble whenever we value things more than people, pleasure more than duty, and distant scenes more than the blessings we have right at home. Jesus once warned two disputing brothers, “Take heed and beware of covetousness!” (Luke 12:15) Why? Because the covetous person can never be satisfied, no matter how much he acquires, and a dissatisfied heart leads to a disappointed life. The prodigal learned the hard way that you cannot enjoy the things money can buy if you ignore the things money cannot buy.

“The far country” is not necessarily a distant place to which we must travel, because “the far country” exists first of all *in our hearts*. The younger son dreamed of “enjoying” his freedom far from home and away from his father and older brother. If the sheep was lost through foolishness and the coin through carelessness, then the son was lost because of willfulness. He wanted to have his own way so he rebelled against his own father and broke his father’s heart.

But life in the far country was not what he expected. His resources ran out, his friends left him, a famine came, and the boy was forced to do for a stranger what he would not do for his own father—go to work! This scene in the drama is our Lord’s way of emphasizing what sin really does in the lives of those who reject the Father’s will. Sin promises freedom, but it only brings slavery (John 8:34); it promises success, but brings failure; it promises life, but “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). The boy thought he would “find himself,” but he only lost himself! When God is left out of our lives, enjoyment becomes enslavement.

Repentance—he came to himself (vv. 17–19). To “repent” means “to change one’s mind,” and that is exactly what the young man did as he cared for the pigs. (What a job for a Jewish boy!) He “came to himself,” which suggests that up to this point he had not really “been himself.” There is an “insanity” in sin that seems to paralyze the image of God within us and liberate the “animal” inside. Students of Shakespeare like to contrast two quotations that describe this contradiction in man’s nature.

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!

(*Hamlet*, II, ii)

When he is best, he is a little worse than a man; and when he is worst, he is little better than a beast.

(*The Merchant of Venice*, I, ii)

The young man changed his mind about himself and his situation, and he admitted that he was a sinner. He confessed that his father was a generous man and that service

at home was far better than “freedom” in the far country. It is God’s goodness, not just man’s badness, that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). If the boy had thought only about himself—his hunger, his homesickness, his loneliness—he would have despaired. But his painful circumstances helped him to see his father in a new way, and this brought him hope. If his father was so good to *servants*, maybe he would be willing to forgive a *son*.

Had he stopped there, the boy would have experienced only regret or remorse (2 Cor. 7:10), but true repentance involves the will as well as the mind and the emotions—“I will arise ... I will go ... I will say ...” Our resolutions may be noble, but unless we act on them, they can never of themselves bring about any permanent good. If repentance is truly the work of God (Acts 11:18), then the sinner will obey God and put saving faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

Rejoicing—he came to the father (vv. 20–24). Here Jesus answered the accusations of the scribes and Pharisees (Luke 15:2), for the father not only ran to welcome his son, but he honored the boy’s homecoming by preparing a great feast and inviting the village to attend. The father never did permit the younger son to finish his confession; he interrupted him, forgave him, and ordered the celebration to begin!

Of course, the father pictures to us the attitude of our Heavenly Father toward sinners who repent: He is rich in His mercy and grace, and great in His love toward them (Eph. 2:1–10). All of this is possible because of the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. No matter what some preachers (and singers) claim, we are not saved by God’s love; God loves the whole world, and the whole world is not saved. We are saved by God’s grace, and grace is *love that pays a price*.

In the East, old men do not run; yet the father ran to meet his son. Why? One obvious reason was his love for him and his desire to show that love. But there is something else involved. This wayward son had brought disgrace to his family and village and, according to Deuteronomy 21:18–21, he should have been stoned to death. *If the neighbors had started to stone him, they would have hit the father who was embracing him!* What a picture of what Jesus did for us on the cross!

Everything the younger son had hoped to find in the far country, he discovered back home: clothes, jewelry, friends, joyful celebration, love, and assurance for the future. What made the difference? Instead of saying, “Father, *give me!*” he said, “Father, *make me!*” He was willing to be a servant! Of course, the father did not ask him to “earn” his forgiveness, because no amount of good works can save us from our sins (Eph. 2:8–10; Titus 3:3–7). In the far country, the prodigal learned the meaning of misery; but back home, he discovered the meaning of mercy.

The ring was a sign of sonship, and the “best robe” (no doubt the father’s) was proof of his acceptance back into the family (see Gen. 41:42; Isa. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21). Servants did not wear rings, shoes, or expensive garments. The feast was the father’s way of showing his joy and sharing it with others. Had the boy been dealt with according to the Law, there would have been a funeral, not a feast. What a beautiful illustration of Psalm 103:10–14!

It is interesting to consider the father’s description of his son’s experience: he was dead, and was now alive; he was lost, and now was found. This is the spiritual experience of every lost sinner who comes to the Father through faith in Jesus Christ

(John 5:24; Eph. 2:1–10). Note the parallels between the prodigal's coming to the father and our coming to the Father through Christ (John 14:6):

<i>The Prodigal</i>	<i>Jesus Christ</i>
He was lost (v.24)	"I am the way"
He was ignorant (v.17)	"I am the truth"
He was dead (v.24)	"I am the life"

There is only one way to come to the Father, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. Have you come home?

The Joy of Forgiving (Luke 15:25–32)

At this point in the parable, the scribes and Pharisees felt confident that they had escaped our Lord's judgment, for He had centered His attention on the publicans and sinners, pictured by the prodigal son. But Jesus continued the story and introduced the elder brother, who is a clear illustration of the scribes and Pharisees. The publicans and sinners were guilty of the obvious sins of the flesh, but the Pharisees and scribes were guilty of sins of the spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). Their outward actions may have been blameless, but their inward attitudes were abominable (see Matt. 23:25–28).

We must admit that the elder brother had some virtues that are commendable. He worked hard and always obeyed his father. He never brought disgrace either to the home or to the village, and apparently he had enough friends so that he could have planned an enjoyable party (Luke 15:29). He seems like a good solid citizen and, compared to his younger brother, almost a saint.

However, important as obedience and diligence are, they are not the only tests of character. Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love others (Luke 10:25–28), but the elder brother broke both of these divine commandments. He did not love God (represented in the story by the father), and he did not love his brother. The elder brother would not forgive his brother who wasted the family inheritance and disgraced the family name. But neither would he forgive his father who had graciously forgiven the young man those very sins!

When you examine the sins of the elder brother, you can easily understand why he pictures the scribes and Pharisees. To begin with, he was *self-righteous*. He openly announced the sins of his brother, but he could not see his own sins (see Luke 18:9–14). The Pharisees defined sin primarily in terms of outward actions, not inward attitudes. They completely missed the message of the Sermon on the Mount and its emphasis on inward attitudes and holiness of heart (Matt. 5–7).

Pride was another one of his failings. Just think, he had served his father all those years and had *never* disobeyed his will! What a testimony! But his heart was not in his work, and he was always dreaming of throwing a big party at which he and his friends could enjoy themselves. He was only a drudge. Like the Prophet Jonah, the elder brother did God's will *but not from the heart* (Jonah 4; Eph. 6:6). He was a hard worker and a faithful worker—qualities to be commended—but his work was not a "labor of love" that would please his father.

You cannot help but notice his *unconcern for his missing brother*. Imagine having to be told that his brother had come home! The father watched for the younger son day after day and finally saw him afar off, but the elder brother did not know his brother was home until one of the servants told him.

Even though he knew it would make his father happy, the elder brother did not want his younger brother to come home. Why should he share his estate with somebody who had wasted his own inheritance? Why should he even share the father's love with somebody who had brought shame to the family and the village? Reports of the prodigal's lifestyle only made the elder brother look good, and perhaps this would make the father love his obedient son even more. No doubt about it—the arrival of the younger son was a threat to the older son.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing about the elder son was his fierce *anger*. He was angry at both his father and his brother and would not go into the house and share in the joyful celebration.

Anger is a normal emotion and it need not be sinful. "Be ye angry, and sin not" (Eph. 4:26, quoting Ps. 4:4). Moses, David, the prophets, and our Lord Jesus displayed holy anger at sin, and so should we today. The Puritan preacher Thomas Fuller said that anger was one of the "sinews of the soul." Aristotle gave good advice when he wrote: "Anybody can become angry. That is easy. But to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose and in the right way—that is not within everybody's power and is not easy."

The elder brother was angry with his father because his father had given the younger son the feast that the elder brother had always wanted. "You never gave me so much as a goat," he said to his father, "but you killed for him the valuable fatted calf!" The elder brother's dreams were all shattered because the father had forgiven the prodigal.

Of course the elder brother was angry at his younger brother for getting all that attention and receiving the father's special gifts. As far as the elder brother was concerned, *the younger brother deserved none of it*. Had he been faithful? No! Had he obeyed the father? No! Then why should he be treated with such kindness and love?

The Pharisees had a religion of good works. By their fasting, studying, praying, and giving, they hoped to earn blessings from God and merit eternal life. They knew little or nothing about the grace of God. However, it was not what they did, but what they did not do, that alienated them from God (see Matt. 23:23–24). When they saw Jesus receiving and forgiving irreligious people, they rebelled against it. Even more, they failed to see that *they themselves also needed the Saviour*.

The same father who ran to meet the prodigal came out of the house of feasting to plead with the older son. How gracious and condescending our Father is, and how patient He is with our weaknesses! The father explained that he would have been willing to host a feast for the older boy and his friends, but the boy had never asked him. Furthermore, ever since the division of the estate, the elder brother owned everything, and he could use it as he pleased.

The elder brother refused to go in; he stayed outside and pouted. He missed the joy of forgiving his brother and restoring the broken fellowship, the joy of pleasing his father and uniting the family again. How strange that the elder brother could speak peaceably to a servant boy, but he could not speak peaceably to his brother or father!

If we are out of fellowship with God, we cannot be in fellowship with our brothers and sisters and, conversely, if we harbor an unforgiving attitude toward others, we cannot be in communion with God (see Matt. 5:21–26; 1 John 4:18–21). When they show true repentance, we must forgive those who sin, and we should seek to restore them in grace and humility (Matt. 18:15–35; Gal. 6:1–5; Eph. 4:32).

The father had the last word, so we do not know how the story ended. (See Jonah 4 for a parallel narrative.) We do know that the scribes and Pharisees continued to oppose Jesus and separate themselves from His followers, and that their leaders eventually brought about our Lord's arrest and death. In spite of the Father's pleading, they would not come in.

Everybody in this chapter experienced joy except the elder brother. The shepherd, the woman, and their friends all experienced the joy of finding. The younger son experienced the joy of returning and being received by a loving, gracious father. The father experienced the joy of receiving his son back safe and sound. But the elder brother would not forgive his brother, so he had no joy. He could have repented and attended the feast, but he refused; so he stayed outside and suffered.

In my years of preaching and pastoral ministry, I have met elder brothers (and sisters!) who have preferred nursing their anger to enjoying the fellowship of God and God's people. Because they will not forgive, they have alienated themselves from the church and even from their family; they are sure that everyone else is wrong and they alone are right. They can talk loudly about the sins of others, but they are blind to their own sins.

"I never forgive!" General Oglethorpe said to John Wesley, to which Wesley replied, "Then, sir, I hope you never sin."

Don't stand outside! Come in and enjoy the feast!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE RIGHT AND WRONG OF RICHES

Luke 16

The *Wall Street Journal* quoted an anonymous wit who defined *money* as "an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider for everything except happiness." The writer might have added that money is also a provoker of covetousness and competition, a wonderful servant but a terrible master. The love of money is still "a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10, nkjv) and has helped fill our world with corruption and lust (1 Peter 1:4).

When you read our Lord's sermons and parables, you are struck with the fact that He had a great deal to say about material wealth. He ministered to people who, for the most part, were poor and who thought that acquiring more wealth was the solution to all

their problems. Jesus was not blind to the needs of the poor, and by His example and teaching, He encouraged His followers to share what they had with others. The early church was a fellowship of people who willingly shared their possessions with the less fortunate (Acts 2:44–47; 4:33–37).

In His portrait of the prodigal and the elder brother, Jesus described two opposite philosophies of life. Prior to his repentance, the prodigal *wasted* his life, but his elder brother only *spent* his life as a faithful drudge. Both attitudes are wrong, for the Christian approach to life is that we should *invest* our lives for the good of others and the glory of God. This chapter emphasizes that truth: life is a stewardship, and we must use our God-given opportunities faithfully. One day we must give an account to the Lord of what we have done with all He has given to us, so we had better heed what Jesus says in this chapter about the right and wrong use of wealth.

Neither of the two accounts in this chapter is called a parable either by Jesus or by Luke, so it is likely that our Lord was describing actual happenings. However, whether they are actual events or only parables, the spiritual values are the same.

The Right Use of Wealth (Luke 16:1–13)

A foolish steward (vv. 1–2). A steward is someone who manages another's wealth. He does not own that wealth himself, but he has the privilege of enjoying it and using it for the profit of his master. The most important thing about a steward is that he serve his master faithfully (1 Cor. 4:2). When he looks at the riches around him, the steward must remember that they belong to his master, not to him personally, and that they must be used in a way that will please and profit the master.

This particular steward *forgot* that he was a steward and began to act as if he were the owner. He became a “prodigal steward” who wasted his master's wealth. His master heard about it and immediately asked for an inventory of his goods and an audit of his books. He also fired his steward.

Before we judge this man too severely, let's examine our own lives to see how faithful we have been as stewards of what God has given to us. To begin with, we are stewards of the *material wealth* that we have, whether much or little; and we will one day have to answer to God for the way we have acquired it and used it.

Christian stewardship goes beyond paying God a tithe of our income and then using the remainder as we please. True stewardship means that we thank God for *all* that we have (Deut. 8:11–18) and use it as He directs. Giving God 10 percent of our income is a good way to begin our faithful stewardship, but we must remember that God should control what we do with the remaining 90 percent as well.

We are also stewards of *our time* (Eph. 5:15–17). The phrase “redeeming the time” comes from the business world and means “buying up the opportunity.” Time is eternity, minted into precious minutes and handed to us to use either wisely or carelessly. The main lesson of this narrative is that the steward, as dishonest as he was, used his opportunity wisely and prepared for the future. Life ceased to be “enjoyment” and became “investment.”

Christians are stewards of the *gifts and abilities* God has given them (1 Peter 4:10), and we must use those gifts and abilities to serve others. The thief says, “What's yours is mine—I'll take it!” The selfish man says, “What's mine is mine—I'll keep it!” But the Christian must say, “What's mine is a gift from God—I'll share it!” We are stewards and

we must use our abilities to win the lost, encourage the saints, and meet the needs of hurting people.

Finally, God's people are stewards of the Gospel (1 Thes. 2:4). God has committed the treasure of His truth to us (2 Cor. 4:7), and we must guard this treasure (1 Tim. 6:20) and invest it in the lives of others (2 Tim. 2:2). The enemy wants to rob the church of this treasure (Jude 3–4), and we must be alert and courageous.

Like this steward, we will one day have to give an account of our stewardship (Rom. 14:10–12; 2 Cor. 5:10ff). If we have been faithful, the Lord will give us His commendation and reward (Matt. 25:21; 1 Cor. 4:5); but if we have not been faithful, we will lose those blessings, even though we will be saved and enter heaven (1 Cor. 3:13–15).

Vance Havner often said, "God called us to play the game, not keep the score." If we are faithful stewards, God will reward us generously, and that reward will bring glory to His name.

A wise steward (vv. 3–8). The steward knew he would lose his job. He could not change the past, but he could prepare for the future. How? By making friends of his master's creditors so that they would take him in when his master threw him out. He gave each of them a generous discount, provided they paid up immediately, and they were only too glad to cooperate. Even his master complimented him on his clever plan (Luke 16:8).

Jesus did not commend the steward for robbing his master or for encouraging others to be dishonest. *Jesus commended the man for his wise use of opportunity.* "The children of this world" are experts at seizing opportunities for making money and friends and getting ahead. God's people should take heed and be just as wise when it comes to managing the spiritual affairs of life. "The children of this world" are wiser only "in their generation"; they see the things of time, but not the things of eternity. Because the child of God lives "with eternity's values in view," he should be able to make far better use of his opportunities.

The application (vv. 9–13). Jesus gave three admonitions, based on the experience of the steward.

First, He admonishes us to *use our opportunities wisely* (Luke 16:9). One of these days, life will end, and we will not be able to earn or use money. Therefore, while we have the opportunity, we must invest our money in "making friends" for the Lord. This means winning people to Christ who will one day welcome us to heaven. Our lives and our resources will one day end, so it behooves us to use them wisely.

It is tragic to see how God's wealth is being wasted by Christians who live as though Jesus never died and judgment is never coming. The old couplet is certainly true:

The only difference between men and boys
Is that men buy more expensive toys.

The heritage of the past must be used wisely in the present to guarantee spiritual dividends in the future. All of us should want to meet people in heaven who trusted Christ because we helped to pay the bill for Gospel witness around the world, starting at home. Thoreau wrote that a man is wealthy in proportion to the number of things he can afford to do without, and he was right. I once heard the late Jacob Stam pray, "Lord, the

only thing we know about sacrifice is how to spell the word." I wonder if today some of us can even spell the word!

Our Lord's second admonition is *be faithful in the way you use your material wealth* (Luke 16:10–12). He makes it clear that you cannot divorce the "spiritual" from the "material." Notice the contrasts:

<i>The material</i>	<i>The spiritual</i>
the god "Mammon"	the true God
that which is least	that which is much
false riches	true riches
that which is another's	that which is yours

Why is our Lord so concerned about the way we use money? Because money is not neutral; it is basically evil ("the mammon of unrighteousness"), and only God can sanctify it and use it for good. It is significant that both Paul and Peter called money "filthy lucre" (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7, 11; 1 Peter 5:2). Apparently by its very nature, money defiles and debases those who love it and let it control their lives. "We cannot safely use mammon," writes Richard Foster, "until we are absolutely clear that we are dealing, not just with mammon, but with unrighteous mammon" (*Money, Sex and Power*, Harper & Row, p. 57).

People who are unfaithful in the way they use money are also unfaithful in the way they use the "true riches" of God's kingdom. We cannot be orthodox in our theology and at the same time heretical in the way we use money. God will not commit His true riches to individuals or ministries that waste money and will not give an honest accounting to the people who have supported them. When it came to money, Paul was very careful that everything was honest "not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Cor. 8:21).

Finally, the Lord admonishes us to *be wholly devoted to God and single-minded* (Luke 16:13; and see Matt. 6:19–24). We cannot love or serve two masters, anymore than we can walk in two directions at one time. If we choose to serve money, then we cannot serve God. If we choose to serve God, then we will not serve money. Jesus is demanding *integrity*, total devotion to God that puts Him first in everything (Matt. 6:33).

If God is our Master, then money will be our servant, and we will use our resources in the will of God. But if God is not our Master, then *we will become the servants of money*, and money is a terrible master! We will start *wasting* our lives instead of *investing* them, and we will one day find ourselves "friendless" as we enter the gates of glory.

Henry Fielding wrote, "Make money your god and it will plague you like the devil!" Jesus said, "Make money your servant and use today's opportunities as investments in tomorrow's dividends." Be a wise steward! There are souls to win to the Saviour, and our money can help get the job done.

The Wrong Use of Money (Luke 16:14–31)

Jesus had been speaking primarily to His disciples, but the Pharisees had been listening, and their response was anything but spiritual. They sneered at Him! (The Greek word means “to turn up one’s nose.”) In spite of their strict religious practices, they loved money and cultivated values that were godless. They professed to trust God, but they measured life by wealth and possessions, the same as the unbelieving worldly crowd. *Far too many professed Christians today are making the same mistake.* With their lips, they honor the Lord; but with their wealth, they live like the world.

The Pharisees needed to stop “drifting” with the crowd and start “pressing into the kingdom” as many others were doing. The Pharisees had rejected the ministry of John the Baptist and permitted him to be killed, even though they knew he was God’s prophet. They were also rejecting the ministry of Jesus Christ and would ultimately ask Pilate to have Him crucified. When your life is controlled by the love of money, you open the door to every kind of sin.

The Law and the Prophets were “until John,” for John introduced the Saviour to the nation and announced the arrival of the kingdom. But that did not mean that the Law was discredited or destroyed, for in Jesus Christ, the Law has been fulfilled (Matt. 5:17–20). The Pharisees prided themselves in their faithful obedience to the Law of Moses, but they did not receive the Saviour of whom Moses wrote!

Why did Jesus talk about divorce and remarriage when His basic discussion was about covetousness? The scribes and Pharisees were divided on this question, and perhaps they wanted to provoke Jesus into an argument, but He thwarted their plans. (In most marriages and divorces, money is involved, so the topic was not completely foreign to the discussion.) Some of the Jews were very lax in their views of divorce and remarriage, while others were very strict. Jesus had spoken about this subject before, so it was not a new teaching (Matt. 5:31–32).

Having silenced the sneering Pharisees, Jesus then gave them a vivid description of what would happen to them if they continued in their covetousness and unbelief. The account focuses on an anonymous rich man and a beggar named Lazarus (“God is my help”), and it warns us against covetousness by presenting several contrasts.

A contrast in life (vv. 19–21). This man was indeed rich if he could afford daily to wear expensive clothes and host splendid feasts. The one word that best describes his lifestyle is “flamboyant.” He was definitely among “the rich and famous,” and other people admired and envied him.

Why is one man wealthy and another man poor? Had the Jewish people obeyed God’s commandments concerning the Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee, there would have been little or no poverty in the land, for the wealth and real estate could not have fallen into the hands of a few wealthy people (see Lev. 25, and note Ex. 23:11; Deut. 14:28–29). The Old Testament prophets denounced the rich for amassing great estates and exploiting the widows and the poor (Isa. 3:15; 10:2; Amos 2:6; 4:1; 5:11–12; 8:4–6; Hab. 2:9–13). In Jesus’ day, Palestine was under the rule of Rome, and life was very difficult for the common people.

Lazarus was sick and possibly crippled, because he was “laid” at the rich man’s gate daily (see Acts 3:1–2). The only attention he got was from the dogs! The rich man could easily have assisted Lazarus, but he ignored him and went on enjoying his recognition and his riches. Life was comfortable for him and he felt secure.

The rich man obviously had no concept of stewardship, or he would have used part of his wealth to help Lazarus. It is a mystery why he even allowed the beggar to camp at his front door. Perhaps he thought that providing a place for the man was ministry enough, and it may be that some of his wealthy guests occasionally gave Lazarus alms. Did any of them ever recall what the Old Testament had to say about the care of the poor, such as Proverbs 14:21; 19:17; 21:13; or 28:27?

A contrast in death (v. 22). “The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all” (Prov. 22:2). As John Donne said, death is the “great leveler.” The rich man died in spite of his wealth (Ps. 49:6–9) and “was buried,” no doubt with an expensive funeral. But when Lazarus died, he was carried to Abraham’s bosom. What a difference! Perhaps the beggar’s body did not even have a decent burial, though the Jews were usually compassionate in such cases. Lazarus certainly did not have the traditional Jewish funeral, with its paid mourners, costly spices, and elaborate tomb. After Lazarus’ body was taken away, the neighbors probably said, “Well, we’re glad he’s not around anymore!”

Death takes place when the spirit leaves the body (James 2:26). But death is not the end; it is the beginning of a whole new existence in another world. For the Christian, death means to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:1–8; Phil. 1:21). For the unbeliever, death means to be away from God’s presence and in torment.

A contrast in eternity (vv. 23–31). The *King James Version* uses the word *hell* in Luke 16:23, but the Greek word is not “hell” but “hades.” It is the temporary realm of the dead as they await the judgment. The permanent place of punishment for the lost is “hell,” the lake of fire. One day, death will give up the bodies and hades will give up the souls (Rev. 20:13, where “hell” should be “hades”), and the lost will stand before Christ in judgment (Rev. 20:10–15).

From our Lord’s description, we learn that hades had two sections: a paradise portion called “Abraham’s bosom,” and a punishment portion. It is believed by many theologians that our Lord emptied the paradise part of hades when He arose from the dead and returned to the Father (John 20:17; Eph. 4:8–10). We know that today “paradise” is in heaven, where Jesus reigns in glory (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:1–4). There is no indication in Scripture that souls in heaven can communicate with people in hades or with people on earth.

This narrative refutes so-called “soul sleep,” for both the rich man and Lazarus were conscious, one enjoying comfort and the other suffering torment. It is a solemn thing to ponder one’s eternal destiny and realize the reality of divine punishment.

C.S. Lewis was told about a gravestone inscription that read: “Here lies an atheist— all dressed up and no place to go.” Lewis quietly replied, “I bet he wishes that were so!”

The interesting thing is that, in hades, the rich man began to pray! First, he prayed for himself, that Abraham would have mercy on him and allow Lazarus to bring him some comfort (Luke 16:23–26). Even a drop of cool water would be welcomed. What a change from his sumptuous feasts when slaves ran to do his bidding!

The word *torment* is used four times in this account, and it speaks of definite pain. This is the same word that is used for the doom feared by the evil spirits (Mark 5:7) and the judgments God will send on an unrepentant world (Rev. 9:5; 11:10; 20:10). If hell is the permanent prison of the damned, then hades is the temporary jail, and the suffering in both is very real.

People ask, "How can a loving God even permit such a place as hell to exist, let alone send people there?" But in asking that question, they reveal that they do not understand either the love of God or the wickedness of sin. God's love is a *holy* love ("God is light," 1 John 1:5), not a shallow sentiment, and sin is rebellion against a holy and loving God. God does not "send people to hell." They send themselves there by refusing to heed His call and believe on His Son. The "unbelieving" are named second on the list of the people who go to hell, even before the murderers and the liars (Rev. 21:8; also see John 3:18–21, 36).

Abraham gave two reasons why Lazarus could not bring the comfort that was requested: the character of the rich man and the character of the eternal state. The rich man had lived for the "good things" of earth, and had experienced abundant temporal blessings. He had his reward (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16). He had determined his own destiny by leaving God out of his life, and now neither his character nor his destiny could be changed. Lazarus could not leave his place of comfort and make even a brief visit to the place of torment.

Then the rich man prayed for his brothers (Luke 16:27–31). He did not say, "I'm glad my brothers will also come here. We'll have a wonderful time together!" Occasionally you hear a lost person say, "Well, I don't mind if I go to hell. I'll have a lot of company!" *But there is no friendship or "company" in hell!* Hell is a place of torment and loneliness. It is not an eternal New Year's Eve party at which sinners have a good time doing what they used to do on earth.

Luke 16:28 suggests that Lazarus had testified to the rich man and probably to his brothers, but none of them had taken his witness seriously. But now, Lazarus' testimony is very important! The brothers knew that Lazarus had died, so if the beggar appeared to them, they would be frightened and would listen to his witness. *People in hades have a concern for the lost, but they cannot do anything about it.*

Abraham explained that only one thing could prevent the five men from eventually joining their brother: they needed to hear the Word of God and respond to it by faith. Moses and the Prophets tell sinners how to repent and be saved, and the Jews heard them read every Sabbath in the synagogue. Though miracles can attest to the authority of the preacher, they cannot produce either conviction or conversion in the hearts of the lost. Faith that is based solely on miracles is not saving faith (John 2:23–25). A man named Lazarus *did* come back from the dead, *and some of the people wanted to kill him!* (see John 11:43–57; 12:10) Those who claim that there can be no effective evangelism without "signs and wonders" need to ponder this passage and also John 10:41–42.

In the rich man's lifetime, God had spoken to him in many ways. God had permitted him to have riches, yet he did not repent (Rom. 2:4–5). Lazarus had witnessed to the rich man, and so had the Old Testament Scriptures that were familiar to the Jews, but his heart remained unbelieving. The fact that Lazarus died first was a strong witness to the rich man, a reminder that one day he would also die, but even a death at his very doorstep did not melt the man's heart.

In spite of the fact that he was in torment in hades, the rich man did not change; he was still self-centered. He prayed, but it was for *his* comfort and the safety of *his* family. He was not concerned about other lost sinners; his only concern was his five brothers. He argued with God instead of submitting to His will. This indicates that the punishment

of lost sinners is not remedial; it does not improve them. Hades and hell are not hospitals for the sick; they are prisons for the condemned.

Dr. Luke does not tell us how the covetous Pharisees responded to this account. They certainly knew Moses and the Prophets, and this meant even greater responsibility—and *greater condemnation* (John 12:35–41).

We must remind ourselves that the rich man was not condemned because he was rich, nor was Lazarus saved because he was poor. Abraham was a very wealthy man, yet he was not in torment in hades. The rich man trusted in his riches and did not trust in the Lord.

“The safest road to hell,” wrote C.S. Lewis, “is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36)

Jesus asked that question.

What is your answer?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER

Luke 17

As Jesus made His way to Jerusalem, He continued to teach His disciples and prepare them for what He would suffer there. But He was also preparing them for the time when He would no longer be with them and they would be ministering to others in His place. It was a critical period in their lives.

In this chapter, Luke recorded lessons that Jesus gave His disciples about some of the essentials of the Christian life: forgiveness (Luke 17:1–6), faithfulness (Luke 17:7–10), thankfulness (Luke 17:11–19), and preparedness (Luke 17:20–37).

Forgiveness (Luke 17:1–6)

After Jesus warned the Pharisees about the sin of loving money (Luke 16:14–31), He then turned to His disciples to warn them about possible sins in their lives, for occasions to stumble (“offenses”) are an unfortunate part of life. After all, we are all sinners living in a sinful world. But we must take heed not to cause others to stumble, for it is a serious thing to sin against a fellow believer and tempt him or her to sin (Rom. 14:13; 1 Cor. 10:32; 1 John 2:10).

By “these little ones” (Luke 17:2), Jesus was referring not only to children but also to young believers who were learning how to follow the Lord (Matt. 18:1–6; Luke 10:21). Since Luke 17:1–10 is part of a context that begins with Luke 15:1, “little ones” would

include the publicans and sinners who had come to believe in Jesus Christ. The Pharisees had criticized Jesus, and this might well have caused these new believers to stumble. So serious is this sin that a person would be better off cast alive into the sea, never to be seen again, than to deliberately cause others to stumble and sin.

But suppose *you* are not the one who does the sinning. Suppose another believer sins against you. Jesus anticipated this question in Luke 17:3–4 and instructed us what to do. First, we must have a personal concern for each other and obey His warning, “Take heed to yourselves.” This means that we should lovingly watch over each other and do all we can to keep one another from sinning.

If a brother or sister does sin against us, we should give a private loving rebuke. Our tendency might be to feel hurt down inside, nurse a grudge, and then tell others what happened to us, but this is the wrong approach (see Matt. 18:15–20). “Speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) is the first step toward solving personal differences.

Our aim is not to embarrass or hurt the offender, but to encourage him or her to repent (Gal. 6:1). If the offender does repent, then we must forgive (Eph. 4:32; and see Matt. 5:43–48). In fact, we must be *in the habit of forgiving*, for others might sin against us seven times a day—or even seventy times seven! (Matt. 18:21ff) No one is likely to commit that much sin in one day, but this use of hyperbole emphasized the point Jesus was making: do not enumerate the sins of others, for love “keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Cor. 13:4–6). We should always be ready to forgive others, for one day we may want them to forgive us!

We might have expected the disciples to respond with the prayer, “Increase our love!” Certainly love is a key element in forgiveness, but faith is even more important. *It takes living faith to obey these instructions and forgive others.* Our obedience in forgiving others shows that we are trusting God to take care of the consequences, handle the possible misunderstandings, and work everything out for our good and His glory.

Mature Christians understand that forgiveness is not a cheap exchange of words, the way squabbling children often flippantly say “I’m sorry” to each other. True forgiveness always involves pain; somebody has been hurt and there is a price to pay in healing the wound. Love *motivates* us to forgive, but faith *activates* that forgiveness so that God can use it to work blessings in the lives of His people.

Our Lord’s image of the mustard seed conveys the idea of life and growth. The mustard seed is very small, but it has life in it and, therefore, it can grow and produce fruit (Mark 4:30–32). If our faith is a *living* faith (James 2:14–26), it will grow and enable us to obey God’s commands. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass” (Ps. 37:5). Forgiveness is a test of both our faith and our love.

Human nature being what it is, there will always be offenses that can easily become opportunities for sin. God’s people must get into the habit of facing these offenses honestly and lovingly, and forgiving others when they repent. The Anglican pastor and poet George Herbert wrote, “He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass.”

Faithfulness (Luke 17:7–10)

The introductory word *but* indicates that Jesus was now going to balance one lesson with another. There was a danger that the Twelve might get so carried away with transplanting trees that they would ignore the everyday responsibilities of life! Faith that does not result in faithfulness will not accomplish God's work. It is good to have faith to do the *difficult* (Luke 17:1–3) and the *impossible* (Luke 17:4–6), but it is essential that we have faith to do even the *routine tasks* our Master has committed to us. Privileges must always be balanced with responsibilities.

The servant in the story was evidently a “jack-of-all-trades,” for he was responsible for farming, shepherding, and cooking. It was not unusual for people with only modest means to hire at least one servant, but Jesus described a situation which in that day was unthinkable: a master ministering to his servant! In fact, He introduced the story with a phrase that means, “Can any of you imagine?” ... Their answer had to be, “No, we cannot imagine such a thing!”

Jesus had already discussed His relationship to His servants *and had promised to serve them if they were faithful* (Luke 12:35–38). He Himself was among them as a servant (Luke 22:27), even though He was Master of all. This story emphasizes faithfulness to duty no matter what the demands might be, and the argument is from the lesser to the greater. If a common servant is faithful to obey the orders of his master who does not reward (thank) him, how much more ought Christ's disciples obey their loving Master, who has promised to reward them graciously!

A faithful servant should not expect any special reward, since he did only what he was told to do. The word translated “unprofitable” means “without need”—that is, “nobody owes us anything.” The servant was indeed profitable; after all, he cared for his master's fields, flocks, and food. The statement means, “My master does not owe me anything extra.” *The fact that Jesus will reward His servants is wholly a matter of God's grace. We do not deserve anything because we have obeyed Him and served Him.*

As His servants, we must beware lest we have the wrong attitude toward our duties. There are two extremes to avoid: merely doing our duty in a slavish way *because we have to*, or doing our duty *because we hope to gain a reward*. Christian industrialist R.G. LeTourneau used to say, “If you give because it pays, *it won't pay*.” This principle also applies to service. Both extremes are seen in the attitudes of the elder brother (Luke 15:25–32) who was miserably obedient, always hoping that his father would let him have a party with his friends.

What then is the proper attitude for Christian service? “Doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph. 6:6). “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15, nkjv). To the person who is born again, “His commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). Serving Him is a delight, not just a duty, and we obey Him because we love Him. “I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8).

Thankfulness (Luke 17:11–19)

Between Luke 17:10 and 11, the events of John 11 occurred as the Lord Jesus made His way to Jerusalem. At the border of Samaria and Judea, Jesus healed ten lepers at one time, and the fact that the miracle involved a Samaritan made it even more significant (see Luke 10:30–37). Jesus used this event to teach a lesson about gratitude to God.

The account begins with *ten unclean men* (Luke 17:11–13), all of whom were lepers (see the comments on Luke 5:12–15). The Jews and Samaritans would not normally live together, but misery loves company and all ten were outcasts. What difference does birth make if you are experiencing a living death? But these men had hope, for Jesus was there, and they cried out for mercy. The word translated “master” is the same one Peter used (Luke 5:5) and means “chief commander.” They knew that Jesus was totally in command of even disease and death, and they trusted Him to help them.

The account continues by referring to *nine ungrateful men* (Luke 17:17). Jesus commanded the men to go show themselves to the priest, which in itself was an act of faith, for they had not yet been cured. When they turned to obey, they were completely healed, for their obedience was evidence of their faith (see 2 Kings 5:1–14).

You would have expected all ten men to run to Jesus and thank Him for a new start in life, but only one did so—and he was not even a Jew. How grateful the men should have been for the providence of God that brought Jesus into their area, for the love that caused Him to pay attention to them and their need, and for the grace and power of God that brought about their healing. They should have formed an impromptu men's chorus and sung Psalm 103 together!

But before we judge them too harshly, what is our own “GQ”—“Gratitude Quotient”? How often do we take our blessings for granted and fail to thank the Lord? “Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (Ps. 107:8, 15, 21, 31) Too often we are content to enjoy the gift but we forget the Giver. We are quick to pray but slow to praise.

The next time you sing “Now Thank We All Our God,” try to remember that Martin Rinkhart wrote it during the Thirty Years' War when his pastoral duties were most difficult. He conducted as many as forty funerals a day, including that of his own wife; yet he wrote those beautiful words as a table grace for his family. In spite of war and plague around him and sorrow within him, he was able to give thanks to the Lord from a grateful heart.

Luke's account closes with *one unusual man* (Luke 17:15–19). The Samaritan shouted “Glory to God!” and fell at Jesus' feet to praise Him and give thanks. It would have been logical for him to have followed the other men and gone to the temple, but he first came to the Lord Jesus with his sacrifice of praise (Ps. 107:22; Heb. 13:15). This pleased the Lord more than all the sacrifices the other men offered, even though they were obeying the Law (Ps. 51:15–17). Instead of *going to* the priest, the Samaritan *became a priest*, and he built his altar at the feet of Jesus (read Ps. 116:12–19).

By coming to Jesus, the man received something greater than physical healing: he was also saved from his sins. Jesus said, “Your faith has saved you” (literal translation), the same words He spoke to the repentant woman who anointed His feet (Luke 7:50). The Samaritan's nine friends were declared clean by the priest, but he was declared *saved* by the Son of God! While it is wonderful to experience the miracle of physical healing, it is even more wonderful to experience the miracle of eternal salvation.

Every child of God should cultivate the grace of gratitude. It not only opens the heart to further blessings but glorifies and pleases the Father. An unthankful heart is fertile soil for all kinds of sins (Rom. 1:21ff).

Preparedness (Luke 17:20–37)

The Jewish people lived in an excited atmosphere of expectancy, particularly at the Passover season when they commemorated their deliverance from Egypt. They longed for another Moses who would deliver them from their bondage. Some had hoped that John the Baptist would be the deliverer, and then the attention focused on Jesus (John 6:15). The fact that He was going to Jerusalem excited them all the more (Luke 19:11). Perhaps He would establish the promised kingdom!

The Pharisees were the custodians of the Law (Matt. 23:2–3), so they had the right to ask Jesus when He thought the kingdom of God would appear. It was customary for Jewish teachers to discuss these subjects publicly, and Jesus gave them a satisfactory answer. However, He reserved His detailed lessons for His disciples.

The word translated “observation” (Luke 17:20) is used only here in the New Testament and means in classical Greek “to observe the future by signs.” It carries the idea of spying, lying in wait, and even scientific investigation. The point Jesus made was that God’s kingdom would not come with great “outward show” so that people could predict its arrival and plot its progress.

The Pharisees’ question was legitimate, but it was also tragic; for Jesus had been ministering among them for some three years, and these men were still in spiritual darkness. They did not understand who Jesus was or what He was seeking to accomplish. Their views of the kingdom were political, not spiritual; Jewish, not universal. Jesus did not deny that there would be a future earthly kingdom, but He did emphasize the importance of the *spiritual* kingdom that could be entered only by the new birth (John 3:1–8).

The statement “the kingdom of God is within you” has challenged Bible translators and interpreters for centuries, and many explanations have been given. One thing we can be sure of is that He was not telling the unbelieving Pharisees that they had the kingdom of God in their hearts!

The Greek preposition can mean “within,” “among,” or “in the midst of.” Jesus was saying, “Don’t look for the kingdom ‘out there’ unless it is first in your own heart” (see Rom. 14:17). At the same time, He may also have been saying, “The fact that I am here in your midst is what is important, for I am the King. How can you enter the kingdom if you reject the King?” (see Luke 19:38–40) The Pharisees were preoccupied with the great events of the future but were ignoring the opportunities of the present (Luke 12:54–57).

Having answered the Pharisees, Jesus then turned to His disciples to instruct them about the coming of the kingdom. He warned them not to become so obsessed with His return that they ended up doing nothing else but trying to track Him down. This is a good warning to believers who do nothing but study prophecy. Certainly we should look for His return and long to see Him come, but at the same time, we should be busy doing His work when He comes (note Acts 1:6–11).

To begin with, His coming will affect the whole world, so it is foolish for anyone to follow false prophets who say “He is here!” or “He is there!” Furthermore, His coming will be as sudden as a flash of lightning (Matt. 24:27, 30). While a study of the prophetic Scriptures will help us understand the general characteristics of the time of His coming, we cannot know the day or the hour (Matt. 25:13; Luke 12:40, 46). It is futile to investigate signs and try to calculate the day of His coming.

Jesus then used two Old Testament events to illustrate the certainty and the suddenness of His coming: the Flood (Gen. 6–8) and the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 19). In both examples, the people of the world were caught unprepared as they engaged in their everyday activities of eating and drinking, marrying, buying, and selling. Noah witnessed to his generation in the years preceding the Flood (2 Peter 2:5), but his preaching did not convert them. Noah and his wife, his three sons, and their wives—only eight people—were saved from destruction because they entered the ark. Peter saw this as an illustration of the salvation Christians have through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:18–22).

Both Noah and Lot lived in days of religious compromise and moral declension, not unlike our present time. During “the days of Noah,” population growth was significant (Gen. 6:1), lawlessness was on the increase (Gen. 6:5), and the earth was given over to violence (Gen. 6:11, 13). In Lot’s day, the unnatural lusts of Sodom and Gomorrah were so abhorrent to God that He completely destroyed the cities. Only Lot, two of his daughters, and his wife (who later was destroyed) were saved from the terrible judgment.

Luke 17:30–36 describes what will occur when Jesus Christ returns in judgment to defeat His enemies and establish His kingdom on earth (Rev. 19:11–20:6). Believers in every age of the church can take warning from these verses, but they apply in a special way to Israel at the end of the age (see Matt. 24:29–44). When Jesus comes for His church and takes it to heaven, it will happen “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52). Nobody taking part in the rapture of the church need worry about being on a housetop or in a field and wanting to get something out of the house! However, when the Lord returns *to the earth*, His coming will first be preceded by a “sign” in heaven (Matt. 24:30–31), and some people might try to hurry home to rescue something. “Remember Lot’s wife!”

The verb *taken* in Luke 17:34–36 does not mean “taken to heaven” but “taken away in judgment” (Matt. 24:36–41). The person “left” is a believer who enters into the kingdom. Noah and his family were “left” to enjoy a new beginning, while the whole population of the earth was “taken” in the Flood. In spite of their sins, Lot and his daughters were “left” while the people in Sodom and Gomorrah were “taken” when the fire and brimstone destroyed the cities.

The fact that it is night in Luke 17:34 but day in Luke 17:35–36 indicates that the whole world will be involved in the return of Jesus Christ in glory. “Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him” (Rev. 1:7).

Three times the disciples had heard Jesus talk about people being “taken” and “left,” so they asked Him a most logical question: “Where, Lord?” Our Lord’s reply has the sound of a familiar proverb: “Just as the eagles [and vultures, Matt. 24:28] gather at a corpse, so the lost will be gathered together for judgment.” The description of the last battle in Revelation 19:17–21 certainly parallels the image of carrion-eating birds gorging themselves on flesh.

In other words, when the Lord Jesus returns to judge His enemies, there will be a separation of the saved and the lost. Whether it be day or night, whether people are working or sleeping, the separation and judgment will come. Those who are saved will be left to enter the glorious kingdom, while those who are lost will be taken away in judgment.

Even though the primary interpretation of these verses is for Israel in the end times, they do emphasize for the church the importance of being ready when Jesus returns. We must not be like Lot's wife whose heart was so in Sodom that she looked back in spite of the angels' warning (Gen. 19:17, 26). There are many professed Christians today whose plans would be interrupted if Jesus returned! (note 1 Thes. 5:1–11) Our Lord's warning in Luke 17:33 finds parallels in Matthew 10:39; Luke 9:24; and John 12:25, and is a fundamental principle of the Christian life. The only way to save your life is to lose it for the sake of Christ and the Gospel.

Jesus pictured civilization as a "rotting corpse" that would one day be ripe for judgment. The discerning believer sees evidence of this on every hand and realizes that the "days of Noah" and the "days of Lot" are soon on us. Our Lord can return for His church at any time, so we are not looking for signs; but we do know that "coming events cast their shadows before." As we see many of these things begin to come to pass (Luke 21:28), we know that His return is nearing.

Are we looking for His return, and do we really want to see Him come?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

PEOPLE TO MEET, LESSONS TO LEARN

Luke 18

Lord Chesterfield, the English statesman, wrote, "Learning ... is only to be acquired by reading men, and studying all the various editions of them."

He was referring to "the knowledge of the world," but what he said applies to *spiritual* knowledge as well. Much can be learned from reading the "book of humanity," whether in daily life, history, biography, or even fiction.

There are several "editions" of mankind introduced in this chapter, and each one has a spiritual lesson to teach us. Being a compassionate physician, Dr. Luke wrote about widows and politicians, Pharisees and publicans, little children and adults, rich men and beggars. From this colorful cast of characters, I have selected four "editions" for us to "read." The lessons they teach us are important.

A Demanding Widow (Luke 18:1–8)

Luke mentions widows more than do all the other Gospel writers combined (Luke 2:37–38; 4:25–26; 7:11–17; 18:1–8; 20:45–47; 21:1–4). In that day, widows usually had a difficult time making ends meet, in spite of the care God instructed His people to give them (Ex. 22:22–24; Deut. 14:28–29; 16:9–15; Ps. 146:9; Isa. 1:17, 23; Jer. 7:6). The early church was serious about the care of Christian widows (Acts 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:3–10; James 1:27), a good example for us to follow today.

As you study this parable, try to see it in its Eastern setting. The “courtroom” was not a fine building but a tent that was moved from place to place as the judge covered his circuit. The judge, not the law, set the agenda; and he sat regally in the tent, surrounded by his assistants. Anybody could watch the proceedings from the outside, but only those who were approved and accepted could have their cases tried. This usually meant bribing one of the assistants so that he would call the judge’s attention to the case.

The widow had three obstacles to overcome. First, being a woman she, therefore, had little standing before the law. In the Palestinian society of our Lord’s day, women did not go to court. Since she was a widow, she had no husband to stand with her in court. Finally, she was poor and could not pay a bribe even if she wanted to. No wonder poor widows did not always get the protection the law was supposed to afford them!

Now that we understand something of the setting of this parable, we can better understand what Jesus was teaching. Basically, He was encouraging His disciples to pray, and He did this by presenting three contrasts.

Praying contrasted with fainting (v. 1). If we don’t pray, we will faint; it’s as simple as that! The word *faint* describes a believer who loses heart and gets so discouraged that he or she wants to quit. I can recall two occasions when I have fainted physically, and it is the most helpless feeling I have ever experienced. I felt myself “going,” but I couldn’t seem to do a thing about it!

There is a connection between what our Lord said in Luke 18:1 and His statement in Luke 17:37. If society is like a rotting corpse, then the “atmosphere” in which we live is being slowly polluted, and this is bound to affect our spiritual lives. But when we pray, we draw on the “pure air” of heaven, and this keeps us from fainting.

But what does it mean “always to pray” or to “pray without ceasing”? (1 Thes. 5:17) It certainly doesn’t mean that we should constantly be repeating prayers, because Jesus warned against that kind of praying (Matt. 6:5–15). Rather, it means to make prayer as natural to us as our regular breathing. Unless we are sick or smothering, we rarely think about our breathing; we just do it. Likewise with prayer—it should be the natural habit of our lives, the “atmosphere” in which we constantly live.

Prayer is much more than the words of our lips; it is the desires of our hearts, *and our hearts are constantly “desiring” before Him*, even if we never speak a word. So, to “pray without ceasing” means to have such holy desires in our hearts, in the will of God, that we are constantly in loving communion with the Father, petitioning Him for His blessing.

Take your choice: do you want to pray—or faint?

The widow contrasted with God’s elect (vv. 2–5). Jesus did not say that God’s people are like this woman; in fact, He said just the opposite. Because we are *not* like her, we should be encouraged in our praying. He argued from the lesser to the greater: “If a poor widow got what she deserved from a selfish judge, how much more will God’s children receive what is right from a loving Heavenly Father!”

Consider the contrasts. To begin with, the woman was a stranger, *but we are the children of God*, and God cares for His children (Luke 11:13). The widow had no access to the judge, but God’s children have an open access into His presence and may come at any time to get the help they need (Eph. 2:18; 3:12; Heb. 4:14–16; 10:19–22).

The woman had no friend at court to help get her case on the docket. All she could do was walk around outside the tent and make a nuisance of herself as she shouted at

the judge. But when Christian believers pray, they have in heaven a Saviour who is Advocate (1 John 2:1) and High Priest (Heb. 2:17–18), who constantly represents them before the throne of God.

When we pray, we can open the Word and claim the many promises of God, but the widow had no promises that she could claim as she tried to convince the judge to hear her case. We not only have God's unfailing promises, but we also have the Holy Spirit, who assists us in our praying (Rom. 8:26–27).

Perhaps the greatest contrast is that the widow came to a court of law, but God's children come to a throne of grace (Heb. 4:14–16). She pled out of her poverty, but we have all of God's riches available to us to meet our every need (Phil. 4:19). The point is clear: if we fail to pray, our condition spiritually will be just like that of the poor widow. That should encourage us to pray!

The judge contrasted with the Father (vv. 6–8). Unless you see that Jesus is pointing out contrasts, you will get the idea that God must be “argued” or “bribed” into answering prayer! God is *not* like this judge; for God is a loving Father, who is attentive to our every cry, generous in His gifts, concerned about our needs, and ready to answer when we call. The only reason the judge helped the widow was because he was afraid she would “weary” him, which literally means “give me a black eye”—i.e., ruin his reputation. God answers prayer for His glory and for our good, and He is not vexed when we come.

How, then, do we explain *delays* in answers to prayer, especially when Jesus said that God would “avenge [give them justice] speedily”? (Luke 18:8) Remember that God's delays are not the delays of inactivity but of preparation. God is always answering prayer, otherwise Romans 8:28 could not be in the Bible. God works in all things at all times, causing all things to work together to accomplish His purposes. The moment we send Him a request that is in His will (see 1 John 5:14–15), God begins to work. We may not see it now, but one day the answer will come.

The question in Luke 18:8 ties in with what Jesus taught in Luke 17:22–37: “Shall He find [that kind of] faith on the earth?” The end times will not be days of great faith. Eight people were saved in Noah's day, and only four out of Sodom (and one of them perished on the way). Passages like 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3 paint a dark picture of the last days.

Deluded Pharisee (Luke 18:9–17)

Throughout His public ministry, Jesus exposed the self-righteousness and unbelief of the Pharisees (see Luke 11:39–54). He pictured them as debtors too bankrupt to pay what they owed God (Luke 7:40–50), guests fighting for the best seats (Luke 14:7–14), and sons proud of their obedience but unconcerned about the needs of others (Luke 15:25–32). The sad thing is that the Pharisees were completely deluded and thought they were right and Jesus was wrong. This is illustrated in this parable.

The Pharisee was deluded about prayer, for he prayed with himself and told God (and anybody else listening) how good he was. The Pharisees used prayer as a means of getting public recognition and not as a spiritual exercise to glorify God (Matt. 6:5; 23:14).

He was deluded about himself, for he thought he was accepted by God because of what he did or what he did not do. The Jews were required to fast only once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29), but he fasted twice a week. He tithed everything that came into his possession, even the tiny herbs from his garden (Matt. 23:23).

He was deluded about the publican who was also in the temple praying. The Pharisee thought that the publican was a great sinner, but the publican went home justified by God while the proud Pharisee went home only self-satisfied. To be "justified" means to be declared righteous by God on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (Rom. 3:19–4:25).

The publican repeatedly smote his breast, for he knew where his greatest problem was, and he called to God for mercy. The publican knew the enormity of his sins, but the Pharisee was blissfully ignorant of his own heart. The Pharisee's pride condemned him, but the publican's humble faith saved him (see Luke 14:11 and Isa. 57:15). It is the prodigal son and elder brother over again (Luke 15:11ff).

In contrast to the proud Pharisee are the children who were brought to Jesus (Luke 18:15–17). It was customary for the Jews to bring little children to the rabbis to receive their special blessing, so it is strange that the disciples would stand in the way. Perhaps they thought Jesus was weary and needed rest, or they may have decided that He was not really interested in children. How wrong they were!

However, this was not the first time the disciples had attempted to "get rid of" people. They wanted to send the crowd away hungry, but Jesus fed them (Matt. 14:15ff); and they tried to stop the Canaanite woman from asking Jesus to heal her daughter (Matt. 15:21ff), but Jesus answered her prayer. The Twelve did not yet have the compassion of their Master, but it would come in due time.

Jesus wants us to be *childlike* but not *childish*. An unspoiled child illustrates humility, faith, and dependence. A child has a sense of wonder that makes life exciting. The only way to enter God's kingdom is to become like a child and be born again (John 3). If the proud Pharisee had become like a child, he too would have gone home justified.

A Dishonest Youth (Luke 18:18–34)

The rich young ruler (Matt. 19:20) may be the only man in the Gospels who came to the feet of Jesus and went away in worse condition than when he came. And yet he had so much in his favor! He was moral and religious, earnest and sincere, and probably would have qualified for membership in the average church. Yet he refused to follow Jesus Christ and instead went his own way in great sorrow.

What was wrong with him? In a word: *dishonesty*. In spite of the fact that he came to the right Person, asked the right question, and received the right answer, *he made the wrong decision*. Why? Because he was not honest with God or with himself. Therefore, he would not do what he was commanded to do. He was a superficial young man who said one thing but did another. Consider the areas in which he was dishonest.

His view of Christ (vv. 18–19). The rabbis were called "Master" (Teacher), but it was most unusual for a rabbi to be called "good." The Jews reserved the word *good* for God (Pss. 25:8; 34:8; 86:5; 106:1). This explains why our Lord asked the young man what he meant, for if he really believed that Jesus was "good," *then he had to confess that Jesus was God*. By asking this question, our Lord was not denying His deity but

affirming it. He was testing the young man to see if he really understood what he had just said.

His subsequent behavior proved that the young ruler did not believe that Jesus Christ was God. If he really thought he was in the presence of Almighty God, why did he argue politely about the Law, brag about his character, and then refuse to obey the Word? Surely he knew that God sees the heart and knows all things!

His view of sin (vv. 20–21). He also had a superficial view of his own sin. No doubt the young man sincerely tried to keep the Law; in fact, this may have been what brought him to the feet of Jesus (Gal. 3:24). Jesus did not quote the Law to him as a means of salvation, because obedience to the Law does not save us. He held the Law before the young man as a mirror to reveal his sins (Rom. 3:19–20; Gal. 2:21; 3:21).

But the young man looked into the mirror and would not see the stains and blemishes in his life. When Jesus quoted from the second table of the Law, He did not quote the last commandment, “Thou shalt not covet” (Ex. 20:17). Jesus knew the young man’s heart, so instead of preaching to him about covetousness, He asked him to do something that a covetous person would not do.

Nobody is saved by giving all his wealth to the poor, but nobody can be saved who will not repent of his sins and turn away from them. This young man was possessed by the love of money and he would not let go.

His view of salvation (vv. 22–34). The young man thought that eternal life came to those who “did something” (Luke 18:18), which was a typical Jewish conviction (Luke 18:9–12). But when Jesus gave him something to do, he refused to obey! He wanted salvation on his terms, not God’s, so he turned and went away in great sorrow.

The disciples were shocked when Jesus announced that it was difficult for rich people to be saved. They were Jews and the Jews believed that riches were a mark of God’s blessing. “If rich people can’t be saved,” they reasoned, “what hope is there for the rest of us?” John D. Rockefeller would have agreed with them, for he once said that riches were “a gift from heaven signifying, ‘This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

It is not possessing riches that keeps people out of heaven, for Abraham, David, and Solomon were wealthy men. It is *being possessed* by riches and *trusting* them that makes salvation difficult for the wealthy. Wealth gives people a false sense of success and security, and when people are satisfied with themselves, they feel no need for God.

Peter’s comment in Luke 18:28 suggests that he had a rather commercial view of discipleship: “What then will there be for us?” (Matt. 19:27, nasb) Jesus promised all of them (“you” in Luke 18:29 is plural) blessings in this life and reward in the life to come, but then He balanced His words with another announcement about His impending suffering and death. How could Peter be thinking about personal gain when his Lord was going to Jerusalem to be crucified?

The rich young ruler is a warning to people who want a Christian faith that does not change their values or upset their lifestyle. Jesus does not command every seeking sinner to sell everything and give to the poor, but He does put His finger of conviction on any area in our lives about which we are dishonest.

A Determined Beggar (Luke 18:35–43)

Matthew tells us that there were *two* blind beggars who met Jesus as He *left* Jericho (Matt. 20:29–30), but Luke introduces us to one blind beggar, Bartimaeus, who called out as Jesus *approached* Jericho. There were two Jerichos, the old ruined city and the new one built by Herod the Great, and they stood about a mile apart. The two men, one of whom was more outspoken, were sitting at the entrance to the new city, so there is no contradiction (note Mark 10:46).

In that day, blindness was a common affliction for which there was no cure, and all a blind person could do was beg. These two men had not been born blind, for their prayer was to “regain” their sight (Luke 18:41, nasb, and note Matt. 20:34, nasb). They persisted in crying out to the Lord, in spite of the obstacles in their way: their inability to see Jesus, the opposition of the crowd, and our Lord’s delay in responding to them. They were not going to let Jesus pass them without first pleading for mercy.

The fact that they addressed Him as “Son of David,” a messianic title, indicates that these two Jewish beggars knew that Jesus could give sight to the blind (Isa. 35:5; and see Luke 4:18). Jesus responded to their faith and healed them, and what a change took place! They went from darkness to light, from begging to following Jesus, and from crying to praising the Lord. They joined the pilgrim crowd going to Jerusalem and lifted their voices in praising the Lord.

The contrast is obvious between these two beggars and the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18–27). The beggars were poor, yet they became rich, while the young man was rich and became eternally poor. The beggars claimed no special merit and openly admitted their need, while the young man lied about himself and bragged about his character. The young man would not believe, so he went away from Jesus very sad; but the two beggars believed in Jesus and followed Him with songs of praise. “He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away” (Luke 1:53).

The “human editions” we have “read” in this chapter encourage us to put our faith in Jesus Christ, no matter what others may say or do. The widow was not discouraged by the indifferent attitude of the judge, nor the publican by the hypocritical attitude of the Pharisee. The parents brought their little ones to Jesus in spite of the selfish attitude of the Apostles, and the blind men came to Jesus even though the crowd told them to keep quiet and stay put. Jesus always responds to faith and rewards those who believe.

But the rich young ruler stands as a warning to all who depend on character to save them from sin. This young man shows us how close a person may come to salvation and yet turn away in unbelief. John Bunyan closed his *Pilgrim’s Progress* with the warning, “Then I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction.” Heed that warning today!

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

JERUSALEM AT LAST!

Luke 19

When Christopher Columbus made his voyage west in 1492, he kept two log books, one of which contained falsified information. He wanted his men to believe that they were closer to land than they really were. Apparently Columbus felt that the morale of the crew was more important than the integrity of the captain.

As Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem, He told His disciples what would happen there, but they could not grasp what their Lord was saying (Luke 18:31–34). Some of the people in the crowd thought He was going to Jerusalem to deliver Israel from Roman bondage and usher in the kingdom of God. Still others followed Him just to see the next miracle He would perform.

In this chapter, Dr. Luke focuses on who Jesus really is as he presents Him in a threefold ministry.

The Saviour Who Seeks the Lost (Luke 19:1–10)

The name *Zaccheus* means “righteous one,” but this supervisor of tax collectors was not living up to his name. Certainly the Jewish religious community in Jericho would not have considered him righteous, for he not only collected taxes from his own people but also worked for the unclean Gentiles! And publicans were notorious for collecting more taxes than required; the more money they collected, the more income they enjoyed (Luke 3:12–13). Though Zaccheus was a renegade in the eyes of the Jews, he was a precious lost sinner in the eyes of Jesus.

It is interesting to see the changes Zaccheus experienced that day, all because Jesus visited Jericho.

A man became a child (vv. 2–4). In the East, it is unusual for a man to run, especially a wealthy government official; yet Zaccheus ran down the street like a little boy following a parade. And he even climbed a tree! Curiosity is certainly characteristic of most children, and Zaccheus was motivated by curiosity that day.

John Calvin wrote, “Curiosity and simplicity are a sort of preparation for faith.” This is often the case, and it was certainly true of Zaccheus. Why the big crowd? Who is this Jesus of Nazareth they are following? What am I missing?

Jesus said, “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God like a little child shall in no way enter therein” (Luke 18:17). Perhaps more than anything else, it is pride that keeps many “successful” people from trusting Jesus Christ.

A seeking man became found (v. 5). Zaccheus thought he was seeking Jesus (Luke 19:3), but Jesus was seeking him! (Luke 19:10) By nature, the lost sinner does not seek the Saviour (Rom. 3:11). When our first parents sinned, they hid from God, but God came and sought them (Gen. 3:1–10). When Jesus was ministering on earth, He sought out the lost; and today the Holy Spirit, through the church, is searching for lost sinners.

We do not know how God had worked in the heart of Zaccheus to prepare him for this meeting with Jesus. Was Levi, the former publican (Luke 5:27–39), one of his friends? Had he told Zaccheus about Jesus? Was he praying for Zaccheus? Had Zaccheus become weary of wealth and started yearning for something better? We

cannot answer these questions, but we can rejoice that a seeking Saviour will always find a sinner who is looking for a new beginning.

A small man became big (vv. 7–8). It was not Zaccheus' fault that he was "little of stature" and could not see over the crowd. He did what he could to overcome his handicap by putting aside his dignity and climbing a tree. In a spiritual sense, all of us are "little of stature," for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). No one measures up to God's high standards; we are all "too little" to enter into heaven.

The tragedy is, many lost sinners think they are "big." They measure themselves by man's standards—money, position, authority, popularity—things that are an "abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). They think they have everything when really they have nothing (Rev. 3:17).

Zaccheus trusted Jesus Christ and became a true "son of Abraham," meaning, of course, a child of faith (Rom. 4:12; Gal. 3:7). That is as big as you can get!

A poor man became rich (vv. 9–10). The people thought Zaccheus was a wealthy man, but actually he was only a bankrupt sinner who needed to receive God's gift of eternal life, the most expensive gift in the world. This is the only instance in the four Gospels of Jesus inviting Himself to someone's home, and it illustrates the words of Revelation 3:20.

Zaccheus was not saved because he promised to do good works. He was saved because he responded by faith to Christ's gracious word to him. Having trusted the Saviour, he then gave evidence of his faith by promising to make restitution to those he had wronged. Saving faith is more than pious words and devout feelings. It creates a living union with Christ that results in a changed life (James 2:14–26).

Under the Mosaic Law, if a thief voluntarily confessed his crime, he had to restore what he took, add one fifth to it, and bring a trespass offering to the Lord (Lev. 6:1–7). If he stole something he could not restore, he had to repay fourfold (Ex. 22:1); and if he was caught with the goods, he had to repay double (Ex. 22:4). Zaccheus did not quibble over the terms of the Law; he offered to pay the highest price because his heart had truly been changed.

The child of God is born rich, for he shares "every spiritual blessing" in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3). We have the riches of God's mercy and grace (Eph. 1:7; 2:4) as well as the riches of His glory (Phil. 4:19) and wisdom (Rom. 11:33). These are "unsearchable riches" that can never be fully understood or completely exhausted (Eph. 3:8).

The host became the guest (v. 6). Jesus invited Himself to Zaccheus' house, and Zaccheus received Him joyfully. *Joy* is one of the key themes in the Gospel of Luke, and the word is found over twenty times in one form or another. The experience of salvation certainly ought to produce joy in the believer's heart.

Zaccheus became the guest in his own house, for Jesus was now his Master. He was ready to obey the Lord and do whatever was necessary to establish a genuine testimony before the people. To be sure, the people criticized Jesus for visiting in a publican's house (Luke 5:27–32), but the Lord paid no attention to their words. The critics also needed to be saved, but there is no evidence that they trusted Jesus.

When a day begins, you never know how it will end. For Zaccheus, that day ended in joyful fellowship with the Son of God, for he was now a changed man with a new life. Jesus is still seeking the lost and yearning to save them. Has He found you?

The Master Who Rewards the Faithful (Luke 19:11–27)

Passover season was always an emotionally charged time for the Jews, because it reminded them of their deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. This annual celebration aggravated the misery of their bondage to Rome and made them yearn all the more for a deliverer. Of course, there were subversive groups like the Zealots who used commando tactics against Rome, and politicians like the Herodians who compromised with Rome, but most of the Jews rejected those approaches. They wanted God to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies and send them their promised King.

Jesus knew that many of the people in the crowd were hoping to see Him establish the kingdom, so He gave this parable to clarify things. Many of the people who listened no doubt connected it with an event in Jewish history that had occurred many years before. When Herod the Great died in 4 b.c., he left Judea to his son Archelaus, who had to go to Rome to have the inheritance approved. Not wanting Archelaus as their ruler, the Jews sent fifty men to argue their case before Augustus Caesar, who did ratify the inheritance without giving Archelaus the title of “king.”

Jesus explained that the kingdom would not come until a future time, but that His servants had better be faithful now to do the job assigned to them. In the parable, you see three different responses to the Master.

Faithful obedience (vv. 16–19, 24). Each of the servants received an amount of money equal to three months' wages for a laboring man, so you can figure out its buying power today. *Occupy* means “do business, put my money to work.” They could give the money to investors and earn interest, or purchase goods and sell them for a profit. The important thing was that they give back to their master more than he had given to them. How they did it was up to them, so long as it was legal and profitable.

We are given a report on only three of the ten servants, and the first two proved to be successful. The first servant brought ten pounds more, the second brought five pounds more, and both were rewarded accordingly. These men did their job faithfully even though they were promised no rewards and had no assurance that their master would even return, let alone secure the kingdom that he sought.

The Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14–30) is similar to the Parable of the Pounds, but their lessons must not be confused. In this parable, each of the ten servants received the same amount but different rewards, while in the Parable of the Talents, the servants received different amounts but the same reward, the approval and joy of the Lord (Matt. 25:21).

The Parable of the Talents teaches us to be faithful to use our different gifts as God gives us opportunities to serve. Some people have a great deal of ability, so God gives them greater opportunity. The important thing is not how much ability you have but how faithful you are to use what you have for the Lord. The person with the least ability, if he or she is faithful, will receive the same reward as the most gifted church leader.

In the Parable of the Pounds, each servant has the same deposit, which probably represents the message of the Gospel (1 Thes. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; 6:20). Our gifts and abilities are different, but our job is the same: to share the Word of God so that it multiplies and fills the world (1 Thes. 1:8; 2 Thes. 3:1). Only 120 believers met together on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:15), but before that day ended, there were 3,000 more

(Acts 2:41). And before long, there were 5,000 believers (Acts 4:4). In time, the Jewish leaders accused the disciples of “filling Jerusalem” with the message! (Acts 5:28)

When it comes to witnessing, all believers start on the same level, so the reward is according to faithfulness and achievement. The faithful servants were rewarded by being made *rulers* of various cities. The reward for faithful work is always—more work! But what a compliment to be entrusted with the management of so many cities! How we serve the Lord today will help determine our reward and ministry when He comes to establish His kingdom on earth. Faithfulness now is preparation for blessed service then.

Unfaithful disobedience (vv. 20–23). At least one of the ten men did not obey his master and as a result lost even the pound that the master gave him. It is a basic principle of the Christian life that wasted opportunity means loss of reward *and possibly loss of the privilege of service*. If we do not use the gifts God gives us under His direction, why should we even have them? Somebody else can make better use of the gifts to the glory of God (see Matt. 13:12 and Luke 8:18).

“It is always so,” wrote Charles Haddon Spurgeon; “the gracious and faithful man obtains more grace and more means of usefulness, while the unfaithful man sinks lower and lower and grows worse and worse. We must either make progress or else lose what we have attained. There is no such thing as standing still in religion.”

This servant was unfaithful because his heart was not right toward his master. He saw his master as a hard man who was demanding and unfair. The servant had no love for his master; in fact, he feared him and dreaded to displease him. Rather than lose the pound and incur his master's anger, he guarded it so that he would at least have something to give the master if he returned and asked for a reckoning.

It is sad when a Christian is motivated by slavish fear instead of loving faith. While there is a proper “fear of the Lord” that should be in every Christian's heart, that “fear” should be the respect of a loving child and not the dread of a frightened slave. “Nothing twists and deforms the soul more than a low or unworthy conception of God,” wrote Dr. A.W. Tozer. How important it is that we do the will of God from our hearts (Eph. 6:6).

Outright rebellion (vv. 14–27). The “citizens” or “enemies” are mentioned at the beginning and the ending and are an important part of the story, for most of the people in the crowd that day were in that category. Jesus was near Jerusalem, and in a few days He would hear the mob shout, “We have no king but Caesar!” (John 19:15) In other words, “We will not have this Man to reign over us!”

God was gracious to Israel and gave the nation nearly forty years of grace before judgment fell (Luke 19:41–44). But we must be careful to see in this a warning to all who reject Jesus Christ—Jew or Gentile—for during this time while He is away in heaven, Jesus Christ is calling men everywhere to repent and submit to Him.

The faithful servants obeyed because they trusted their master and wanted to please him. The unfaithful servant disobeyed because he feared his master. But these citizens rebelled because they hated their king (Luke 19:14). Jesus quoted Psalm 69:4 and told His disciples, “They hated Me without a cause” (John 15:25).

We are living today in the period between Luke 19:14 and 15 when our Master is absent but will return according to His promise. We have been given a task to perform, and we must be faithful until He comes. What will the King say to us when He returns?

Will His words mean reward, rebuke, or possibly retribution? “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2).

The King Who Offers Peace (Luke 19:28–48)

The traditional calendar for the events of our Lord's last week of ministry looks like this:

- Sunday—Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem
- Monday—Cleansing the temple
- Tuesday—Controversies with the Jewish leaders
- Wednesday—Apparently a day of rest
- Thursday—Preparation for Passover
- Friday—Trial and Crucifixion
- Saturday—Jesus rests in the tomb
- Sunday—Jesus raised from the dead

Keep in mind that the Jewish day went from sundown to sundown, so that our Thursday evening would be their Friday, the Day of Passover.

Preparation (vv. 28–36). The owners of the donkey and the colt were disciples of the Lord and had everything ready for Him. The plan was executed quietly because the Jewish leaders had let it be known that anyone confessing Christ would be excommunicated (John 9:22). The fact that the rulers planned to kill Jesus made it even more important that the owners be protected (John 7:1, 19, 25; 8:37; 11:47–57).

We think of the donkey as a lowly animal, but to the Jew it was a beast fit for a king (1 Kings 1:33, 44). Jesus rode the colt (Luke 19:35) while the mother walked along with it. The fact that the colt had never been ridden and yet submitted to Jesus indicates our Lord's sovereignty over His creation. The laying of garments on the animals and on the road and the waving and spreading of branches were all part of a traditional Jewish reception for royalty.

Celebration (vv. 37–40). This is the only time that Jesus permitted a public demonstration on His behalf, and He did so for at least two reasons. First, He was fulfilling prophecy and presenting Himself as Israel's king (Zech. 9:9). How much of this the crowd really understood we cannot tell, even though they responded by quoting their praises from a messianic psalm (Ps. 118:25–26). No doubt many of the Passover pilgrims thought that Jesus would now get rid of the Roman invaders and establish the glorious kingdom.

The second reason for this demonstration was to force the Jewish religious leaders to act. They had hoped to arrest Him *after* the Passover (Matt. 26:3–5), but God had ordained that His Son be slain *on* Passover as the “Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29; and see 1 Cor. 5:7). Every previous attempt to arrest Jesus had failed because “His hour had not yet come” (John 7:30; 8:20; also see John 13:1; 17:1). When they saw this great public celebration, the leaders knew that they had to act, and the willing cooperation of Judas solved their problem for them (Matt. 26:14–16).

The theme of the celebration was *peace*. Dr. Luke opened his Gospel with the angel's announcement of “peace on earth” (Luke 2:14), but now the theme was “peace in heaven.” Because the King was rejected, there could be no peace on earth. Instead, there would be constant bitter conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of

evil (Luke 12:49–53). There would be no peace on earth but, thanks to Christ's work on the cross, there is "peace with God" in heaven (Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20). The appeal today is, "Be ye reconciled to God!" (2 Cor. 5:17–21)

Lamentation (vv. 41–44). While the crowd was rejoicing, Jesus was weeping! This is the second occasion on which our Lord wept openly, the first being at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). There He wept quietly, but here He uttered a loud lamentation like one mourning over the dead. In this, He was like the Prophet Jeremiah who wept bitterly over the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 9:1ff; see also the Book of Lamentations). Jonah looked on Nineveh and hoped it would be destroyed (Jonah 4), while Jesus looked at Jerusalem and wept because it had destroyed itself.

No matter where Jesus looked, He found cause for weeping. If He looked *back*, He saw how the nation had wasted its opportunities and been ignorant of their "time of visitation." If He looked *within*, He saw spiritual ignorance and blindness in the hearts of the people. They should have known who He was, for God had given them His Word and sent His messengers to prepare the way.

As He looked *around*, Jesus saw religious activity that accomplished very little. The temple had become a den of thieves, and the religious leaders were out to kill Him. The city was filled with pilgrims celebrating a festival, but the hearts of the people were heavy with sin and life's burdens.

As Jesus looked *ahead*, He wept as He saw the terrible judgment that was coming to the nation, the city, and the temple. In a.d. 70, the Romans would come and, after a siege of 143 days, kill 600,000 Jews, take thousands more captive, and then destroy the temple and the city. Why did all of this happen? Because the people did not know that God had visited them! "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11). "We will not have this man to reign over us!" (Luke 19:14)

Denunciation (vv. 45–48). Jesus lodged in Bethany that night (Matt. 21:17) and came into the city early the next morning. It was then that He cursed the fig tree (Mark 11:12–14) and cleansed the temple for the second time. (See John 2:13–22 for the record of the first cleansing of the temple.)

The court of the Gentiles was the only place in the temple that was available to the Gentiles. There the Jews could witness to their "pagan" neighbors and tell them about the one true and living God. But instead of being devoted to evangelism, the area was used for a "religious marketplace" where Jews from other lands could exchange money and purchase approved sacrifices. The priests managed this business and made a good profit from it.

Instead of *praying* for the people, the priests were *preying* on the people! The temple was not a "house of prayer" (Isa. 56:7); it was a "den of thieves" (Jer. 7:11). Campbell Morgan reminds us that a "den of thieves" is a place where thieves *run to hide* after they have committed their wicked deeds. The religious leaders were using the services of the holy temple to cover up their sins (see Isa. 1:1–20). But before we condemn them too harshly, have we ever gone to church and participated in religious worship just to give people the impression that we were godly?

Jesus remained in the temple and used it as a gathering place for those who needed help. He healed many who were sick and afflicted, and He taught the people the Word of God. The hypocritical religious leaders tried to destroy Him, but His hour had not yet come and they could not touch Him. In the days that followed, they argued with Him and

tried to catch Him in His words (Luke 20), but they failed. When His hour came, He would surrender to them and they would crucify Him.

The courageous Son of God had set His face like a flint and come to Jerusalem. During His last week of ministry, He would courageously face His enemies and then bravely go to the cross to die for the sins of the world.

He still summons us to *be courageous!*

CHAPTER NINETEEN

ISSUES AND ANSWERS

Luke 20

Jesus had already told the Twelve to expect conflict and suffering when they arrived in the Holy City. “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day” (Luke 9:22). Jesus knew fully what was coming, and He was not afraid.

In this chapter, you meet the three groups of religious leaders (Luke 20:1) and witness their conflict with Jesus. They challenged Him because He had cleansed the temple and called them “thieves.” They tried to catch Him in His words so they could trump up some charge against Him and have Him arrested as an enemy of the state.

But there was more to this series of questions than mere guile. The word translated “rejected” in Luke 9:22 (and also Luke 20:17) means “to reject after investigation.” It was required that the Jews carefully examine the Passover lambs from the tenth day to the fourteenth day to make sure they had no blemishes (Ex. 12:1–6). Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), was watched and tested by His enemies during that final week; and yet in spite of what they saw and learned, they rejected Him.

However, *Jesus was also examining them!* For as they questioned Him, He questioned them, and their responses revealed the ignorance, hatred, and unbelief of their hearts.

Our Lord's questions centered on four different men.

A Question about John the Baptist (Luke 20:1–19)

The cleansing of the temple was a dramatic event that both captured the attention of the people and aroused the anger of the religious establishment. The fact that Jesus daily made the temple His headquarters for ministry only made the members of the Sanhedrin more indignant, so they decided to question Him. “What authority do You have to do these things?” they asked. “And if You do have authority, who gave it to You?”

Authority is important for the success of any social, political, or religious organization; without authority, you have confusion. The chief priests claimed their authority from Moses, for the Law set the tribe of Levi apart to serve in the sanctuary. The scribes were students of the Law and claimed their authority from the rabbis whose interpretations they studied. The elders of Israel were the leaders of the families and clans, chosen usually for their experience and wisdom. All of these men were sure of their authority and were not afraid to confront Jesus.

They wanted to push our Lord into a dilemma so that no matter how He answered, He would be in trouble. If He said that He had *no* authority, then He was in trouble with the Jews for invading their temple and acting like a prophet. If He said that His authority came from God, then He would be in trouble with the Romans who were always alert to would-be messiahs, especially during Passover season (see Acts 5:34–39; 21:37–39).

Note our Lord's wise approach as He turned things around and put them completely on the defensive. First, *He asked a question* (Luke 20:3–8); then *He gave a parable* (Luke 20:9–16); and finally, *He quoted a prophecy* (Luke 20:17–18). In each of these approaches, He revealed the sins of the nation of Israel.

Their past rejection (vv. 3–8). Jesus took them back to John the Baptist for two reasons. First, John had pointed to Jesus and introduced Him to the nation (John 1:15–34), so their rejection of John was actually a rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, it is a spiritual principle that if we disobey truth we already know, God cannot reveal new truth to us (see John 7:14–17). Why answer their question when they had refused to submit to John's message?

Now it was the religious leaders who were in the dilemma! No matter what answer they gave, they were in trouble, so they decided to "play dumb" and not answer at all. They were deceitful in asking the question and dishonest in the way they avoided answering it. Even if Jesus *had* given them an answer, *their hearts were not prepared to receive it*. If they had disobeyed God's message given by John the Baptist (Luke 7:24–30), they would disobey the message given by God's Son. That was the theme of the parable Jesus told.

Their present rebellion (vv. 9–16). These men knew the Scriptures and recognized that Jesus was speaking about the "vineyard" of Israel (Ps. 80:8ff; Isa. 5:1–7). God the Father blessed the nation abundantly and gave the Jews a land that was rich and pleasant. All He asked was that they obey His statutes and give Him the "spiritual harvest" He deserved.

Instead of being grateful for their blessings and joyfully giving the Lord His due, the nation proceeded to rob God and reject His messengers (see Neh. 9:26; Jer. 7:25–26; 25:4). God was patient and sent them one servant after another, but they refused to obey (Matt. 23:29–39). Finally, He sent His beloved Son (Luke 3:22) and they killed Him. In this story, Jesus gave His own death announcement.

Under Jewish law, any man could lay claim to ownerless property. The tenants may have concluded that the owner was dead; otherwise he would have come himself. If they killed the son, then they could claim the vineyard for themselves. *This is exactly the way the religious leaders were thinking as they stood there before Jesus!* (see John 11:47–54)

Their future ruin (vv. 17–18). Jesus fixed a steady gaze on them and quoted Psalm 118:22. The rulers knew that this was a messianic psalm, and they had heard it shouted

by the crowd when Jesus rode into the city (compare Luke 19:38 with Ps. 118:26). By applying this verse to Himself, Jesus was clearly claiming to be the Messiah. The “builders,” of course, were the Jewish religious leaders (Acts 4:11).

In the Old Testament, the “stone” is a familiar symbol of God and of the promised Messiah (see Gen. 49:24; Ex. 17:6; 33:22; Deut. 32:4, 15, 30–31; Isa. 8:14; 28:16; 1 Cor. 10:4). Because the Jews did not believe, they stumbled over Him and were judged. Those who trust Jesus Christ find Him to be the foundation stone and the chief cornerstone of the church (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20).

But Jesus also referred to Daniel 2:34–35, 44–45, where the Messiah is pictured as a “smiting stone” that crushes all that gets in its way. He was warning the Sanhedrin that they would only destroy themselves if they condemned Him. The same principle applies today, and unbelievers should carefully heed His warning.

When the rulers rejected John the Baptist, they sinned against the Father who sent Him. When they crucified Jesus, they sinned against the Son. Jesus had told them that they could sin against Him and still be forgiven, but when they sinned against the Holy Spirit, there could be no forgiveness (Matt. 12:24–37). Why? *Because that was the end of God's witness to the nation.* This is the so-called “unpardonable sin,” and it was committed by the Jewish leaders when they finally rejected the witness of the Spirit of God through the Apostles. The evidence of their rejection was the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:51–60). Then the Gospel went from the Jews to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

In this parable, Jesus illustrated the insidious nature of sin: *the more we sin, the worse it becomes.* The tenants started off beating some of the servants and wounding others, but they ended up becoming murderers! The Jewish leaders *permitted* John the Baptist to be killed, they *asked* for Jesus to be crucified, and then *they themselves stoned Stephen.* They sinned against the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and that was the end of God's witness to them.

It is a serious thing to reject the message of God and the messengers of God (see John 12:35–43; Heb. 2:1–4).

A Question about Caesar (Luke 20:20–26)

Jesus knew that the men who questioned Him were spies sent by the Pharisees and the Herodians (Mark 12:13), but He patiently listened and replied. These two groups were usually fighting each other, but now they had a common enemy, and this brought them together. They wanted to discuss taxes and Roman authority, hoping to provoke Jesus into offending either the Jews (“Pay the poll tax!”) or the Romans (“Don't pay the poll tax!”). But Jesus lifted the discussion to a much higher level and forced the spies to think about the relationship between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men.

Governmental authority is instituted by God and must be respected (Prov. 8:15; Dan. 2:21, 37–38; Rom. 13; 1 Peter 2:11–17). Yes, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), and we are strangers and pilgrims on earth, but that does not mean we should ignore our earthly responsibilities. Human government is essential to a safe and orderly society, for man is a sinner and must be kept under control.

Jesus was not suggesting that we divide our loyalties between God and government. Since “the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1), *we live as good citizens*

when we obey the authorities for the Lord's sake. When obedience to God conflicts with obedience to man, then we must put God first (Acts 4:19–20; 5:29), but we must do it in a manner that is honorable and loving. Even if we cannot respect the people in office, *we must respect the office.* The counsel that Jeremiah gave to the Jewish exiles in Babylon is a good one for God's "strangers and pilgrims" to follow today (Jer. 29:4–7): "Seek the peace of the city!"

Caesar's image and name were on the coins, so it was basically *his* currency. To pay the poll tax meant simply to give Caesar back that which belonged to him. God's image is stamped on us; therefore, He has the right to command our lives as citizens in His kingdom. We should seek to be such good citizens that God will be glorified and the unsaved will be attracted to the Gospel and want to become Christians (1 Peter 2:9–12; 3:8–17).

It is unfortunate that some Christians have the mistaken idea that the more obnoxious they are as citizens, the more they please God and witness for Christ. We must never violate our conscience, but we should seek to be peacemakers and not troublemakers. Daniel is an example to follow (Dan. 1).

A Question about Moses (Luke 20:27–40)

Next in line were the Sadducees with a hypothetical question based on the Jewish law of "levirate marriage" (Gen. 38; Deut. 25:5–10). The word *levirate* comes from the Latin *levir*, which means "a husband's brother." The Sadducees accepted as Scripture only the Five Books of Moses, and they did not believe in angels, spirits, or the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8). They claimed that Moses did not write about any of these doctrines. The priestly party in Israel was composed of Sadducees, which explains why the priests opposed the Apostles' preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 4:1–2) and why they wanted to kill Lazarus, who was raised from the dead (John 12:10–11).

Jesus pointed out that His opponents were wrong and that their question revealed assumptions that limited God's power and denied God's Word. Resurrection is not reconstruction; it is the miraculous granting of a new body that has continuity with the old body but not identity. Paul compared our present body to a planted seed and the future resurrection body to the glorious flower and fruit (1 Cor. 15:35–50). Our Lord's resurrection body was the same as before His death and yet different! His friends recognized Him and even felt Him; He could eat food and yet He could also walk through closed doors, change His appearance, and vanish suddenly.

The future life with God is not a mere continuation of the present life only on "a higher scale." We will maintain our identities and know each other, but there will be no more death—hence, no need for marriage and procreation. Christians do not become angels. In heaven we will share the image of Jesus Christ and be much higher than the angels (1 John 3:2). Angels appear in Scripture as men, but they are spirit beings without sexuality. It is in this regard that we will be like them; there will be no marriage or childbearing in heaven.

Is not God powerful enough to raise the dead and give them new bodies suited to their new environment? If today He can give different bodies to the various things in creation, why can He not give people new bodies at the resurrection? (1 Cor. 15:35–44) In their attempt to be "rational," the Sadducees denied the very power of God!

But Jesus went beyond logic and referred them to the Word of God, particularly what happened to Moses as recorded in Exodus 3. There God identified Himself with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and thus affirmed that these three patriarchs were very much alive. But if they were alive, then they were “out of the body,” for they had died (James 2:26). There must be a real world of spirit beings or Moses would not have written these words. (By the way, Moses also affirmed the existence of angels: Gen. 19:1, 15; 28:12; 32:1.)

But Jesus said that Exodus 3:6, 15–16 taught not only the truth of life after death but also the reality of the resurrection. In what way? Not by direct statement but by inference. God is the God of the whole person—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23)—because He created the whole person. He does not simply “save our souls” and ignore the rest of our being. Inherent in the very nature of God’s creative act is His concern for the total person. Hence, He will not keep us disembodied spirits forever but will give us glorious bodies to match our heavenly perfection.

Another factor is God’s covenantal relationship with the patriarchs. He made promises of earthly blessing to them and their descendants, but He cannot fulfill these promises if His people are going to live forever only as disembodied spirits. Can there be a glorious new heaven and earth but no corporeal glory for the people of God?

Jesus affirmed what the Sadducees denied: the existence of angels, the reality of life after death, and the hope of a future resurrection—and He did it with only one passage from Moses! Of course, He could have referred to other passages that teach a future resurrection, but He met His adversaries on their own ground (see Job 14:14; 19:25–27; Pss. 16:9–10; 17:15; Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37; Dan. 12:2).

A Question about David (Luke 20:41–44)

While the Pharisees were still gathered together, Jesus asked them a final question: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” (Matt. 22:41–42, nkjv) This is the *key* question for every generation and each individual, for our salvation and eternal destiny are dependent on what we think about Christ (1 John 2:21–25; 4:1–6; 5:1).

Of course, they knew the expected reply: “The Son of David.” They based this on such verses as 2 Samuel 7:13–14; Isaiah 11:1; and Jeremiah 23:5. God had ordained that the Messiah should come from the family of David and be born in David’s city, Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The fact that the Jewish people identified Jesus with Nazareth, not Bethlehem, indicates that they had not really looked into the facts connected with His birth (John 7:40–53).

Jesus then referred them to Psalm 110, which is quoted in the New Testament more than any other psalm. The Jewish religious leaders in that day identified Psalm 110 as a prophetic psalm and said that David was speaking of the Messiah. But if the Messiah is David’s *Lord*, how can He be David’s *son*? Here was an enigma for them to solve!

The only explanation is that Messiah must be both God and man. As eternal God, Messiah is David’s Lord, but as man, He is David’s son (Rom. 1:3; 9:4–5; Acts 2:32–36; 13:22–23).

On Palm Sunday, the multitudes had acclaimed Jesus as the Son of David, and He had not rebuked them (Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:10). By applying Psalm 110:1 to Himself, Jesus claimed to be Israel’s promised Messiah, the Son of God.

Then why did the Pharisees not believe in Him? Because their minds were made up, their hearts were hardened, and their eyes were blind (John 12:37–50). They did not have the courage to confess the truth, and they persecuted those who did affirm faith in Jesus Christ. Christ's question silenced His enemies (Matt. 22:46) and ended their public challenges, but they would not admit defeat.

Because of their hypocrisy and dishonesty, the scribes and Pharisees were dangerous to have around, so Jesus warned the people about them (Luke 20:45–47; see Matt. 23). Men see the outside, but God sees the heart (1 Sam. 16:7; Heb. 4:12).

These religious leaders did not desire personal holiness; they wanted public recognition. Therefore, they wore special garments, expected special titles and greetings, and looked for special seats at public gatherings.

There is a double tragedy here. First of all, their deliberate hypocrisy was only a cover-up that enabled them to fool people and exploit them. Of all rackets, religious rackets are the worst. The religious leaders had turned the temple of God into a den of thieves and religious devotion into playacting. The general public actually thought that their leaders were godly men, when in reality they were defiling and destroying souls (Matt. 23:13–36).

The second tragedy is that they rejected their own Messiah and voted to crucify Him. They led the nation into ruin because they would not admit their sins and confess Jesus Christ. Keep in mind that these men were “experts” in the Bible, yet they did not apply its truths to their own lives. Their religion was a matter of external observance, not internal transformation.

At this point, according to Matthew (Matt. 23:37–39), Jesus once again uttered a lamentation over the blind unbelief of the nation and their unwillingness to trust in Him.

He had given them many opportunities, but they had wasted them.

Now it was too late.

This same tragedy is reenacted today. This is why the Holy Spirit warns, “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb. 3:7–8, nkjv).

“How often I wanted to ... but you were not willing!” (Matt. 23:37, nkjv)

CHAPTER TWENTY

QUESTIONS ABOUT TOMORROW

Luke 21

Now it was the disciples' turn to ask the questions!

It all started with the arrival in the temple of a poor widow with an offering for the Lord (Luke 21:1–4). Compared to the gifts of the rich men, her two copper coins seemed insignificant, but Jesus said that she gave more than all the others combined. “The widow's mite” does not represent *the least* we can give, but *the most*, our very all.

When we sing, "Take my silver and my gold/ Not a mite will I withhold," we are telling God that everything we have belongs to Him.

When it comes to our giving, God sees more than the *portion*; He also sees the *proportion*. Men see *what is given*, but God sees *what is left*, and by that He measures the gift and the condition of our hearts. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." He may have learned that from Jesus (Luke 6:38) or perhaps from Paul (2 Cor. 8:1–15).

The temple was a beautiful structure, embellished with many costly decorations that a poor widow could never give, and the disciples mentioned this to Jesus. But our Lord was not impressed. He told them that the day would come when the beautiful Jewish temple would be demolished (Luke 21:5–6). He had already announced that the city would be destroyed (Luke 19:41–44), but now He specifically mentioned the destruction of the temple.

Jesus left the temple and went to the Mount of Olives, and there Peter, James, and John asked Him three questions: (1) When would the temple be destroyed? (2) What would be the sign of His coming? (3) What would be the sign of the end of the age? (see Mark 13:3–4; Matt. 24:3) The disciples thought that these three events would occur at the same time, but Jesus explained things differently. Actually, the temple would be destroyed first, and then there would be a long period of time before He would return and establish His kingdom on earth (see Luke 19:11–27).

Our Lord's reply comprises what we call "The Olivet Discourse," the greatest prophetic sermon He ever preached. It is recorded in greater detail in Matthew 24–25 and Mark 13, and you will want to compare the three passages. Since Luke wrote with the Gentile reader in mind, he omitted some of the strong Jewish elements of the sermon while retaining the essential truths that we must consider and apply.

Keep in mind that this was a message given to Jews by a Jew about the future of the Jewish nation. Though there are definite applications to God's people today, the emphasis is on Jerusalem, the Jews, and the temple. Our Lord was not discussing His coming for the church, for that can occur at any time and no signs need precede it (1 Cor. 15:51–58; 1 Thes. 4:13–18). "For the Jews require a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22); the church looks for a Saviour (Phil. 3:20–21).

The sermon focuses on a period in God's program called "the Tribulation" when God will pour out His wrath on the nations of the world. Many Bible students believe that the Tribulation will begin after the Lord comes *in the air* and takes His church to heaven (1 Thes. 4:13–5:11). It will climax with the return of Jesus Christ *to the earth*, at which time He will defeat His foes and establish His kingdom (Rev. 19:1–20:6).

It is helpful to see the development of the sermon as a whole, so here is a suggested outline:

The first half of the Tribulation

(Matt. 24:4–14; Mark 13:5–13; Luke 21:8–19)

The middle of the Tribulation

(Matt. 24:15–28; Mark 13:14–18; note Dan. 9:24–27)

The last half of the Tribulation

(Matt. 24:29–31; Mark 13:19–27; Luke 21:25–27)

Closing admonitions

(24:32–25:46; Mark 13:28–37; Luke 21:28–36)

Jesus answered the disciples' questions by discussing four topics relating to the future of the nation of Israel.

The Description of the Age (Luke 21:8–19)

The characteristics Jesus stated can be seen in *every* age of the church, for from the beginning there have been counterfeit messiahs, national and international upheavals, and religious persecution. But these things will *increase and intensify* as the time of Jesus' coming draws near. Thomas Campbell, British poet and educator, said that "coming events cast their shadows before" and he was right.

There will be *religious delusion* (Luke 21:8), and even God's people will be in danger of being deceived. Satan is a counterfeiter who for centuries has led people astray by deceiving their minds and blinding their hearts (2 Cor. 4:1–6; 11:1–4, 13–15). Israel was often seduced into sin by false prophets, and the church has had its share of false teachers (2 Peter 2).

Most people are naturally concerned about the future, especially when world events are threatening; therefore, religious racketeers can prey on them and take advantage of them. In every age, there are those who either claim to be the Christ or claim to know when He will return. These false prophets often "use" the Scriptures to "prove" the accuracy of their predictions, in spite of the fact that Jesus clearly stated that nobody knows the time of His return (Matt. 24:36–44).

"Be not deceived!" is our Lord's admonition, and we must take it to heart. The only sure way to keep our balance in a deceptive world is to know the Scriptures and obey what God tells us to do (2 Peter 3:17–18). It is foolish and hurtful to become so obsessed with Bible prophecy that we start to neglect the practical things of the Christian life. Blessed are the balanced!

There will also be *international distress* (Luke 21:9–11). I have a friend who has been keeping track of the earthquakes that have occurred in recent years. Another prophetic student has a list of all the wars and attempted invasions. Both have overlooked the fact that Jesus said that wars, earthquakes, pestilences, and famines *by themselves* are not signs of His soon return. These things have been going on throughout the history of the world.

However, during the first half of the Tribulation, these events will multiply and intensify. Matthew 24:1–14 lists them in detail, and if you compare Revelation 6, you will see the parallel:

<i>Events</i>	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Revelation</i>
false Christs	24:4–5	6:1–2
wars	24:6	6:3–4
famines	24:7a	6:5–6
death	24:7b–8	6:7–8
martyrs	24:9	6:9–11

worldwide chaos	24:10–13	6:12–17
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In fact, most of Revelation 6–19, describes the Tribulation period in detail and follows the outline of Matthew 24: (1) first half of the Tribulation, chapters 6–9; (2) middle of the Tribulation, chapters 10–14; (3) last half of the Tribulation, chapters 15–19.

Our Lord's admonition to His people is, "Don't be terrified!" These things must come to pass; there is nothing anyone can do to prevent them. This does not mean that God's people are submitting to blind fate; rather, it means they are yielding to the plan of a loving Father who works all things "after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

Finally, there will be *religious persecution*, both official (Luke 21:12–15) and personal (Luke 21:16–19). Of course, there has been religious persecution ever since Cain killed Abel (Matt. 23:34–36; and see Acts 4:1ff; 5:17ff; 6:9ff; 8:1ff). Jesus promised that His people would suffer (John 15:18–16:4, 32–33), and that promise holds true today (2 Tim. 3:12). But the persecution in the end times will be much more severe and many will give their lives for Christ.

Notice the encouragements Jesus gives to all who suffer persecution. To begin with, we must remember that when we are persecuted, we suffer *for His name's sake* (Luke 21:12), and this is a high honor (Acts 5:41). It is not important what people say about our names, but it is important that the name of Christ be glorified.

Second, times of suffering provide opportunities for witness (Luke 21:13–15). The Apostles made good use of the witness stand when they were arrested and taken before the council (Acts 4–5), and Christ's servants and martyrs down through the centuries have followed their example. The English word *martyr* comes from the Greek word *martus* which means "a witness" (see 1 Peter 3:13–17).

Because of official persecution, God's witnesses will stand before important people; and when that happens, they must not panic, for God will give them the words to speak. This promise is not an excuse for lazy preachers or Sunday School teachers who do not want to study! Rather, it is an assurance to faithful witnesses that God will always give them the words they need when they need them.

Not only will the saints endure official persecution from the government, but there will also be opposition from family and friends. Relatives will even follow in the footsteps of Judas and betray their Christian loved ones to be killed. Hatred, arrest, and death will be the lot of many of God's children during the Tribulation.

But they must not despair, for God is in control. Not a hair on their head can perish apart from His sovereign will (Matt. 10:28–31). Knowing this, they can have endurance and be able to face the challenge with faith and courage.

While many Christians today enjoy freedom from official persecution, or even family opposition, there are others who suffer greatly for their faith, and what our Lord said here is an encouragement to them. A friend of mine ministered in Eastern Europe, and a believer in Poland said to him, "We are praying for you Christians in the Western world *because you have it too easy*. The Lord must help you not to compromise."

Remember, the things Jesus described here are not signs of His soon return, because they have been going on for centuries. However, as the coming of the Lord draws near, these things will multiply and intensify. No matter what our views may be of the coming of the Lord, we all need to heed His three admonitions: "Don't be deceived! Don't be afraid! Don't worry!"

The Destruction of the Temple (Luke 21:20–24)

This paragraph is peculiar to Luke; there is no parallel in Matthew or Mark, in spite of the similar language in Matthew 24:16–21 and Mark 13:14–17. However, it is clear that both Matthew and Mark were referring to events in the middle of the Tribulation when “the abomination of desolation” would be set up in the Jewish temple and the Antichrist (the world ruler) would begin to persecute Israel (Dan. 9:24–27; Rev. 13). Jesus warned the people to flee and go into hiding, for “great tribulation” was about to fall.

Luke's account refers not to a distant event to occur during the Tribulation but to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and the Roman army in a.d. 70, just forty years from that time (see Luke 19:41–44). This terrible event was in many respects a “dress rehearsal” for what will happen when Satan vents his anger on Israel and the believing Gentiles during the last half of the Tribulation (Rev. 12:7–17). The Jewish historian Josephus claimed that nearly a million people were killed by the Romans, and over 100,000 taken captive, when Titus captured the city.

This was not the first time Jerusalem would be “trodden down of the Gentiles,” for the Babylonians had destroyed the city in 586 b.c. when “the times of the Gentiles” began. This significant period in God's plan will end when Jesus Christ returns to the earth, destroys all Gentile power, and sets up His own righteous kingdom (Dan. 2:34–36, 44–45; Rev. 19:11ff).

Believers today who are looking for their Lord's return should not apply Luke 21:20–24 to their own situation. Jesus was talking about Jerusalem in a.d. 70. In Matthew 24:15–28 and Mark 13:14–23, He was speaking about Israel's situation at the middle of the Tribulation. Since our Lord's coming for the church will take place “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52), no one will have time to go back home for a coat; nor will we have to worry about traveling on the Sabbath or caring for nursing babies.

Thus far in His message, our Lord has told the disciples when the temple would be destroyed and what signs would point to the end of the age. Now He tells them about His own coming at the end of the Tribulation period.

The Return of the Lord (Luke 21:25–28)

Revelation 15–19 describes the frightening judgment signs that God will send on the earth during the last half of the “time of Jacob's trouble” (Jer. 30:7). When these things occur, it will be evidence that the Lord's coming is drawing near. The image of “waves roaring” describes nations rising and falling like waves in a storm (Ps. 46:1–6; Rev. 17:15). It will be an awesome time, and the population of the earth will tremble with fear, but men will not repent of their sins and turn to God by faith (Rev. 9:20–21; 16:9–11).

Matthew 24:29 informs us that the sun and moon will be darkened and the stars will fall (Isa. 13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15). Matthew 24:30 states that “the sign of the Son of man” will appear in heaven. We do not know what this “sign” is, but it will produce fear among the nations of the earth. However, then Jesus Christ will appear, and every eye will see Him (Rev. 1:7). The nation of Israel will at last recognize their Messiah, repent, believe, and be saved (Zech. 12:10–14; and see Mark 14:61–62).

These awesome signs will bring terror to the lost people of the world, but hope to those who have trusted the Lord during the Tribulation period (Rev. 7), for these

believers know that the Lord's coming will be soon. Believers today look for the Saviour, not signs. However, as we see "coming events casting their shadows," we believe that the Lord's return is near.

Christ's appearing will be sudden, glorious, and with great power (Luke 21:27). The image here is taken from Daniel 7:13–14, a messianic passage that must have been familiar to the disciples. The angels promised that Jesus would return to earth in the same way He departed (Acts 1:9–11), and He will (Rev. 1:7).

There are those who ignore and even ridicule the doctrine of the return of Christ. After all, the church has been waiting for the Lord for 2,000 years, and He has not returned yet! Peter answered that accusation in 2 Peter 3. He pointed out that God keeps His promises whether we believe them or not, and that God measures time differently from the way men measure it. Furthermore, the reason He waits is so that *unsaved sinners may repent, be saved, and be ready when Jesus comes*. While His seeming delay is a trial to the church, it is an opportunity for the lost.

Having answered their questions, the Lord then "applied" the message to their hearts by giving them two closing admonitions: "Know!" and "Watch!"

The Responsibilities of the Believers (Luke 21:29–38)

In the Bible, the fig tree is often an image of Israel (Hosea 9:10; Luke 13:6–10). Some students interpret this parable to mean that the emergence of the State of Israel on May 15, 1948 was the "sign" that the Lord would soon return. Surely it is a significant thing that Israel is now a free nation after so many centuries of political bondage. But Luke added "and all the trees" (Luke 21:29), suggesting that more than one nation is involved. Perhaps Jesus was saying that *the rise of nationalism around the world* is the thing to watch. In recent years we have certainly seen the growth of nationalism and the emerging of new nations, and this may be a "sign" that the coming of the Lord is near.

However, the basic idea here is that of *knowing what is going on*. As the budding of the trees indicates that summer is near, so the occurring of these signs indicates that the Lord's return is near (see Luke 12:54–57 for a similar passage). The important thing is that the believer *knows* that God is keeping His promises and that His Word will not fail (Josh. 23:14).

To what "generation" does Luke 21:32 apply? Some who doubt that Jesus will literally return say that this statement applies to the generation of the Apostles, so that "the coming of the Lord" was either the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) or the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70. *But none of the signs Jesus mentioned took place before or during those events*. Nor did they climax with the deliverance of Israel and the establishing of the kingdom.

Jesus was probably referring to the generation that would be alive on earth at the time all these things take place. He was not suggesting that it would take a whole generation to accomplish these things, for they will occur with swiftness once they begin. The Greek word translated "generation" can also mean "race" and could refer to the people of Israel. Jesus used it that way in Mark 8:12, 38; 9:19. Jesus was assuring the disciples that, in spite of all the difficulties Israel would endure, the nation would be protected by God and not be destroyed. Satan has wanted to destroy the nation of Israel, but he will not succeed.

His first admonition was “Know!” and His second was “Watch!” (Luke 21:34–36) Both admonitions apply to God’s people in every age, though they will have a special meaning for the Jews of the Tribulation period. “Watch!” does not mean to stand around looking for signs. It means, “Be awake! Be alert! Don’t get caught unprepared!” This admonition carries a warning for us today, because it is so easy for us to “get weighted down” with the cares of this life and the temptations of the world and the flesh (see Luke 12:35–48).

During difficult times, it is easy to give up and start living like the unsaved world; and believers during the Tribulation period will face that temptation. They must “watch and pray” and resist the temptations around them, for they want to be ready when their Lord returns.

Luke 21:36 refers primarily to believers standing before the Lord at the judgment when He returns to earth to establish His kingdom (Matt. 25:31–46). The sheep will enter into the kingdom while the goats will be cast out. While some of God’s people will die during the Tribulation judgments and persecutions, some will “escape” and see Jesus Christ when He returns in glory.

If believers during that *difficult* age will be tempted to yield to the world and the flesh, Christians in this present age of comfort and affluence must face even greater dangers. We today do not know when our Lord will return, and it behooves us to be faithful and to be ready.

“I’m not looking for signs,” said the late Vance Havner; “I’m listening for a sound.”

The sound of the trumpet! The shout of the archangel!

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20)

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

IN THE UPPER ROOM

Luke 22:1–38

Jesus had “steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51), knowing full well what would happen to Him there; and now those events were about to occur. They were appointments, not accidents, for they had been determined by the Father and written centuries ago in the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:26–27). We cannot but admire our Saviour and love Him more as we see Him courageously enter into this time of suffering and eventual death. We must remember that He did it for us.

The Passover supper in the Upper Room gives us the focus for our present study.

Before the Supper: Preparation (Luke 22:1–13)

Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles were the three most important feasts on the Jewish calendar (Lev. 23); and all the Jewish men were expected to go to Jerusalem each year to celebrate (Deut. 16:16). The Feast of Passover commemorated the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and it was a time for both remembering and rejoicing (Ex. 11–12). Thousands of excited pilgrims crowded in and around Jerusalem during that week, causing the Romans to always be nervous about possible uprisings. Passover had strong political overtones, and it was the ideal time for some would-be messiah to attempt to overthrow Rome. This explains why King Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, were in Jerusalem instead of being at Tiberius and Caesarea respectively. They wanted to help keep the peace.

The religious leaders prepared for a crime (vv. 1–6). It is incredible that these men perpetrated history's greatest crime during Israel's holiest festival. During Passover, the Jews were expected to remove all leaven (yeast) from their houses (Ex. 12:15) as a reminder that their ancestors left Egypt in haste and had to eat unleavened bread. Jesus had warned His disciples about the "leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1; also see Matt. 16:6; 1 Cor. 5:1–8), and now we see this hypocrisy at work.

The religious leaders had cleansed their homes but not their hearts (see Matt. 23:25–28). For a long time now, they had wanted to arrest Jesus and get Him out of the way, but they had not been able to work out a safe plan that would protect them from the people. Judas solved their problem for them. He guaranteed to deliver Jesus to them privately so there would be no uproar from the people. The last thing the Jewish Sanhedrin wanted was a messianic uprising at Passover season (see Luke 19:11).

Judas was motivated and energized by Satan (John 13:2, 27), for he never was a true believer in Jesus Christ. His sins had never been cleansed by the Lord (John 13:10–11), and he had never believed and received eternal life (John 6:64–71). Yet none of the other Apostles had the least suspicion that Judas was a traitor. We have every reason to believe that Judas had been given the same authority as the other men and that he had preached the same message and performed the same miracles. It shows how close a person can come to God's kingdom and still be lost (Matt. 7:21–29).

Why did Judas betray the Lord Jesus? We know that he was a thief (John 12:4–6) and that money played a part in his terrible deed. But thirty pieces of silver was not a large payment for such a great crime, and there had to be something more involved. It is possible that Judas saw in Jesus the salvation of the Jewish nation and, therefore, he followed Him because he hoped to hold an office in the kingdom. Keep in mind that the Twelve often argued over who was the greatest in the kingdom, and Judas, the treasurer, surely participated in those important discussions.

When Judas understood that Jesus would not establish the kingdom but rather would surrender to the authorities, he turned against Him in bitter retaliation. The "leaven" in his life grew quietly and secretly until it produced "malice and wickedness" (1 Cor. 5:6–8). When you cooperate with Satan, you pay dearly, and Judas ended up destroying himself (Matt. 27:3–5). Satan is a liar and a murderer (John 8:44), and he reproduced himself perfectly in Judas.

Jesus prepared for the Passover (vv. 7–13). The way our Lord arranged for the Passover feast indicates that He knew there were plots afoot. Until the disciples arrived

at the Upper Room, only Jesus and Peter and John had known where the feast would be held. Had Judas known, he might have been tempted to inform the authorities.

Peter and John would have no trouble locating the man with the water pitcher, because men rarely carried pitchers of water. This was the task of the women. Like the men who owned the ass and colt (Luke 19:28–34), this anonymous man was a disciple of Jesus who made his house available to the Master for His last Passover.

Peter and John would purchase an approved lamb and take it to the temple to be slain. Then they would take the lamb and the other elements of the supper to the house where they planned to meet, and there the lamb would be roasted. The table would be furnished with wine, unleavened bread, and the paste of bitter herbs that reminded the Jews of their long and bitter bondage in Egypt (see Ex. 12:1–28).

There is a chronological question here that must be addressed or it will appear that the Gospel writers are contradicting each other. According to John 18:28, the Jewish leaders had not yet eaten the Passover, and the day Jesus was tried and condemned was “the preparation of the Passover” (John 19:14). But our Lord and His disciples had already eaten the Passover!

In their excellent *Harmony of the Gospels* (Harper & Row), Robert Thomas and Stanley Gundry suggest a possible solution to the dilemma (pp. 320–23). The Jews at that time reckoned days in one of two ways: from sunset to sunset or from sunrise to sunrise. The first approach was traditionally Jewish (Gen. 1:5) while the second was Roman, though it had biblical precedent (see Gen. 8:22).

If Matthew, Mark, and Luke used the Jewish reckoning, and John the Roman, then there is no contradiction. There was an “overlapping” of days that permitted both groups to celebrate on the same *date* but a different *day*. The temple priests permitted the Jews to bring their lambs for sacrifice either the earlier or the later time. Apparently the Jewish leaders followed the Roman form of reckoning (John 18:28) while Jesus and the disciples followed the Jewish form. Our Lord was crucified on Passover at the time when the lambs were being slain, becoming a fulfillment of Old Testament type.

During the Supper: Revelation (Luke 22:14–16, 21–38)

The disciples did not know what to expect as they met in the Upper Room, but it turned out to be an evening of painful revelation. Jesus, the Host of the supper, met them with the traditional kiss of peace (He kissed Judas!), and then the men reclined around the table, Judas at our Lord's left and John at His right (John 13:23).

Jesus revealed His love (vv. 14–16). He did this by what He *said* and by what He *did*. He told His friends that He had a great desire to share this last Passover with them before He suffered. Passover commemorated the Exodus of Israel from Egypt centuries before, but He would accomplish a greater “exodus” on the cross. He would purchase redemption from sin for a world of lost sinners (Luke 9:31).

Then He arose, girded Himself with a towel, and washed the disciples' feet, including Judas' (John 13:1–20). Later that evening, the Twelve would argue over which of them was the greatest, so this lesson on humility and service did not penetrate their hearts. Perhaps Peter had this scene in mind when years later he admonished his readers to “be clothed with humility” (1 Peter 5:5; and see Phil. 2:1–11).

Our Lord's words in Luke 22:16 indicate that there would be no more Passover on God's calendar. The next feast would be the great "kingdom feast" when He would return to establish His rule on earth (Luke 22:28–30; 13:24–30; Matt. 8:11–12). He saw beyond the suffering to the glory, beyond the cross to the crown; and in His love, He reached out to include His friends.

Jesus revealed the presence of treachery (vv. 21–23). He had already hinted to His disciples that one of their number was not truly with Him (John 6:66–71), but now He openly spoke about a traitor in their midst. However, He did not do this just for the sake of the disciples, but more for the sake of Judas. Jesus had kissed Judas and washed his feet, and now He was giving Judas another opportunity to repent. It is most significant that Jesus did not openly identify Judas as the traitor but protected him until the very end.

If Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him, why did He choose him in the first place? And, if *somebody* had to betray the Lord, why condemn Judas? After all, he simply did God's will and fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy (see Pss. 41:9; 55:12–14; compare Pss. 69:25 and 109:8 with Acts 1:15–20).

Before He chose His 12 Apostles, Jesus spent a whole night in prayer (Luke 6:12–16), so we must believe that it was the Father's will that Judas be among them (John 8:29). But the selection of Judas did not seal his fate; rather, it gave him opportunity to watch the Lord Jesus closely, believe, and be saved. God in His sovereignty had determined that His Son would be betrayed by a friend, *but divine foreknowledge does not destroy human responsibility or accountability*. Judas made each decision freely and would be judged accordingly, even though he still fulfilled the decree of God (Acts 2:23).

The fact that the disciples were puzzled by this strange announcement reveals that they did not know Judas' true character, their own hearts ("Which of us could do such a terrible thing?"), or the prophecies in the psalms. Nor did they remember the Lord's statements that He would be betrayed into the hands of the enemy (Matt. 17:22; 20:18). If Peter had fully understood what was happening, he might have used his sword on Judas!

Much about Judas remains a mystery to us, and we must not speculate too much. Judas is certainly a witness to the sinlessness of Jesus Christ, for if anybody could have given witness against Him, it was Judas. However, the authorities had to find false witnesses in order to build their case against Jesus. Judas admitted that he had "betrayed innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4).

At this point, Judas left the Upper Room to go to the religious leaders and get ready for the arrest of Jesus in the Garden. Judas went out "and it was night" (John 13:30), for he was obeying the prince of darkness (Luke 22:53). Alas, for Judas, *it is still night and always will be night!*

Jesus revealed the disciples' worldliness (vv. 24–30). This was not the first time the disciples had committed this sin (Matt. 20:20–28; Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46–48), but in the light of what their Lord had said and done that evening, this latest exhibition was inexcusable. Perhaps the argument grew out of their speculating over who would betray Him, or there may have been some jealousy over the way they had been seated at the table. When you are interested in promoting yourself, it doesn't take much to start an argument.

Jesus had to explain that they were thinking like the unsaved Gentiles and not like God's children. The Romans in particular vied for honors and did all they could, legally and illegally, to win promotion and recognition, but they are not the examples for us to follow. As in all things, Jesus is our example, and He has completely reversed the measure of true greatness.

True greatness means to be like Jesus, and that means being a servant to others. A servant does not argue over who is the greatest, because he knows that he is the least, and he accepts this from the hand of God. Since all Christians are to be servants, there is no reason for us to compete with one another for honors and recognition. It is too bad that this competitive spirit is so strong in the church today as people promote themselves and their ministries as "the greatest."

Jesus closed this lesson on servanthood by reminding them of their future reward in the kingdom (Luke 22:28–30). In spite of their weaknesses and failures, the disciples had stood by Jesus during His earthly ministry, and God would honor them for their faithfulness. We should not mind being servants today, for we shall sit on thrones in the future kingdom! For that matter, our faithful service today is preparing us for the rewards we shall receive. Jesus has set the example: first the cross, then the crown.

Jesus revealed Peter's denial (vv. 31–38). It is interesting that this word of warning followed the dispute over who was the greatest! Imagine how the disciples must have felt when they heard that not only would one of their number betray Him, but that their spokesman and leader would publicly deny Him! If a strong man like Peter was going to fail the Lord, what hope was there for the rest of them?

The word *you* in Luke 22:31 is plural; Satan asked to have all the disciples so he might sift them like wheat. These men had been with Jesus in His trials (Luke 22:28), and He would not forsake them in their trials. This was both a warning and an encouragement to Peter and the other men, and our Lord's prayers were answered. Peter's courage failed but not his faith; he was restored to fellowship with Christ and was greatly used to strengthen God's people.

Peter's self-confident boasting is a warning to us that none of us really knows his own heart (Jer. 17:9) and that we can fail *in the point of our greatest strength*. Abraham's greatest strength was his faith, and yet his faith failed him when he went down to Egypt and lied about Sarah (Gen. 12:10–13:4). Moses' strength was in his meekness (Num. 12:3), yet he lost his temper, spoke rashly with his lips, and was not allowed to enter Canaan (Num. 20). Peter was a brave man, but his courage failed him and he denied his Lord three times. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12, nkjv).

The word *converted* in Luke 22:32 means "turned around." Peter was already a *saved* man, but he would soon start going in the wrong direction and would have to be turned around. He would not lose the gift of eternal life, but he would disobey the Lord and jeopardize his discipleship. Actually, all of the disciples would forsake Jesus, but Peter would also deny Him. It is a humbling lesson for all of us.

Our Lord's counsel in Luke 22:35–38 was not fully understood by the disciples, because they interpreted what He said quite literally. Peter's use of the sword in the Garden is evidence of this (Luke 22:49–51). The point He was making was this: "You are now moving into a whole new situation. If they arrest Me, they will one day arrest

you. If they treat Me like a common criminal (Isa. 53:12), they will do the same to you; so, be prepared!"

During their ministry with Jesus, the disciples had been sent out with special authority, and they were treated with respect and appreciation (Luke 9:1ff; 10:1ff). At that time, Jesus was still a very popular rabbi, and the authorities were not able to attack His disciples. But now "His hour had come" and the situation would change radically. Today, God's people are aliens in enemy territory, and we must use our faith and sanctified common sense as we serve the Lord. This is a good warning to zealous people who foolishly get themselves into tight spots and then expect God to perform miracles for them. The Apostle Paul knew how to use the "sword" of human government to protect him and the Gospel (Acts 16:35–40; 21:37–40; 25:11; Rom. 13).

Their words, "Here are two swords!" must have grieved the Lord, for they indicated that the disciples had missed the meaning of His words. Did they think that He needed their protection or that He would now overthrow Rome and establish the kingdom? "It is enough!" means "Don't say anything more about the matter" (Deut. 3:26). His kingdom does not advance by means of men's swords (John 18:36–37) but by the power of God's truth, the Word of God that is sharper than any human sword (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12).

After the Supper: Commemoration (Luke 22:17–20)

It was when the Passover meal was drawing to a close (Matt. 26:25; Luke 22:20) that Jesus instituted the ordinance that the church calls "The Communion" (1 Cor. 10:16), or "The Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:20), or "The Eucharist," from the Greek word which means "to give thanks."

The Passover feast opened with a prayer of thanksgiving, followed by the drinking of the first of four cups of wine. (The wine was diluted with water and was not intoxicating.)

Next they ate the bitter herbs and sang Psalms 113–114. Then they drank the second cup of wine and began eating the lamb and the unleavened bread. After drinking the third cup of wine, they sang Psalms 115–118; and then the fourth cup was passed among them. It is likely that between the third and fourth cups of wine, Jesus instituted the Supper.

Paul gave the order of the Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. First, Jesus broke a piece from the unleavened loaf, gave thanks, and shared it with the disciples, saying that it represented His body which was given for them. He then gave thanks for the cup and shared it, saying that it represented His blood. It was a simple observance that used the basic elements of a humble Jewish meal. Jesus sanctified the simple things of life and used them to convey profound spiritual truths.

Jesus stated one of the purposes for the Supper: "in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:24–25). It is a memorial feast to remind the believer that Jesus Christ gave His body and blood for the redemption of the world. There is no suggestion in the accounts of the Supper that anything "miraculous" took place when Jesus blessed the bread and the cup. The bread remained bread and the wine remained wine, and the physical act of receiving the elements did not do anything special to the eleven disciples. When we partake, we identify ourselves with His body and blood (1 Cor. 10:16), but there is no suggestion here that we receive His body and blood.

A second purpose for the supper is the proclaiming of His death until He returns (1 Cor. 11:26). The Supper encourages us to *look back* with love and adoration to what He did for us on the cross and to *look forward* with hope and anticipation to His coming again. Since we must be careful not to come to the Lord's table with known sin in our lives, the Supper should also be an occasion for *looking within*, examining our hearts, and confessing our sins (1 Cor. 11:27–32).

A third blessing from the Supper is the reminder of the unity of the church: we are “one loaf” (1 Cor. 10:17). It is “The *Lord's* Supper” and is not the exclusive property of any Christian denomination. Whenever we share in the Supper, we are identifying with Christians everywhere and are reminded of our obligation to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

For us to receive a spiritual blessing from the Supper, it takes more than mere physical participation. We must also be able to “discern the body” (1 Cor. 11:29), that is, see the spiritual truths that are inherent in the bread and the cup. This spiritual discernment comes through the Spirit using the Word. The Holy Spirit makes all of this real to us as we wait before the Lord at the table.

Following the instituting of the Supper, Jesus taught His disciples many of the basic truths they desperately needed to know in order to have effective ministries in a hostile world (John 14–16). He prayed for His disciples (John 17); then they sang a hymn and departed from the Upper Room for the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas knew they would go there and he would have the arresting officers all prepared.

As you review this passage, you cannot help but be impressed with the calmness and courage of the Saviour. It is He who is in control, not Satan or Judas or the Sanhedrin. It is He who encourages the Apostles! And He is able even to sing a hymn before He goes out to die on a cross! Isaac Watts has best expressed what our response should be:

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE NIGHT THEY ARRESTED GOD

Luke 22:39–71

Perhaps the best way to grasp the spiritual lessons behind the tragic events of that night is to focus on the *symbols* that appear in the narrative. The Bible is a picture book as well as a book of history and biography, and these pictures can say a great deal to us. In this passage, there are six symbols that can help us better understand our Lord's

suffering and death. They are: a lonely Garden, a costly cup, a hypocritical kiss, a useless sword, a crowing cock, and a glorious throne.

A Lonely Garden (Luke 22:39)

The Son of man left the Upper Room and went with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. This was His customary place of retirement when in Jerusalem (Luke 21:37). Knowing that the Lord would be there (John 18:1–2), Judas led his band of Roman soldiers and temple guards into the Garden to arrest Jesus, who willingly yielded Himself into their hands.

But why a Garden? Human history began in a Garden (Gen. 2:7–25) and so did human sin (Gen. 3). For the redeemed, the whole story will climax in a “garden city” where there will be no sin (Rev. 21:1–22:7). But between the Garden where man failed and the Garden where God reigns is Gethsemane, the Garden where Jesus accepted the cup from the Father’s hand.

John informs us that when Jesus went to the Garden, He crossed the Kidron brook (John 18:1). John may have had in mind King David’s experience when he left Jerusalem and fled from his son Absalom (2 Sam. 15; and note especially v. a). Both David and Jesus were throneless kings, accompanied by their closest friends and rejected by their own people. The name *Kidron* means “murky, dark,” and *Gethsemane* means “olive press.” Surely these names are significant.

Guides in modern Jerusalem can take visitors to four different sites that lay claim to being the ancient Garden of Gethsemane. Perhaps the most widely accepted one, and surely the most popular, is outside the east wall of Jerusalem near the Church of All Nations. The olive trees there are indeed very old, but it is not likely that they go back as far as the time of Christ since the Romans destroyed all the trees in their invasion of Judea in a.d. 70.

The geographical location of the Garden of Gethsemane is not as important as the spiritual message that we receive from what Jesus did there when He accepted “the cup” from His Father’s hand. The first Adam rebelled in the Garden of Eden and brought sin and death into the world, but the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) submitted in the Garden of Gethsemane and brought life and salvation for all who will believe.

A Costly Cup (Luke 22:40–46)

Jesus left eight of His disciples somewhere in the Garden and took Peter, James, and John with Him to a private place to pray (Mark 14:32–33). This is the third time He has shared a special occasion with these three men. The first was when Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead (Luke 8:41–56), and the second was when He was transfigured before them (Luke 9:28–36). There must be a spiritual message here.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, the British expositor, has pointed out that each of these occasions had something to do with death. In Jairus’ house, Jesus proved Himself to be victorious over death; and on the Mount of Transfiguration, He was glorified through death. (He and Moses and Elijah were talking about His “exodus” in Jerusalem [Luke 9:31].) Here in the Garden, Jesus was surrendered to death. Since James was the first of the apostles to die (Acts 12:1–2), John the last to die, and Peter experienced great

persecution and eventually was crucified, these three lessons were very practical for their own lives.

Jesus is the Son of God and knew full well that He would be raised from the dead, and yet His soul experienced agony as He anticipated what lay before Him. In the hours ahead, He would be humiliated and abused, and suffer shame and pain on the cross. But even more, He would be made sin for us and separated from His Father. He called this solemn experience “drinking the cup.” (For parallel uses of this image, see Pss. 73:10; 75:8; Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15–28.)

A comparison of the Gospel accounts reveals that Jesus prayed three times about the cup and returned three times to the disciples, only to find them asleep. How little they realized the testing and danger that lay before them! And how much it would have meant to Jesus to have had their prayer support as He faced Calvary! (see Heb. 5:7–8)

Dr. Luke is the only Gospel writer who mentions “sweat ... like great drops of blood.” His use of the word *like* may suggest that the sweat merely fell to the ground like clots of blood. But there is a rare physical phenomenon known as *hematidrosis*, in which, under great emotional stress, the tiny blood vessels rupture in the sweat glands and produce a mixture of blood and sweat. The first Adam sinned in a Garden and was condemned to living by the sweat of his brow (Gen. 3:19). Jesus, the Last Adam, obeyed the Father in a Garden and conquered Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12–21).

Luke is also the only writer to mention the ministry of the angel (Luke 22:43). In fact, both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts give angels a prominent place in the work of the Lord. Angels could not come to die for our sins, but they could strengthen our Saviour as He courageously accepted the cup from His Father's hand. Dr. George Morrison said, “Every life has its Gethsemane, and every Gethsemane has its angel.” What an encouragement to God's people when they wrestle and pray about difficult and costly decisions!

A Hypocritical Kiss (Luke 22:47–48)

Someone has defined “kiss” as “the contraction of the mouth due to the enlargement of the heart.” But not all kisses are born out of a loving heart, for kisses can also be deceitful. In the case of Judas, his kiss was the basest kind of hypocrisy and treachery.

It was customary in that day for disciples to greet their teachers with a loving and respectful kiss. Judas used the kiss as a sign to tell the arresting officers who Jesus was (Matt. 26:48–49). Jesus had taught in the temple day after day, and yet the temple guards could not recognize Him!

The presence of such a large group of armed soldiers shows how little Judas really knew about the Lord Jesus. Did he think that Jesus would try to run away or perhaps hide somewhere in the Garden? Judas must have expected Jesus and the disciples to resist arrest; otherwise he would not have enlisted so much help. Perhaps he feared that Jesus might perform a miracle, but even if He did, what can a group of armed men do against the power of Almighty God?

Judas was deceitful; he was a liar just like Satan who entered into him (John 8:44; 13:27). He defiled almost everything that he touched: his name (*Judah* = “praise”), the disciple band (Luke 6:13–16), gifts given to Christ (John 12:1–8), and the kiss. He even invaded a private prayer meeting, defiled it with his presence, and betrayed the Saviour

with a kiss. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Prov. 27:6).

A Useless Sword (Luke 22:49–53)

The disciples remembered (and misunderstood) His words about the sword (Luke 22:35–38), so they asked Him if now was the time to make use of their two swords. Without waiting for the answer, Peter rushed ahead and attacked a man who turned out to be Malchus, a servant to the high priest (John 18:10, 26–27).

Why did Peter do this? For one thing, he had to back up the boastful words he had spoken in the Upper Room (Luke 22:33) and again on the way to the Garden (Matt. 26:30–35). Peter had been sleeping when he should have been praying, talking when he should have been listening, and boasting when he should have been fearing. Now he was fighting when he should have been surrendering!

Peter made a number of serious mistakes when he attacked Malchus with his sword. To begin with, Peter was fighting the wrong enemy with the wrong weapon. Our enemies are not flesh and blood, and they cannot be defeated with ordinary weapons (2 Cor. 10:3–6; Eph. 6:10–18). In His wilderness temptations, Jesus defeated Satan with the Word of God (Matt. 4:1–11), and that is the weapon we must use (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12).

Peter also revealed the wrong attitude and trusted the wrong energy. While Jesus was surrendering, Peter was busy declaring war! And he was depending on “the arm of flesh.” His whole approach to the situation was not at all Christlike (John 18:36) and stands as a good warning to us today. The lost world may act this way, but it is not the way God’s servants should act (Matt. 12:19; 2 Tim. 2:24).

It is just like Jesus to act in grace when others are acting in malice (Ps. 103:10). He showed grace to Peter by rebuking his presumptuous sin and repairing the damage he had done. He showed grace to Malchus, a lowly slave, by healing his ear, and He showed grace to the whole world by willingly yielding Himself to the mob and going to Calvary. He did not come to judge but to save (Luke 19:10; John 3:17).

Our Lord’s last miracle before the cross was not a big flashy thing that attracted attention. It is likely that very few of the men who were there that night even knew what Peter and Jesus had done. Jesus could have summoned twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26:53), one legion (6,000 soldiers) for each of the eleven disciples and one for Himself, but He did not. Instead of performing some spectacular feat, He lovingly healed the ear of an obscure slave and then presented His hands to be bound.

Each of us must decide whether we will go through life *pretending*, like Judas; or *fighting*, like Peter; or *yielding to God’s perfect will*, like Jesus. Will it be the kiss, the sword, or the cup?

A Crowing Cock (Luke 22:54–62)

Our Lord endured six different “trials” before He was condemned to be crucified, three before the Jews and three before the Roman authorities. First, He was taken to Annas, the former high priest who was an influential man in the nation and retained his former title (John 18:12–13). Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas, his son-in-law, who was the official

high priest (Matt. 26:57). Finally, at daybreak, He was tried before the Sanhedrin and found guilty (Luke 22:66–71).

The Jews did not have the right of capital punishment (John 18:31–32), so they had to take Jesus to the Roman authorities to get Him crucified. First, they took Him to Pilate (Luke 23:1–4), who tried to avoid a decision by sending Him to Herod (Luke 23:6–12), who sent Him back to Pilate! (Luke 23:13–25) When Pilate saw that he could not escape making a decision, he gave the Sanhedrin what they asked for and condemned Jesus to die on a Roman cross.

It was during the second Jewish “trial,” the one before Caiaphas, that Peter in the courtyard denied his Lord three times. How did it happen? To begin with, Peter did not take the Lord’s warnings seriously (Matt. 26:33–35; Luke 22:31–34), nor did he “watch and pray” as Jesus had instructed in the Garden (Mark 14:37–38). For all of his courage and zeal, the Apostle Peter was totally unprepared for Satan’s attacks.

Jesus was led out of the Garden, and “Peter followed afar off” (Luke 22:54). This was the next step toward his defeat. In spite of all the sermons that have been delivered on this text, criticizing him for walking at a distance, *Peter was not intended to follow at all*. The “sheep” were supposed to scatter and then meet Jesus later in Galilee (Matt. 26:31). In fact, when He was arrested, Jesus said to the guards, “Let these [disciples] go their way” (John 18:8–9), a clear signal that they were not to follow Him.

Peter and John followed the mob and gained entrance into the courtyard of Caiaphas’ house (John 18:15–16). It was a cold night (though Jesus had been sweating!), and Peter first *stood* by the fire (John 18:18) and then *sat down* with the servants and officers (Luke 22:55). Sitting there in enemy territory (Ps. 1:1), Peter was an easy target. While he was thinking only of his own comfort, his Master was being abused by the soldiers (Luke 22:63–65).

First, it was one of the high priest’s servant girls who challenged Peter. She accused him of being with Jesus and of being one of His disciples. Peter lied and said, “Woman, I am not one of His disciples! I don’t know Him and I don’t know what you are talking about!” He left the fire and went out to the porch (Matt. 26:71), and the cock crowed the first time (Mark 14:68). This in itself should have warned him to get out, but he lingered.

Peter could not escape notice, and a second servant girl told the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth! He is one of them!” For a second time, Peter lied and said, “I am not! I don’t know the Man!”

The bystanders were not convinced, especially when one of Malchus’ relatives showed up and asked, “Didn’t I see you in the Garden with Him?” Others joined in and said, “Surely you are one of them, because the way you talk gives you away. You talk like a Galilean.” (The Galileans had a distinctive dialect.) At this point Peter used an oath and said, “I don’t know the Man! I don’t know what you are talking about!” It was then that the cock crowed for the second time and the Lord’s prediction was fulfilled (Mark 14:30).

At that moment, Jesus, being led away to the next trial, turned and looked at Peter; and His look broke Peter’s heart. While the bystanders were watching Jesus, Peter slipped out and went off and wept bitterly. It is to Peter’s credit that all the Lord had to do was *look* at him to bring him to the place of repentance.

For one cock to crow at the right time while the other birds in the city remained silent was certainly a miracle. But the crowing of the cock was much more than a miracle that

fulfilled our Lord's words; it was also a special message to Peter, a message that helped to restore him to fellowship again. What encouragements did the crowing of the cock give to the Apostle Peter?

First, it was an assurance to him that Jesus Christ was still in control of things even though He was a prisoner, bound and seemingly helpless before His captors. Peter could recall witnessing his Lord's authority over the fish, the winds, and the waves, and even over disease and death. No matter how dark the hour was for Peter, Jesus was still in control!

Second, the crowing of the cock assured Peter that he could be forgiven. Peter had not been paying close attention to the Word of God. He had argued with it, disobeyed it, and even run ahead of it, but now he "remembered the word of the Lord" (Luke 22:61), and this brought him hope. Why? Because with the word of warning was also a promise of restoration! Peter would be converted and strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32).

Finally, the miracle of the cock told Peter that a new day was dawning, for after all, that is what the rooster's call means each day. It was not a new day for Judas or for the enemies of the Lord, but it was a new day for Peter as he repented and wept bitterly. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). On Resurrection morning, the angel sent a special message to encourage Peter (Mark 16:7), and the Lord Himself appeared to Peter that day and restored him to fellowship (Luke 24:34).

Each one of us, at one time or another, will fail the Lord and then hear (in one way or another) "the crowing of the cock." Satan will tell us that we are finished, that our future has been destroyed, but that is not God's message to us. It was certainly not the end for Peter! His restoration was so complete that he was able to say to the Jews, "But you denied the Holy One and the Just!" (Acts 3:14, nkjv) Peter did not have 1 John 1:9 to read, but he did experience it in his own heart.

A Glorious Throne (Luke 22:63–71)

Jesus had not yet officially been declared guilty, and yet the soldiers were permitted to mock Him and abuse Him. Here they mocked His claim to being a Prophet; later they would mock His claim to being a King (John 19:1–3). But their mockery, sinful as it was, actually fulfilled Christ's own promise (Matt. 20:19). He is an example to us of how we should behave when sinners ridicule us and our faith (see 1 Peter 2:18–25).

It is generally believed that the Jewish council could not vote on capital offenses at night; so the chief priests, scribes, and elders had to assemble again as soon as it was day. Whether this ruling was in force in our Lord's day, we are not sure, but it does explain the early morning meeting of the Sanhedrin.

This was the climax of the religious trial, and the key issue was, "Is Jesus of Nazareth the Christ of God?" They were sure His claims were false and that He was guilty of blasphemy, and the penalty for blasphemy was death (Lev. 24:10–16).

Jesus knew the hearts of His accusers, their unbelief, and intellectual dishonesty (Luke 20:1–8). It was futile to preach a sermon or enter into a debate. They had already rejected the evidence He had given them (John 12:37–43), and more truth would only have increased their responsibility and their judgment (John 9:39–41).

Our Lord called Himself "Son of man," a messianic title found in Daniel 7:13–14. He also claimed to have the right to sit "on the right hand of the power of God" (Luke

22:69), a clear reference to Psalm 110:1, another messianic passage. It was this verse that He quoted earlier that week in His debate with the religious leaders (Luke 20:41–44). Jesus saw beyond the sufferings of the cross to the glories of the throne (Phil. 2:1–11; Heb. 12:2).

That our Lord is seated at the right hand of the Father is a truth that is often repeated in the New Testament (Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55–56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1). This is the place of honor, authority, and power; and by claiming this honor, Jesus was claiming to be God.

Only Luke records the direct question in Luke 22:70 and our Lord's direct answer, which literally was: "You say that I am." They would use this testimony later when they brought Him to Pilate (John 19:7). Some liberal theologians say that Jesus never claimed to be God, and we wonder what they do with this official trial? The Jewish religious leaders knew what Jesus was talking about, and this is why they condemned Him for blasphemy.

The "religious trial" was now over. The next step was to put Him through a civil trial and convince the Roman governor that Jesus of Nazareth was a criminal worthy of death. The Son of God was to be crucified, and only the Romans could do that.

Referring to the Jewish authorities, William Stalker wrote in *The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ*: "It may be said that they walked according to their light; but the light that was in them was darkness."

"None so blind as those that will not see," wrote Matthew Henry, the noted Bible commentator.

"While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light" (John 12:36, nkjv).

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

CONDEMNED AND CRUCIFIED

Luke 23

The trial and death of Jesus Christ revealed both the wicked heart of man and the gracious heart of God. When men were doing their worst, God was giving His best. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). Jesus was not crucified because evil men decided to get Him out of the way. His crucifixion was "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23), an appointment made from eternity (1 Peter 1:20; Rev. 13:8).

As you study this chapter, notice the six encounters our Lord experienced during those critical hours.

Jesus and Pilate (Luke 23:1–25)

Pontius Pilate served as governor of Judea from a.d.26 to a.d.36, at which time he was recalled to Rome and then passed out of official Roman history. He was hated by the orthodox Jews and never really understood them. Once he aroused their fury by putting up pagan Roman banners in the Jewish temple, and he was not beneath sending armed spies into the temple to silence Jewish protesters (Luke 13:1–3).

In his handling of the trial of Jesus, the governor proved to be indecisive. The Gospel of John records seven different moves that Pilate made as he went *out* to meet the people and then went *in* to question Jesus (John 18:29, 33, 38; 19:1, 4, 9, 13). He kept looking for a loophole, but he found none. Pilate has gone down in history as the man who tried Jesus Christ, three times declared Him not guilty, and yet crucified Him just the same.

Pilate affirming (vv. 1–5). Roman officials were usually up early and at their duties, but Pilate was probably surprised that morning to learn that he had a capital case on his hands, and on Passover at that. The Jewish leaders knew that their religious laws meant nothing to a Roman official, so they emphasized the political aspects of their indictment against Jesus. There were three charges: He perverted the nation, opposed paying the poll tax to Caesar, and claimed to be a king.

Pilate privately interrogated Jesus about His kingship because that was the crucial issue, and he concluded that He was guilty of no crime. Three times during the trial, Pilate clearly affirmed the innocence of Jesus (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). Dr. Luke reported three other witnesses besides Pilate who also said, “Not guilty!”: King Herod (Luke 23:15), one of the malefactors (Luke 23:40–43), and a Roman centurion (Luke 23:47).

Pilate deferring (vv. 6–12). The Jews rejected his verdict and began to accuse Jesus all the more. When they mentioned Galilee, Pilate, astute politician that he was, immediately saw an opportunity to get Jesus off his hands. He sent Him to Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, the man who had murdered John the Baptist, who was anxious to see Jesus (Luke 9:7–9). Perhaps the wily king could find some way to please the Jews.

Herod must have been shocked and perhaps nervous when the guards brought Jesus in, but the more he questioned Him, the bolder he became. Perhaps Jesus might even entertain the king with a miracle! In spite of the king's persistent interrogation and the Jews' vehement accusations, Jesus said nothing. *Herod had silenced the voice of God.* It was not Herod who was judging Jesus; it was Jesus who was judging Herod.

The king finally became so bold as to mock Jesus and permit his soldiers to dress Him in “an elegant robe,” the kind that was worn by Roman candidates for office. Herod did not issue an official verdict about Jesus (Luke 23:15), but it was clear that he did not find Him guilty of any crime worthy of death (Luke 23:15).

The only thing accomplished by this maneuver was the mending of a broken friendship. Herod was grateful to Pilate for helping him to see Jesus and for honoring him by seeking his counsel. The fact that Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate without issuing a verdict could be interpreted as, “Since we are not in Galilee, Pilate, you have the authority to act, and I will not interfere. Jesus is *your* prisoner, not mine. I know you will do the right thing.” Finally, the fact that the two men met over a common threat (or enemy) helped them to put aside their differences and become friends again.

Pilate bargaining (vv. 13–23). He met the Jewish leaders and announced for the second time that he did not find Jesus guilty of the charges they had made against Him.

The fact that Herod backed Pilate's decision would not have impressed the Jews very much, because they despised Herod almost as much as they despised the Romans.

Since it was customary at Passover for the governor to release a prisoner, Pilate offered the Jews a compromise: he would chastise Jesus and let Him go. He had another prisoner on hand, Barabbas, but Pilate was sure the Jews would not want him to be released. After all, Barabbas was a robber (John 18:40), a murderer, and an insurrectionist (Luke 23:19). He may have been a leader of the Jewish Zealots who at that time was working for the overthrow of Rome.

We must not think that the general populace of the city was gathered before Pilate and crying out for the blood of Jesus, though a curious crowd no doubt gathered. It was primarily the official religious leaders of the nation, the chief priests in particular (Luke 23:23), who shouted Pilate down and told him to crucify Jesus. To say that the people who cried "Hosanna!" on Palm Sunday ended up crying "Crucify Him!" on Good Friday is not completely accurate.

Pilate yielding (vv. 24–25). Pilate realized that his mishandling of the situation had almost caused a riot, and a Jewish uprising was the last thing he wanted during Passover. So, he called for water and washed his hands before the crowd, affirming his innocence (Matt. 27:24–25). He was a compromiser who was "willing to content the people" (Mark 15:15). Barabbas was released and Jesus was condemned to die on a Roman cross.

Pilate was a complex character. He openly said that Jesus was innocent, yet he permitted Him to be beaten and condemned Him to die. He carefully questioned Jesus and even trembled at His answers, but the truth of the Word did not make a difference in his decisions. He wanted to be popular and not right; he was more concerned about reputation than he was character. If Herod had silenced the voice of God, then Pilate smothered the voice of God. He had his opportunity and wasted it.

Jesus and Simon (Luke 23:26)

It was a part of the prisoner's humiliation that he carry his own cross to the place of execution, so when Jesus left Pilate's hall, He was carrying either the cross or the crossbeam (John 19:17). Apparently, He was unable to go on, for the soldiers had to "draft" Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross for Him. (This was a legal Roman procedure. See Matt. 5:41.) When you consider all that Jesus had endured since His arrest in the Garden, it is not difficult to imagine Him falling under the load. But there is something more involved: carrying the cross was a sign of guilt, *and our Lord was not guilty!*

Thousands of Jews came to Jerusalem from other nations to celebrate the feasts (Acts 2:5–11), and Simon was among them. He had traveled over 800 miles from Africa to celebrate Passover, and now he was being humiliated on a most holy day! What would he say to his family when he got home?

What looked to Simon like a catastrophe turned out to be a wonderful opportunity, for it brought him in contact with Jesus Christ. (By the way, where was the *other* Simon—Simon Peter—who had promised Jesus to go with Him to prison and to death?) Simon may have come into the city to attend the 9 a.m. prayer meeting in the temple, but the soldiers rearranged his schedule for him.

We have good reason to believe that Simon was converted because of this encounter with Jesus. Mark identified him as “the father of Alexander and Rufus” (Mark 15:21), two men that Mark assumed his Roman readers would know. A Christian named Rufus was greeted by Paul in Romans 16:13, and it is possible that he was the son of Simon of Cyrene. Apparently Simon and his two sons became well-known Christians who were held in honor in the church.

Before Simon met Jesus, he had religion and devotion; but after he met Jesus, he had reality and salvation. He did both a physical and spiritual “about face” that morning, and it transformed his life. God can still use unexpected and difficult situations, even humiliating situations, to bring people to the Saviour.

Jesus and the Jerusalem Women (Luke 23:27–31)

Public executions drew crowds of spectators, and one involving Jesus would especially attract attention. Add to this the fact that Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims, and it is not difficult to believe that a “great multitude” was following the condemned man to Calvary.

In that crowd was a group of women who openly wept and lamented as they sympathized with Jesus and contemplated the terrible spiritual condition of their nation. It has been pointed out that, as far as the Gospel records are concerned, no woman was ever an enemy of Jesus. Nor was Jesus ever the enemy of womankind. His example, His teachings, and most of all, His redemption have done much to dignify and elevate women. The news of His birth was shared with a Jewish maiden, His death was witnessed by grieving women, and the good news of His resurrection was announced first to a woman who had been demon-possessed.

Jesus appreciated their sympathy and used it to teach them and us an important lesson. While they were weeping over the injustice of *one man's death*, He was looking ahead and grieving over the terrible destruction of *the entire nation*, a judgment that was wholly justified (see Luke 19:41–44). Alas, it would be the women and children who would suffer the most, a fact supported by history. The Romans attempted to starve the Jews into submission; and hungry men, defending their city, took food from their suffering wives and children and even killed and ate their own flesh and blood.

The nation of Israel was like a “green tree” during the years when Jesus was on earth. It was a time of blessing and opportunity, and it should have been a time of fruitfulness. But the nation rejected Him and became like a “dry tree,” fit only for the fire. Jesus often would have gathered His people together, but they would not. In condemning Him, they only condemned themselves.

We might paraphrase His words: “If the Roman authorities do this to One who is innocent, what will they do to you who are guilty? When the day of judgment arrives, can there be any escape for you?”

Jesus and the Malefactors (Luke 23:32–43)

It had been prophesied that the Suffering Servant would be “numbered with the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12; Luke 22:37), and two criminals were crucified with Jesus, men who were robbers (Matt. 27:38). The Greek word means “one who uses violence to

rob openly," in contrast to the thief who secretly enters a house and steals. These two men may have been guilty of armed robbery involving murder.

The name *Calvary* comes from the Latin *calvaria* which means "a skull." (The Greek is *kranion*, which gives us the English word *cranium*, and the Aramaic word is *Golgotha*.) The name is not explained in the New Testament. The site may have resembled a skull, as does "Gordon's Calvary" near the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem. Or perhaps the name simply grew out of the ugly facts of execution.

Our Lord was crucified about 9 a.m. and remained on the cross until 3 p.m.; and from noon to 3 p.m., there was darkness over all the land (Mark 15:25, 33). Jesus spoke seven times during those six terrible hours:

1. "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34).
2. "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).
3. "Woman, behold thy son" (John 19:25–27).
[Three hours of darkness; Jesus is silent]
4. "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46)
5. "I thirst" (John 19:28).
6. "It is finished!" (John 19:30)
7. "Father, into Thy hands" (Luke 23:46).

Luke recorded only three of these seven statements, the first, the second, and the last. Our Lord's prayer for His enemies, and His ministry to a repentant thief, fit in well with Luke's purpose to show Jesus Christ as the sympathetic Son of man who cared for the needy.

While they were nailing Him to the cross, He repeatedly prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Not only was He practicing what He taught (Luke 6:27–28), but He was fulfilling prophecy and making "intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12).

We must not infer from His prayer that ignorance is a basis for forgiveness, or that those who sinned against Jesus were automatically forgiven because He prayed. Certainly both the Jews and the Romans were ignorant of the *enormity* of their sin, but that could not absolve them. The Law provided a sacrifice for sins committed ignorantly, but there was no sacrifice for deliberate presumptuous sin (Ex. 21:14; Num. 15:27–31; Ps. 51:16–17). Our Lord's intercession postponed God's judgment on the nation for almost forty years, giving them additional opportunities to be saved (Acts 3:17–19).

It was providential that Jesus was crucified *between* the two thieves, for this gave both of them equal access to the Saviour. Both could read Pilate's superscription, "This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews," and both could watch Him as He graciously gave His life for the sins of the world.

The one thief imitated the mockery of the religious leaders and asked Jesus to rescue him from the cross, but the other thief had different ideas. He may have reasoned, "If this Man is indeed the Christ, and if He has a kingdom, and if He has saved others, then He can meet my greatest need which is salvation from sin. I am not ready to die!" It took courage for this thief to defy the influence of his friend and the mockery of the crowd, and it took faith for him to trust a dying King! When you consider all that he had to overcome, the faith of this thief is astounding.

The man was saved wholly by grace; it was the gift of God (Eph. 2:8–9). He did not deserve it and he could not earn it. His salvation was personal and secure, guaranteed by the word of Jesus Christ. The man hoped for some kind of help in the future, but Jesus gave him forgiveness that very day, and he died and went with Jesus to paradise (2 Cor. 12:1–4).

It should be noted that the people at Calvary fulfilled Old Testament prophecy in what they did: gambling for our Lord's clothing (Ps. 22:18), mocking Him (Ps. 22:6–8), and offering Him vinegar to drink (Ps. 69:21). God was still on the throne and His Word was still in control.

Jesus and the Father (Luke 23:44–49)

We must keep in mind that what our Lord accomplished on the cross was an eternal transaction that involved Him and the Father. He did not die as a martyr who had failed in a lost cause. Nor was He only an example for people to follow. Isaiah 53 makes it clear that Jesus did not die for His own sins, because He had none; He died for our sins. He made His soul an offering for sin (Isa. 53:4–6, 10–12).

The three hours of darkness was a miracle. It was not an eclipse, because that would have been impossible during the Passover season when there is a full moon. It was a God-sent darkness that shrouded the cross as the Son of God was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). It was as though all nature was sympathizing with the Creator as He suffered and died. When Israel was in Egypt, three days of darkness preceded the first Passover (Ex. 10:21ff). When Jesus was on the cross, three hours of darkness preceded the death of God's Lamb for the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Both Matthew 27:45–46 and Mark 15:33–34 record our Lord's cry at the close of the darkness, a Hebrew quotation from Psalm 22:1, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" What this abandonment was and how Jesus felt it are not explained to us, but certainly it involves the fact that He became sin for us.

Our Lord cried with a loud voice, "It is finished!" (John 19:30) a declaration of victory. He had finished the work the Father gave Him to do (John 17:4). The work of redemption was completed, the types and prophecies were fulfilled (Heb. 9:24ff), and the Saviour could now rest.

He then addressed His Father in the final statement from the cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Ps. 31:5). This was actually a bedtime prayer used by Jewish children, and it tells us how our Lord died: confidently, willingly (John 10:17–18), and victoriously. Those who know Jesus as their Saviour may die with the same confidence and assurance (2 Cor. 5:1–8; Phil. 1:20–23).

When our Lord released His spirit, the veil of the temple was torn in two "from the top to the bottom" (Mark 15:38). This miracle announced to the priests and people that the way into God's presence was open for all who would come to Him by faith through Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:1–10:25). No more do sinners need earthly temples, altars, sacrifices, or priests, for all had now been fulfilled in the finished work of the Son of God.

Luke recorded three responses to the events of the last moments of Christ's death. The centurion who was in charge of the execution testified, "Certainly this was a righteous [innocent] man, the Son of God" (Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). He was greatly

impressed by the darkness, the earthquake (Matt. 27:54), and certainly the way Jesus suffered and died. He must have been shocked when Jesus shouted and then instantly died, for victims of crucifixion often lingered for days and did not have the strength to speak.

The people who came to "see the spectacle" began to drift away one by one, some of them beating their breasts as they felt their guilt (Luke 18:13). Were these people believers? Probably not. They were spectators who were attracted to the execution, but certainly they saw and heard enough to convict them of their own sins.

Finally, our Lord's friends were there, including the women who followed Jesus (Luke 8:1-3; 24:22). It is significant that the women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb on Easter morning.

Jesus and Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50-56)

Joseph and his friend Nicodemus (John 19:38-42) were both members of the Jewish council, but they had not been present to vote against Jesus. Mark 14:64 states that the whole council condemned Him, and that could not have happened if Joseph and Nicodemus had been there.

It is likely that Joseph and Nicodemus had learned from the Old Testament Scriptures how Jesus would die, so they agreed to take care of His burial. The new tomb was likely Joseph's, prepared in a garden near Golgotha but not for himself; it was for Jesus. No rich man would prepare his own burial place so near a place of execution and so far from his own home. The two men could well have been hiding in the tomb while Jesus was on the cross, waiting for that moment when He would yield up His life. They would have the spices and the winding sheets all prepared, for they would probably not be able to go shopping for these items on Passover.

When Jesus died, Joseph immediately went to Pilate for permission to have the body, and Nicodemus stayed at Calvary to keep watch. They tenderly took Jesus from the cross, quickly carried Him to the garden, washed the body, and wrapped it with the spices. It was a temporary burial; they would return after the Sabbath to do the job properly. When they laid Jesus into the new tomb, they fulfilled Isaiah 53:9, and they kept the Romans from throwing His body on the garbage dump outside the city. Condemned criminals lost the right to proper burial, but God saw to it that His Son's body was buried with dignity and love.

It was important that the body be buried properly, for God would raise Jesus from the dead. If there were any doubt about His death or burial, that could affect the message and the ministry of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-8).

When after six days God finished the work of the "old Creation," He rested (Gen. 2:1-3). After six hours, our Lord finished the work of the "new Creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), and He rested on the Sabbath in Joseph's tomb.

But that was not the end of the story.

He would rise again!

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE SON OF MAN TRIUMPHS!

Luke 24

Christianity is in its very essence a resurrection religion," says Dr. John Stott. "The concept of resurrection lies at its heart. If you remove it, Christianity is destroyed."

The resurrection of Jesus Christ affirms to us that He is indeed the Son of God, just as He claimed to be (Rom. 1:4). It also proves that His sacrifice for sin has been accepted and that the work of salvation is completed (Rom. 4:24–25). Those who trust Him can "walk in newness of life" because He is alive and imparts His power to them (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 2:20). Our Lord's resurrection also declares to us that He is the Judge who will come one day and judge the world (Acts 17:30–31).

It is no surprise, then, that Satan has attacked the truth of the Resurrection. The first lie that he spawned was that the disciples came and stole Christ's body (Matt. 28:11–15), but it is difficult to imagine how they could have done this. To begin with, the tomb was carefully guarded (Matt. 27:61–66); and it would have been next to impossible for the frightened Apostles to overpower the soldiers, open the tomb, and secure the body. But the biggest obstacle is the fact that the Apostles themselves *did not believe that He would be resurrected!* Why, then, would they steal His body and try to perpetrate a hoax?

A second lie is that Jesus did not really die on the cross but only swooned, and when He was put into the cool tomb, He revived. But Pilate carefully checked with the centurion to see whether Jesus was dead (Mark 15:44), and the Roman soldiers who broke the legs of the two thieves knew that Jesus had died (John 19:31–34). Furthermore, how could a "cool tomb" transform Christ's body so that He could appear and disappear and walk through closed doors?

The message of the Gospel rests on the death of Jesus Christ *and His resurrection* (1 Cor. 15:1–8). The Apostles were sent out as witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 1:22), and the emphasis in the Book of Acts is on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This explains why Luke climaxed his book with a report of some of the appearances of Jesus after He had been raised from the dead. He first appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–18), then to the "other women" (Matt. 28:9–10), and then to the two men on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–22). At some time, He also appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34) and to His half brother James (1 Cor. 15:7).

That evening, He appeared to the Apostles (Luke 24:36–43), but Thomas was not with them (John 20:19–25). A week later, He appeared to the Apostles again, especially for the sake of Thomas (John 20:26–31). He appeared to seven of the Apostles when they were fishing at the Sea of Galilee (John 21). He appeared several times to the Apostles before His ascension, teaching them and preparing them for their ministry (Acts 1:1–12).

When the believers discovered that Jesus was alive, it made a tremendous difference in their lives.

Perplexed Hearts: He Opens the Tomb (Luke 24:1–12)

We do not know at what time Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week, but it must have been very early. The earthquake and the angel (Matt. 28:2–4) opened the tomb, not to let Jesus out but to let the witnesses in. “Come and see, go and tell!” is the Easter mandate for the church.

Mary Magdalene had been especially helped by Jesus and was devoted to Him (Luke 8:2). She had lingered at the cross (Mark 15:47), and then she was first at the tomb. With her were Mary the mother of James; Joanna; and other devout women (Luke 24:10), hoping to finish preparing their Lord's body for burial. It was a sad labor of love that was transformed into gladness when they discovered that Jesus was alive.

“Who will roll the stone away?” was their main concern. The Roman soldiers would not break the Roman seal, especially for a group of mourning Jewish women. But God had solved the problem for them; the tomb was open *and there was no body to prepare!*

At this point two angels appeared on the scene. Matthew 28:2 and Mark 16:5 mention only one of the two, the one who gave the message to the women. There was a kind rebuke in his message as he reminded them of their bad memories! More than once, Jesus had told His followers that He would suffer and die and be raised from the dead (Matt. 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; Luke 9:22, 44; 18:31–34). How sad it is when God's people forget His Word and live defeated lives. Today, the Spirit of God assists us to remember His Word (John 14:26).

Obedient to their commission, the women ran to tell the disciples the good news, but the men did not believe them! (According to Mark 16:14, Jesus later rebuked them for their unbelief.) Mary Magdalene asked Peter and John to come to examine the tomb (John 20:1–10), and they too saw the proof that Jesus was not there. However, all that the evidence said was that the body was gone and that apparently there had been no violence.

As Mary lingered by the tomb weeping, Jesus Himself appeared to her (John 20:11–18). It is one thing to see the empty tomb and the empty graveclothes, but quite something else to meet the risen Christ. We today cannot see the evidence in the tomb, but we do have the testimony of the witnesses found in the inspired Word of God. And we can live out our faith in Jesus Christ and know *personally* that He is alive in us (Gal. 2:20).

Keep in mind that these women did not expect to see Jesus alive. They had forgotten His resurrection promises and went to the tomb only to finish anointing His body. To say that they had hallucinations and only thought they saw Jesus is to fly in the face of the evidence. And would this many people hallucinate about the same thing at the same time? Not likely. They became excited witnesses, even to their leaders, that Jesus Christ is alive!

Discouraged Hearts: He Opens Their Eyes (Luke 24:13–35)

Emmaus was a small village eight miles northwest of Jerusalem. The two men walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus were discouraged disciples who had no reason to be discouraged. They had heard the reports of the women that the tomb was empty and that Jesus was alive, but they did not believe them. They had hoped that Jesus would

redeem Israel (Luke 24:21), but their hopes had been shattered. We get the impression that these men were discouraged and disappointed because God did not do what they wanted Him to do. They saw the glory of the kingdom, but they failed to understand the suffering.

Jesus graciously walked with them and listened to their "animated heated conversation" (Luke 24:17, wuest). No doubt they were quoting various Old Testament prophecies and trying to remember what Jesus had taught, but they were unable to put it all together and come up with an explanation that made sense. Was He a failure or a success? Why did He have to die? Was there a future for the nation?

There is a touch of humor in Luke 24:19 when Jesus asked, "What things?" *He had been at the heart of all that had happened in Jerusalem, and now He was asking them to tell Him what occurred!* How patient our Lord is with us as He listens to us tell Him what He already knows (Rom. 8:34). But we may come "boldly" ("with freedom of speech") to His throne and pour out our hearts to Him, and He will help us (Ps. 62:8; Heb. 4:16).

The longer Cleopas talked, the more he indicted himself and his friend for their unbelief. What more evidence could they want? Witnesses (including Apostles) had seen the tomb empty. Angels had announced that Jesus was alive. Witnesses had seen Him alive and heard Him speak. The proof was there!

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17, nkjv). This explains why Jesus opened the Word to these two men as the three of them walked to Emmaus. Their real problem was not in their heads but in their hearts (see Luke 24:25 and 32, and note v. 38). They could have discussed the subject for days and never arrived at a satisfactory answer. What they needed was a fresh understanding of the Word of God, and Jesus gave that understanding to them. He opened the Scriptures and then opened their eyes, and they realized that Jesus was not only alive *but right there with them!*

What was their basic problem? They did not believe all that the prophets had written about the Messiah. That was the problem with most of the Jews in that day: they saw Messiah as a conquering Redeemer, but they did not see Him as a Suffering Servant. As they read the Old Testament, they saw the glory but not the suffering, the crown but not the cross. The teachers in that day were not unlike some of the "success preachers" today, blind to the *total* message of the Bible.

That was some Bible conference, and I wish I could have been there! Imagine the greatest Teacher explaining the greatest themes from the greatest Book and bringing the greatest blessings to men's lives: eyes open to see Him, hearts open to receive the Word, and lips open to tell others what Jesus said to them!

Perhaps Jesus started at Genesis 3:15, the first promise of the Redeemer, and traced that promise through the Scriptures. He may have lingered at Genesis 22, which tells of Abraham placing his only beloved son on the altar. Surely He touched on Passover, the levitical sacrifices, the tabernacle ceremonies, the Day of Atonement, the serpent in the wilderness, the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, and the prophetic messages of Psalms 22 and 69. *The key to understanding the Bible is to see Jesus Christ on every page.* He did not teach them only doctrine or prophecy; He taught "the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

These men had talked to Jesus and listened to Jesus, and when He made as though He would go on alone, they asked Jesus to come home with them. *They had been won by the Word of God*, and they did not even know who the Stranger was. All they knew was that their hearts were “burning” within them, and they wanted the blessing to last.

The more we receive the Word of God, the more we will want to fellowship with the God of the Word. The hymn writer expressed it perfectly: “Beyond the sacred page/I seek Thee, Lord.” Understanding Bible knowledge can lead to a “big head” (1 Cor. 8:1), but receiving Bible truth and walking with the Saviour will lead to a burning heart.

Jesus opened the Scriptures to them, and then He opened their eyes so that they recognized Him. *Now they knew for themselves that Jesus was alive*. They had the evidence of the open tomb, the angels, the witnesses, the Scriptures and now their own personal experience with the Lord. The fact that Jesus vanished did not mean that He abandoned them, for He was with them even though they could not see Him; and they would see Him again.

The best evidence that we have understood the Bible and met the living Christ is that we have something exciting to share with others. The two men immediately left Emmaus and returned to Jerusalem to tell the believers that they had met Jesus. But when they arrived, the apostles and the others *told them* that Jesus was alive and had appeared to Peter! What a difference it would make in our church services if everybody who gathered came to tell about meeting the living Christ! If our services are “dead” it is probably because we are not really walking with and listening to the living Saviour.

The “breaking of bread” (Luke 24:30, 35) refers to a meal and not to the Lord’s Supper. As far as we know, the Apostles were the only ones Jesus had instructed about the Lord’s Supper; and it was not likely that our Lord would celebrate it at this time. Jesus revealed Himself to them during a common meal, and that is often how He works. We must learn to see Him in the everyday things of life. However, as we do celebrate the Lord’s Supper from time to time, we want Jesus to reveal Himself to us in a new way, and we must not be satisfied with anything less.

Troubled Hearts: He Opens Their Minds (Luke 24:36–46)

So many exciting things had happened that day and so much was unexplained that ten of the Apostles, plus other believers, met together that evening and shared their witness with one another. While Cleopas and his friend were telling their story, *Jesus Himself appeared in the room!* And the doors were shut! (John 20:19)

You would have expected the believers to have a great sigh of relief and sing a hymn of praise, but instead they became terrified, frightened, and troubled (Luke 24:37–38). They thought a ghost had appeared! It all happened so suddenly that they were totally unprepared, even though several of them had already seen the risen Christ. Mark 16:14 suggests that the condition of their hearts had something to do with the expression of their fears.

Jesus sought to calm them. The first thing He did was to give them His blessing: “Peace be unto you!” He even repeated the blessing (John 20:19–21). “The God of peace” had raised Jesus from the dead, and there was nothing for them to fear (Heb. 13:20–21). Because of His sacrifice on the cross, men and women could now have peace with God (Rom. 5:1) and enjoy the peace of God (Phil. 4:6–7).

The next thing He did to calm them was to show them His wounded hands and feet (Ps. 22:16) and assure them that He was not a ghost. Songwriters sometimes mention His “scars,” but the record says nothing about “scars.” The “prints” of Calvary were on His glorified body (John 20:24–29), and they are still there (Rev. 5:6, 9, 12). It has well been said that the only work of man now in heaven is the marks of Calvary on the body of the exalted Saviour.

Jesus even ate some honey and fish to prove to His doubting followers that He was indeed alive and real, and He even invited them to *feel* His body (Luke 24:39; 1 John 1:1). With our limited knowledge, we cannot explain how a human body can be solid flesh and bones and still pass through closed doors and appear and disappear, or how it can be glorified and still carry the marks of the cross. We do know that we shall one day be like Him and share His glory (1 John 3:1–2).

Luke 24:41 describes a perplexing emotion: “they believed not for joy.” It was just too good to be true! Jacob had this same feeling when he got the news that Joseph was alive (Gen. 45:26–28), and the nation of Israel experienced it when God gave them a great deliverance (Ps. 126:1–3). Jesus had told His disciples that they would rejoice when they saw Him again, and the promise was fulfilled (John 16:22).

The final source of peace and assurance is the Word of God, so our Lord “opened their understanding” of the Old Testament Scriptures, just as He had done with the Emmaus disciples. After all, the believers were not being sent into the world to share their own personal experiences but to share the truths of the Word of God. We today cannot touch and feel the Lord Jesus, nor is it necessary that we do so; but we can rest our faith on the Word of God (1 John 1:1–5).

Jesus not only enabled them to understand the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, but He also reminded them of what He had taught them, and He explained how it all fit together. Now they began to understand the necessity for His suffering and death and how the Cross related to the promise of the kingdom (see 1 Peter 1:10–12). What a privilege it was for them to listen to Jesus expound the Word!

Joyful Hearts: He Opens Their Lips (Luke 24:47–53)

But privilege always brings responsibility; they were to be witnesses of all that He had said and done (Acts 1:8). A witness is somebody who sincerely tells what he has seen and heard (Acts 4:20), and the word *witness* is used in one way or another twenty-nine times in the Book of Acts. As Christians, we are not judges or prosecuting attorneys sent to condemn the world. We are witnesses who point to Jesus Christ and tell lost sinners how to be saved.

How could a group of common people ever hope to fulfill that kind of a commission? God promised to provide the power (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8), and He did. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the church and empowered them to preach the Word (Acts 2). After Pentecost, the Spirit continued to fill them with great power (see Acts 4:33).

Witnessing is not something that we do for the Lord; it is something that He does through us, *if* we are filled with the Holy Spirit. There is a great difference between a “sales talk” and a Spirit-empowered witness. “People do not come to Christ at the end of an argument,” said Vance Havner. “Simon Peter came to Jesus because Andrew went

after him with a testimony.” We go forth in the authority of His name, in the power of His spirit, heralding His Gospel of His grace.

Luke 24:50–52 should be compared with Mark 16:19–20 and Acts 1:9–12. For some reason, our Lord’s ascension is not given the prominence in the church that it deserves. Think of what it meant to Him to return to heaven and sit on the throne of glory! (John 17:5, 11) His ascension is proof that He has conquered every enemy and that He reigns supremely “far above all” (Eph. 1:18–23).

In heaven today, our Lord ministers as our High Priest (Heb. 7:25) and our Advocate (1 John 2:1). As High Priest, He gives us the grace we need to face testing and temptation (Heb. 4:14–16); and if we fail, as Advocate He forgives and restores us when we confess our sins (1 John 1:6–10). As the glorified Head of the church, Jesus Christ is equipping His people to live for Him and serve Him in this present world (Eph. 4:7–16; Heb. 13:20–21). Through the Word of God and prayer, He is ministering to us by His Spirit and making us more like Himself.

Of course, He is also preparing in heaven a home for His people (John 14:1–6), and one day He will return and take us to be with Him forever.

The last thing our Lord did was to bless His people, and the first thing they did was to worship Him! The two always go together, for as we truly worship Him, He will share His blessings. He not only opened their lips to witness, but He also opened their lips to worship and praise Him!

Dr. Luke opened his Gospel with a scene in the temple (Luke 1:8ff), and he closed his Gospel the same way (Luke 24:53). But what a contrast between the unbelieving, silent priest and the trusting, joyful saints! Luke has explained how Jesus went to Jerusalem and accomplished the work of redemption. His book begins and ends in Jerusalem. But his next book, The Acts of the Apostles, would explain how that Gospel traveled from Jerusalem to Rome!

Is the Gospel going out to the ends of the earth from your Jerusalem?